



Industry-Segmented Career Dialogues

A Matchmaking Approach to Get the Right People
Around the Table

Advancement Forum

The New Rules of Engagement: Building the Next
Generation of Alumni Leaders and Volunteers

Advancement Forum

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Industry-Segmented Career Dialogues

A Matchmaking Approach to Get the Right People Around the Table

Practice in Brief

Alumni relations staff, development officers, and other stakeholders collaborate to handpick prospects or donors to serve as networking conversation hosts with students or alumni. The host role is a one-time volunteer opportunity, which serves as a meaningful cultivation or stewardship opportunity. Hosts and meal attendees are intentionally drawn from the same industry or field.

Rationale

Broad-based marketing for events and engagement opportunities are declining in effectiveness, especially among influential alumni or donors who expect more customized outreach. Proactive targeting of specific alumni to engage in specific activities increases their likelihood of attendance and facilitates a higher-quality event by ensuring fit between the attendees and the program's goals.

Implementation Considerations

This brief includes two case studies of programs with similar principles that operate in a single metropolitan market with a critical mass of donors and alumni. However, institutions should replicate the program that matches their goals:

- Because students attend Dinners on DePaul, it makes most sense for institutions whose campuses are in such a setting. This program is led by alumni relations.
- Washington University in St. Louis is more portable as a program concept, and could be applied in any key region, including near campus. This program is led by regional development.

Resource Considerations

The amount of staff time required to execute the "Dinners on DePaul" program varies based on the number of dinners planned. On average, each dinner takes seven to 10 hours to organize, secure volunteer hosts, market to students, and attend spread over a three to six month timeframe.

The monthly lunch for the Washington University in St. Louis' Chicago Professionals Network requires about five hours spread across four weeks, during which the senior regional development professional coordinates with annual giving staff, alumni relations staff, and other MGOs. However, the larger twice-yearly gatherings require more work from staff members every six months to plan and execute.

Profiled Institutions:

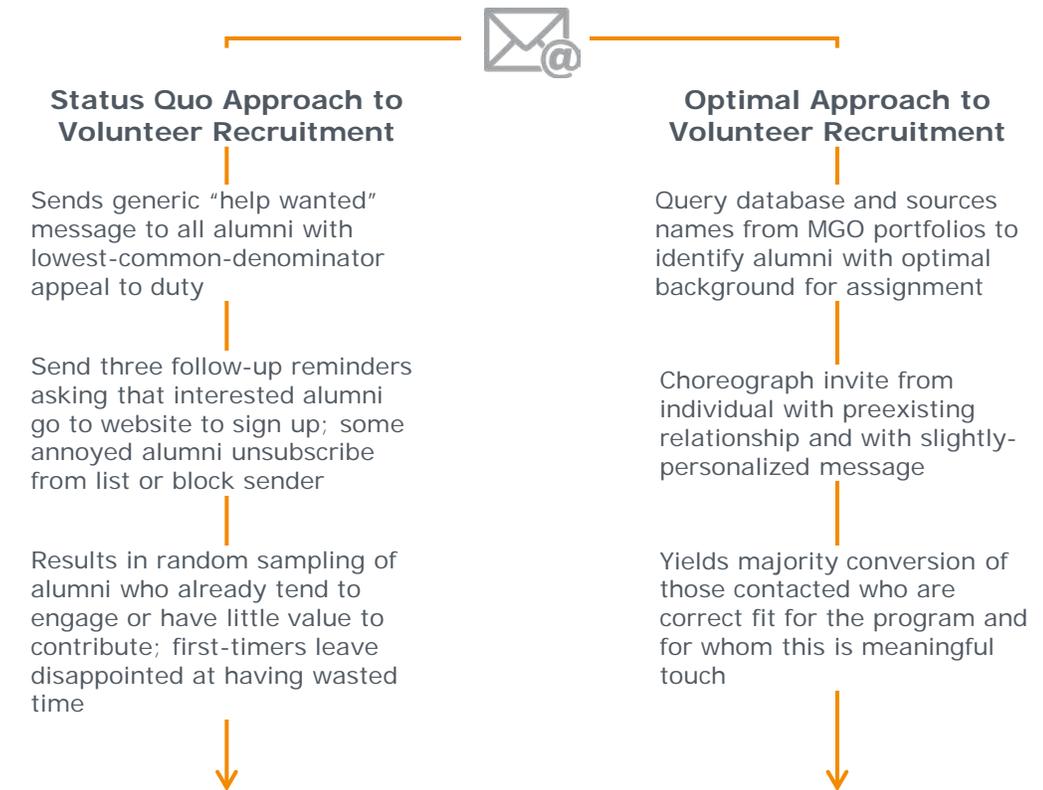
- DePaul University in Chicago, IL
- Washington University in St. Louis, in St. Louis, MO

