



# **Benchmarking Alumni Relations in Community Colleges**

*Findings from a 2012 CASE Survey*

Prepared by

**Andrew Paradise** and **Paul Heaton**

Council for Advancement and Support of Education

March 2013

### **CASE Project Staff**

Andrew Paradise  
Senior Research Specialist

Judith A. Kroll  
Senior Director of Research

Paul Heaton  
Director, CASE Center for Community College Advancement

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COUNCIL FOR ADVANCEMENT  
AND SUPPORT OF EDUCATION®  
1307 New York Avenue, NW  
Suite 1000  
Washington, DC 20005-4701  
[www.case.org](http://www.case.org)

CASE EUROPE  
3rd Floor, Paxton House  
30 Artillery Lane  
London E1 7LS  
United Kingdom

CASE ASIA-PACIFIC  
Unit 05-03  
Shaw Foundation Alumni House  
11 Kent Ridge Drive  
Singapore 119244

CASE AMÉRICA LATINA  
Av. Universidad Anáhuac No. 46  
Col. Lomas Anáhuac  
Huixquilucan  
Edo. De México  
C.P. 52786 México

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## INTRODUCTION

### SURVEY BACKGROUND

In 2011, CASE founded the Center for Community College Advancement to provide training and resources to help community colleges build and sustain effective fundraising, alumni relations and communications and marketing programs. A goal for the center is to collect data on best practices at community colleges. This white paper summarizes the results of a groundbreaking survey on alumni relations programs at community colleges across the United States and Canada. The purpose of the survey was to help community college staff benchmark their experiences and programs in alumni relations with their peers.

For more information about the CASE Center for Community College Advancement, visit [www.case.org/communitycolleges](http://www.case.org/communitycolleges).

### SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The CASE research office fielded the Community College Alumni Relations survey in June 2012. All U.S. and Canadian institutions that offer associate's or two-year degrees were eligible to participate. A total of 133 usable responses were collected. Responding institutions represented a broad range of demographic profiles reflecting enrollment size, geographic area and alumni base.

### STATISTICS IN THE REPORT: HOW TO INTERPRET

All financial figures in this report are presented in U.S. dollars (USD). Only one of the 133 community college respondents was from Canada. The CASE research team converted this one institution's financial responses into USD for the results presentation based on the exchange rate observed on July 2, 2012.

Percentages are rounded to the nearest one-tenth of a percent. Because of rounding, not all percentages may add to 100. Because of respondents' ability to select more than one response to a question, totals add to more than 100 percent in some cases.

Commonly used statistics in this report include the following:

**Mean (or Simple Mean or Average).** The mean is calculated by summing all responses to a question and dividing by the number of respondents to that question. Unless there are clear outliers that need to be excluded from the calculation (i.e., a few responses that are far outside the expected range of values for a given question), the mean includes each value reported. A mean computation is affected by extremely high or low values, which can skew results.

**Median.** When all values for a given question are rank-ordered from lowest to highest (or the reverse), the value in the middle position is the median. Half the values are above this point and half are below. If there is an even number of values, the median is derived by taking the values just below and just above the midpoint and averaging the two.

The median is sometimes preferred over the mean as a more representative measure because median values are not added and then divided by the number of respondents (as the mean is) but rather are chosen from the position of the value at the midpoint of the values. Thus, the median is less vulnerable to being skewed by very high or very low individual values. However, when both the mean and the median measures are provided, readers can get a sense of the range of responses to a question if there is a big difference between the two measures.

**Correlation coefficient (or Pearson's  $r$ ).** The Pearson correlation coefficient measures the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. A correlation coefficient, expressed through an  $r$ -score, can range from  $-1.00$  to  $+1.00$ . A correlation value of  $0$  indicates that there is no linear relationship between the variables. In contrast, non-zero values reveal some type of association between the variables. Positive  $r$ -scores mean that values of both variables tend to increase simultaneously (or decrease simultaneously). Negative  $r$ -scores reveal an inverse relationship, where the value of one variable tends to rise while the value of the second variable tends to fall.

Correlation coefficients are tested for statistical significance to determine whether observations reflect a reliable pattern rather than just coincidence. Tests of significance yield a  $p$ -value, which constitutes a threshold for attributing the results to chance or to a meaningful pattern that will hold up over repeated observations. Commonly used levels of significance are 5 percent ( $p = .05$ ) and 1 percent ( $p = .01$ ). If a test of significance gives a  $p$ -value lower than the significance level, such results are referred to as "statistically significant." Tests of significance measure only association, not causation, and there is no measured direction of influence to the relationship.

The results of a correlation analysis are presented throughout this white paper. The two primary variables of interest are outcome metrics: the percentage of alumni who were donors and the average gift per alumna/alumnus. These metrics related to fundraising are important indicators of financial outcomes for community colleges. The percentage of alumni who were donors is calculated by taking the number of alumni donors and dividing by the size of the total alumni base. The average gift per alumna/alumnus is calculated by taking the amount of funds secured from alumni sources and dividing by the size of the total alumni base. The two outcome metrics are standardized, which bypasses any order of magnitude effects on the correlation results that would have occurred with the raw variables (number of donors and total funds secured from alumni sources).

## INSTITUTIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey respondents represented multiple types of community colleges. More than two-thirds (68 percent) were single colleges with multiple campuses (see table 1). Nearly one-quarter (22 percent) identified themselves as a single institution with only one campus. Only 8 percent of the responding institutions classified themselves as districts with multiple colleges.

**TABLE 1**  
 What kind of institution does your office represent?  
 (n = 133)

Institution Type	Percent
Single college with one campus	21.8%
Single college with multiple campuses	68.4%
District with multiple colleges	7.5%
Other	2.3%

Although community colleges of varying enrollment sizes participated in the survey, the majority (64 percent) had student populations of fewer than 10,000 FTEs, or full-time equivalents (see table 2). Roughly one-tenth represented the smallest enrollment categories of fewer than 2,000 FTEs, and 29 percent maintained a student population between 2,000 and 4,999 FTEs. The largest enrollment classification of 20,000 or more FTEs accounted for 14 percent of the responding institutions.

