



International Alumni Engagement Strategies to Support Recruitment

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RESPONSIVE RESEARCH REPORT

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
International Alumni Engagement Foundations	5
International Alumni Recruitment Impacts	5
International Alumni Ambassadors	6
International Alumni Engagement Motivations	7
International Alumni Engagement Execution	9
International Alumni Engagement Considerations	9
Engagement Channels	10
International Alumni Data Collection	12
Beyond International Alumni Contributions in International Recruitment	14
International Alumni and Employer Partnerships.....	14
International Alumni and Fundraising	15
Research Methodology	17

Executive Summary

Alumni ambassadors can play a valuable role in recruitment, particularly at the yield stage. Trusted alumni voices add authenticity during consideration and conversion, making outreach to admitted students especially effective. This stage shows the highest return on alumni investment, as alumni can address practical questions and provide reassurance to students deciding to enrol.

Mentorship and career access programmes create mutual value. Alumni benefit from meaningful opportunities to give back, while students gain guidance, networks and confidence for their careers. Micro-mentoring of either prospective or current students can offer alumni low-commitment opportunities to engage with their primary motivations in mind.

Successful international alumni engagement requires emphasis on their original student experience. Engaging international students before graduation strengthens their sense of belonging, increases long-term loyalty and directly influences future giving and participation. Alumni satisfied with their student experience are up to five times more likely to donate than less satisfied peers.

Digital engagement must reflect local communication norms. Channels vary by geography (e.g., WeChat in China, WhatsApp in India, LinkedIn in the US), and universities that tailor platforms to alumni preferences build stronger connections. Formal communication strategies also amplify alumni volunteerism and participation. Beyond direct communication, alumni engagement units also sponsor virtual book clubs or host podcasts to provide scalable, flexible options to maintain ties with international alumni communities.

Robust data collection underpins long-term alumni relationships. Structured surveys, update campaigns and peer referrals improve alumni records, strengthen engagement and fuel more accurate outcome reporting. Incentivised campaigns (e.g., prizes of airline tickets or event tickets) have proven especially effective in boosting response rates.

Employer-linked alumni engagement presents an untapped opportunity. While most examples of employer partnerships generating new enrolments for institutions feature local employers, international alumni mentoring and career exploration programmes demonstrate potential to evolve into global employer partnerships, creating pipelines for both recruitment and professional development.

International Alumni Engagement Foundations

International Alumni Recruitment Impacts

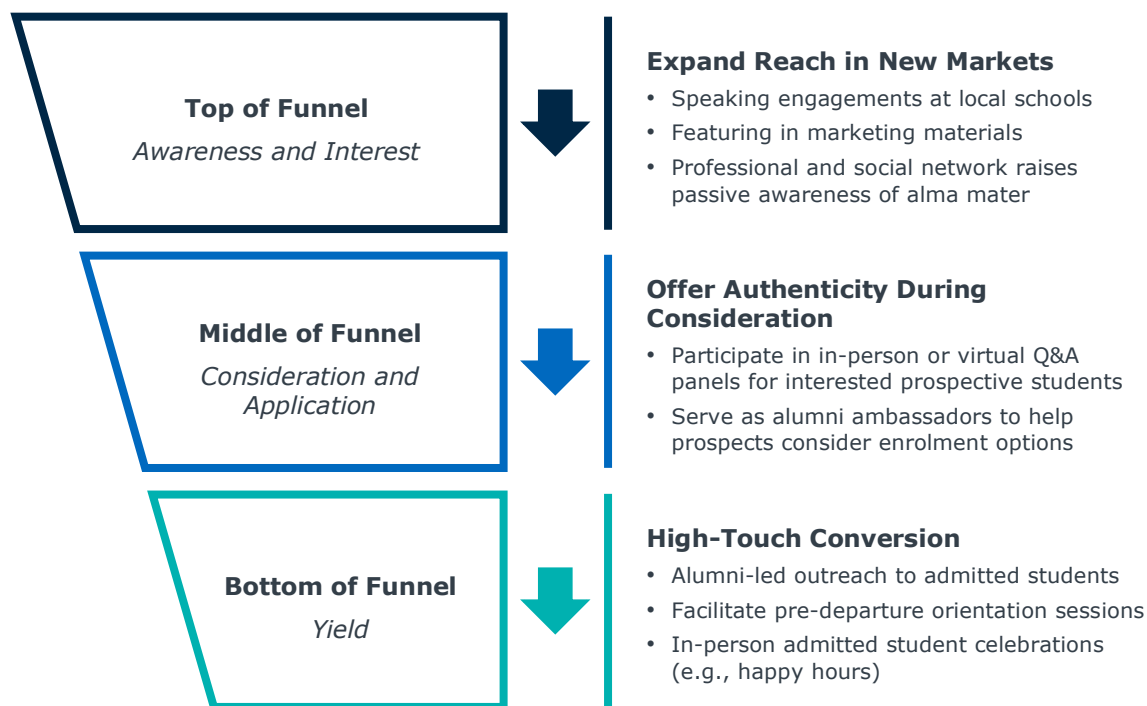
International Alumni Make the Greatest Impact During the Yield Stage of Recruitment

