

Tool #8: Corporate Alumni Club Builder

In aiming to leverage word-of-mouth advertising, COE units are on the hunt for pockets of alumni (main campus or COE) who are also likely to need to enroll in another course, certificate, or degree in the future. Based on COE Forum interviews, corporate alumni clubs offer universities a way to remind alumni of continuing education offerings, to establish name recognition that may lead to contract education, and to serve as an introduction to potential internship sponsors for programs with field-based components. The Alumni Club Builder is designed to help COE units evaluate the goals and strategy for corporate “alumni clubs,” cohorts of alumni at individual businesses or organizations where the COE unit may find and connect with prospects.

Successful corporate alumni clubs host events to gather prospective student names; the COE Forum recommends relying on alumni cohorts at each employer to promote such events, building upon the idea of peer-to-peer recruiting. Finally, consider the resources available and assess whether corporate alumni club events can be expanded to include select guests or can be opened to all employees. The steps outlined in this Builder will help COE units select potential employer hosts, weigh the invitation and promotion considerations, and plan a corporate alumni club event.

Use the profile below to set goals for future alumni club events. This profiled institution launched alumni clubs because of its history of serving industry with practitioner faculty frequently teaching at the university. In developing alumni clubs, the profiled institution learned valuable lessons about identifying alumni volunteers and ensuring that events are well-attended by the right people.

Case in Brief: A Master’s University Corporate Alumni Club

This club is designed for traditional alumni and is organized by the central alumni office, though COE unit graduates are welcome to join; the host employer is a software firm with offices near the university campus:

\$200-300 Cost of Breakfast Event	2-4 Events Per Location, Per Year	75 attendees At Alumni-Only Event	Prospect Offer Application fee waivers
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Implementation Advice

Contacts at the institution profiled in the case study below offered the following advice for universities or individual units launching corporate alumni clubs:

- ✓ Identify potential alumni-employee volunteers at regional alumni events
- ✓ Alumni who receive invitations will invite other alumni not registered as employees in university database
- ✓ Alumni-employees know which executives or team leaders should receive special invitations because of a potential for contract education or internship/job placement

Instructions for Launching an Alumni Club

Step1: Gather Information from External Departments and Units

1. Ask the central alumni office if they are willing to share a list of alumni volunteers (not donors to avoid sensitivity) and the names of their employers.
2. If the COE unit maintains an alumni database, determine if the alumni administrator can run a short e-mail campaign designed to motivate alumni to update their contact and employer information. When the alumni information is as complete as possible, export from the COE database as many names of COE alumni and their employers as possible. Alternatively, if the unit does not maintain a database of alumni information, ask program directors for names of active or particularly successful alumni and their employers.
3. Contact the corporate education department at your COE unit and collect a list of contract education partners that have requested a customized program within the past five years.

Tool #8: Corporate Alumni Club Builder

Step 2: Identify Corporate Hosts

Answer the questions below in the space provided to help your team brainstorm potential corporate hosts.

- Which employers regularly hire your graduates (traditional or continuing education)?

_____	_____
_____	_____

- Which employers have engaged in contract education?

_____	_____
_____	_____

- Which employers participate in advisory boards?

_____	_____
_____	_____

- If applicable, with which employers do continuing education students participate in internships or co-ops?

_____	_____
_____	_____

- Consider the occupations most prevalent at the employers above. Consult market research staff and faculty members about which firms or organizations listed above are most likely to be interested in pursuing continuing education. Circle the three firms where employee occupations are best suited to continuing education.
- Of the employers listed above, star three firms or organizations that employ alumni who actively engage (i.e., volunteer, mentor, serve as adjuncts) with the continuing education unit or volunteer with the main campus alumni group.

The organizations with both circles and stars make the best candidate for a pilot corporate alumni club. After identifying an employer suitable for a corporate alumni club, complete the steps below to refine the purpose of the club and define responsibilities of alumni-employees who volunteer to lead the club.

Step 3: Articulate the Goals of the Corporate Alumni Club:

Invite contract education, alumni affairs (main campus and/or COE unit-specific departments), the recruitment office, and career services to discuss the goals of the program. Complete the exercises below with these stakeholders.