**TABLE 2**  
 What is the size of your student population (or full district per question above)?  
 (n = 132)

Size of Student Population	Percent
Fewer than 500 FTEs	0.8%
500–1,999 FTEs	9.8%
2,000–4,999 FTEs	28.8%
5,000–9,999 FTEs	25.0%
10,000–19,999 FTEs	22.0%
20,000 or more FTEs	13.6%

Most of the participating community colleges have a robust alumni base. The average number of alumni for each institution was 139,462, with a median of 42,000 (see table 3). Nearly 29 percent of the respondents reported an alumni base on the smaller end of the scale (fewer

than 25,000 alumni), while a similar percentage (28 percent) fell on the larger end (100,000 alumni or more).

**TABLE 3**

Approximately how many alumni does your college/district have?  
(n = 98)

Mean	139,462
Median	42,000

Range	Percent of Respondents
Less than 25,000	28.6%
25,000 to 49,999	25.5%
50,000 to 100,000	18.4%
More than 100,000	27.5%

## THE ALUMNI RELATIONS OFFICE

Forty percent of chief alumni relations staff members report to the college foundation’s executive director. Nearly one-quarter report to the vice president for advancement, while 20 percent report directly to the president or chancellor of the institution (see table 4).

**TABLE 4**

To whom does the chief alumni relations staff member report?  
(n = 119)

Reporting Level for Chief AR Staff	Percent
President/Chancellor	20.2%
Vice President for Advancement	23.5%
Foundation Executive Director	39.5%
Other	16.8%

The survey data suggest that many community college employees focused on alumni relations have relatively little experience in their current roles. More than one-quarter of responding institutions (27 percent) had a chief alumni relations staff member in that position for less than a year (see table 5 and figure 1). A similar proportion of community colleges reported a tenure of one to two years (22 percent) and three to five years (21 percent) for their chief alumni relations

staff member. Only 19 percent of the institutions surveyed had a chief alumni relations staff member with more than seven years of experience in that position.

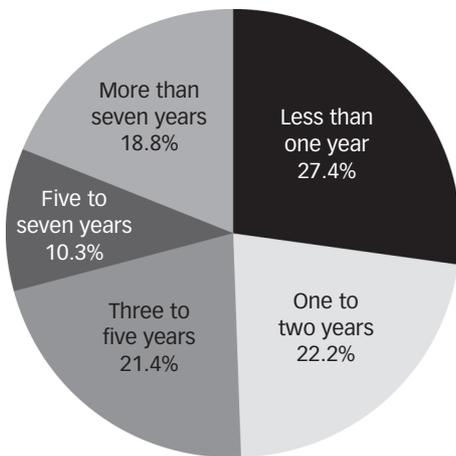
**TABLE 5**

How long has the chief alumni relations staff member been in her/his current role?  
(n = 117)

Tenure	Percent
Less than one year	27.4%
One to two years	22.2%
Three to five years	21.4%
Five to seven years	10.3%
More than seven years	18.8%

**FIGURE 1**

How long has the chief alumni relations staff member been in her/his current role?  
(n = 117)



Respondents were asked to indicate, from a list of 10 items, the primary responsibilities of the chief alumni relations staff person and to estimate how much time was spent on completing each responsibility. The three primary responsibilities selected were alumni relations, event planning and the annual fund. Not surprisingly, the responsibility with the largest share of time spent was alumni relations, accounting for an average of 30 percent of time spent (see table 6). The only other responsibilities that accounted for more than one-tenth of the alumni relations staff member’s time were event planning (average of 14 percent), the annual fund (13 percent) and the role as foundation executive director (13 percent). Responsibilities for major gifts, communications and public

relations, marketing and advertising, website management and social media coordination each accounted for an average of 5 percent or less of the alumni relations staff member’s time.

**TABLE 6**  
Primary responsibilities of the chief alumni relations staff member

	Percent for Whom This Is a Primary Responsibility	Percentage of Time Spent on This Responsibility	
		Median	Mean
Alumni relations	92.2%	20.0%	29.9%
Event planning	74.1%	10.0%	14.1%
Annual fund	63.8%	10.0%	13.3%
Website management	42.2%	0.0%	3.0%
Major gifts	39.7%	0.0%	5.4%
Communications and public relations for the college, district or foundation (not AR related)	39.7%	0.0%	4.9%
Social media coordinator	36.2%	0.0%	2.7%
Marketing and advertising the college, district or foundation (not AR related)	34.5%	0.0%	3.5%
Other	34.5%	0.0%	10.0%
Foundation executive director	28.4%	0.0%	13.2%

One responsibility often based in alumni relations—the annual fund—was significantly correlated with positive financial outcomes. For institutions where the chief alumni relations staff members spent more time on the annual fund, the percentage of alumni who were donors tended to be greater ( $r = .27, p < .05$ ). Time spent on the annual fund by the chief alumni relations staff member was also significantly correlated with the average gift per alumnus/alumna ( $r = .39, p < .01$ ), indicating that the greater the share of time spent on the annual fund, the larger the size of the average gift.

The results of the survey suggest that although many community colleges have full-time employees who are dedicated to alumni relations, nearly one-half of those institutions limit the number to one staff member (see table 7). Part-time staff members tasked with alumni relations responsibilities are less prevalent than full-time employees. More than half of the responding institutions (54 percent) employ at least one full-time staff member whose primary responsibility is alumni relations, while 35 percent of respondents employ part-time employees who handle alumni relations. The average number of full-time alumni relations employees was 0.7, while the average for the part-time classification was 0.5.

**TABLE 7**

Number of full-time and part-time staff at community colleges who are dedicated to alumni relations

(n = 117)

	Full-time Employees	Part-time Employees
Median	1.0	0.0
Mean	0.7	0.5
Minimum	0.0	0.0
Maximum	4.0	5.0
% of institutions reporting any staff	54.0%	35.0%

Number of AR staff	Full-time Employees	Part-time Employees
None	45.8%	65.0%
One or less	44.1%	29.9%
More than one	10.2%	5.1%

A slim majority of responding institutions confirmed the presence of a board or council for their alumni associations. The split was fairly even: 55 percent of respondents did have a board governing the alumni association, while 45 percent did not.

Among the 63 community colleges that have an alumni association board, the size of the board tends to skew smaller. The most prevalent size of the alumni association board was 11 to 15 members, with 38 percent of respondents reporting this makeup (see table 8). Nearly half of the responding institutions had smaller alumni association governing boards: 22 percent had boards of fewer than six members, and 27 percent had boards with six to 10 members. Ten percent of respondents had boards in the largest category of 21 or more members.

**TABLE 8**

How large is the board/council, among those that have a board/council?

