

## Engaging Local Fraternity and Sorority Alumni

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One of the key features of fraternities and sororities is the involvement with alumni. Alumni serve as those who support the organization long after graduation. One of the benefits of being a member of an inter/national fraternity or sorority is the advantage of finding your organization in the state or region you live in, even if its not where you went to school. This convenience provides alumni members the opportunity to live their membership wherever they go. However, local fraternities and sororities may struggle because moving away limits opportunities to be engaged with the organization.

I am an alumni of a local fraternity at a medium-sized public institution in central New York, and I have been a member since 2006. Although I lived in New York for most of my life, I have also lived in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and now in North Carolina. Since joining my fraternity in 2006, I have seen many iterations of my fraternity's alumni board, some of which were successful while others were not. In 2015, I was named president of our alumni board, and since then, I have chaired the position that seeks out talented and engaged alumni to serve in roles to support both the undergraduate membership and alumni. Over time, I learned many things about how people function in groups, how they want to be engaged, and how they want to be recognized for their efforts. Together, we will walk through some tips and tricks I learned that can ensure a local organization will be successful when engaging their alumni base.

### What Are You Offering?

Before you begin considering people you feel would be a good fit, it's important you know what roles you need to fill. This can be tricky, especially if you have yet to determine who you will be serving. Will this be an alumni advisory board for the undergraduate members or will it serve as an alumni association? Both will have similar positions but each will serve a different purpose. Once decided, you will be able to determine what kinds of positions to create. Generally, it is always good practice to develop a list of expectations for these individuals so they know what they are responsible for. Make sure those expectations are meaningful and achievable. Furthermore, spelling out expectations helps in understanding levels of involvement will vary for each position and on the time of the year. If you are creating an alumni association, recognizing board members may not have much to do during certain slow times and communicating that to potential candidates is important. On the flip side, if you are creating an advisory board, contacting the undergraduate students to understand what support they need will be essential to establish buy-in. Once these areas are addressed, begin looking at

inter/national fraternity and sorority websites for example job descriptions, titles, and materials relevant to you and your organization.

### **Be Mindful of Those Who Serve**

Being a member of a local organization means there is no oversight from a national organization. As the fraternity/sorority industry has advocated against hazing, high-risk behavior, and recruiting practices involving alcohol, that information has not sunk in with some local organizations. Be mindful of who you are asking to serve on your board. If you are looking to create change, you must seek individuals who willing to accept and advocate for change. These individuals may not share your personal philosophy or the same level of understanding of the trends in higher education, but they are essential nonetheless because they offer different perspectives and ideas.

When seeking out prospective alumni volunteers, it is important to recognize their time commitments. In the formation phases, consider which characteristics or traits would benefit the alumni as well as the undergraduate members. You want to make sure you are finding a healthy balance of younger volunteers who are still passionate about the organization but are removed enough to not be emotionally invested in the day-to-day operations. Furthermore, you also want to seek out older members who have more availability, have connected with their peers, and serve as an example of commitment to membership. A healthy balance of personalities and career backgrounds will also benefit everyone involved. If you are having difficulty seeking out individuals, contact the institution's alumni affairs or development office to determine if any of your organization's alumni have expressed interest in the past or are still connected with the institution. You may also see if the alumni/development staff are willing to provide you with a list of graduated members.

### **Training and Evaluating People and Positions**

In some cases, this is an overlooked component of an advisory board. Those individuals who volunteered to serve may be enthusiastic but not necessarily knowledgeable about what they are going to be doing. Develop training materials or documents to explain what their intended role will be within the advisory board or alumni association. Additionally, provide documents that can provide an introductory level understanding of advising college students. Without this, there can be confusion among volunteers about how they engage and support undergraduates.

The final step is to ensure the positions are effective, as well as the people in the roles are getting what they want out of their involvement. The benefit of being a local organization means there is significantly fewer hoops you need to jump through in order to make a change.

Evaluate the position or person, evaluate if the role or individual is effective, and make a change if needed.

### **Final Thought**

Engaging and supporting alumni volunteers can be difficult for local organizations that do not have the initial foundation found in inter/national organizations. Although this is not a comprehensive list, it should be able to get your organization off the ground in creating or enhancing your advisor positions or experience. It may be difficult at first to find volunteers to fit some important criteria but use resources at your disposal, including the institution's alumni affairs/development office, the campus fraternity/sorority advisor, and your peers. Ensuring a positive connection between the undergraduates and the alumni can ensure the organization remains innovative while recognizing their sense of history and lifelong bond.