Waiting for Constituents to Raise Their Hand

Alumni relations and volunteer program directors must abandon the status-quo of advertising engagement opportunities and waiting to see who turns up. Today's alumni are inundated with social media notifications and electronic messages through multiple channels.

To break through the noise, an ask must be personalized and customized. Mass market "help wanted" messages tend to overwhelmingly emphasize generic messages like duty, loyalty, or alumni pride. These fail to spark interest beyond an already-engaged subset of alumni and certainly do not penetrate the tier of donors and high-level who expect a more tailored approach.

From a "Post and Pray" Mentality to an Executive-Recruiting Mindset



50%

Of high-net-worth donors who volunteer do so because they were personally asked to engage in a specific task by a staff member or volunteers

The New Normal

"Audiences today expect segmentation – they increasingly assume that the content you share with them will be targeted, personalized, relevant, and customized to them. If it's not, they get confused, think you made a mistake, and/or ignore it completely."

*Andy Shaindlin
Vice President, Grenzebach Glier and Associates*

Source: The 2014 U.S. Trust Study of High Net Worth Philanthropy." Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, Indiana University. 2014. <http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/files/research/2014ustrustfinalreport.pdf>. EAB interviews and analysis.

Does This Sound Like Your Campus?

Colleges and universities are well-intentioned in their efforts to help students and alumni with career development, but they often demonstrate how failure to make proactive asks limits program effectiveness. Many institutions fall prey to the overly-general approach of simply inviting constituents to assemble, with the hope that mutually-beneficial networking and mentorship will spontaneously occur.

Anecdotes abound regaling the comical tales of the poor results that follow this strategy. For example, an orthodontist who attends a networking event ready to counsel pre-dentistry students, but only finds humanities PhD candidates. Small steps such as simply segmenting events and involvement opportunities by industry or profession; or separately pursuing experienced professionals as hosts and early-career recent graduate cohorts as attendees, can dramatically increase the likelihood that valuable connections are brokered.

Failure to Make Proactive Asks Result in Low-Quality Volunteer and Attendee Experiences

Common Misfires Demonstrate the Importance of Asking

	Current Methods	Pitfalls
<p><i>Career Center Database Request</i></p> 	<p>Alumni receives one-time e-mail invite to create a profile, but receives no follow-up for several years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too passive • Requires alumni to log in to remember password, update career and contact information regularly • Student overwhelmed by thousands of out of date profiles
<p><i>"Please Help!" E-mails</i></p> 	<p>Alumni receive e-mails asking for their time to help with current students, but roles and tasks are unspecific – "let us know what you can do"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vague asks are easy to ignore • Puts burden on alumni to come up with the way that they can help • Alumni assumes they wouldn't want people like me (i.e., they probably need more time than I can offer; they probably only want business types; my career hasn't been a straight line; I still don't really have a plan)
<p><i>Generic Networking Invite</i></p> 	<p>Alumni in particular city all invited to a networking event, bringing out a random group of individuals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear which alumni segments would be best fit • Results in disappointing conversation and sense that alumni have wasted their time when event is well-attended, but without enough commonalities across attendees to actually be useful

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

A Tale of Two Programs in One City

DePaul University and Washington University in St. Louis both bring together handpicked constituents for meals attended exclusively by individuals in the same field or with the same professional interests. However, they target different constituencies. At DePaul, alumni relations staff assemble dinners on campus hosted by three to four alumni (many of whom are major gift prospects) in a single industry or profession, attended by 15-25 students interested in that field. At Washington University in St. Louis, a regional development director plans a lunch hosted by a major donor, attended by six to eight mid-career alumni who work in his or her industry or profession.