(n = 63)

Size of Board/Council	Percent
Fewer than 6	22.2%
6–10	27.0%
11–15	38.1%
16–20	3.2%
More than 20	9.5%

The responding institutions with alumni association boards or councils tended to favor one of two selection methods: self-perpetuating/self-selecting (43 percent) or election by association members (40 percent). Other selection methods, such as appointment by college or district staff (10 percent) and appointment by the foundation board (2 percent), were much less popular methods (see table 9).

**TABLE 9**  
How the board/council is selected, among those that have a board/council?  
(n = 63)

Selection Method	Percent
Self-perpetuating/self-selecting	42.9%
Elected by association members	39.7%
Appointed by college or district staff	9.5%
Appointed by foundation board	1.6%
Other	6.3%

## FUNDING ALUMNI RELATIONS

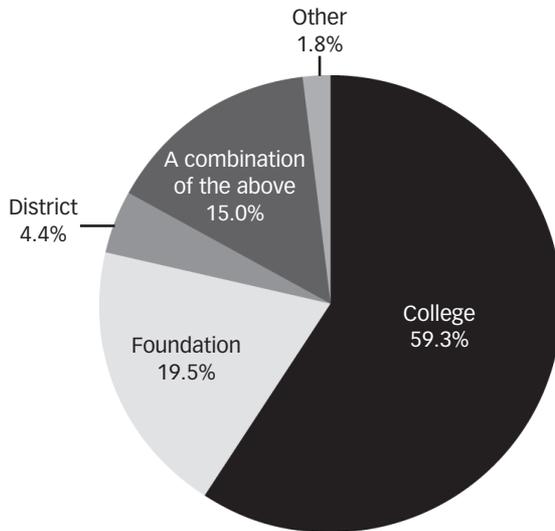
The majority of community colleges (59 percent) fund alumni relations staff salaries directly from their own budgets (see table 10 and figure 2). Roughly one-fifth of responding institutions have an affiliated foundation that serves as the budget source, while less than 5 percent reported the community college district as the source. An additional 15 percent of the survey respondents classified their salary funding as some kind of combination of budgets from the college, a foundation and/or the district.

**TABLE 10**  
Where does the budget for alumni relations staff salaries come from?  
(n = 113)

Budget Source	Percent
College	59.3%
Foundation	19.5%
District	4.4%
A combination of the above	15.0%
Other	1.8%

**FIGURE 2**

Where does the budget for alumni relations staff salaries come from?  
(n = 113)



More than half (58 percent) of the survey respondents indicated that their community colleges maintain a dedicated annual operating budget for alumni relations. Among the 61 institutions that specified the amount of their alumni relations budgets, the average annual amount was \$23,611 (median \$17,000). Roughly one-fifth of responding institutions had annual alumni relations budgets of \$5,000 or less, while 28 percent had annual budgets exceeding \$25,000 (see table 11 and figure 3).

**TABLE 11**

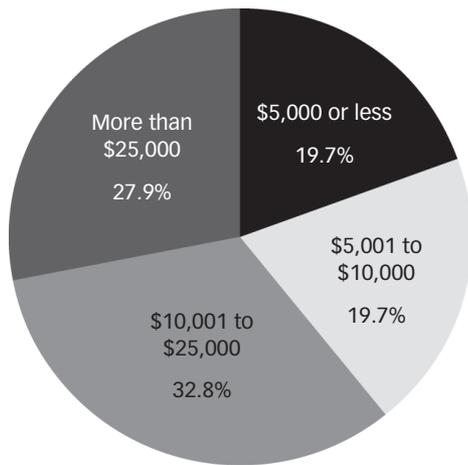
The size of the annual operating budget for alumni relations, among those with an operating budget  
(n = 61)

Mean	\$23,611
Median	\$17,000

Budget Range	Percent of Respondents
\$5,000 or less	19.7%
\$5,001 to \$10,000	19.7%
\$10,001 to \$25,000	32.8%
More than \$25,000	27.9%

**FIGURE 3**

The size of the annual operating budget for alumni relations, among those with an operating budget (n = 61)



The college itself is the dominant source of funds for the alumni relations operating budget, according to the survey data. Two-thirds of respondents received funds from the college, and the college accounted for an average of 56 percent of the budget’s sources each year (see table 12). Foundation annual unrestricted gifts were an operating budget source for one-third of the respondents and accounted for an average of 24 percent of the alumni relations budget. Each of the other sources accounted for an average of less than 10 percent of the budget.

**TABLE 12**

Sources of funds for the annual alumni relations operating budget (n = 65)

	Percent for Which This Is a Source	Percent for Which This Is the Only Source	As a Percentage of the Alumni Relations Operating Budget	
			Median	Mean
College	66.2%	40.0%	80.0%	55.7%
Foundation annual unrestricted gifts	32.3%	13.8%	0.0%	23.8%
Special events/fundraisers	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.6%
Alumni organization dues	13.8%	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%
Other sources	9.2%	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%
Foundation endowment	7.7%	1.5%	0.0%	4.5%
Affinity programs (such as credit cards, license plates, insurance offers)	6.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
District	1.5%	1.5%	0.0%	1.5%
External grants	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%

Although most alumni relations budgets have a limited number of sources, their applications into specific activities were more diversified. More than 81 percent of the respondents used some of their operating budget for printing, and printing accounted for 18 percent (see table 13) of the budget’s uses.

Similar proportions of the average alumni budget are earmarked for dinners, lunches and receptions (12 percent), postage for mailings (11 percent) and special events (10 percent).

Community colleges set aside the lowest average proportion of their alumni relations budgets for professional development (2 percent), support for internal college programs and activities (3 percent) and reunions (3 percent).

