



Affinity Detectors

Mass Discovery of Potential Alumni Volunteers

Advancement Forum

Project Director

John Tannous

Contributing Consultants

Diana Barnes

Dena Schwartz

Practice Manager

Katie Stratton Turcotte

Managing Director

Liz Rothenberg

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Affinity Detectors

Mass Discovery of Potential Alumni Volunteers

Practice in Brief

Affinity detectors provide a low-resource vehicle for alumni to self-identify as potential volunteers and leaders while furnishing valuable intelligence about their affinity and propensity.

Rationale

Institutions seeking to recruit volunteers for a new project often turn to the “usual suspects,” fishing for leaders in an ever-shrinking pool of those who have volunteered before. The alternative, though, is just as ill-advised: to market a one-size-fits-all-message with a lowest-common-denominator appeal to the entire alumni base and hope that the right individuals self-select or opt in. Progressive institutions are building vetted lists of potential alumni leaders based on actions that suggest affinity for the institution and/or philanthropic propensity, actions tantamount to alumni raising their hand to be engaged.

Implementation Considerations

Susquehanna University’s approach to developing affinity detectors is most sensible for large, national, and/or dispersed alumni bases. This program is focused on quantity, uncovering hundreds or thousands of alumni who could be engaged in regional roles. This is accomplished through two asks:

- Ask #1: Requesting that alumni mail their business card for a career display
- Ask #2: Requesting that alumni record their community service for an alumni social impact report

Resource Considerations

This strategy is effective because it taps into legitimate initiatives that collect alumni information for career development and community service initiatives; as such, the effort required for execution is dispersed across advancement and student affairs staff. However, key costs for advancement include:

- Staff time for alumni relations or prospect management staff to coordinate with student affairs staff in the spring and to process submissions (the latter of which can be delegated to student-workers, with staff oversight)
- The opportunity cost of one month of phonathon deployment (however, execution in the spring limits these costs, as these tend to be the lowest-yield months)

Profiled Institution:

Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, PA

Actions Speak Louder than Words

Susquehanna University makes two multi-channel “micro asks” of their alumni base each spring. Compliance with these asks supplies valuable intelligence to advancement leaders and also serves as a proxy for alumni affinity and volunteer inclination.

To disseminate the message, staff utilize a direct e-mail campaign, task their phonathon to call alumni, and ask campus partners to market to alumni that graduated from or were involved in their unit.

Each of the requests, associated with student career development and community service initiatives, takes less than ten minutes to complete. Susquehanna’s alumni relations team consider alumni follow-through a form of subtle hand-raising that signals pride regarding how they have used their education after graduation. This practice helps to surface alumni that the university might not have realized were inclined to serve as a volunteer and creates a ready-made list of names for admissions, career services, and other units.

Narrowing the Field of Potential Volunteers to Alumni Inclined to Engage Based on Behavioral Indicators

Deploying Mini-Asks to Surface Alumni Willing to Engage

- 1 Ask alumni to share business cards for admissions display on various careers that liberal arts majors enter and for distribution to interested students
- 2 Ask alumni to share community service involvement, especially board service, for alumni social impact report



Not Just Detecting, but Also Inflecting Engagement

Susquehanna’s team praises the positive engagement that results from the asks, especially when alumni assume that they’ll be solicited for money and are instead asked for their professional accomplishments or their community service. The “feel good” touch helps to generate goodwill.

Consequently, after following through on either ask, respondents are more likely to give than non-respondents and are more likely to open emails from the university than they were before.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Ask #1: Alumni, Lay Your Cards on the Table

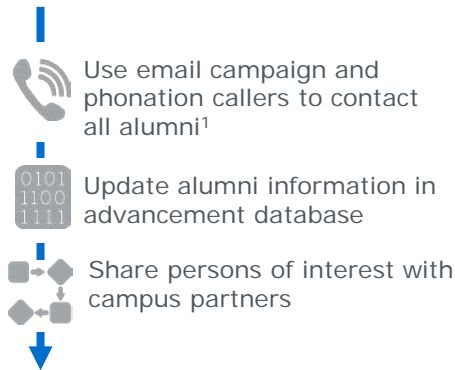
The first ask is for alumni to mail copies of their business cards to the alumni office for a spring semester display. They send all alumni an email with this request, and then follow up using the phonathon to remind them (alumni can respond to the initial email and opt out of a reminder phone call). The majority of respondent cards come from alumni under 40.

