

Trends and Best Practices In Alumni Association Advocacy Programs

- 1. Alumni association advocacy programs harness alumni support for the university's federal and state legislative goals. Alumni lend value to these efforts by making the university more visible to elected officials in their districts and by informed communication with elected officials about issues that impact the university and its budget.** It is a common practice for alumni association staff to collaborate with their university government relations offices, which typically report to the university president or senior leadership in external relations. In the most active programs, the alumni associations build upon the email and letter activity from the government relations office, participate in state capital visits and educate public officials through annual forums to increase the "octane" of their efforts.
- 2. Alumni associations are partnering with university government relations offices to ensure that the messages and activities of volunteer advocates are consistent with their institution's overall policy messages.** Links on both government relations and alumni association websites cross-reference each other so that advocates can navigate effectively to get the information they need.
- 3. High-profile annual presentations for alumni advocates feature university presidents, governors and other leaders within the university and federal or state government.** These events often take place in prestigious buildings on campus, in the state capital and in Washington, D.C. Engaging well-known individuals and using venues with symbolic value help make the events more publicity friendly and create a sense of momentum and shared purpose. Alumni advocates are also encouraged to host legislators in their own communities and to spread the word locally among friends, families and service organizations about the university's benefits to their state.
- 4. Other annual forums featuring university faculty in academic buildings or research centers allow the university to mine its own resources and demonstrate them to alumni and public officials.** Showcasing faculty expertise and the utility of a new building or research center simultaneously justify the state's expenditures and educate alumni advocates to strengthen their case on behalf of the university.
- 5. In the most energetic programs, alumni association and government relations websites are information-rich.** Providing data about the number and quality of contacts by alumni advocates also builds a sense of momentum and success. Reports, e-newsletter archives, photos, volunteer sign-up forms and archives of photos featuring key administrators with legislators indicate an energetic advocacy program. In election years links to candidates' campaign websites and details of their positions on key education issues provide volunteers with helpful shortcuts to use in their advocacy role. For example, in one program, the association's board of directors interviewed two gubernatorial candidates and posted the Q&A results on the association's website, representing a special level of engagement.