Goals

Check the goals that apply:

- ☐ Offer enrichment to audience (e.g., a faculty member presenting on industry topic)
- ☐ Highlight university goings-on and achievements (e.g., a university staff presenter)
- ☐ Collect the names of prospective students
- ☐ Advertise applicable continuing education programs

Tool #8: Corporate Alumni Club Builder

- ☐ Establish name recognition among employees
- ☐ Identify internship placement opportunities for current continuing education students
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Strategies

The COE Forum recommends offering discounts and promotions in conjunction with an event, which makes the event more memorable and special. Events also ensure that the COE unit can collect the names of those who receive a discount or other type of promotion. *Check the following strategies that the COE unit is willing to pursue:*

- ☐ An event designed for a guest speaker
- ☐ An event designed for mixing and mingling
- ☐ Discounts on courses for alumni (specify type of course: _____)
- ☐ Other promotions for alumni (e.g., application waivers, university paraphernalia, tuition discounts, etc.)
- ☐ Discounts on courses for all employees (specify type of course: _____)
- ☐ Other promotions for all employees (e.g., application waivers, university paraphernalia, tuition discounts, athletic event promotions, etc.)

Scope

Consider budget and staff time and then specify the number of events the unit would like to host at an employer site per year: _____

Contacts recommend about two events per year per employer.

Step 4: Develop Relationship with Alumni-Employee Liaisons

- Identify one to three alumni at the organization identified in step 2:
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
- E-mail the alumni identified above and explain the goals of a partnership. Ask if they are interested in serving as liaisons between the employer and continuing education unit. Explain that the primary responsibility is organizing [x] number of events per year but that in return they will receive incentives (e.g., bookstore paraphernalia, course discount vouchers for their personal use or for distribution to friends, and/or tickets to main campus sporting events).

Step 5: Plan an Alumni Club Recruiting Event

Complete the checklist below when launching an alumni club and planning associated events.

Coordinating with Employer HR Department:

- ☐ Ask for liaison alumni-employee(s) to set up a meeting with COE unit recruiter, HR representative, and other alumni who would like to be involved in event planning
- ☐ Determine how involved they or another internal party would like to be in the event planning

Step 5: Plan an Alumni Club Recruiting Event (Cont.)

Tool #8: Corporate Alumni Club Builder

Event Planning

- ☐ Set a budget and assign alumni to inquire about event sponsorship (see worksheet below)
- ☐ Conduct alumni-employee survey and assign alumni responsibilities (see worksheet below)
- ☐ Schedule a guest speaker if applicable
- ☐ Send alumni electronic invitations to distribute
- ☐ Determine who (alumni or university representatives) should reach out to C-suite level guests and offer a personal invitation
- ☐ Determine best way to collect prospective student information and specify information that should be collected (e.g., via information table, a sign-up sheet, RSVPs, when distributing discount cards)
- ☐ Determine who from the university will staff
- ☐ Assign event responsibilities (e.g., collecting lead names, greeting guests, answering questions, etc.)

Event Planning Worksheet for Alumni-Employees

Alumni-Employee Survey

Which audience is most important to accommodate if the goal is to raise awareness of continuing education offerings at Example University? Please rank in order of importance, 1 being most important.

- ___ Alumni only
- ___ Alumni with limited guest invites (___ per alumnus)
- ___ Employees in a specific department, regardless of alumni status
- ___ All employees

The Forum recommends sending special invitations sent to C-suite leaders regardless of type of event

Rank the format that you think will most interest your colleagues with one being the most interesting (in all cases, the COE unit will set up an information table):

- ___ Faculty guest lecturer presenting on industry topics
- ___ "About the university" presentation, highlighting accolades and COE unit program offerings
- ___ Mix and mingle only
- ___ Mix and mingle with short faculty guest lecture
- ___ Mix and mingle with short "about the university" presentation

Alumni Responsibilities:

- Name of alumnus/a securing date and location: _____
- Name of alumnus/a responsible for inquiring about event sponsorship (i.e., is the host employer willing to cover some of the event costs?) _____
- Name of alumnus/a ordering and coordinating food and beverages: _____
- Name of alumnus/a developing and overseeing promotion plan: _____
- Name of alumnus/a collecting event RSVPs: _____