International alumni offer value to recruitment efforts across the entire enrolment funnel, from helping raise awareness of academic offerings in their home countries, to answering prospective students' questions about institutional culture and international transition, to conducting direct outreach to admitted students to increase yield. Available research and institutional case studies suggest that international alumni can have the largest impact on yield efforts towards the "bottom" of the enrolment funnel. International alumni offer trusted, authentic perspectives to prospective students who are already close to enrolment.

International alumni engagement higher in the funnel can be impactful, but the return on investment (ROI) of these efforts is harder to measure, and the broad nature of awareness-raising efforts can mean any impact is diffuse.

Targeted yield efforts for admitted students can have a higher and more measurable return on investment.

Alumni Impact at Different Points in the Recruitment Funnel



International Alumni Ambassadors

Ambassador Programmes Empower Engaged Alumni to Connect Authentically with Prospective Students

High-performing alumni relations programs often engage international alumni as alumni ambassadors to support student recruitment. Alumni ambassadors are recruited during their final semester of studies at the university and complete a pre-graduation orientation programme to ensure that they are prepared to represent the university at student recruitment events.

For example, the [University of York](#) established a team of ambassadors to expand both the reach and impact of its international recruitment efforts. Research conducted by the alumni relations team revealed a substantial number of alumni residing in global regions where international enrolment had historically been low. Many of these graduates were already well-connected to the institution and could be relied upon to engage prospective students directly by delivering presentations and leading workshops independently. University leaders also found that this program provided an opportunity to engage with alumni in regions where there is limited university activity.

Similarly, **Loughborough University** developed a [Global Alumni Ambassador](#) programme to strengthen engagement in regions with large alumni populations, including Mainland China, Hong Kong SAR, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Singapore and the USA. Ambassadors serve as vital links between the University and local alumni communities, serving as key points of contact. Ambassadors also advance the University's strategic priorities by sharing career insights with students, supporting international recruitment efforts and fostering opportunities for research collaboration.

International Alumni Ambassadors Also Recommend Process and Offering Improvements

International alumni not only support and improve current recruiting efforts but also advise on admissions processes, new in-demand educational offerings development and strategic partnership exploration. **Stanford University's** international alumni ambassadors share insights about their Stanford experience to inform current admissions operations, while the **University of Colorado-Boulder's** ambassadors are expected to share ideas and opportunities for new academic programmes, employer partnerships and potential recruitment markets.

Alumni Ambassador Roles in Student Recruitment

Top of Funnel

Bottom of Funnel

Ongoing Strategy

University	Feature in Alumni Profiles	Participate in Fairs, Panels, Events	Host Prospective and Admitted Student Receptions	Communicate with Prospective and Admitted Students	Interview Applicants	Identify Opportunities for Institution (e.g., new degrees)
Imperial College London UK	✓	✓	✓	✓		
University of Newcastle UK	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Northwestern University US	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Purdue University US			✓	✓		
Stanford University US		✓	✓		✓	✓
University of Colorado-Boulder US	✓		✓	✓		✓
University of Michigan US		✓		✓		

International Alumni Engagement Motivations

International Alumni Value Mentorship Opportunities, While International Students Seek Career Support

International alumni seek opportunities to mentor current or prospective students, while international students value career support in their alumni relationships. Programmes that address these needs will best engage both populations and encourage international alumni to support recruitment efforts.