The business cards are organized by major in a large display in the student center. The display demonstrates unlikely connections between majors and occupations and visualizes how liberal arts graduates will apply their degrees in a variety of settings, some of which are unconventional.

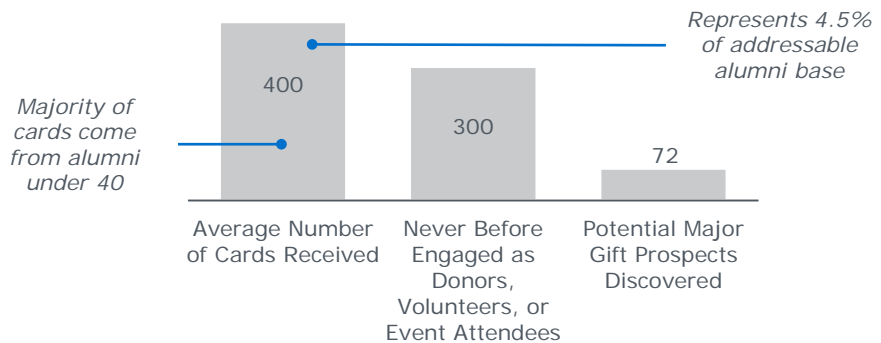
Before the cards are organized to form the display, a staff member manually processes each one, updating the alumni database with current employment and location information, and sharing the information across campus. Career services staff utilize the database to identify speakers and volunteers for various fields. Admissions staff use the database to identify credible ambassadors in important regions and might even use it to flag impressive alumni that the marketing and communications office may want to profile for publications.

Business Card Submission Represents Alumni Affinity and Generates Actionable Intelligence

Process Every Spring Semester



Average Business Card Yield



Oh, the Places They'll Go

"We tell them that the goal of the program is to show the power of a Susquehanna education by explaining to students all the places they can go in their future."

*Becky L. Deitrick
Assistant VP of Alumni, Parent & Donor Engagement*

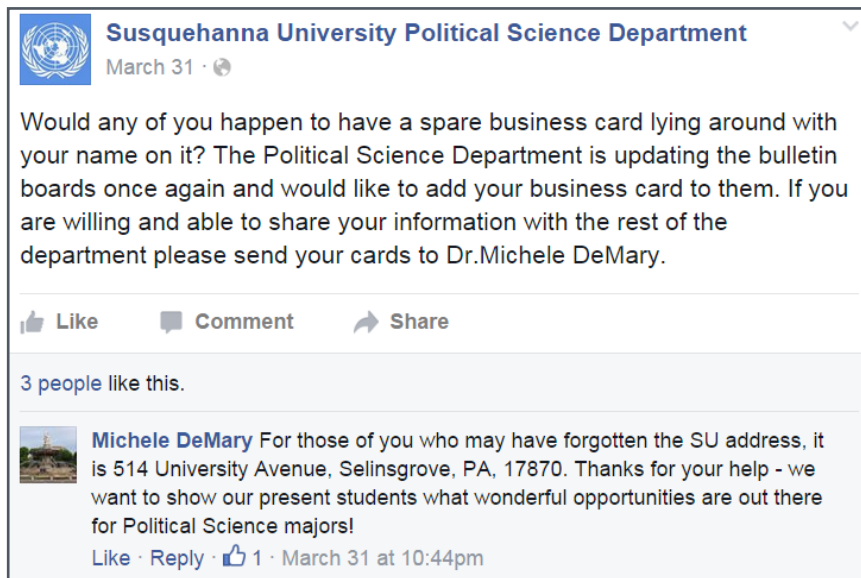
1) Staff do not currently segment this outreach in any rigorous way, but do make sure to call alumni that gave in previous years.

The business card display is featured as part of a week of special events for graduating seniors that consists of panels on post-college life and networking opportunities. After spring semester, this display is used by the admissions office, where it reportedly helps to rebut parent and family concerns about the value of a liberal arts education.

Susquehanna's annual collection of business cards has evolved into a campus tradition. Staff now collect them at regional events and Homecoming events. Departments across campus have also taken up the mantle of soliciting these cards. Faculty members take particular pride in seeing the destinations of students from their departments.

