



Colleges and universities look to alumni for financial support. If you attended or graduated from college you likely receive fundraising solicitations from your alma mater. Some colleges excel at engaging their alumni and raising money from them. Their programs have been built over generations: first year students are encouraged to set alumni giving as a personal goal. Other institutions such as community colleges are newer to engaging alumni. Many historically black colleges and universities also face challenges.

According to the Council for Aid to Education 2013 Voluntary Support for Education report alumni provide 27% of gifts to higher education, contributing \$9 billion. This is second only to giving by foundations (30% and \$10 billion). Don't overlook your alumni. Consider these three keys to building a successful alumni giving program.

First, as with all fundraising, make a strong case for giving. The fact that an individual attended or graduated from your institution is not a good enough reason for a person to give. Take the time to create a case that speaks to alumni in general and then tailor the case to communicate to alumni of different generations. Communicate the president's vision for the future of the institution and provide facts and figures such as current enrollment; male/female ratio; student and graduation rates; five programs with the highest enrollment; five inspiring alumni; and the college's local economic impact. Let alumni know the current price of annual tuition and fees and the average amount of debt that students graduate with. Encourage giving for scholarships and general operating support.

Second, keep a focus on retaining current alumni donors, engaging new ones, and re-engaging lapsed alumni. Be patient and consistent. Measure your results. Use multiple methods to engage alumni: direct mail, social media, special events, one-on-one solicitation. Don't look for a quick home run: major donors typically have a relationship with their alma mater that has grown over time. Offer opportunities for engagement with other alumni and current students.

FUNdraising Good Times: Three keys to building a successful alumni relations program

Written by Mel and Pearl Shaw
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Third, if you are responsible for hiring and managing alumni relations employees take the time to make the right hire. Alumni relations should not be the "resting place" for long-tenured and well-loved employees. These positions should be filled by individuals who can work from a fundraising plan and implement multiple strategies for engaging diverse alumni. There should be annual goals for donor retention, new donors, and average gift size. Consider the obligations alumni may face at different points in their lives and set goals for those in their first five years out of college, those who are 10 years out, and those who are older alumni. Know your costs: the alumni relations department should have fundraising goals that take into consideration the cost to operate the department and that tie into the institution's overall fundraising goal.

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