The International Alumni Mentoring and Career Access Mentoring Programs at [the University of Adelaide](#) connect current international students with alumni and industry professionals. The goal is to provide extra support, career guidance and insights into study success and job hunting. Alumni mentors, many of whom were once international students themselves, act as relatable role models. Sessions typically occur online (e.g., Zoom) to accommodate mentors who may live locally, interstate, or abroad

The International Alumni Mentoring and Career Access Mentoring Programs take a mentee-driven approach with students directing conversations toward their own career goals and interests. Student participants are expected to attend the program

information session (or watch the recording) and review the program handbook, prepare for and engage in two to four mentoring meetings (about 45 minutes each), set career goals and track learning outcomes, submit a reflection after each meeting and complete a program evaluation at the end to improve the experience for future students.



Micro-Mentoring Offers Alumni Low-Intensity Engagement with Prospective or Current Students

Micro-mentoring connects alumni and students for short, targeted interactions rather than long-term mentoring commitments. The goal is to make career guidance and networking more accessible by allowing alumni to share expertise in focused conversations that fit their schedules. Students benefit from quick insights into industries, job searches or professional development while alumni can give back in a flexible and meaningful way.

This practice could support recruitment via short-term mentoring of prospective students as well as demonstrates the value of the institutional alumni network in-country once enrolled.

Examples of micro-mentoring include:

- **Harvard University** established [Firsthand Advisors](#) to connect Arts and Science students with alumni volunteers from a variety of Harvard schools for career information and advice. The tool provides scheduling and connection tools to facilitate productive flash mentoring.
- **Carnegie Mellon University** created [CMUniverse](#), a virtual mentoring platform, that allows students to choose how and when they want to engage with alumni. Students can connect via text, phone, Zoom, or in-person, allowing mentors and mentees flexibility.
- **Thomas Moore University's BIO PACE Program** sponsors a speed dating-style networking experience, which allows students to engage with several alumni in a comfortable and controlled atmosphere.
- **University of Massachusetts Dartmouth** hosts a [Meet and Mentor mixer](#) to introduce current and past students, building organic relationships in an informal setting.

International Alumni Engagement Execution

International Alumni Engagement Considerations

Deploy Engagement Efforts with Strategic Focus, and Consider Risks Involved Before Investing Heavily

The following five considerations¹ ensure the success, and minimise the risk, of new international alumni engagement efforts:

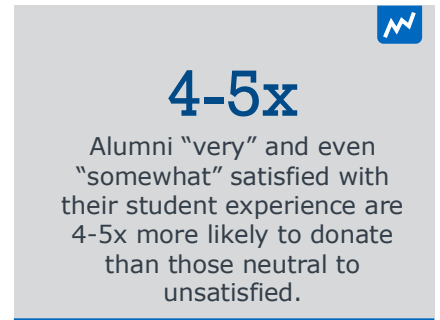
- 1. Consider how existing domestic alumni engagement translates internationally**
 - a. Translate existing practices: International programmes are often adaptations of domestic models rather than wholly new approaches
 - b. Adapt to cultural norms: Tailor marketing and delivery approaches to the expectations of each international audience (e.g., preferred digital communication channels)
- 2. Consider available resources and future scalability at initial launch**
 - a. Be realistic with resources: Avoid launching international projects that cannot be sustained due to limited capacity
 - b. Ensure sustainability: Avoid over-reliance on individual staff; build succession planning through shared information, team training and knowledge transfer
 - c. Maintain focus: Resist the temptation to expand into too many markets at once, especially when staff capacity is limited
- 3. Consider how early pilots inform future execution**
 - a. Pilot carefully: Start with defined areas, prioritising control and quality over autonomy; successful case studies and participant profiles can later fuel expansion
 - b. Leverage peer advocacy: Alumni, students and stakeholders in successful pilots can become powerful advocates to promote further growth
 - c. Manage expectations: As pilot programmes succeed, more alumni and colleagues will want to engage; ensure the infrastructure exists to meet demand
- 4. Consider assessment and strategies to share ensuing lessons learned**
 - a. Build evaluation into planning: Regularly review and benchmark practices, learning from both internal successes and peer institutions
 - b. Encourage professional learning: Alumni relations teams should share lessons openly within networks like CASE and sector forums
- 5. Consider long-term funding diversification**
 - a. Plan for resources: Mature programmes often diversify funding (e.g., corporate sponsorship, alumni fundraising, discretionary budgets or shared budgets across functions)