These respective programs demonstrate the power of making proactive asks of volunteers and alumni to engage with the institution and each other. A small amount of intentionality inviting individuals with similar career goals and aspirations to certain events, instead of hosting a series of all-call events or online sign-ups, goes a long way towards making these events feel incredibly customized and intimate. When in fact, they are actually just the same templated event, repeated each time with a new invite list. They also exemplify how integrated advancement staff can leverage one time volunteer roles as cultivation or stewardship opportunities for prospects and donors.

From Serendipity to Matchmaking

Industry-Segmented Career Dialogues at Two Institutions

	DePaul University's "Dinners on DePaul"	Washington University in St. Louis's "Chicago Professionals Network"
Goal	To leverage alumni knowledge to help students break into a specific field and engage alumni in the process	To surface, cultivate, and steward emerging alumni leaders in large regional market
Number of Meals Per Year	12-22 dinners in South Loop or Lincoln Park campuses	11-12 lunches at restaurants or workplaces across Chicago
Alumni Volunteer Roles	Three to four dinner hosts, usually mid-career professionals	One major donor acts as event host ¹
Attendees	15-25 students	Six to eight alumni who are regular annual giving society prospects or donors
Development Component	MGOs nominate prospects or donors from their portfolios to serve as dinner hosts	Senior regional development director hand-picks and matches one major donor with six to eight young and mid-career alumni attendees ²

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Helping Students Find Their Purpose

Each year, DePaul University offers 20+ dinners as part of its Dinners on DePaul series. Each dinner features three to four alumni in a specific career field and 15-25 students who are interested in learning more about them. Past dinners focused on accounting, non-profits, entrepreneurship, digital media, and counseling.

Each year, the alumni relations team creates a calendar of dates and times and determines industry themes for the dinners, with feedback from the career center on desired fields. About six months in advance of the dinners, they work with development officers in the units to identify potential alumni volunteers.

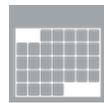
They also look across other alumni volunteer programs and the database to surface potential invitees.

Gift officers view these dinners as excellent cultivation or stewardship opportunities; this one-time volunteer ask has become a popular penultimate touch before asking for a gift. Interviewees also cite anecdotes of students finding mentors in alumni volunteers and getting help finding a job. One English graduate student met an alumna who works in the publishing industry, who, in the end, published her book.

DePaul Connects Students and Alumni for Industry-Specific Career Dinners



Planning the “Dinners on DePaul” Program



Alumni Relations Develops Calendar



Populate Dinners with Alumni Volunteers Who are Development Prospects



Recruit Students from Right Fields to Attend

- Six months before year begins, staff consults the career center on most sought-after fields
- Recent dinner themes include advertising, new media, nonprofit management, entrepreneurship, and sustainability
- Alumni relations asks MGOs to recommend their for prospects or donors in relevant fields; this is seen as an excellent cultivation or stewardship move
- Volunteers 15 to 20 years out of school can best relate to students, so they ask for younger nominations
- To fill in remaining spots, alumni relations staff scan LinkedIn and alumni CRM for donors and alumni in these fields and make proactive asks
- All dinners marketed on website with set capacity to RSVP in advance (25 students sign up, assuming 65-75% follow-through)
- To ensure students sign up, alumni relations staff work through relevant channels for specific industries or occupations. For a dinner on actuarial science, for example, they asked accounting professors to share their classes, e-mailed the leaders of accounting-related student organizations, and put flyers in the business school that featured alumni employers in prominent lettering

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Leveraging Major Donors to Engage the Mid-Career

Washington University in St. Louis operates a program in one of their largest regional donor markets called the Chicago Professionals Network (CPN), run in partnership between regional development officers, annual giving, and alumni relations.

Each month, the senior regional development director plans a lunch featuring one major donor and six to eight mid-career alumni who are high-end annual giving donors or prospects. All attendees work in the same industry. These lunches are hosted at the major donor's workplace or at a private room in a restaurant.

The role of hosting the lunch serves as stewardship for the major donor and attending serves as cultivation for high-end annual giving prospects.

Because the major donor tends to be a senior executive in the field while the alumni are middle management, they are excited to interact personally with the donor. During the lunch, participants have an opportunity to network and socialize. At the conclusion, the major donor talks to them about why he or she gives back to the university and how they view them as the next generation of leaders and institutional champions.

