



Survey Conducted by Access Development®

# 2024 VAESE

## The Alumni Relations Benchmarking Study

### Voluntary Alumni Engagement in Support of Education

# Voluntary Alumni Engagement in Support of Education (VAESE)



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1012 W. Beardsley Place,  
S.L.C., UT 84119



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The VAESE is not affiliated with the VSE, (Voluntary Support of Education) survey or CASE (the Counsel for the Advancement and Support of Education.)

For more information, contact:

Gary W. Toyn, Senior Researcher, Access Development  
[Gary.Toyn@accessdevelopment.com](mailto:Gary.Toyn@accessdevelopment.com) +1-866-714-7251

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Colleague,

Welcome to the 2024 VAESE Alumni Relations Benchmarking Study, a comprehensive exploration of higher education alumni relations and engagement.

Drawing upon a vast array of institutions, ranging from venerable Ivy League universities and large Power Five Conference schools, to burgeoning small colleges and thriving international institutions, this study aims to shed light on the state of alumni relations today.

While the emphasis of most research into higher education advancement is primarily on development and fundraising matters, this study focuses solely on issues that directly impact the multifaceted responsibilities of alumni relations and engagement professionals.

The study also focuses on identifying important trends and establishing benchmarks that can help us all better understand how our specific circumstances compare and relate to our peers.

The VAESE study specifically concentrates on providing actionable data about:

- Staffing and budgets
- Best practices
- Communication metrics
- Common challenges and solutions
- Effective programming strategies
- Work-related stressors

Through rigorous examination of mounds of data that now span multiple years, our aim is to unravel the dynamics that impact the interplay between alumni and their alma mater. Although we're confronted with nagging economic challenges that impact all aspects of higher education, this study aims to provide your alumni organization with data you need to make more informed and confident business decisions.

I'm happy to discuss this report with alumni and advancement professionals and answer specific questions about our data and analysis.

I invite you to connect with my professional network via LinkedIn, where you'll find more information about this study, and you'll also find related analysis that I publish on an ongoing basis.

Thank you for your interest.

*Gary W. Toyn, Sr. Researcher,*

*VAESE Alumni Relations Benchmarking Study*  
*Gary.Toyn@AccessDevelopment.com*  
[Linkedin.com/in/gary-toyn](https://www.linkedin.com/in/gary-toyn)

# ABOUT THE 2024 VAESE SURVEY

## METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted by voice interview and online survey instrument conducted March 13, 2024 – April 15, 2024, and a total of 367 responses were received.

We invited alumni relations professionals from all types of higher education institutions to participate, provided they have at least a one-half FTE dedicated to alumni relations.

Participating institutions hail from five continents, and fifteen countries. While we are thrilled with the international participation, the vast majority—96%—hail from the United States.

Respondents consist of 74% senior management, including titles like “Executive Director,” “Vice President,” and “Associate VP.” The next largest segment includes titles like “associate director,” “specialist,” and “coordinator.”

The estimated margin of error for the study, at a 95% confidence level and assuming maximum variability, is approximately  $\pm 4.62\%$ . This means that the results of the study could vary by this margin in either direction if the study were to be repeated with a new sample from the same population.

The most used statistics involve the calculation of the average, or simple mean. In limited cases we provide a median simply because the range of data is so varied, that providing the median is more relevant.

When compiling these results, we’ve rounded to the nearest full percentage. In some cases, percentages may not add up to 100.

## INCLUDED COHORTS

In addition to offering the overall survey results, we have segmented the data into several pertinent cohorts. They include:

**1: Type of Institution: USA Private, USA Public, Non-USA:** This segment identifies whether the institution is a private owned/funded institutions; a publicly owned/funded institution; or outside the USA.

Type of Institution		
USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA

### 2: NCAA Division 1 Conferences vs. Non-Division 1 Conference

Because the NCAA Division 1 Conference Schools are the largest and most well-funded institutions in the USA, it can be helpful to see how these institutions differ from the non D-1 schools.

NCAA Division 1 Conf. vs. Non-Division 1 Conference	
D-1 (Division 1)	Non-D-1

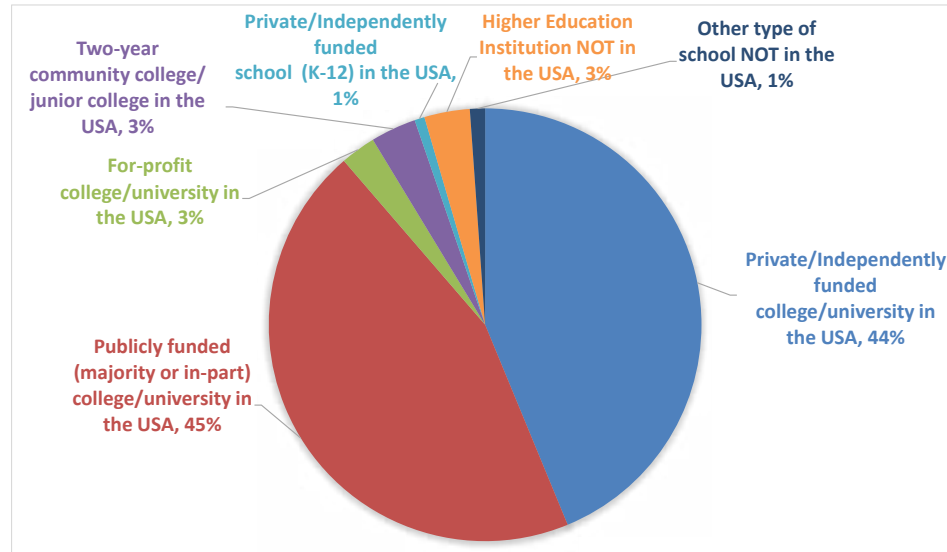
### 3: Number of Full-Time Employees

Because alumni organizations differ greatly by their size, we’ve also included segmented data based the number of full-time employees:

Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees equivalent)		
1-3 FTEs	4-9 FTEs	10+ FTEs

## 1. TYPE OF INSTITUTIONS PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY

Although participants in this study hail from five continents and 15 countries, 96% of participating institutions reside in the USA.