1) Analyzed from [Higher Education Academy Report](#) profiling case studies on engaging international alumni.

- b. Explore revenue-generating opportunities: Some models (e.g., alumni “travel-learn” programmes) can generate modest income but require higher service levels

International Alumni Engagement Begins While Enrolled

Lessons learned from international alumni fundraising (alumni engagement teams’ usual focus) should inform recruitment-motivated efforts. [Recent research by Ruffalo Noel Levitz](#) reveals a strong link between alumni satisfaction, sense of connection and future engagement. This illustrates the importance of effectively serving and engaging international alumni while they are still on campus as students. Using engaged international alumni to support current students through mentorship programmes is a high-impact way to benefit both groups and further engagement goals. This improved student experience can then build toward deepened relationships with international alumni and recruiting those graduates as ambassadors to benefit future recruitment efforts.



Engagement Channels

Assess Alumni Communication Preferences and Home Country Restrictions Before Investing in Digital Communication

Alumni engagement staff establish digital communities to maintain alumni connections. However, the media for such communication differ from country to country. These communities often employ locally popular platforms, such as WeChat in China or WhatsApp in India, to sustain peer-to-peer engagement and facilitate leadership travel or city-based gatherings. Many universities have developed structured alumni communications programs to connect with international alumni, foster a sense of connection to the university and cultivate opportunities for volunteerism.

Alumni Communication Channels for China, India and the United States

Alumni Country	China	India	United States
Channel(s)	WeChat	WhatsApp	LinkedIn, WhatsApp
Examples	<p>Given the reduced presence of mainstream alumni engagement platforms in China (e.g., LinkedIn's InCareer shutdown in 2023), universities that maintain strong engagement in China establish official WeChat presences. See below for institutions using WeChat to connect with alumni in China:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loughborough University (UK) has an official WeChat account for its China alumni network. • University of Birmingham's (UK) China Alumni Association has an official WeChat account and publishes WeChat contacts for the association's leaders. • Brandeis University's (US) China Alumni clubs direct alumni to an official WeChat account. • Ohio State University (US) uses both Weibo and WeChat to engage with students, faculty, alumni, parents and university and business partners. • University of Wisconsin-Madison (US) lists Alumni Chapter contacts in China by WeChat handle and promotes its official alumni WeChat account. 	<p>According to a 2023 survey from the Pew Research Center, the most used media sites in India were WhatsApp (50% have "ever used") and Facebook (39% have "ever used"). See below for insights into WhatsApp usage for alumni programs in India at other institutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Wolverhampton (UK) highlights an invitation to join the WhatsApp group for the India Alumni Association on the group's official page. • Columbia University (US) School of Professional Studies alumni network in India runs an India WhatsApp community for alumni. • Ohio State University's (US) India Gateway programme lists a WhatsApp group contact. • University of Washington (US) promotes an India alumni WhatsApp group. 	<p>Several universities maintain dedicated alumni communication channels for graduates living in the United States. These networks often rely on widely used social platforms and messaging apps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brunel University London (UK) references a California alumni WhatsApp group on the US Alumni page. • Manchester Metropolitan University (UK) directs alumni to the USA Alumni Network LinkedIn group. • University of Oxford (UK) runs the Oxford Law US Alumni Network on LinkedIn and links to it directly from the alumni webpage. • University of Southampton (UK) links to LinkedIn groups for their Alumni Regional Networks in the Americas.