**TABLE 13**  
Uses of the annual alumni relations operating budget (n = 65)

	Percent for Which This Is a Use	As a Percentage of All Uses of the Alumni Relations Budget	
		Median	Mean
Printing	81.5%	12.0%	17.9%
Postage for mailings	64.6%	8.0%	11.3%
Dinners, lunches, receptions	64.6%	5.0%	11.8%
Gifts, giveaways, "swag"	58.5%	5.0%	6.0%
Special events (galas, golf tournaments, etc.)	55.4%	5.0%	9.7%
Advertising and promotion	52.3%	1.5%	6.4%
Alumni board expenses (meetings, etc.)	50.8%	1.0%	3.5%
Data services (NCOA, email spending, lost alumni finders, etc.)	44.6%	0.0%	8.4%
Awards and recognitions	44.6%	0.0%	5.7%
Fundraising expenses	44.6%	0.0%	5.5%
Professional development	35.4%	0.0%	2.3%
Other	30.8%	0.0%	5.7%
Reunions	24.6%	0.0%	3.1%
Support for internal college programs and activities	23.1%	0.0%	2.8%

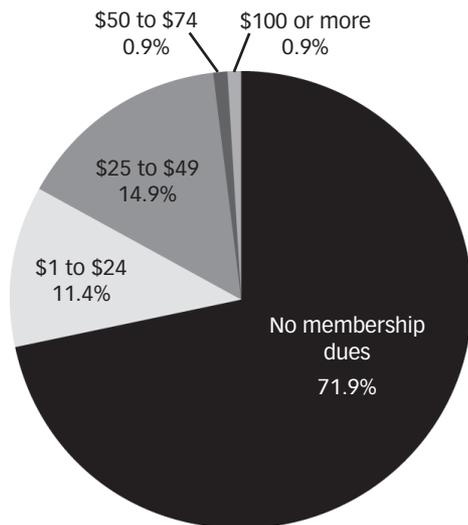
Charging annually for alumni association membership does not appear to be a widespread practice among community colleges. Less than one-third of responding institutions (28 percent) administer an annual charge for membership (see table 14 and figure 4). Among those with annual dues, the majority (53 percent) charge between \$25 and \$49 per year and 41 percent charge between \$1 and \$24.

An interesting significant correlation emerged between annual membership dues and average gift per alumnus/alumna. The amount charged for annual membership dues was positively correlated with the size of the average gift,  $r = .26, p < .05$ . This relationship indicates higher giving levels were associated with higher charges for membership dues.

**TABLE 14**  
How much does your alumni association charge annually for membership (if any)?  
(n = 114)

Charge	Percent
No membership dues	71.9%
\$1 to \$24	11.4%
\$25 to \$49	14.9%
\$50 to \$74	0.9%
\$100 or more	0.9%

**FIGURE 4**  
How much does your alumni association charge annually for membership (if any)?  
(n = 114)



Community college practices for lifetime membership dues are similar to those for annual dues. More than two-thirds of responding institutions (71 percent) do not collect dues for lifetime alumni association memberships (see table 15). Among the institutions that do have lifetime membership dues, most charge at least \$200 for the one-time fee.

As was the case annual membership dues, there was a significant correlation between average gift per alumnus and lifetime membership dues. The positive correlation ( $r = .27, p < .05$ ) indicated that higher charges for lifetime membership dues were associated with larger average gift amounts.

**TABLE 15**  
How much does your alumni association charge for a one-time lifetime membership (if any)?  
(n = 114)

Charge	Percent
No membership dues	71.1%
We charge membership dues but do not have lifetime membership option	8.8%
\$1 to \$49	1.8%
\$50 to \$99	0.9%
\$100 to \$199	6.1%
\$200 or more	11.4%

The survey data suggest that few alumni of community colleges are connecting with their institutions through alumni associations. The average number of paid members of the alumni association was 314 people (median 69). These raw numbers translated to an average of 0.5 percent of the overall alumni base that classified as paid members of the alumni association.

Alumni association memberships appear to have additional financial benefits for community colleges, because the percentage of alumni who were members was significantly correlated with the average gift amount. Higher percentages of alumni who joined the association were positively associated with larger average amounts donated per alumnus/alumna,  $r = .33, p < .01$ .

## ALUMNI DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT

Three approaches to defining *alumni* appear to be used with frequency in community colleges. More than two-fifths of the responding institutions (42 percent) have adopted the most inclusive definition: anyone who has taken one or more classes (see table 16 and figure 5). Defining *alumni* as degree or certificate holders was used by 37 percent of the community colleges surveyed, while 30 percent defined *alumni* as anyone who has completed a certain number of hours or units. In addition, 11 percent of community colleges do not maintain a formal definition of *alumni*.

**TABLE 16**

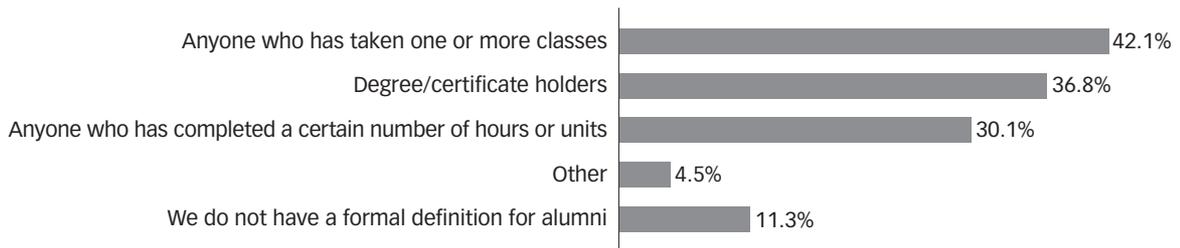
How does your college/district define your alumni (select all that apply)?  
(n = 133)

Definition	Percent
Anyone who has taken one or more classes	42.1%
Degree/certificate holders	36.8%
Anyone who has completed a certain number of hours or units	30.1%
Other	4.5%
We do not have a formal definition for alumni	11.3%

*Note: Responses sum to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed.*

**FIGURE 5**

How does your college/district define your alumni (select all that apply)?  
(n = 133)



Alumni record-keeping in most community colleges seems to be decentralized, according to the survey results. Only 21 percent of responding institutions integrate their alumni data with the college’s central database (see table 17). In contrast, independent, vendor-developed databases were the most popular method for alumni data maintenance (58 percent). An additional 11 percent of respondents reported using Microsoft products (Access or Excel) for their alumni records.

**TABLE 17**

How is your alumni data maintained?  
(n = 119)

Method	Percent
In an independent database, such as Raisers Edge or DonorPerfect	58.0%
As part of the college’s central database	21.0%
In Microsoft Access or Excel	10.9%
Other	10.1%

Although community colleges report some success in tracking mailing addresses for large segments of their alumni bases, many do not have updated contact information for a large number of their alumni. The average number of alumni with valid mailing addresses was 21,938, with a median value of 13,125. When comparing this average to the entire alumni base, responding institutions successfully tracked mailing addresses for 48 percent of their alumni population on average.

