



“Common Denominator” Affinity Appeals

Research

Use this research to understand how affinity-based appeals are used to engage donors’ unique passions. For more information on this topic, refer to the Winning Donor Mindshare study.

Evolving Affinities Complicate Outreach

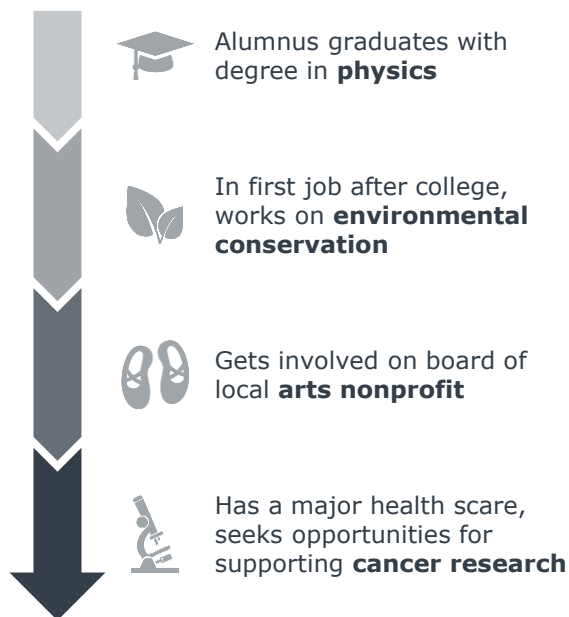
Only Alumni Can Truly Say What Will Motivate Them to Give

Engaging with the unique passions of each alumnus/a can boost response rates. Yet often the advancement office has little information on where those passions lie.

Alumni affinities evolve after graduation. Life experiences expose alumni to new ways to give back and new causes that deserve their support.

University solicitation strategies rarely keep up. In most cases, advancement staff continue soliciting alumni for a particular designation long after their interests move on.

Alumni Affinity Shifts and Grows



Hard to Predict Where Alumni Will Give

Fundraising Results from a Large Research University

49% Of college of engineering graduates gave to another school or college

77% Of college of arts and sciences graduates gave to another school or college

A Lack of Affinity Intel

Embrace the Diversity of Alumni Interests

“Common Denominator” Appeals Overlook Countless Affinities

Common denominator appeals highlight ways that alumni can have an impact on their alma mater. Yet they only offer a small, undifferentiated range of giving options to a wildly diverse community of prospective donors.

This one-size-fits-all approach discourages alumni from giving when the cause for which they’re solicited does not match their interests. Advancement offices can no longer simply show impact up front. They must show the right impact to the right donor.

Advancement professionals have begun to explore how to better group prospective donors into manageable segments based on affinity. They employ two primary strategies for doing so: they enfranchise campus partners, and they put alumni in the driver’s seat.

From a One Size Fits All Approach...



...To More Nuanced Affinity Segments



“Our alumni care about so many different things. How can we possibly capture that in mass appeals?”

“We address each of our affinity groups individually. Personalizing by cause has brought big returns.”

Two “Force Multiplier” Approaches



Enfranchise Campus Partners

Enlist faculty and staff members to help identify segments and compile appeals



Put Alumni in the Driver’s Seat

Curate funds into compelling causes and let alumni choose what resonates with them

Practice: High-Volume Impact Appeals

Solicit for “Common Denominator” Causes

Practice in Brief

Advancement staff identify gift designations that a large number of alumni would find meaningful. They focus on experiences that many alumni have in common or areas of campus that alumni would collectively want to impact through philanthropy.

The resulting gift solicitations focus on these designations, downplaying broader institutional support. The focus is on a bounded choice of funds to capture a broad segment of donor passions.

Problems Addressed

Donors increasingly want to give in a way that has a direct impact on beneficiaries’ lives. Solicitations that make a broad, institutional ask do not always align with those passions.

Yet donors’ interests are diverse and often highly specific. Advancement staff struggle to scale the work of soliciting each donor for a gift to the exact fund that they find most meaningful.

Institution Profiled

University of North Florida

Lifting the Unrestricted Veil

Shine a Spotlight on Discrete Priorities That Donors Can Impact

The University of North Florida recently reoriented appeals for graduates of its business school away from institutional support. Now, they solicit for targeted, high-passion projects that resonate broadly in the alumni community.

Donor counts at the university had declined for years, due in part to a broad unrestricted fundraising strategy. Alumni had little insight into what priorities their dollars could affect and consequently little motivation to give.

In response, advancement leaders reframed appeals for the Coggin College of Business. They highlighted three designations that a large portion of the alumni population would find meaningful—the career center, study abroad, and scholarships.

Response rates among lapsed and non-donors climbed as a result of these “common denominator” cause appeals.

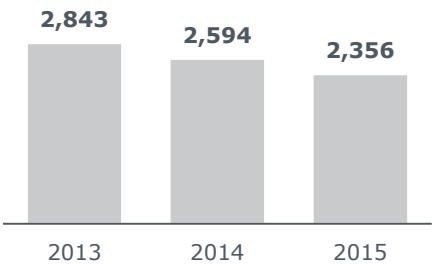
The University of North Florida Changes Course

From Loyalty Appeals...