Book Clubs and Podcasts Offer Additional Opportunities to Retain International Alumni Attention

Virtual alumni book clubs offer alumni an ongoing, low-intensity way to stay connected intellectually and socially. Participants can join the online clubs from anywhere, making the experience inclusive and scalable. Reading selections often span professional development, leadership, or popular literature.

Example virtual alumni book clubs include:

- Alumni at the **University of Maryland** can join the [UMD Alumni Virtual Book Club](#) to connect with fellow graduates and continue learning. Clubs connect through private forums where all participants can discuss the current books and network with each other. The book club is entirely free.
- **Southwestern University** created the ["Let's Talk About It" discussion series](#) within the Southwestern University Alumni Association book club. The series is meant to engage community members in conversations regarding a particular social theme. Each meeting features a group of alumni panelists who have a particular expertise or insight into the subject matter discussed in the chosen book.

- **Winthrop University's** [Virtual Alumni Book Club](#) allows alumni to connect with each other and enjoy books related to lifelong learning, professional development, social issues and more. Joining the book club is completely free for both alumni and friends that are invited to join. The club also features an online forum where book club members can introduce themselves, discuss the book and learn from other participants.

Podcasts showcase alumni stories, career paths and perspectives in an easily accessible and shareable format. They help strengthen affinity by highlighting diverse voices and achievements within the alumni network. This medium also provides a consistent stream of content that alumni can engage with on their own schedules.

Example university alumni-oriented podcasts include:

- **Tulane University's** [Bea Field Alumni podcast](#) is hosted by two graduates who now work in the Tulane Alumni Relations Office. On the podcast, the hosts connect with fellow graduates, profiling their experiences at Tulane and their life after graduation. The podcast also is used to announce alumni events and programs.
- **Union University's** [Lest We Forget podcast](#) was created to connect Union University alumni with other Union alumni. The hosts interview graduates to hear about their favorite time on campus as well as gain valuable insights into a variety of topics.

International Alumni Data Collection

Surveys and Alumni Referrals Can Improve the Accuracy of Data Collected on International Alumni

Many institutions struggle to maintain up-to-date information on their alumni once they graduate. Details such as a graduate's location, industry and place of employment can help institutional leaders understand their graduates' outcomes, as well as enable continued outreach to incentivise fundraising, re-enrolment and other engagement.

Graduate Outcome Surveys

Many universities are adopting structured survey strategies and outcome reporting to strengthen alumni connections and gather more accurate data. By systematically gathering data on career satisfaction, professional trajectories and engagement touchpoints, alumni engagement leaders can better understand the impact of university programmes while also creating opportunities to sustain meaningful alumni relationships.

Berklee School of Music's [International Career Center](#) (ICC) surveys graduate alumni to understand their career satisfaction, career paths and engagement with Berklee. Additionally, the ICC publishes an annual report that highlights alumni involvement, employer engagement and the success of alumni engagement. This approach systematically captures employer names, roles and geographies. Additionally, the **University of Utah's** International Student & Scholar Services has launched a dedicated [international alumni survey](#) to collect information on what alumni are doing and to inform the development of international alumni clubs and engagement. While not specific to international alumni, the [University of Washington](#) surveys alumni six 6-months after graduation about their post-

graduation activities and outcomes to maintain engagement and momentum with recent graduates.



Incentivise Survey Completion to Improve Response Rates

To address the often-low survey response rates among alumni, the **University of Adelaide** launched an ["Update Your Details" campaign](#) from February to September 2017, with the goal of improving the accuracy of its alumni records. The initiative focused on increasing the number of alumni with verified contact and business information, particularly email addresses. Participants were invited to confirm or update their personal details, and those who did were entered into a prize draw for a high-value incentive: two business-class tickets to Iceland to see the Northern Lights, a trip worth \$15,000. Similarly, **Towson University's** [Alumni Information Update form](#) automatically enters alumni who complete the form into a prize raffle. Examples of prizes include a trip for two, tickets to sports games, and gift cards.