Faculty and Staff Across Campus Help to Disseminate the Call for Cards

Facebook Post




Susquehanna University Political Science Department
March 31 · 🌐

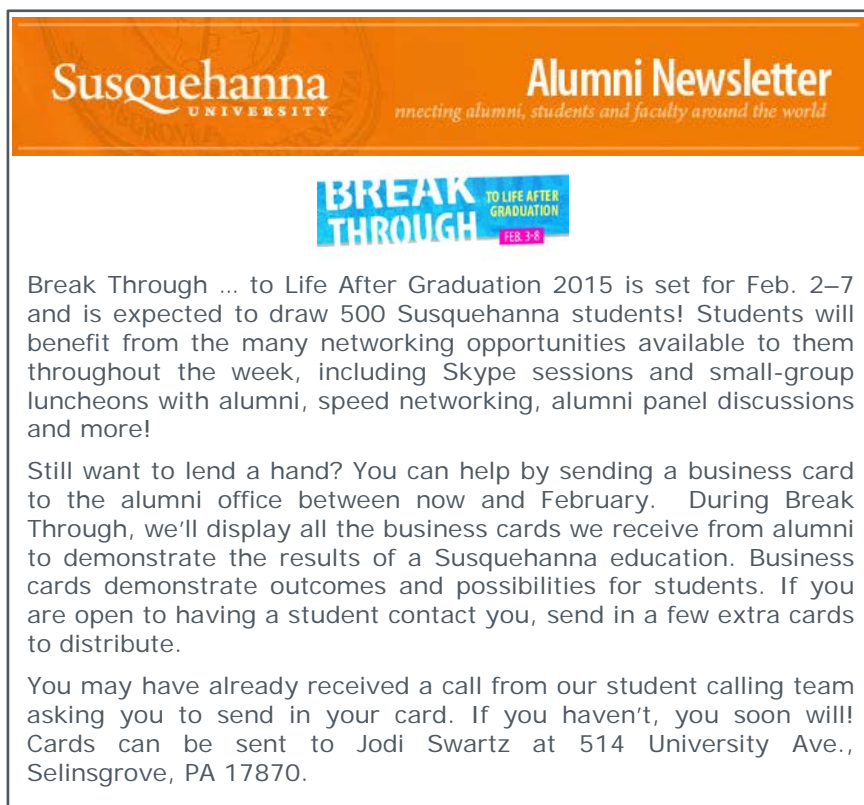
Would any of you happen to have a spare business card lying around with your name on it? The Political Science Department is updating the bulletin boards once again and would like to add your business card to them. If you are willing and able to share your information with the rest of the department please send your cards to Dr. Michele DeMary.

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

3 people like this.

 **Michele DeMary** For those of you who may have forgotten the SU address, it is 514 University Avenue, Selinsgrove, PA, 17870. Thanks for your help - we want to show our present students what wonderful opportunities are out there for Political Science majors!
Like · Reply · 👍 1 · March 31 at 10:44pm

Alumni Newsletter Advertisement



Susquehanna UNIVERSITY Alumni Newsletter
connecting alumni, students and faculty around the world

BREAK THROUGH TO LIFE AFTER GRADUATION
FEB 3-8

Break Through ... to Life After Graduation 2015 is set for Feb. 2-7 and is expected to draw 500 Susquehanna students! Students will benefit from the many networking opportunities available to them throughout the week, including Skype sessions and small-group luncheons with alumni, speed networking, alumni panel discussions and more!

Still want to lend a hand? You can help by sending a business card to the alumni office between now and February. During Break Through, we'll display all the business cards we receive from alumni to demonstrate the results of a Susquehanna education. Business cards demonstrate outcomes and possibilities for students. If you are open to having a student contact you, send in a few extra cards to distribute.

You may have already received a call from our student calling team asking you to send in your card. If you haven't, you soon will! Cards can be sent to Jodi Swartz at 514 University Ave., Selinsgrove, PA 17870.

Source: Adapted from <https://www.facebook.com/supoliscidept> and <http://alumnicconnections.com/olc/filelib/SQA/cpages/9002/Library/ENewsletters/January%202015%20newsletter.html>

Ask #2: Doing Well By Doing Good

The second ask is for alumni to report community service and involvement for the annual “Susquehanna Engaging in Regional Volunteer Experiences” (SERVE). This campaign aims to quantify the university’s social impact. Students participate in a day of service and regional clubs plan hands-on activities.