The survey results suggest that effective tracking of mailing addresses can have positive financial outcomes. The percentage of viable alumni mailing addresses was significantly correlated with the percentage of alumni who are donors ( $r = .45, p < .01$ ) and with the average gift per alumnus/alumna ( $r = .40, p < .01$ ). These positive relationships indicate that having correct street addresses for alumni is a critical early step in achieving philanthropic goals.

Tracking valid email addresses has proved more challenging to community colleges than tracking postal mailing addresses. The average number of valid email addresses in responding institutions' records was 7,870 (median 3,000), which is nearly three times smaller than the average for postal mailing addresses. The average percentage of the entire alumni base with valid email addresses was 12 percent.

Similar to the results for mailing addresses, successful record-keeping of email addresses appears to facilitate giving from alumni. There was a significant correlation between the percentage of viable alumni email addresses and the percentage of alumni who were donors,  $r = .42, p < .01$ .

Community colleges have varying degrees of activity for the maintenance tasks available for their alumni records. The most frequently performed record maintenance was a fundamental step in tracking alumni: receipt of electronic student records from the college or registrar, which was done by 78 percent of the respondents, usually annually (see table 18). Another activity performed by three-fifths of the colleges was running NCOA (national change of address) on alumni records; of these, 53 percent run NCOA yearly and 23 percent quarterly. Other alumni records activities required engagement with a third-party vendor and were done by between one-third and one-half of the respondents and when completed were performed far less frequently, usually every four to five years.

The survey results suggest that two alumni records activities are associated with improved philanthropic outcomes. Running NCOA on alumni records was significantly correlated with the percentage of alumni donors ( $r = .24, p < .05$ ) and with the average gift amount ( $r = .49, p < .01$ ). Additionally, engaging a vendor to conduct a wealth screening was significantly correlated with the average gift amount ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ). These relationships indicate that the more frequently community colleges run NCOA and conduct wealth screening, the better the philanthropic results.

**TABLE 18**  
Whether and how frequently community colleges do the following maintenance activities in relationship to their alumni database

	Never Do This		Never, but Plan to Do This in the Next Year		Do This		Among Those Who Do This, the Frequency with Which They Do It (in percentages)				
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Quarterly	Annually	Every 2 to 3 Years	Every 4 to 5 Years
Receive electronic student records from the college/registrar for alumni purposes	18	15.5%	8	6.9%	90	77.6%	116	20.0%	74.4%	2.2%	3.3%
Run NCOA (national change of address) on alumni records	27	23.3%	19	16.4%	70	60.3%	116	22.9%	52.9%	11.4%	12.9%
Engage a vendor to update addresses or “find” lost alumni	37	31.9%	17	14.7%	62	53.4%	116	1.6%	17.7%	29.0%	51.6%
Engage a vendor to append phone numbers to alumni records	58	50.0%	15	12.9%	43	37.1%	116	0.0%	16.3%	27.9%	55.8%
Engage a vendor to append email address to alumni records	53	46.1%	17	14.8%	45	39.1%	115	0.0%	15.6%	28.9%	55.6%
Engage a vendor to conduct a wealthy screening of alumni	52	44.8%	25	21.6%	39	33.6%	116	2.6%	15.4%	35.9%	46.2%

## ALUMNI COMMUNICATIONS AND STRATEGY

Community colleges have a variety of options for communicating with alumni, and some communication methods are deployed more often than others. Bulk emailing or emailing a newsletter, posting to the community college website and posting to Facebook were each done by about 80 percent of the respondents (see table 19). Among these three methods, posting to Facebook had the highest percentage of respondents doing it daily (16 percent) or weekly (47 percent). The college's website and mass email communications were also heavily used methods of staying in touch with alumni but were more likely to be used monthly or quarterly. Emerging social media technologies are still gaining a foothold in community colleges: 6 percent and 3 percent of respondents used Pinterest and Google+, respectively.

**TABLE 19**  
Whether and how frequently community colleges communicate with alumni, by method

Method	Never Do This		Do This		Among Those Who Do This, the Frequency with Which They Do It (in percentages)					
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually
	Bulk email/email newsletter	19	17.1%	92	82.9%	111	0.0%	3.3%	27.2%	42.4%
Posting to college website	20	18.9%	86	81.1%	106	5.8%	17.4%	36.0%	26.7%	14.0%
Posting to Facebook	21	19.3%	88	80.7%	109	15.9%	46.6%	26.1%	10.2%	1.1%
Direct mail	27	25.5%	79	74.5%	106	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%	30.4%	67.1%
Print newsletter/magazine	37	34.6%	70	65.4%	107	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%	54.3%	42.9%
Individual emails	42	40.4%	62	59.6%	104	9.7%	22.6%	19.4%	30.6%	17.7%
Individual phone calls	57	55.3%	46	44.7%	103	10.9%	23.9%	8.7%	23.9%	32.6%
Posting to LinkedIn	60	57.7%	44	42.3%	104	11.4%	22.7%	38.6%	22.7%	4.5%
Posting to Twitter	76	73.8%	27	26.2%	103	22.2%	40.7%	22.2%	14.8%	0.0%
Phone bank/call center	78	75.0%	26	25.0%	104	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	7.7%	88.5%
Via a college-administered online community	82	80.4%	20	19.6%	102	20.0%	20.0%	30.0%	15.0%	15.0%
Other (please specify)	22	91.7%	2	8.3%	24	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Posting to Pinterest	97	94.2%	6	5.8%	103	33.3%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%
Posting to Google+	99	97.1%	3	2.9%	102	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%
Sending text messages	101	98.1%	2	1.9%	103	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%

Note: Other ways community college communicate with alumni include event notices, radio, TV, community events and students events

A multitude of significant correlations emerged between various communication methods and philanthropic outcomes. All the relationships were positive, indicating that a higher frequency of communication through each method was associated with a higher percentage of alumni donors (and with a larger average gift amount for three of the methods). Table 20 shows the complete list of significant correlations.