Old Model: Solicit for UNF’s Greatest Needs

“If I ask someone to write me a \$100 check without sharing what it’s for, few are going to sign on the dotted line.”

Donor Counts Declining



...To a Focus on Impact

New Model: Highlight High-Passion College Funds

“We started asking the colleges for the areas of opportunity where people could make an impact and likely experienced themselves.”

College of Business Impact Appeal

Solicitation highlights three impact opportunities



Career Center



Study Abroad



Scholarships

0.51%

Response rate for appeal to mostly **lapsed and non-donor** population

Practice: Affinity Giving Campus Collaborations

Enfranchise Campus Partners

Practice in Brief

Campus partners fill in the gaps in advancement's knowledge of alumni affinities. They help identify constituents for whom a personalized solicitation from them would prove meaningful.

The resulting solicitations, though automated, appear to come from the campus partners' personal email accounts. They invoke common experiences and, in some instances, solicit alumni for gifts to restricted funds.

The messaging and designations in these appeals align with alumni's "hidden affinities" that advancement staff would otherwise overlook.

Problems Addressed

When advancement staff attempt to identify micro-affinities in the alumni community, they quickly encounter a problem of reach. Central staff can glean only small amounts of information from the alumni records to which they have access.

Even if advancement staff correctly identify an alumnus/a's particular affinity, sending an appeal from the central annual giving office would not draw enough attention to inspire action.

Alumni can easily ignore appeals from the institution as a whole, since they incur no social cost for doing so, and stand to gain no social reward in exchange for action.

Institutions Profiled

Texas Christian University

University of Vermont

Segment Alumni by Campus Relationship

Faculty and Staff Ambassadors Make a Personalized Case for Giving Back

Texas Christian University enfranchises campus partners through its ambassador-driven outreach initiative.

During the initiative, a diverse group of campus partners, ranging from a philosophy professor to the leadership center director, help annual giving staff identify a target group of young alumni and craft a solicitation that the group would find meaningful.

Fund designations vary by solicitation and include both unrestricted and restricted options, depending on the appeal.

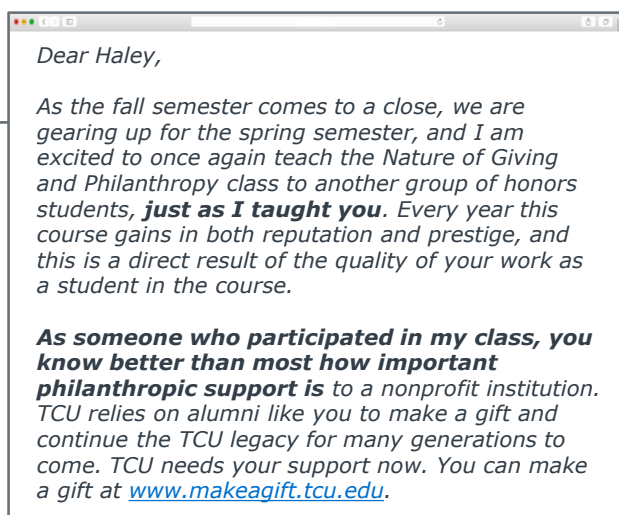
Texas Christian University Taps into Wide-Ranging Alumni Communities

Excerpted Campaign List

Ambassador	Alumni Group	Audience Size
"Nature of Giving" Professor	Course Participants	64 alumni
Director of First Year Experience	Orientation Camp Leaders	263 alumni
Rhinoceros Researcher	Environmental Science Majors	123 alumni
Chemistry Department Chair	Chemistry Majors	208 alumni
Leadership Center Director	Leadership Development Program Participants	71 alumni

Solicitations Emphasize a Cause That Alumni Can Relate To

Plain-Text Email from Personal Connection



An Authentic Appeal to Alumni Affinities

Right Message and Right Messenger Resonates with Young Alumni

The initiative offers a fantastic example of personalization at scale. Although much of the work of crafting and sending the appeal occurs centrally, each solicitation appears wholly customized to each individual alumnus/a.

This high-touch approach brings high engagement from young alumni, who open the emails in record numbers. It also converts many of these alumni into donors. In its first year, the appeal saw a giving rate that was 400 times higher than the institution's typical young-alumni appeals.

Highly Targeted Solicitations

"These emails go through our email system, and they're written and approved by us. But they look like they came from a faculty or staff member from across the university. They are highly targeted and very specific. Open rates for these emails have been through the roof."

*Harmonie Farrow
Director of Loyalty Giving
Texas Christian University*

An Unprecedented Response¹

400x

Higher response rate than for typical young alumni email campaigns

25%

Of solicitation recipients gave a gift

100%

Of donors graduated in the last 10 years

Source: Advancement Forum interviews and analysis.

