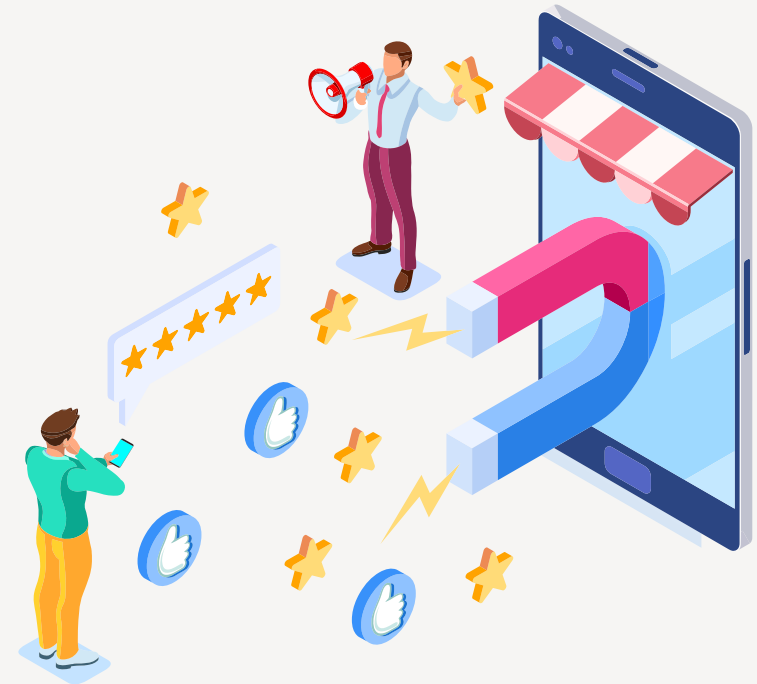


A COMPLETE GUIDE TO **ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT:**

How to Promote Greater Engagement
Among Alumni Members



Overview



At Pennington & Company, there's a saying about Greek Life that goes something like this...

The more engaged the alumni, the better the alumni.

Simply put, when you're dedicated to your organization, you'll work harder to sustain it.

But this level of dedication isn't automatic or unconditional.

It takes time to develop, and more specifically, *it takes effort* on the part of alumni. Alumni members are bombarded by a litany of stressful and pressing obligations that serve to move "engaging with other alumni" to a lower and lower position on their growing list of priorities.

Today, alumni members are burdened by an inventory of responsibilities including:

- Careers
- Family
- Relationships
- Finances
- Personal Obligations

And each presents a considerable time constraint in their daily lives. Alumni members tend to focus on these issues *first*, only choosing to dedicate their residual energy to the enjoyment of the more social aspects of alumni Greekdom.

As a result, they miss out on the historical equity of the organizations they belong to. They come around less often, lose touch, and eventually disappear when it's time to support.

And the problem is systemic.

A chapter cannot thrive on new blood alone. Excluding monetary support, the wisdom and experience of alumni are *vital* for the success and longevity of the fraternal organization.

As fellow alumni, you can...

- Exchange insights on the direction of the fraternity or sorority and the initiatives necessary to accomplish its goals.
- Work together in the creation of community programming that fosters active fellowship, service, and philanthropy for the values of your organization.
- Develop a closer network of like-minded thinkers and professionals that share a common bond of fraternal history and camaraderie.

These lessons are invaluable, and to receive them alumni members must be ushered into a culture that emphasizes the importance of engagement between alumni members at any stage of post-collegiate life.

And these changes begin with you.

Ready to encourage better communication and engagement between alumni?

Good.

Here's our complete guide to alumni engagement...

How to Reach Out and Engage with Alumni Members

One of the most difficult challenges in encouraging alumni engagement among members is simply **getting their attention**.

You send an email...it gets ignored.

You try to call...it goes to voicemail.

You mail a newsletter...and it ends up in the trash.

Although you're looking to build connections with an alumni network spanning the globe, in the modern era your ability to connect is at an unprecedented high. If you want to engage with your alumni members, the best tool for that is something you already possess—**your phone and its apps**.

Let's get started.



STEP #1

Become the point of contact. Let's assume you're starting from scratch in engaging your alumni.

Who do you message and how?

Start with a list. Your alumni association should have a list of your total active members, as well as their contact information. If the role of the secretary isn't filled, then run for the position yourself. If it is, then create a new position and call it the "alumni engagement chair."