Most important to advancement officers is that all alumni receive a branded email campaign in April asking them to account for their local volunteering and leadership. Like the collection of business cards, this email is followed by a call from the student-run phonathon, asking alumni to share their involvement.

In particular, email and phone scripts remind alumni not to omit board service, which they may not equate with community service. Board service also helps to signal philanthropic orientation and interests, and even capacity.

Like the business card collection, a staff member processes every contribution, updates alumni records, and flags certain submissions to relevant campus units and development officers that may find them useful.

Interestingly, the business card request responders skew younger while the responders to the community service request skew older. The responders to each ask largely do not overlap.

Community Service Submission Communicates Philanthropic Propensity and Causes of Interest

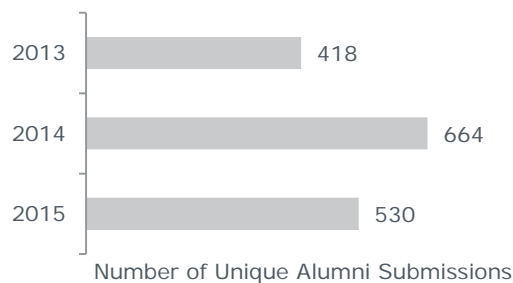
Asking Alumni to Self-Validate as Leaders

“What we say to alumni is that we don’t want them to do anything extra, we just want them to tell us what they already do. We know they’ve continued the great tradition of service among Susquehannans, but we just ask them to tell us how they’ve done so, so that we can quantify the magnitude...”

I remember this past April, an alum not only sent in information about two boards he is on, but also wanted us to know about press releases that feature him and other tangible signs he is in a leader in this field where he does a lot of service. It was so clear to us that he was raising his hand and essentially saying, ‘engage me!’ ”

*Becky L. Deitrick
Assistant VP of Alumni, Parent & Donor Engagement*

Response to Community Service Reporting



60-70%

of the SERVE campaign’s 25,000-hour goal comes from alumni.

Alumni can directly input their service via a website on Susquehanna’s alumni connections page, located [here](#). The page includes a frequently-asked-questions page regarding eligible service and a form to submit hours.

The below document excerpts from the home page of Susquehanna's SERVE campaign, answering frequently asked questions about the types of volunteer service that count for the initiative. While the program does offer valuable intelligence to advancement, co-ownership by community relations or service-learning units is critical to offer legitimacy.

Selected Frequently Asked Questions



Can I count hours that I already do?

Yes. We encourage you to tell us about the service hours you are already doing in your community, including all unpaid service and volunteer activities. We are counting all volunteer hours with the exception of paid employment, campaign activity, and paid board service.

What type of activities can I dedicate for this project?

We are counting time spent organizing, preparing or providing unpaid service hours for nonprofit or similar organizations (schools, nursing homes, hospitals, community service organizations, churches/synagogues). Examples include time spent organizing charity fundraisers, participation in charity events such as walks or runs, pro bono professional or medical work, service learning in or out of the classroom, internships with nonprofit groups that serve the community, board service and service-related federal work study hours, such as those performed for AmeriCorps and the PeaceCorps.

Can I also count my spouse or other family members' service?

We are counting all service hours from individuals affiliated with Susquehanna University. That includes students, alumni, faculty, staff, parents and friends, as well as family members of those individuals. Please invite others you know to become a part of our effort.

Why are we doing this and why is this important?

SERVICE is a big part of Susquehanna University's mission. We know that our alumni and students continue the tradition, and we want to document and share these efforts with the world. It is a uniting experience that bonds us together. Our ability to showcase alumni service activity could also have a significant impact on prospective students who are service oriented and could impact their decision to choose Susquehanna. This is an effort that all alumni can participate in from anywhere in the world, and it is as easy as telling us what you already do.

What is the history of SU SERVE?

SU SERVE, formerly Students Engaging in Regional Volunteer Experiences, is an annual service day, now re-named Susquehanna Engaging in Regional Volunteer Experiences and expanded to allow all alumni, students, faculty, parents, staff and friends to showcase the magnitude of caring that is happening now all over the world. With a common goal of service, SU SERVE will increase Susquehanna's visibility around the world, strengthen our ties to one another, and document the effects Susquehannans are having on organizations and communities across the globe.

How many people do you hope to participate in SU SERVE?