**TABLE 20**  
Significant correlations

Method	% Alumni Donors	Average Gift \$ per Alum
Communicate via text messages	.29*	ns
Communicate via print newsletter/magazine	.29*	.26*
Communicate via direct mail	.28*	.25*
Communicate via phone bank/call center	.29*	.35**
Communicate via individual phone calls	.36**	ns

*Note: ns = not significant*  
*\*Significant at the .05 level*  
*\*\*Significant at the .01 level*

Engaging alumni through face-to-face events and other activities remains an important aspect of alumni relations for community colleges. Keeping alumni engaged through invitations to college events was the most popular method, employed by 84 percent of respondents at least annually (most often quarterly) (see table 21 on next page). Alumni board meetings, free social gatherings and volunteer opportunities were each used annually or more frequently by roughly 60 percent of responding institutions. Some of the least-used engagement methods included credit card affinity program offers, requests to do legislative advocacy, alumni travel tours and insurance affinity program offers.

**TABLE 21**  
Whether and how frequently community colleges engage alumni, by event or activity

Event or Activity	Never Do This			Do This			Among Those Who Do This, the Frequency with Which They Do It (in percentages)					
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually		
Invitations to college events	17	15.9%	90	84.1%	107	0.0%	2.2%	12.2%	52.2%	33.3%		
Alumni board meetings	42	38.9%	66	61.1%	108	0.0%	0.0%	27.3%	57.6%	15.2%		
Free alumni social gatherings	43	40.6%	63	59.4%	106	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	27.0%	66.7%		
College volunteer opportunities	42	40.8%	61	59.2%	103	0.0%	1.6%	1.6%	39.3%	57.4%		
Invitations to student activities	48	45.7%	57	54.3%	105	0.0%	3.5%	12.3%	47.4%	36.8%		
Meetings or events of alumni based on affinity/program	56	53.8%	48	46.2%	104	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	25.0%	70.8%		
College career services	59	57.8%	43	42.2%	102	0.0%	0.0%	4.7%	34.9%	60.5%		
Paid alumni social gatherings	61	59.2%	42	40.8%	103	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	21.4%	73.8%		
Campus advisory committee service	60	59.4%	41	40.6%	101	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	43.9%	53.7%		
Professional networking events	66	62.9%	39	37.1%	105	0.0%	0.0%	5.1%	25.6%	69.2%		
Reunions	70	67.3%	34	32.7%	104	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.8%	91.2%		
Helping with student recruitment	77	75.5%	25	24.5%	102	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	80.0%		
College service projects	79	76.7%	24	23.3%	103	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	33.3%	62.5%		
Participation in a speakers bureau	80	78.4%	22	21.6%	102	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	18.2%	77.3%		
Insurance affinity program offers	86	84.3%	16	15.7%	102	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%		
Alumni travel tours	88	87.1%	13	12.9%	101	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	23.1%	76.9%		
Requests to do legislative advocacy	89	87.3%	13	12.7%	102	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	38.5%	61.5%		
Other events and activities	37	88.1%	5	11.9%	42	0.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	40.0%		
Credit card affinity program offers	99	98.0%	2	2.0%	101	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%		

Note: Other types of events and activities used by community colleges to engage alumni include mentor programs, bus trips and invitations through newsletter.

The survey results suggest that two engagement methods might foster philanthropic support. The percentage of alumni donors was significantly correlated with engaging alumni through reunions ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ) and with engaging alumni through student recruitment assistance ( $r = .28, p < .05$ ). Higher frequency of engagement through these two means appears to be associated with higher percentages of alumni giving.

Assessment of success in alumni relations can take many forms, so most community colleges rely on a mix of performance metrics. The number of alumni donors was the most popular performance metric, tracked by more than half (56 percent) of community college alumni relations offices (see table 22). Attendance at alumni events was monitored by 47 percent of responding institutions, followed by number of alumni association members at 42 percent. As was the case with engagement methods, participants in affinity programs such as insurance or credit cards were a useful performance metric for only a limited number of institutions (5 percent).

**TABLE 22**

What performance metrics do you regularly monitor for your alumni relations program?  
(n = 102)

Metric	Percent
Number of alumni donors	56.4%
Number of alumni attending special events	46.6%
Number of alumni association members	42.1%
Number of alumni submitting address/info updates	39.8%
Number of alumni volunteers	21.1%
Posts to alumni discussion lists or social media sites	21.1%
Number of participants in affinity programs (insurance, credit cards, license plates)	4.5%
Other	6.8%

*Note: Responses sum to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed.*

## ALUMNI RELATIONS AND FUNDRAISING

Financial support from alumni often serves as a bottom-line indicator of success in alumni relations. The average number of alumni donors was 214 in responding institutions (median 100). The raw figures for donors translated into an average of 0.5 percent of the total alumni base who donated in the latest fiscal year.

Financial support from alumni is an active segment of total giving, but there is clearly room for growth at most community colleges. For the most recently concluded fiscal year, the average amount for total private giving from alumni was \$50,846 (median \$19,474).

The average figure for total dollar amount of private giving from all sources was \$1,037,371 for the latest fiscal year (median \$581,658). When factoring in the amount from alumni, the average contribution to total giving from alumni sources was 6.5 percent.

The survey data suggest that community colleges prefer to solicit alumni using traditional methods rather than emerging technologies. Among all solicitation methods, direct mail is used the most, with 79 percent of responding institutions sending out direct mail solicitations, usually annually (see table 23). Gala fundraisers are also a popular venue for solicitations, with more than half of the respondents holding an annual event (56 percent). Email solicitations also registered as a popular method, especially for more frequent intervals of contact than the others. Newer methods of contact did not resonate with responding institutions: none of the community colleges used Google+ for solicitations, and only 3 percent used Twitter.

**TABLE 23**  
Whether and how frequently community colleges solicit alumni for financial contributions, by method

Method	Never Do This			Do This			Among Those Who Do This, the Frequency with Which They Do It (in percentages)				
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually	
Direct mail	23	21.5%	84	78.5%	107	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	15.5%	83.3%	
Gala fundraiser	47	44.3%	59	55.7%	106	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
Email	52	47.7%	57	52.3%	109	0.0%	1.8%	12.3%	45.6%	40.4%	
Alumni magazine or newsletter	51	49.0%	53	51.0%	104	0.0%	0.0%	9.4%	41.5%	49.1%	
Golf tournament	55	51.4%	52	48.6%	107	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	98.1%	
Facebook	79	74.5%	27	25.5%	106	0.0%	7.4%	11.1%	40.7%	40.7%	
Phone bank	81	77.1%	24	22.9%	105	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	4.2%	91.7%	
Other	31	77.5%	9	22.5%	40	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	22.2%	44.4%	
Twitter	101	97.1%	3	2.9%	104	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%	
Google+	104	100.0%	0	0.0%	104	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	

Note: Other ways community colleges solicit financial contributions from alumni include in person, text to give, 5K run and soft ask through brochure.