As your alumni members are often busy professionals, **the best method of contact is email**.

So, in a brief email, explain who you are, your position within the alumni body and that you'd like to work on bridging the gap between disengaged alumni members. Then exchange contact information, and set up a time to call—ideally in the evening when the work day is finished.

If the alumnus is local, invite them to the next chapter meeting and send reminders.

Your organization's chief point of contact will be your responsible for creating processes of alumni engagement, installing these systems, and crafting an actionable plan for follow-up.



STEP #2

Create a black book. Get the contact information for as many of your members as possible. You'll want cell phone numbers, emails, social media handles, graduation years, etc. Set this up as an intake procedure for incoming alumni members, build a mailing list, and send an annual email requesting updated contact information. This will be an evolving document, but allow it to be viewable—but not editable—by anyone possessing the link.

Allow fellow alumni the chance to comment on others' contact information from their era of undergraduate membership.

With a record of total members, you'll give alumni the opportunity to connect with their fellow members from anywhere in the world.

How to Reach Out and Engage with Alumni Members

STEP #3

Email before calling, call before texting.

Alumni tend to regard email as more legitimate and official than text. As a result, emails have a different sense of accountability to them.

So, use them to reach out.

When emailing, keep your tone professional. Introduce yourself to alumni explaining your desire to build engagement among its members. It may take a few hours, days, or even weeks, but you'll eventually receive a formal *and* professional response.

If a week goes by without word from them, and you've collected their information from step #2, give them a call. It's likely they won't answer an unknown number, but leave a voicemail explaining that you'll both call back and email.

STEP #4

Embrace technology. Here's a short list of useful apps to communicate with alumni, and why they're great:

- **Groupme** - A giant online chatroom with all your undergrad members
- **Slack** - Similar to Groupme, but cleaner and used for business communication
- **Facebook** - The largest and most powerful social media platform on Earth
- **WhatsApp** - Text, calls, and video messages, all powered by WiFi
- **Skype** - Chat face-to-face (sort of) with any chapter member, anywhere in the world



Developing solid communication between your alumni members is key to maintaining relationships that can withstand distance, limited free time, and personal responsibilities like career and family.

Speak So They'll Listen:

Connecting and Engaging with Alumni

How a message is delivered is just as important as the message itself.

A 5-star meal served on a paper plate just doesn't taste the same.

And when communicating with your alumni association, the medium that you choose to communicate makes a real difference in both the reception and response of your members.

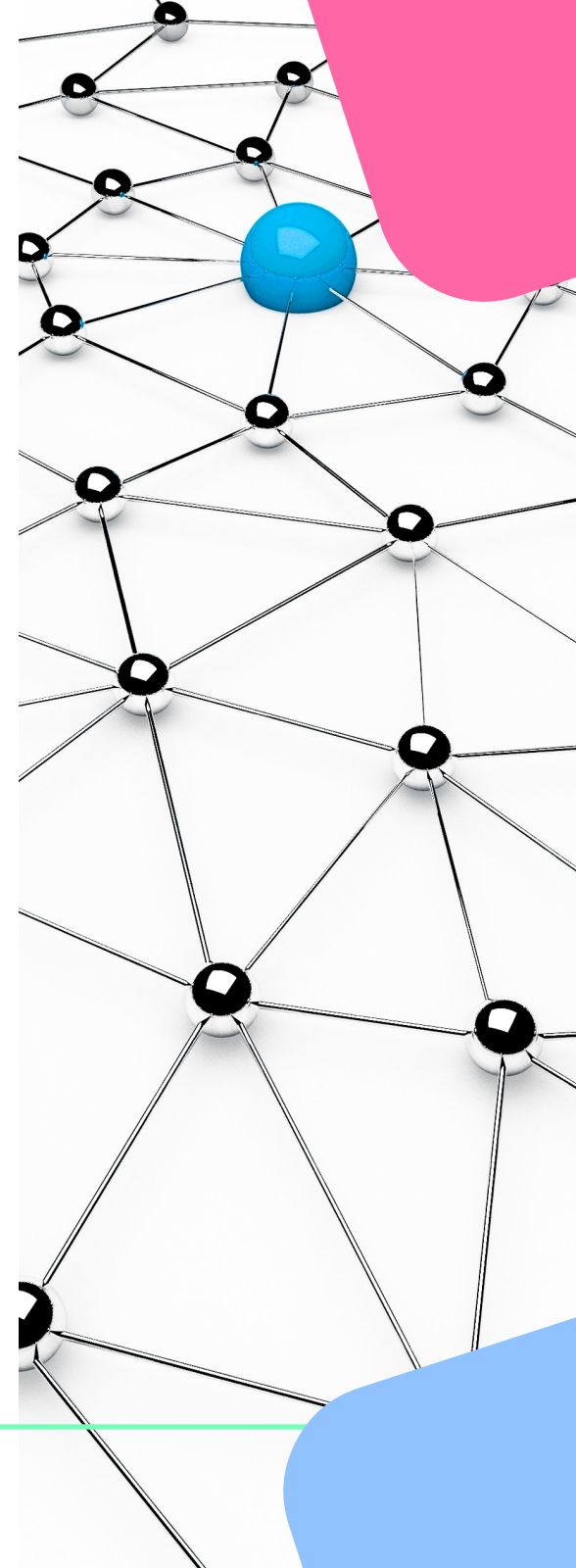
Does your alumni organization publish a monthly newsletter? Is it print or digital?