Alumni Referrals

Many institutions leverage alumni referrals and peer-to-peer outreach as powerful tools to deepen engagement and support giving. These approaches emphasise the influence of alumni networks in motivating participation, both in service and philanthropy.

For example, the [University of Missouri](#) allows alumni to submit the names and contact information of up to five peers they believe would make strong alumni volunteers through an online referral form. At [Elon University](#), alumni can serve as peer agents by engaging their networks via email, social media, or text to encourage event participation and philanthropic giving. Additionally, [Connecticut College](#) has found that alumni are three times more likely to donate when asked by a fellow graduate. To harness this effect, the college recruits alumni to act as Challenge Agents during time-sensitive fundraising campaigns, mobilising classmates through in-person events and peer-to-peer outreach.

Beyond International Alumni Contributions in International Recruitment

International Alumni and Employer Partnerships

Alumni Engagement Teams Typically Connect with International Employers Through Alumni

EAB research does not currently offer examples of alumni engagement and recruitment teams activating employer partnerships specifically as international recruitment pipelines. Most employer partnerships that involve companies and organisations enrolling current employees in institutional programmes occur domestically. However, international alumni mentorships, career treks and other strategies profiled in this report can serve as vital first steps to engaging employers more broadly.

For example, engaged international alumni who mentor current domestic and international students interested in work abroad can benefit from a talent recruiting pipeline and identify potential hires among forthcoming graduates. As an institution's alumni footprint grows at a given company or organisation, its leaders may be better able to engage that employer in a strategic partnership to enrol employees in tailored training programmes, or even full degrees.

EAB research offers [a wealth of strategies and tactics](#) to help institutions develop and grow employer partnerships for recruitment and revenue generation. Each partnership will reflect the unique nature of the employer and the value of your institution's educational and training offerings, but common steps to build a foundation for successful partnerships include:

- Dedicating staff to build and maintain relationships with employer partners, as well as to manage coordination across campus (e.g., faculties and academic programmes, student support services, enrolment and registration) to make partnership as easy as possible for employers
- Building a menu of employer partnership options, simplifying decisions for prospective partners and ensuring the institution's offerings and services are aligned with employer needs
- Aligning offerings to demonstrated employer needs and updating student support services to reflect the unique needs of working professionals

International Alumni Provide Global Career Experiences and Employer Site Visits

The [University of Manchester](#) developed the Global Graduates programme to connect talented international and domestic students from low-income backgrounds with alumni working in leading global cities. Each June, selected students travel to hubs such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai, San Francisco, New York, London and Zurich to spend a week meeting alumni across various industries. Through these encounters (whether over coffee, in the workplace or through networking dinners and tours), students gain a first-hand understanding of diverse career paths and working cultures. Alumni donors fund the travel and experiences to make the programme possible.

More than 85 per cent of participating students come from families without a history of higher education, and the programme raises aspirations, builds cultural awareness and strengthens professional networks. Students also benefit from an assessment centre-style selection process, offering early practice in recruitment techniques. Alumni benefit by contributing directly to the next generation of global talent, often with only a one-hour time commitment. With 86 per cent of past participants attributing their first job at least partly to the experience, Global Graduates demonstrates how alumni engagement can transform employability outcomes for underrepresented students.

International Alumni and Fundraising

Fundraising Appeals that Allow International Alumni to Support Current Students from Their Countries Increase Giving Rates

As universities seek to strengthen ties with their global alumni communities, many are experimenting with giving models that not only provide financial support but also create meaningful connections between donors and current students. Regionally based affinity funds and targeted hardship funds for international students have both proven especially effective. Both strategies allow alumni to see the direct impact of their contributions, whether by supporting students who share their cultural or geographic background or by assisting those navigating urgent financial challenges. Together, these models demonstrate how philanthropy can double as a vehicle for engagement, fostering a sense of shared identity, pride and solidarity across borders.

