Fraternities and sororities were not initially created to engage members in acts of philanthropy, yet that has become a central focus for students in fraternities and sororities today. In addition, collegiate and alumni members of fraternities and sororities are asked to give their financial resources to the educational foundations that support their organizations, their alma maters, and their professional associations on a regular basis. When did philanthropy and the work of educational foundations become such an important aspect of the fraternal experience, and why is it essential for us to understand this concept?

Understanding the impact of dollars given to an educational foundation is vital not only for collegians and alumni, but for fraternity/sorority professionals as well. Members who are interested in preserving the experiences provided by institutions and organizations can do so through their generous financial support of the educational foundations attached to those entities. Through gifts to educational foundations, members have the ability to indicate their support of the organization, the direction of the organization, specific programs within the organization, and so much more. It is important that a donor knows and understands how gifts to the educational foundation are used, and where they can find this information through annual reports, donor updates, websites, and in the stated mission and vision of the foundation. Financial resources within a foundation should be used to off-set educational expenses within the organization, allowing dues and other revenue sources for the organization to go to other strategic items.

Using the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA) Foundation as an example, gifts received by the AFA Foundation go to support the educational mission of the association. This means that every $5 Because You Believe sticker purchased or Day of Giving gift allows the AFA Foundation to provide additional support to the educational initiatives of the association. This frees up association revenue to expand member services and initiatives beyond the educational mission. It is that simple — a gift today means more resources for future generations of members.

Educational foundations additionally have the ability to invest financial resources for future needs and initiatives of the organization. Creating a permanent endowment will allow for financial support of programs to occur in perpetuity. The AFA Foundation’s NALFO Unity Endowment is an excellent example. The gifts received from NALFO member organizations and individual members ensure that education on advising culturally based fraternities and sororities will forever be a part of the work of AFA. This educational programming may change and evolve.
over time; however, there is a guarantee of a set amount of financial resources annually to support that programming.

Most educational foundations offer opportunities for donors to give restricted gifts or unrestricted gifts. The financial value of a restricted gift can only be used for the intention of the gift as outlined in a gift agreement. Restricted gifts are often larger donations that will be invested into an endowment fund, and then the annual gains of that endowment are used for the intended purpose as outlined in the gift agreement. For example, if an AFA member was interested in setting up a scholarship to the AFA Annual Meeting, the minimum restricted gift is $15,000 so that the annual investment return would cover the cost of the Annual Meeting registration. This also allows for that scholarship to be offered in perpetuity for all future Annual Meetings.

As most donors are not in a financial position to give a restricted gift, unrestricted giving is the best option. Unrestricted gifts allow the educational foundation the most flexibility in how those funds are used to support the educational mission of the organization. Unrestricted giving is the lifeblood of any educational foundation, and those donors are critical to the financial health of the foundation.

AFA members benefit every day from the generosity of those that came before, and they will hopefully feel a sense of responsibility to ensure similar experiences for future generations of fraternity and sorority advisors. The AFA Foundation was originally built on gifts of $10.00, and while the scope of fundraising has dramatically increased as the AFA Foundation has matured, the traditional first gift by an individual member is currently $20.00. The growth of the AFA Foundation would not have been possible without gifts from both individual and interfraternal organization donors. Over the years, a very strong culture of giving has been established within the association due to the member impact of AFA Foundation supported programs and events. In addition, the AFA Foundation has worked to ensure that members have a stronger understanding of the impact of how each gift is used within the educational foundation in support of the association.

Knowing and engaging with educational foundations are more essential to the work of fraternity and sorority professionals than we may initially think. Spending time with the advancement staff on your campus or the educational foundation staff at your inter/national organization office will allow professionals to gain greater insight into the important impact foundations make on the daily experience of members. As fraternity and sorority membership continues to expand its focus on philanthropy, our members are learning about the impact of those dollars. This has the potential to then be guided toward understanding the importance of giving back to an alma
mater, a fraternity or sorority educational foundation, or a professional association educational foundation.

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