Keeping your alumni members in the loop is vital to engagement, so, embrace the circulation of regular newsletters as they're *designed* to keep your alumni community educated and on the same page.

Though alumni are more dedicated to the organization than undergraduate members, as life happens and members make choices to shift their focus to their careers and families, it's important to keep these members abreast of chapter updates and notices.

Why?

Because alumni represent a treasure trove of information and wisdom that you can use to further the goals of the alumni association or house corporation. As a network of educated, like-minded, and driven professionals, your organization should be naturally evolving, and the experience of alumni that can be offered toward decision-making, programming, and structural insight for your chapter are attributes to be underestimated.



Meeting Face to Face:

How to Engage Alumni Members

Your fellow alumni members aren't going to drive, fly or donate unless they believe there's a good reason for it. So, if you want to create opportunities to connect and engage significantly with your other members on a personal level, you'll have to be proactive.

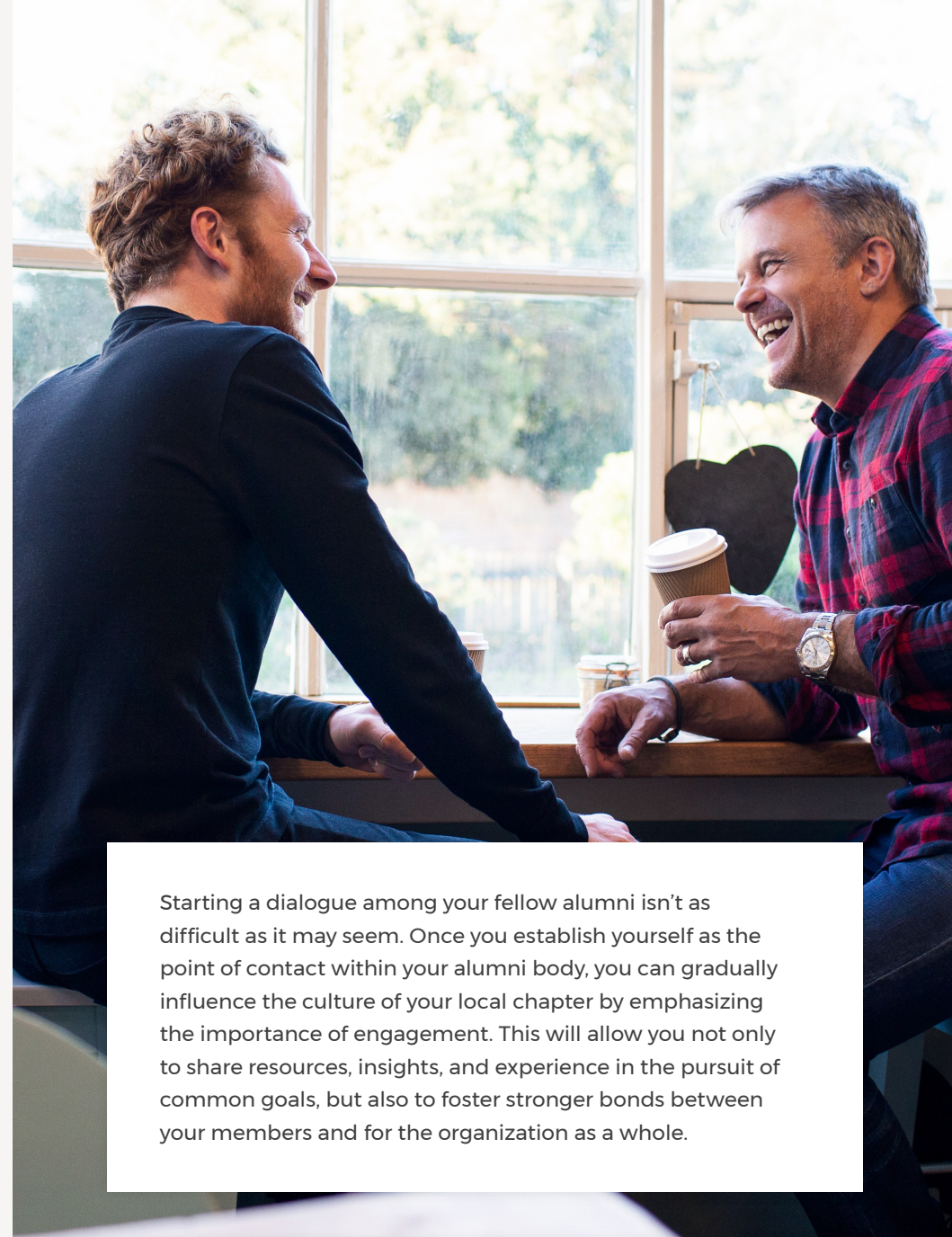
For many collegiate alumni, the time for reunion is Homecoming weekend. However, rather than relying on Homecoming weekend, during which where you'll be splitting your time between football games, school alumni events, and touring your old stomping grounds, consider creating a weekend of events that celebrate the anniversary of your organization. Many fraternities and sororities commemorate these in their own way, but the most successful are the ones that have a planned weekend of accessible but structured celebration.

