

THERE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A TEN-YEAR GAP

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# 5 WAYS

TO TURN YOUNG ALUMNI INTO DONORS

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## Let's talk about engaging young alumni as long-term donors for your college or university.



***If you aren't engaging your alumni who graduated in the last ten years, then something needs to change.***

Young alumni are an important group to target for fundraising. They believe in your mission and know the value of the education they received. These are the people who were tailgating before football games just five years ago, studying in the union a few months ago, or gaining leadership skills in an organization seven years back. They are currently bridesmaids in their college friends' weddings and relying on the alumni group for important networking opportunities. In short, they are deeply connected to the university. They have also seen the value of their education as they embark on their careers or achieve professional degrees and find themselves well prepared to take on the world. Young alumni believe in the importance of what your institution offers.

***As you probably know, engaging young alumni as donors is hard.***

There seems to be a ten-year gap between when people are graduating and when they are giving back to the school. This is because most recent college grads simply don't have a lot of money. The average class of 2016 graduate had \$37,172 in college debt. Since they are paying off their loans, many recent grads feel like they are still paying the university. It can be hard to be motivated to give more when someone still has loans for the education they received. On top of having student debt, many college grads are developing their careers and have relatively low incomes but live in expensive cities. Because of that, they don't always prioritize giving. Don't give up on young alumni, though. Smart development strategy can turn recent graduates into a significant source of funds.

***So, how can you bridge the gap and get them involved?***

Calling young alumni every month to ask them for money isn't the most effective way to reach them. Let's be honest, most millennials won't even answer your call. Spending a lot of money on alumni mailers may not be the best way to reach millennials either. To reach recent grads, you need an engaging, relational strategy that uses digital fundraising tools. Below, we will give you some of the best practices for engaging young alumni.

# What is the game plan?

## 1 Build Specific Campaigns.

It may be hard for a recent grad to sign up to donate if they don't see a tangible connection between their gift and what their money supports. By having a capital campaign— for example, a campaign for a specific building or academic program—you give your donors the ability to understand where their money is going. That can be helpful for a recent grad on a tight budget because it allows them to feel like their donation is really being put to good use.



Consider asking alumni to give toward specific scholarships. Young alumni who recently attended college can often appreciate your school's efforts to attract high-achieving or low-income students and know that scholarships can help build the academic community, increase diversity, or add value to your institution in other ways. One great way to build a scholarship fund is to create scholarships in honor or in memory of specific professors. If you have the capability to access data that lets you know who students had as professors or which program they received their degree from, consider targeting recent grads and asking them to contribute to a named scholarship fund in honor of a professor. In Salesforce, creating groups based on recent grads' degree programs is a great way to stay organized while targeting alumni.

Finally, consider building campaigns around class years. So, ask the class of 2016 to give \$20.16 a month. You could even incentivize giving. For example, if a member of the class of 2016 commits to giving \$20.16 for six months, you could send them a class t-shirt.

## 2 Use an exclusive, gamified giving strategy.

“Gamification” refers to engaging donors with levels, points, or other ways to make giving like a game. It’s great because it makes giving fun for donors and helps with retention. You can also use it to create levels where young donors buy in at a “lower” or less expensive level and their contribution rises over time. Consider the perks that your school offers consistent donors: do alumni who donate a certain amount every year get game tickets or access to tailgates, special privileges at the school’s alumni center when they visit campus, or public recognition? You could create an exclusive offer for young alumni to buy in to these perks at a lower point of entry and have it ramp up over time. So, if donors who give \$100 or more per year get access to these perks, allow alumni who graduated one year ago to buy in for \$10, two years ago for \$20, and so on. This way, you are giving your recent alumni the ability to afford being donors, providing fun (and exclusive) perks, and building long-term financial partners.

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## 3 Mobilize your young alumni through crowdfunding campaigns.