About 300 students participate in SU SERVE each year. We anticipate that through individual efforts, campus activities and regional chapter programs, we will have more than 1,000 alumni, faculty, staff and parent participants.

What is the verification process for pledged hours?

If your actual hours differ from your pledged hours, send us an email in April to alumni@susqu.edu and we will make the adjustment. You may also receive a call from a student in early May to verify your pledge.

Source: Adapted from http://www.alumniconnections.com/olc/pub/SQA/pages/page_45.html ; EAB interviews and analysis.

Information on service reporting streams in through a variety of sources, including conversations with student callers, but also direct submission via the website as directed by an e-mail campaign. The below form collects information on alumni volunteering.

Sample Volunteer Hours Submission Form

First Name	<input type="text"/>	Last Name	<input type="text"/>
Email Address	<input type="text"/>	Maiden Name	<input type="text"/>
Class Year	<input type="text" value="-- Select --"/>		
I am...	<input type="checkbox"/> An alumnus/a <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty/staff <input type="checkbox"/> An SU Parent <input type="checkbox"/> A friend of SU	If you would like an SU SERVE T-shirt, please indicate the size you prefer. Limited shirts are available while supplies last.	<input type="checkbox"/> Small <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Large <input type="checkbox"/> Extra Large
Service Activity 1		Service Activity 2	
Hours Pledged	<input type="text"/>	Hours Pledged	<input type="text"/>
Organization Served	<input type="text"/>	Organization Served	<input type="text"/>
Click here for to add additional service activities			
Additional people who will be joining you and dedicating their hours to the SU SERVE program.			
Guest 1 Information		Class Year (if relevant)	
First Name	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> An alumnus/a <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty/staff <input type="checkbox"/> An SU Parent <input type="checkbox"/> A friend of SU	<input type="text" value="-- Select --"/>
Last Name	<input type="text"/>		Hours Pledged <input type="text"/>
Click here to add additional guests			
Street Address	<input type="text"/>		
City	<input type="text"/>	Zip Code	<input type="text"/>
State	<input type="text"/>	Country	<input type="text" value="-- Select --"/>

Source: Adapted from https://secure.www.alumniconnections.com/olc/pub/SQA/event/showEventForm.jsp?form_id=182032; EAB interviews and analysis.

Undertaking an Affinity Detector Initiative

Four Steps to Bring the Practice to Your Campus

- 1 **Collect Specifications from Campus Partners on Critical Volunteer Needs.** Before undertaking an affinity detector initiative, engage in conversations with other departments that frequently utilize volunteers and ask the qualities or traits they are seeking in volunteers.

Sample Aggregated Demands from Campus Partners

Unit	Need	Quality or Trait Sought
School of Business	Class speakers for capstone professionalism course	Alumni with marketing or sales in their job title
University Marketing	Alumni to feature in brochure or website testimonials	Alumni with interesting, visible, or high-profile roles
School of Education	Department advisory board vacancies	Alumni who serve on boards or report community service for educational organizations
Admissions	Yield event hosts or speakers in key enrollment markets	Any alumni who live in Texas
Development	Potential members of Women & Philanthropy giving circle	Alumnae who are rated prospects according to previous wealth screen
Student Affairs	Mentors for students in the Arts Living-Learning Community	Alumni who work in museums, galleries, theatre, or other arts organizations or professions
Career Center	Panel presenters on "Careers in the Law"	Alumni who are attorneys and live within a one hour drive of campus
Alumni Relations	Reunion organizers for high-need class years	Alumni who graduated before 1977

- 2 **Design and Deploy the Micro Ask that Will Serve as an Affinity Detector.** While this brief profiles two Susquehanna initiatives that are part of larger student life initiatives, there are endless possibilities for affinity detectors. Affinity detectors have several key components:

- **Low-effort, but not no-effort:** The ask should not be time-consuming for alumni to complete, but should require more than simply a clicking a button. Asking alumni to spend ten minutes on an optional and one-off task helps to weed out those who are simply dutiful from those who may be good, reliable, and diligent volunteers.
- **Signals pride or affection for the institution:** The ask should catalyze a self-selecting response from those alumni who feel positively about the institution.
- **Surrenders actionable information:** Beyond merely signaling affinity, the ask should also reveal specific information about alumni interest or passions or about areas on campus that inspire or excite them.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis

Other examples of potential affinity detectors include:

- **Content submissions:** Asking alumni to write a response or upload a piece of content in response to a fun or thought-provoking question can signal their willingness to engage with the institution.

