



The Importance of Reunions for Education Fundraising

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Once you have attended a school, you are linked to that school forever. I recently attended a West Virginia mixed class high school reunion plus a reunion of three teams that won three West Virginia consecutive state high school football championships. This reunion weekend brought back memories and renewed friendships. Even though the participants have aged, their personalities, relationships and friendships have not changed.

An institution's alumni are a reflection of its past, a representation of its present and a link to its future. An alumni reunion is a memorable event where attendees can relive the past by getting nostalgic and reminiscing about the good old days with former classmates. It can also provide tremendous increases in alumni giving to their alma mater.

Why are reunions important to institutions? All institutions need revenue and engagement, and donations can increase through "harnessing the sentimental magic of class and affinity reunions," according to EAB. Millennials value their networks and friendships, so therefore they enjoy reunions that offer giving through digital and social media.

Four tactical elements to maximize ROI for reunions include establishing a digital peer engagement platform, promoting of class gifts, creating inter-class giving goals, and encouraging multi-year pledges and planned gifts. Use the post-reunion period to reconnect with alumni and seek higher level giving. Invite alumni to think back, come back and give back to their alma mater.

There are many benefits to having reunions. A reunion allows conversations about life stories and choices made throughout life. Reunions after graduation dip around the 15-year mark. There is a significant increase in attendance at the 25-year reunion, which is the largest for several universities. For many alumni, the 25th reunion is one when insecurity about career achievement fades. Life and friends mean a great deal more than work success at that point.

Alumni engagement involves “the level of attraction, connection, affection and influence an alumnus has with their alma mater over time,” according to Alumni Access, which noted 67% of higher education institutions struggle with alumni engagement.

Alumni professionals are working with software that will connect alumni with each other on a continuous basis since they want to stay connected with each other not only at reunions, but whenever the desire to connect happens. Some colleges attempt to engage their alumni networks by creating local alumni clubs. Others ask alumni to either serve as mentors or volunteers, or help to establish job boards so their companies can hire graduates.

Reunions are important to schools at every level, and to those who attend those schools. The link with alma mater is important, from graduation to the end of life. Institutions need alumni to provide time, talent and treasure. Schools want alumni to consider returning to their alma mater to learn more, recommend future students, give resources, employ graduates and a host of positive engagement factors. Meanwhile alumni want their alma mater to stay in touch to learn about future events, stay connected with faculty, learn about institutional progress, ensure continual communication with classmates and more.

Reunions provide the perfect opportunity for reinforcement and a win-win scenario between the past, present and future. If you have never attended a reunion, I encourage you to do so. At a certain stage of life, it is all about having the chance to celebrate life. At my last high school reunion, I thanked my best friend for his role, so many years ago, in making my high school years extra special.

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