When examining the relationships between solicitation methods and philanthropic outcomes, four methods had significant correlations with the percentage of alumni donors: email, direct mail, phone banks and alumni magazines or newsletters. These results indicate that greater frequency of solicitation through each of these four methods was associated with a higher percentage of alumni who made donations. In addition, solicitation via phone bank and alumni magazine or newsletter was significantly correlated with average gift amount. Table 24 shows the complete list of significant correlations.

**TABLE 24**  
Additional significant correlations

Method	% Alumni Donors	Average Gift \$ per Alum
Solicit via email	.22*	ns
Solicit via direct mail	.22*	ns
Solicit via phone bank	.28*	.29*
Solicit via alumni magazine or newsletter	.29*	.29*

*Note: ns = not significant*  
*\*Significant at the .05 level*

## CONCLUSION

The CASE survey on community college alumni relations provides useful data that should help colleges benchmark their staffing, structure, communications, engagement and fundraising. The results also serve as baseline information that will contribute to a growing understanding of the role and structure of community college alumni relations programs as they mature and evolve.

The data indicate that where community colleges intentionally and systematically track and engage their former students, they can expect a corresponding increase in philanthropy. The extent to which this emerging constituency can be successfully cultivated will be tracked in subsequent iterations of this survey.

The research also shows that, as with other areas of advancement, community colleges have made minimal investments in staffing and resources to develop alumni relations programs. Given that nearly half of all students in U.S. higher education today are enrolled at a community college, we should be seeing much larger numbers of community college alumni than are being reported. That gap appears to be a function of lack of staffing and resources to properly track and communicate with former students. The survey respondents reported that 6.5 percent of total giving

to community colleges came from alumni, indicating the potential for that number to increase, if only by increasing the quality of data. Those community colleges that consistently update mail and email addresses have greater fundraising success, the survey data show.

Information from open-ended responses indicates that several two-year schools have begun expanding their alumni programs, but often with no or minimal increase in staffing or resources. This comment expressed a common sentiment: “We are woefully negligent of alumni but don’t have the people and financial resources to engage alumni.”

Many respondents indicated that their most successful engagement strategies were large group gatherings, such as reunions or social outings, with inadequate resources to conduct appropriate individual stewardship and cultivation. Others rely on an occasional magazine or similar mass communication. As a result, these “one-off” events and activities may not be as successful as they might otherwise be, through no fault of the institution.

With the majority of former community college students returning to live and work in the community where they studied,<sup>1</sup> this population has enormous potential to become engaged as advocates and volunteers, as well as financial supporters. Future iterations of this research will be important to monitor the unfolding of what for many community colleges will be a new era of advancement.

## ENDNOTE

1. Based on community colleges studied in 2012 by Economic Modeling Specialists Intl., [www.economicmodeling.com](http://www.economicmodeling.com).

## APPENDIX: SURVEY QUESTIONS

### COMMUNITY COLLEGE ALUMNI PROGRAMS SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to collect information that will allow community college staff to benchmark their alumni programs with their peers on a national level. Your responses will also guide future CASE programming for community colleges.

The survey will take roughly 15 minutes to complete, and should be answered by the person who has the primary responsibility for alumni relations at a college or district. Please complete only one survey per institution.

All information regarding the person completing the survey will remain confidential. The final analysis, which we will share with all participants, will only report on general trends.

### DEMOGRAPHICS (Optional)

Note that respondents must provide contact information to receive survey results and to receive one complimentary viewing of a 2011–12 CASE Community College Webinar. Demographic and contact information from this section will remain confidential.

**Name of College/District**

**College Address #1**

**College Address #2**

**City**

**State**

**Zip**

**Phone**

**Your Email Address**

### GENERAL

1. **What kind of institution does your office represent?**
  - Single college with one campus
  - Single college with multiple campuses
  - District with multiple colleges
  - Other (please specify)
  
2. **What is the size of your student population (or full district per question above)?**  
**Full-time Equivalents (FTEs):**
  - Fewer than 500
  - 500–1,999
  - 2,000–4,999
  - 5,000–9,999
  - 10,000–19,999
  - 20,000 or more

**3. How does your college/district define your alumni? (select all that apply)**

- Degree/certificate holders
- Anyone who has completed a certain number of hours or units
- Anyone who has taken one or more classes
- Other (please specify)
- We do not have a formal definition for alumni

**ALUMNI DATA****4. Approximately how many alumni does your college/district have?****5. For approximately how many of your alumni do you have valid mailing addresses? (Use a number, not a percentage)****6. For approximately how many of your alumni do you have valid email addresses? (Use a number, not a percentage)****7. If you charge membership dues, approximately how many paid members do you currently have? (Use a number, not a percentage)****8. In your most recently concluded fiscal year, how many alumni made financial gifts to the college/foundation? (Use a number, not a percentage)****9. In your most recently concluded fiscal year, what was the total dollar amount of private giving from alumni?****10. In your most recently concluded fiscal year, what was the total dollar amount of private giving from all sources? (Do not include pledges, government funds or government grants.)****11. How is your alumni data maintained? (select one)**

- As part of the college's central database
- In an independent database, such as Raisers Edge
- In Microsoft Access or Excel
- Other (please specify)

**12. Please indicate how often you do the following:**

**(Scale: Quarterly; Annually; Every 2-3 years; Every 4-5 years; Never; Never, but we plan to do this in the next year)**

- Receive electronic student records from the college/registrar for alumni purposes
- Run NCOA (National Change of Address) on alumni records
- Engage a vendor to update addresses or "find" lost alumni
- Engage a vendor to append phone numbers to alumni records
- Engage a vendor to append email addresses to alumni records
- Engage a vendor to conduct a wealth screening of alumni