Approach #1: Country-Specific Affinity Funds

Country- and region-specific alumni funds provide a powerful means of connecting international graduates with the next generation of students from their home regions. Their visibility and scale can drive strong engagement, especially when alumni see a clear line of impact between their gift and a student from their own background. While there are several approaches to these funds, the most successful models are alumni-driven, where pride in cultural or geographic identity motivates giving. These funds perform well when supported by compelling storytelling, sustainable funding mechanisms and clear recognition of both donors and student recipients.

Several US universities have developed region-specific or identity-based alumni funds that directly connect graduates with students from their home regions:

- **University of Michigan's** Pan Asia Alumni Scholarship Fund, established by alumni in Hong Kong, is a strong example of this approach, providing targeted support for undergraduates from across Asia and fostering a sense of shared regional identity.
- **University of Southern California's** Asian Pacific Alumni Association Scholarships serve as a well-established model of alumni engagement, distributing over \$200,000 in awards to undergraduate and graduate students in the 2024–25 academic year.
- **Loyola Marymount University** also offers an Asian Pacific Islander Alumni Scholarship Fund, designed in response to the growing recognition of API student needs, enabling alumni who share this identity to support the next generation directly.

Collectively, these initiatives highlight how regional or identity-based giving can channel alumni pride and affinity into tangible support for students with similar backgrounds.

Approach #2: International Student Hardship Fund

Several universities have created targeted funds to address the unique financial challenges faced by international students, underscoring a cause area that resonates strongly with alumni who once navigated similar obstacles.

In the UK, several universities operate hardship or emergency funds specifically for international or non-UK students, illustrating how such targeted support is feasible in this context:

- **The University of Greenwich**, for instance, offers an International Hardship Fund that provides discretionary financial assistance (up to approximately £1,000 per academic year) to overseas and EU students who encounter unexpected financial difficulties.
- **The University of Brighton's** [International Student Hardship Fund](#) is available to full-paying international students facing short-term, unanticipated financial problems.

Examples beyond the UK include:

- **Columbia University's** International Student Hardship Fund provides emergency support for students affected by political crises, natural disasters, or immigration and visa issues.
- **Lehigh University** operates an International Student Assistance Fund, which provides grants of up to \$1,000 to address unforeseen needs. Additionally, the fund includes an Indian Student Opportunity Fund to support students from India and other underrepresented countries.
- **University of Illinois** highlights giving options such as [International Student Support Funds](#) and Study Abroad Scholarship Funds, allowing donors to directly enhance global student mobility and financial stability.

These initiatives demonstrate how international alumni can be engaged in causes that directly impact the success and well-being of students who follow in their footsteps.

Research Methodology

EAB researchers completed this report in September 2025 on behalf of a partner institution in the UK.

Partners sought guidance on how to engage the institution's international alumni more effectively. Researchers conducted secondary research within our library and beyond to identify valuable international alumni engagement strategies.

Research Questions

Leadership at the partner institution asked:

International Alumni Engagement Foundations

- In what ways do other institutions build and maintain relationships with their international alumni? In what ways do other institutions engage their international alumni to support recruitment?
- What international alumni engagement strategies lead to the greatest increases in international student recruitment?
 - Where are alumni most impactful in the recruitment process?
- What benefits do international alumni derive from engagement with other institutions?

International Alumni Engagement Execution

- In what types of activities (e.g., chat groups, recruitment panels) do other institutions ask their international alumni to engage? How successful are these in maintaining or increasing engagement?
- How do other institutions maintain up-to-date information on their alumni (e.g., current job title, employer), especially in countries like China, where traditional data collection methods (e.g., email surveys) can fall short?

International Engagement Beyond Alumni to Increase International Recruitment

- In what ways are other institutions building relationships with employers that support alumni engagement and further recruitment?
- What other international engagement strategies might lead to increased international enrolments?

Research Resources

The Applied Insights team consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal research library
- Secondary research

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- ChatGPT: Enterprise, which was used within the research and writing process for this report. EAB researchers have validated, enhanced and, where needed, corrected any included information and writing produced using artificial intelligence.