

By Charlotte West

Funding Internationalization Through Creative Collaboration

The Benefits of Working with Advancement and Alumni Departments to Fund International Initiatives

THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY (W&M), a public institution located in Williamsburg, Virginia, is within close reach of meeting its ambitious target of 60 percent student participation in study abroad—and the support to make it happen came from a somewhat surprising source.

A capital campaign launched in 2016 by W&M's Office of University Advancement has raised more than \$19 million to date for international initiatives.

"This money allows us to give over \$500,000 a year in study abroad scholarships," says Steve Hanson, vice provost for international affairs. "We've also dramatically increased our support for international scholarships. In fact, a scholarship endowment allowed us to recruit a promising new undergraduate from Rwanda who likely wouldn't have attended W&M without financial assistance."

At a time when public funding for higher education is constricted and institutions are concerned about international student enrollment, a growing number of international offices are combining their efforts with advancement, development, and alumni offices to raise money for international initiatives on campus. These initiatives include funding for international research, scholarships for study abroad, and support for international students and scholars.

Experienced development officers say that international fundraising should be viewed in the context of helping the institution meet its strategic priorities.

"The goal of university development is not fundraising for its own sake, but to support the university's success in achieving its goals, ...such as student success, faculty research collaboration, and serving our communities," says Ingrid Schmidt, associate vice provost for external relations and development in the Office of Global Engagement at North Carolina State University (NCSU).

The Impact of Collaboration

Some institutions, such as W&M, include global priorities in their capital campaigns. Others hire dedicated staff within the international office to solicit donors and expand outreach to international alumni—which almost always requires collaboration with the offices of advancement and development.

"Nothing inhibits joint development efforts more than colleagues hearing about an unauthorized approach to a major donor for an international initiative that wasn't first discussed and vetted by university advancement," Hanson says. "To avoid such challenges, establishing close working relationships and open lines of communication with the advancement team is absolutely vital."

At NCSU, the Office of Global Engagement initially encountered resistance from its advancement office, which was wary of allowing other units to approach potential donors. According to Senior Vice Provost for Global Engagement Bailian Li, by coordinating with and acknowledging the support provided by the advancement office in fundraising efforts, his office has been able to add several global priorities to the university's capital campaign.

When working closely together, each office brings its own expertise to the table. "Partnering with full-time specialized professionals in units such as the alumni association, development office, advancement services, or university communications can greatly expand the capacity of the global education office to implement major initiatives," says Schmidt. She adds that the international office can provide valuable cultural expertise to development officers.

Partnerships also allow international offices to leverage the resources of the entire institution. "[A] critical area of building partnerships between international offices and development [or] advancement offices is to build coordinated messaging and outreach strategies. You never know when a single sentence or experience of a donor might spark a significant partnership platform," says Joan Goodman-Williamson, director of international relations at Texas Tech University.

W&M's Hanson says that international offices can approach collaboration with university advancement offices by making a case for why joint efforts are valuable for the institution as a whole.

“As a senior international officer, one must always strive to demonstrate...that international fundraising efforts are a ‘positive-sum’ contribution to the university’s fundraising strategy, bringing in more funding and alumni participation than would be possible if the international dimension were neglected,” Hanson says.

Donor-Driven Funding

Funding for particular initiatives is often built around a donor’s individual interests, says Joe Mandernach, senior associate vice president and chief development officer at the University of Florida (UF). UF’s gift planning team, which helps donors plan their estates, recently worked with a donor to provide support for international graduate students. “The donor had an interest in this area, so the fundraiser helped facilitate it,” Mandernach says.

NCSU’s Schmidt adds that building on donors’ interests is even more important when engaging alumni in countries where philanthropy for higher education might not be the norm.

“Those who were international students themselves may remember not having funding to attend research conferences and might be willing to help current students have that experience,” she explains.

In addition to collaboration between units on campus, international fundraising stems from outreach to international alumni. If institutions do not already have robust alumni networks, Schmidt says, “choose a small number of strategic locations first, to ensure sustainable contact and support while building systems and infrastructure,” she says.

It is important to be cognizant of what is culturally appropriate—and legal—in a given country when soliciting donations. Alumni clubs are not allowed in Saudi Arabia, for example, but institutions can connect with alumni through the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. Additionally, in China, there are different norms around estate planning. “While U.S. alumni are accustomed to discussing issues like...wills and legacy gifts, in China, it would be highly inappropriate to bring up topics related to the alumnus’s own death,” Schmidt explains.

A Worldwide Network

International alumni aren’t the only potential donors who might be willing to support international initiatives. At W&M, the advancement officer who heads up global fundraising also oversees regional development teams within the United States.

“This arrangement allows us to communicate key international fundraising priorities to alumni, parents, and friends throughout the country as well as in key overseas markets,” Hanson says.

Getting Started

- Establish a connection with the advancement, development, and alumni offices on campus.
- Make the case for the value of including global priorities in capital campaigns.
- Share credit with other offices.
- Consider donors’ interests and passions.
- Foster a culture of philanthropy among international students while they are on campus.
- Help alumni understand the value of supporting their alma mater by connecting it to issues they care about.
- Leverage alumni events abroad to solicit donations.
- Consider matching campaigns—based on country, class, majors, or other factors—which can be an effective way to increase giving.
- Take advantage of current resources and social media, and ask faculty and staff who may be traveling abroad to meet with potential students or alumni.
- Look beyond alumni abroad and consider returning study abroad students or international alumni who have stayed in the United States.
- Register for a preconference workshop on fundraising and alumni relations ahead of NAFSA’s annual conference.

Goodman-Williamson at Texas Tech University suggests reaching out to international alumni who might still be in the United States: “Don’t just involve those living abroad. Think about current community members or alumni who may be from other regions of the world but living in the United States [or] alumni working for multinational companies.”

Those who work on fundraising campaigns that target international alumni emphasize that it is a long-term investment. “It’s one thing to engage a prospect sitting in Atlanta, but it’s another one to engage a prospect sitting in Tokyo,” UF’s Mandernach says. “It’s incumbent on institutions to very much take the long view.”

Cultivating a culture of giving among international alumni is part of this long-term investment. “Don’t be afraid to talk about the importance of giving back, but work diligently to build a sense of loyalty,” advises Goodman-Williamson. “Most importantly, be patient. It takes time to acculturate international alumni—don’t ask for money on the first date.” ■

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RESOURCES

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) is a membership association serving educational institutions and the advancement professionals who work on their behalf in alumni relations, communications, development, marketing, and associated areas. CASE can help institutions become familiar with norms and regulations of soliciting donations in other countries. For more information, visit case.org.