



*Part two of a two part series on alumni fundraising*

Alumni associations offer memberships and raise funds for the colleges and universities they are associated with. Many are independent nonprofit organizations, others operate as part of the institution's alumni relations department. Some colleges have both an alumni relations department and an independent alumni association. Sometimes alumni fundraising efforts are coordinated, sometimes they are haphazard, and other times there is overt conflict between alumni and their alma mater. In our work with colleges and alumni we witness the good, the bad and the ugly. Here are four suggestions for how to grow your alumni association's fundraising program.

First, open communication between alumni and college leadership is a must. If you are an alumni leader we recommend regularly scheduled meetings with the president or chancellor. Develop a relationship. Learn his or her vision for the institution. Ask questions. Explore ways in which alumni can partner to advance the vision. Most importantly learn the president's fundraising priorities and expectations of alumni as donors. Share the concerns and interests of alumni. Most importantly find common ground. Differences of opinion will always exist. Move beyond those to create a shared vision that strengthens the relationship between alumni, their alma mater and current and future students.

Second, don't confuse membership and fundraising. Purchasing an alumni association membership is the first step not the only one. In general membership provides networking opportunities with other alumni and benefits such as discounts and access to events. Giving to your alumni association – or to your alma mater through the alumni association – is how you provide financial support for the institution and current/future students. When giving to your alumni association ask what your gift will support. If you are responsible for soliciting alumni, make sure your solicitations clearly communicate the use of funds. Let your members know when they are supporting the work of the association and when they are supporting their alma mater. Be transparent.

Third, before launching a meaningful alumni giving program conduct a feasibility study to learn how alumni want to be engaged, what they want to give to, what is important to them in their

## **FUNdraising Good Times: Four ways to grow your alumni association**

Written by Mel and Pearl Shaw  
Monday, 10 March 2014 15:01

---

relationship with their alma mater, and why they don't give. Just because you think something is a good idea doesn't mean alumni will give.

Finally, when engaging recent college graduates encourage giving that is appropriate for early career salaries. Be aware of the financial impact of student loan payments. Remember that alumni who are the first in their family to obtain a college degree who may be supporting other family members. Offer opportunities for engagement such as assisting with student recruitment, serving as a mentor for a potential or current student, hosting an event, or volunteering at an on-campus or local college event.

Copyright 2014 – Mel and Pearl Shaw

*Mel and Pearl Shaw position nonprofits, colleges and universities for fundraising success. For help with your campaign visit [www.saadandshaw.com](http://www.saadandshaw.com) or call (901) 522-8727.*