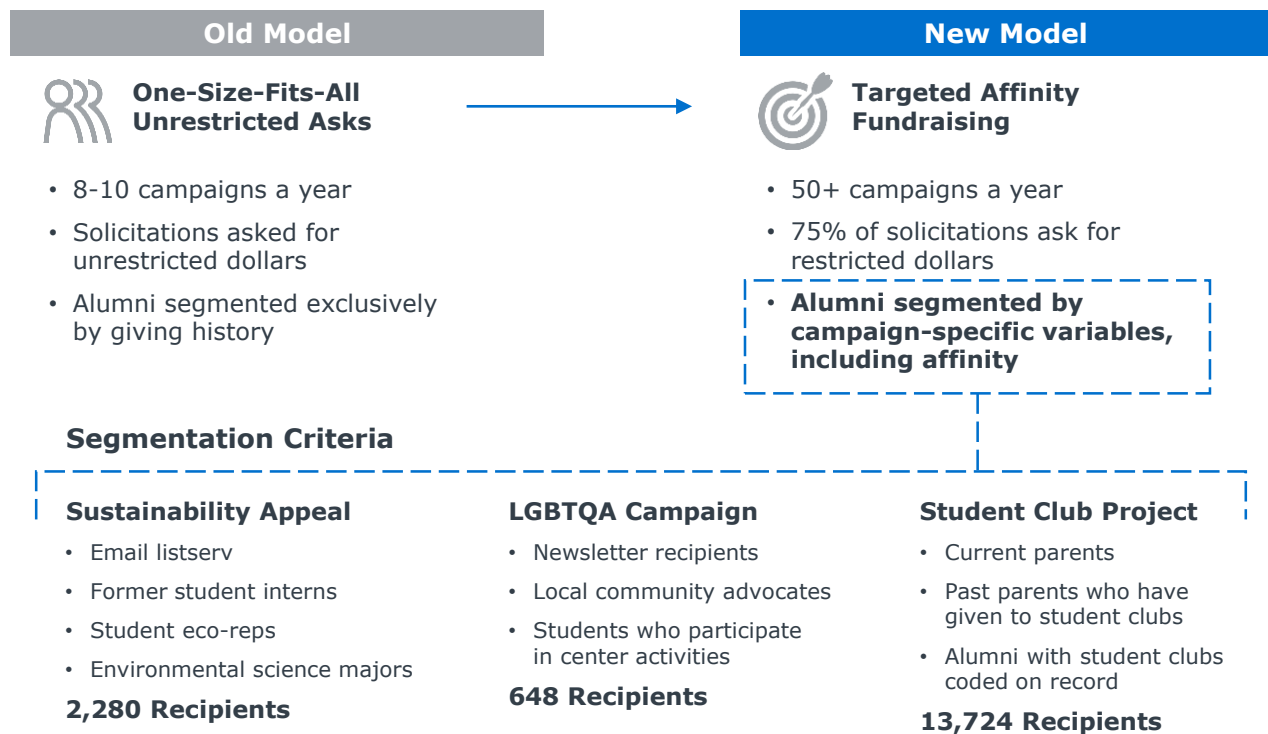
Surface High-Potential Fundraising Projects

Affinity Group Partnerships Target Nuanced Alumni Segments

The University of Vermont has also worked closely with campus partners to personalize appeals for alumni affinities, interests, and demographics.

Previously, the university conducted a small number of broad outreach campaigns every year. These efforts brought declining returns as alumni interest gravitated away from unrestricted institutional support.

In response, advancement leaders at Vermont reoriented annual giving efforts to focus primarily on restricted funds on campus. They now conduct over 50 targeted campaigns every year, soliciting alumni for everything from sustainability efforts on campus, to the LGBTQA center, to support for specific student clubs.



Source: Advancement Forum interviews and analysis.

Collaboration Is Key to Affinity Outreach

Annual Giving Staff Share Campaign Workload with Fundraising Groups

Unsurprisingly, executing 50 campaigns annually involves quite a bit of work. Central advancement is not alone in this endeavor.

While advancement staff coordinate many of the logistical, data, and copywriting needs, campus partners contribute to the effort, too. Staff and faculty members review prospect lists to ensure the university is targeting the right individuals, help craft the case for support, and promote the campaigns on social media.

Advancement leaders who would like to launch their own segmented affinity campaigns should review the above EAB guidance.

A Collaborative Enterprise



Annual Giving Handles Mechanics

- Appeal logistics (deadlines, printing)
- Copywriting best practices
- Solicitation templates
- Alumni data



Campus Partner Adds Reach and Relevance

- Prospect lists and contact information
- Appeal content and case for support
- Social media promotion
- Personal network solicitations

Key Steps to Launching Affinity Campaigns *EAB Recommendations*

✓	Identify campus partners willing to participate in fundraising
✓	Determine which alumni segments each project could appeal to
✓	Prioritize projects based on breadth of relevance and diversity of appeal
✓	Assign roles and responsibilities to campus partners and establish deadlines
✓	Develop creative materials for multichannel or digital appeals
✓	After campaign, assess results and record lessons-learned for future solicitations

Source: Advancement Forum interviews and analysis.