Most of your recent grads from the last ten years are millennials, and most millennials are incredibly connected to each other through social media. Crowdsourcing, or peer to peer marketing, is vital for reaching young donors. Here are four key things to keep in mind to successfully mobilize young alumni to be fundraising ambassadors:

**Find peer leaders:** Crowdfunding requires buy-in from fundraisers at an early stage. You should put effort into identifying young alumni who are engaged with the university so that they can lead the campaign. Chat with recent graduates who have joined university staff (for example, as admissions representatives), young alumni who are active in alumni association groups across the country, and other graduates who have maintained strong ties to the university. Use Salesforce Communities to have a space where leaders can ask questions and get answers from your team.

**Recognize key players:** Incentivize participation in your crowdfunding campaign by recognizing individuals who raise a high amount of total dollars for the university. For example, you could invite every alumnus who raises over \$1,000 to a suite during a sporting event, or you could publish their names in an alumni magazine.

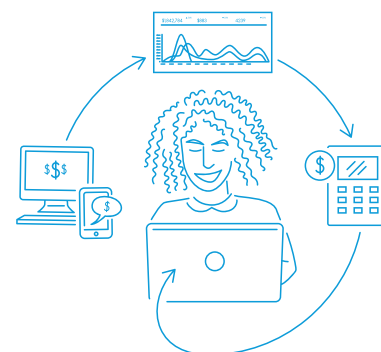


Have a cause that young alumni will rally behind: It is way easier for young alumni to ask their friends and networks to give to a sympathetic cause than an unsympathetic one. With that in mind, crowdfunding is more likely to be successful for your university's fund increasing student access to mental health services than, say, for raising money to increase office space. If you can find a cause that young alumni will identify with, they can be motivated and enthusiastic supporters.

Make everything shareable: Make sure that you create engaging, shareable content so that young alumni who are raising funds for the university can easily share your social media posts with their friends.

#### 4 **Make it easy on donors and use digital fundraising tools.**

No matter what campaign strategy you are using, use a range of digital fundraising tools to execute on your campaign ideas and reach young donors. Use technology to engage in meaningful conversations with prospective donors. Being able to answer questions quickly and digitally is important. Create opportunities to give online or via text message. Create excellent social media content, and use social media as a way to communicate with (and not just talk at) your alumni: listen to what they are posting and respond.



Finding one solution to deploy, manage, analyze and report on these fundraising tools will help your administrators save large amounts of time and headache. Digital fundraising platforms like [iDonate](#) offer a wide range of multi-channel tools that take less than a day to setup and are designed with the donor in mind to attract and retain today's modern and connected givers – especially young alumni.

#### 5 **Build loyalty by deploying an alumni community portal.**

Communicating with young alums on social media has to be a critical part of your engagement strategy. But there are certain limitations to using a Facebook group to foster your community. There aren't many options for customizing it to match your brand. It's harder to encourage

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authentic connections in such a public space. And at the end of the day, Facebook owns the data, so you aren't able to run analytics to learn more about how your alumni interact and how your messages are performing.

Many institutions are starting to turn to community-building technologies like the [Salesforce Community Cloud](#) to deploy private social portals for alumni. Schools like [Columbia University](#) are using these "communities" to engage alums of all ages, but they've proven especially effective with those in the ten-year gap. Communities provide a login-only online space for alums to connect, network, share career opportunities, and join groups based around interests or location.

With a community built on a business platform, rather than a social network, it's easier to integrate with your back-end advancement and events systems. These platforms also come with many more tools for customizing your portal, so you can design a more branded, personalized experience. Best of all, you control the data, so you can keep your finger on the pulse, analyze trends, and understand what messages are most effective at driving young alums to give back.

## It's time to get a plan in place

There doesn't have to be a ten-year gap between graduating and giving. Young alumni can absolutely be a vibrant, generous part of your school's donor base. So, plan what you will do. Consider what campaigns make the most sense for your school. Will a gamified strategy work for you? Can you identify peer leaders to help a new crowdfunding campaign take off? It's time to reach out to young alumni and use the ten years after college to build great relationships with lifelong donors.