**STAFFING & BUDGET**

- 13. To whom does the chief alumni relations staff member report?**
- President/Chancellor
  - Vice President for Advancement
  - Foundation Executive Director
  - Other (please specify)
- 14. If the chief alumni relations staff member has other primary responsibilities, please indicate approximately what percentage of time is spent on other activities (numbers should total 100):**
- \_\_\_ % Alumni relations (put 100% if this person has no other responsibilities)
  - \_\_\_ % Annual Fund
  - \_\_\_ % Major Gifts
  - \_\_\_ % Marketing & advertising the college, foundation or district (not alumni-related)
  - \_\_\_ % Communications & public relations for the college, district or foundation (not alumni-related)
  - \_\_\_ % Foundation Executive Director
  - \_\_\_ % Event Planning
  - \_\_\_ % Website management
  - \_\_\_ % Social media coordinator
  - \_\_\_ % Other (please specify)
- 15. How long has the chief alumni relations staff member been in her/his current role?**
- Less than one year
  - 1–2 years
  - 3–5 years
  - 5–7 years
  - More than 7 years
- 16. Please indicate the total number of full-time and part-time employees at your office that are dedicated to alumni relations. (If you are responding on behalf of a district or multiple offices, include the total for all offices.)**
- \_\_\_ Number of part-time alumni relations staff
  - \_\_\_ Number of full-time alumni relations staff
- 17. Where does the budget for alumni relations staff salaries come from? (check only one)**
- District
  - College
  - Foundation
  - A combination of the above
  - Other (please specify)
- 18. Is there a dedicated annual operating budget for alumni relations?**
- Yes
  - No

**18B. How much is the annual operating budget for alumni relations? (Not including salaries and benefits)**

**18C. Indicate approximately what percentage of the amount listed in 18B comes from the following sources (total should equal 100%):**

- \_\_\_ % District
- \_\_\_ % College
- \_\_\_ % Foundation endowment
- \_\_\_ % Foundation annual unrestricted gifts
- \_\_\_ % Alumni organization dues
- \_\_\_ % Affinity programs (such as credit cards, license plates, insurance offers)
- \_\_\_ % External grants
- \_\_\_ % Special events/Fundraisers
- \_\_\_ % Other sources (please specify)

**18D. Indicate approximately what percentage of your operating budget from 18B is spent on the following alumni relations activities (totals should equal 100%):**

- \_\_\_ % Postage for mailings
- \_\_\_ % Printing
- \_\_\_ % Dinners, lunches, receptions
- \_\_\_ % Special events (galas, golf tournaments, etc.)
- \_\_\_ % Gifts, giveaways, “swag”
- \_\_\_ % Alumni board expenses (meetings, etc.)
- \_\_\_ % Data services (NCOA, email appending, lost alumni finders, etc.)
- \_\_\_ % Awards and Recognitions
- \_\_\_ % Reunions
- \_\_\_ % Advertising and promotion
- \_\_\_ % Support for internal college programs and activities
- \_\_\_ % Fundraising expenses
- \_\_\_ % Professional Development
- \_\_\_ % Other (please specify)

#### **ALUMNI ORGANIZATIONS & BOARDS**

**19. Does your alumni association have a board/council?**

- Yes
- No

**19A. If yes, how large is the board/council?**

- Fewer than 6
- 6–10
- 11–15
- 16–20
- More than 20

**19B. How is the board/council selected?**

- Elected by association members
- Appointed by college or district staff
- Appointed by Foundation board
- Self-perpetuating/self-selecting
- Other (Please describe)

**20. How much does your association charge annually for membership (if any):**

- No membership dues
- \$1–\$24
- \$25–\$49
- \$50–\$74
- \$75–\$99
- \$100 or more

**21. How much does your association charge for a one-time lifetime membership (if any):**

- No membership dues
- We charge membership dues, but do not have a lifetime membership option
- \$1–\$49
- \$50–\$99
- \$100–\$199
- \$200 or more

**COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT****22. Please indicate how often you or your alumni office communicates with alumni via the following methods: (Scale: Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Quarterly; Annually; Never)**

- Bulk email/email newsletter
- Individual emails
- Posting to Facebook
- Posting to Twitter
- Posting to LinkedIn
- Posting to Google+
- Posting to Pinterest
- Posting to college website
- Sending text messages
- Via a college-administered online community
- Print newsletter/magazine
- Direct mail
- Phone bank/call center
- Individual phone calls
- Other (please specify)

**23. Please indicate how often you or your alumni office solicits alumni for financial contributions using the following methods: (Scale: Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Quarterly; Annually; Never)**

- Email
- Direct mail
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Google+
- Phone bank
- Golf Tournament
- Gala Fundraiser
- Alumni magazine or newsletter
- Other (please specify)

**24. Please indicate how often you or your school engages alumni through the following means: (Scale: Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Quarterly; Annually; Never)**

- Alumni board meetings
- Reunions
- Meetings or events of alumni based on affinity/program
- Free alumni social gatherings
- Paid alumni social gatherings
- Alumni travel tours
- Professional networking events
- Requests to do legislative advocacy
- Invitations to college events
- Invitations to student activities
- Campus advisory committee service
- College volunteer opportunities
- Community service projects
- Helping with student recruitment
- Participation in a speakers bureau
- College career services
- Insurance affinity program offers
- Credit card affinity program offers
- Other events or activities (describe)

**25. Please briefly describe what you think are your most effective alumni engagement activities:**

**26. What performance metrics do you regularly monitor for your alumni relations program?**

Number of alumni donors

Number of alumni volunteers

Number of alumni association members

Number of participants in affinity programs (insurance, credit cards, license plates)

Number of alumni attending special events

Number of alumni submitting address/info updates

Posts to alumni discussion lists or social media sites

Other (Please specify)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The CASE Center for Community College Advancement gratefully acknowledges the work of these volunteers who helped develop this survey:

**Ginny Baxter**, executive director, Long Beach City College Foundation, California

**Christopher W. Hancock**, executive director of advancement and alumni engagement, Ivy Tech Community College, Indiana

**Maureen Hoepfer**, director of alumni affairs, Harrisburg Area Community College, Pennsylvania

**Barbara Shell**, director of community and alumni relations, Valencia College, Florida

## ABOUT CASE

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) is the professional organization for advancement professionals at all levels who work in alumni relations, communications and marketing, development and advancement services.

CASE's membership includes more than 3,500 colleges, universities and independent and secondary schools in more than 70 countries. This makes CASE one of the largest nonprofit education associations in the world in terms of institutional membership. CASE also serves more than 60,000 advancement professionals on staffs of member institutions and has more than 22,500 individual "premier-level members" and more than 230 Educational Partner corporate members.

CASE has offices in Washington, D.C., London, Singapore and Mexico City. The association produces high-quality and timely content, publications, conferences, institutes and workshops that assist advancement professionals perform more effectively and serve their institutions.

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