Helping Major Donors Meet Emerging Successors in Major Markets



Components of the Washington University in St. Louis's "Chicago Professionals Network"

Participant-Facing Programming

Major Donors Volunteer to Host Monthly Lunches

11 to 12 lunches each calendar year, segmented by industry or profession, featuring one major donor and six to eight high-end annual fund donors or prospects in 20s or 30s

Twice-Annual Events Convene All Participants

Twice-annually, they gather all participants, friends, and local alumni for large-scale event where major donors run panels and give presentations on industry issues, attended on average by 200+ alumni, with follow-up annual giving solicitation

Back-End Organizational Structure

Unified Advancement Effort Supports CPN

Senior regional Chicago development director leads program:

- MGOs leverage relationships with major donors
- Annual giving suggests leads for mid-career alumni prospects
- Alumni relations helps to run events for larger gatherings

Executive Committee of Donors Gives Time

To generate an easy pool of willing volunteers, the senior regional development director created an executive committee of the Chicago Professionals Network that consists of 20 major donors who volunteer to conduct lunches and help with the larger gathering

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Resonating with Donors at Every Level

The second component of the CPN is a twice-yearly gathering of individuals involved: major donor hosts, mid-career alumni attendees, along with any friends and fellow alumni of either group that they invite to join. These gatherings take the form of half-day conferences, where major donors serve as volunteers for speaking engagements, panelists on industry issues, and hosts for structured networking sessions. They also include university programming, such as remarks by a dean or administrator and references to the importance of giving back to the institution as a donor or volunteer.

After each conference, staff organize an annual fund appeal to young and mid-career alumni. The appeal comes from some of the more prominent major donors they interacted with during the events, explaining how WUSTL and the alumni network has been valuable to the author.

While the program only began in 2013, it has already begun to further penetration of the Chicago regional market. Its success stems from offering high-level networking and professional value to high-potential constituents that might not engage with typical alumni programming.

Engagement Programs Help to Penetrate Regional Market at Both Major and Mid-level Giving

Encouraging Results

570

Unique young and mid-career alumni have attended at least one CPN event since 2013

100

Annual leadership giving society prospects surfaced, which they are now working to convert

46%

Giving rate of CPN participants, compared to 22% APR

20

Major donors on CPN executive committee volunteer as lunch hosts, speakers, and panelists,

~30

Major donors beyond CPN executive committee have begun to attend larger gatherings

”

“The point of the Chicago Professionals Network is to build a pipeline. The older cohort of donors loves to see that we are ushering in young leaders in the alumni base – in other words, the people that will become them. And in the process, we engage both of those demographics simultaneously while adding value to each..

We get rave reviews about the CPN...It's about communicating that you're part of this alumni family that wants to use their connections to help you succeed. The hosts pull me aside after the lunch and ask, 'Where did you find these people? They're so great.' ”

*Stephanie Sutton
Senior Director for Regional Development Programs*

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Brainstorming and Implementation Guide

Instructions: Use the worksheet to determine how you will tailor your networking events. The diagnostic questions are designed to assist your decision-making and strategic planning.

Step 1. What segment do you need to prioritize?

- Current Students
- Mid-Career Alumni

Step 2. List the key sectors you want to target. Consider lucrative and sociable industries or professions where networking is important to advancement. Think about both where your institution possesses existing volunteers and champions that could support this program, as well as areas that are under-penetrated and could benefit from additional opportunities for engagement.

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Step 3. Are there key major donors or prospects that come to mind in the above fields that you could engage?

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Step 4. Consider a pilot. Before launching a full-scale program to offer multiple meals a year, plan one meal featuring a major donor prospect and either students or mid-career alumni in that field. How did it go? Track lessons learned across the selection and invitation process, meal conversation flow, and follow-up.

Step 5. Evaluate results and assemble proposal for future events to share with advancement leadership.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.



Want to Learn More?

This practice brief is part of the EAB Advancement Forum's research initiative, entitled: *The New Rules of Engagement: Building the Next Generation of Alumni Leaders and Volunteers*.

To learn more about this research and to find other resources, access the [Alumni Leadership and Volunteerism Resource Center](#). If you have any trouble accessing this page, please consult your Dedicated Advisor.



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