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Engaging Alumni in your International Student Recruitment Plan

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Working with alumni is integral to the international recruitment processes. We read reports, attend professional development sessions, and add alumni engagement to our strategic planning documents, but how do we get this off the ground? Our NAFSA blog series contributors have pooled their resources together to share seven steps of utilizing alumni in your international recruitment plan.

- **Plan and budget.** Given the work ahead of you, strategic planning will be crucial. Not only plans, but budgets need to be approved for proper alumni events and engagement. We are not talking about creating new positions or million-dollar budgets. A few coffee sessions, professional development meetings, and some advertising will be a good start in helping you get off your feet and keep you on track.
- **Listen.** Listening to alumni stories, regardless of the tone it can provide a new perspective on promoting your program. Learning about accommodation, registration, and socio-cultural issues will help you identify and solve these for future students. Dedicate some time in your day to read Google reviews and social media comments about your program and engage with students and alumni in conversations regarding their concerns. Eventually, you will have to answer for these on the road, so taking a proactive approach will help you in the long run.
- **Collaborate.** Each term, meet with your student services team to identify top alumni within your institution. By doing this, you will obtain an alumni database that can be used for events, travel, market research, etc. If possible, obtain a list of international graduates each semester from your Registrar's Office. You can then reach out to them with a "Congratulations!" and a quick survey of where they are going next (in life and geographically). You can use that information on your next recruitment trip by getting them to assist you or ask them to reach out to students in their area if you are not traveling there.



- **Engage.** Once equipped with lists of names, it is time to get to work. Be strategic about how you utilize this information. We recommend setting goals like finding 3-5 alumni from each recruitment region or adding 100 active alumni in the first year. Setting metrics will help you track your progress and identify any challenges. Remember to start small. Excel spreadsheets can be a good tool for this.
- **Engage, again!** An active alumni network is a great tool not only in recruitment but for market insights, event planning, etc. Learn from step 1 and engage and listen to your alumni network, facilitate alumni events, clubs, lunch and learns, etc.
- **Train.** For the recruitment folks with aspirations of having alumni represent your institution abroad, training them will be crucial! If possible, budget, interview, and train alumni interns. If you are looking to create good buzz via ambassadors, have training sessions with marketing and recruitment teams. Remember, your alumni know your institution well. Get them involved in the discussion rather than walking them through your recruitment presentation.
- **Be consistent.** Alumni engagement is essentially relationship management. As with all relationships, establishing and maintaining a rich alumni network that one can rely on takes time. Often, this takes multiple visits (and coffees) before credibility and trust is built. The perspective should be on how the university can add value to the alumni and finding ways to do so.

We hope that these steps can get the conversation started. If you are already doing this, please let us know what your successes and downfalls have looked like. If you are new to the world of alumni engagement, send us an e-mail (KCIEM@nafsa.org).