Sample Content Submission Requests



Ask alumni to post a photo of themselves or their friends participating in a favorite campus memory or tradition along with a designated hashtag for a “Throwback Thursday” event on Facebook or Twitter.



On Commencement Day, ask alumni to post their advice to the graduating class.



On Faculty or Staff Appreciation Day ask alumni to share an anecdote of a mentor they had while they were on campus.

- **Surveys:** Surveys that ask alumni their feedback on various institutional priorities and activities also help to surface potential alumni volunteers. Most surveys have low response rates between 5 and 25 percent, but the alumni who respond tend to have especially strong feelings. To leverage surveys as affinity detectors, respondents must be individually identifiable, allowing staff to connect positive and sincere submissions with actual identities. Such surveys may even directly ask alumni about their interest in participating in or learning about various activities.
- **Awards and nominations:** Asking alumni to indicate fellow alumni, students, or staff for various awards and honors not only signals their affinity to the institution, but also illuminates individuals with which they have important relationships. For example, a high-capacity prospect who nominates their former dissertation advisor for a university-wide award has revealed a potential campus partner who could help to arrange a visit. Not only does the nominator reveal their affinity, but they also may reveal information about nominees. For example, Stony Brook University recently created a “40 under 40” program, nominees for which were alumni that had achieved career success but that the university was not engaged with. Miami University’s “18 of the Last 9” program similarly focused on graduates of the last decade, and uncovered successful entrepreneurs and valuable intelligence on other individuals.
- **Student discovery initiatives:** Popularized by Georgetown University and now adapted by many institutions, student discovery initiatives use student volunteers to interview alumni over spring or summer breaks about their impressions of their alma maters and their lives since graduation. Their notes can help discern potential volunteers. For example, Georgetown University conducted 10,500 alumni interviews between 2006 and 2014, connecting participants to 29 different engagement opportunities. It has resulted in over 575 new reunion and alumni club volunteers and over 2,000 new admissions volunteers.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis





Undertaking an Affinity Detector Initiative (cont'd)

- 3 Enter Data from Affinity Detector Responses into Advancement CRM.** Student-workers or junior staff enter the data into the advancement CRM with a special flag or solicitation code to indicate how the information was received (such as SP2015 Phonathon for Business Cards), creating new records or updating existing alumni records with new information.

The flag or solicitation code should note the channel the information was sent through – this could indicate if the alum in question is most inclined to answer phone calls, respond to emails, etc. Data analysts may also classify this flag or code as contributing to a prospect’s affinity rating if the CRM system allows – or even their financial capacity, if they are comfortable relying on certain job titles, industries, or companies as sufficient proxy.

- 4 Distribute Rosters of Warm Leads for Potential Volunteers to Campus Partners.** Entering all names into the CRM with a flag then allows alumni relations or prospect management staff to query the full list, sort through them using specific variables provided by campus partners, and generate lists of potential volunteers to distribute to interested units.

Recommendations to Alumni Relations or Prospect Management Staff for Lead Provision to Campus Partners

Problem	Example
 Allow four to six weeks before sharing list	Being contacted so soon after supplying information to the university may arouse alumni suspicion.
 Remind units to reach out	This information is only as valuable as it is used. Prod unit volunteer leads to reach out after three and six months to ensure they use the information.
 Share an alumnus’ name with only one unit	Even if a single submission satisfies multiple criteria, the alumnus/a may find concurrent outreach by multiple units confusing, annoying, or suspicious. Include the alum’s name on only one or two lists to limit this.
 Determine protocols for development access	While the goal of this tactic is to generate names of alumni whose actions indicate their potential as volunteers, development colleagues will naturally be interested in rated prospects who express affinity or in submissions by individuals whose job titles, industries, or companies suggest wealth. Submissions may also come in from individuals who are currently in a gift officer’s portfolio, which warrants notice. To avoid incidents of simultaneous outreach by a gift officer and a unit seeking volunteers, or provoke alumni concern about a “bait and switch” in seeking only information initially then being solicited for a gift, advancement leaders should create parameters to avoid conflicts.

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.



EAB

Education Advisory Board

2445 M Street NW, Washington DC 20037

P 202.266.6400 | F 202.266.5700 | eab.com