A weekend of events should be a weekend to reignite brotherhood or sisterhood among members young and old, allowing them to share traditions, stories, and rites of passage with one another...as well as to sing songs, tour the campus, and enjoy general fellowship.

Instead of just watching the one-sided homecoming game every year, work with your alumni members to set the stage for creating a new chapter tradition in addition to the game.

Here's how:

- Establish the weekend of your organization's anniversary as a celebratory weekend
- Create a chapter newsletter that keeps alumni informed regarding its member base
- Make a detailed itinerary for the weekend's events with an expected budget
- Send this to your alumni members on a monthly basis
- Coordinate with airlines and hotels for group rates and discounts
- Set a **HARD DEADLINE** for RSVP's of at least a month before the event
- *Enjoy the weekend.*



Starting a dialogue among your fellow alumni isn't as difficult as it may seem. Once you establish yourself as the point of contact within your alumni body, you can gradually influence the culture of your local chapter by emphasizing the importance of engagement. This will allow you not only to share resources, insights, and experience in the pursuit of common goals, but also to foster stronger bonds between your members and for the organization as a whole.



Craig M. Tucker

Board Of Trustees Chairman
Oklahoma Kappa Chapter Of
Sigma Alpha Epsilon



“It has been our experience that effective alumni communication is absolutely critical before taking on a capital campaign. We were dead in the water as far as our ability to raise money until we signed on with Pennington to handle all alumni communications. Our alumni relations program and events got our alums plugged back into the active chapter and with their peers. Since we began the program we have raised an average of \$35,000 a year and have raised more than \$3.2 million in back-to-back campaigns over a six-year period. I encourage you to sign on with some real pros. It is money well spent.”

Pennington & Company is the recognized leader in fraternity and sorority fundraising,

..... having helped raise more than \$630 million in support of the renovation and new construction of Greek housing on 145 university and college campuses. Pennington & Company's proven strategies will help you assess your needs and develop support for a successful fundraising campaign. Pennington & Company is licensed/registered as a professional solicitor/fundraising counsel in all 44 applicable states. If you would like more information about effective alumni communication or fundraising programs, please visit PenningtonCo.com or contact us at (785) 843-1661.



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