## 2. HOW MANY FTEs WORK IN AN ALUMNI RELATIONS CAPACITY?

How many FTEs work in an alumni relations capacity? (Exclude those who work primarily in an institutional fundraising or similar capacity.)	Average vs. Median		Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	Overall Average	Overall Median	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
<b>2024 Total FTEs</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>4.0</b>	8.6	9.8	9.9	14.0	6.9	1.7	6.3	27.8
<b>2016 Total FTEs</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>3.7</b>	6.7	7.1	4.6	10.7	5.6	1.5	6.0	25.4
<b>Difference 2024 vs. 2016</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>115%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>9%</b>

## 2. SUMMARY ANALYSIS: FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES (CONTINUED)

**Median vs. Average FTEs:** The discrepancy between the median (4.0 in 2024) and the average (9.3 in 2024) number of FTEs indicates the unique challenges of conducting a global study of alumni relations. These large alumni organizations represent a vital and critical segment of alumni relations programs in general, but they reflect a very small number of overall programs in total. Consequently, it's important to see the unavoidable impact of their size on skewing the overall data of this study. Where a few institutions may have very high numbers of staff, elevating the average, we recognize that most institutions have fewer FTEs, which is reflected in the lower median number.

**Discrepancies in Perception vs. Reality:** Despite the actual increase in FTEs, only 28% of respondents in 2024 reported an increase in the number of employees dedicated to alumni relations, which is lower than the 35% reported in 2016. This discrepancy could be caused by staff turnover, and the lack of long-term perspective that comes from shorter work tenures. This could also indicate a possible perception gap where stakeholders may not fully recognize or feel the impact of the increased staffing. See question 11 where “lack of alumni staff” is reported as one of the greatest roadblocks to increasing the number of alumni/ae who engage.

### 3. ALUMNI STAFFING TRENDS

Within the past three years, has the total number of <u>employees</u> dedicated to alumni relations & engagement increased, decreased or remained the same?				
n=346	Overall 2024	Overall 2020	Overall 2016	% difference 2024 vs. 2016
Increased	<b>28%</b>	25%	35%	-20%
Decreased	<b>23%</b>	24%	26%	-10%
Remained the same	<b>48%</b>	48%	38%	25%
Don't know	<b>2%</b>	2%	2%	0%

Type of Institution		
USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA
27%	26%	52%
22%	16%	15%
49%	49%	33%
1%	3%	0%

NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools	
D-1	Non D-1
30%	28%
22%	16%
47%	52%
1%	4%

Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
22%	30%	37%
21%	26%	22%
55%	44%	41%
3%	0%	0%

#### Summary Analysis

**Perception of Decrease in Alumni Relations Staffing:** Respondents report a decrease in the number of employees dedicated to alumni relations and engagement since 2016, with 70% of respondents reporting a decrease or flatlining of their total number of employees in alumni relations. As reported in graph #1, over the past eight years, the actual number of staff has increased roughly 9%, yet respondents feel as though their numbers are actually down. This could indicate a likely shift in institutional priorities away from alumni relations and cultivation, and toward other institutional priorities. In some cases, it could also indicate efficiencies gained through new technologies or as a result of specific cost-cutting strategies.



#### 4. DEMOGRAPHICS: TRENDS IN ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT BUDGETS

Within the past three years, has your <b>budget for alumni programs</b> and activities increased, decreased or remained the same?				
n=347	Overall 2024	Overall 2020	Overall 2016	% difference 2024 vs. 2016
Increased	25%	23%	28%	7%
Decreased	30%	28%	32%	5%
Remained the same	39%	44%	35%	-11%
Don't know	6%	3%	3%	80%

Type of Institution		
USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA
22%	26%	48%
34%	28%	19%
39%	41%	26%
5%	5%	7%

NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools	
D-1	Non D-1
27%	24%
26%	28%
40%	40%
7%	8%

Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
25%	16%	31%
33%	37%	24%
36%	42%	39%
6%	5%	5%

#### Summary Analysis

**Stagnation and Decline in Budgets Despite Increased Staffing:** The data shows that 30% of respondents noted a decrease in budgets for alumni programs from 2016 to 2024, with only 25% reporting an increase during the same period. This contrasts with the previous datasets which showed a rise in the number of FTEs dedicated to alumni relations. This discrepancy suggests that while institutions may be investing in more personnel, they might not be proportionately increasing the budget for programs and activities, which could limit the effectiveness of the added staff.

**Perceptual Gaps in Budget Increases:** Although there is a reported overall increase in the number of FTEs and some budget increases, the increase in budget is not as widely perceived or reported by respondents. For instance, 25% reported increased budgets in 2024 compared to 28% in 2016, suggesting a downturn in growth perception. Additionally, the “Don’t know” responses have increased significantly from 3% in 2016 to 6% in 2024, indicating a possible lack of transparency or awareness regarding budget changes, which could impact strategic planning and perceptions of resource adequacy.

**Increasing FTEs vs. Budget Allocation:** The increase in staffing contrasts with the relatively stable or decreasing budget scenarios, which might lead to operational challenges if new staff cannot be effectively utilized due to budget constraints. This could result in underutilization of human resources or decreased morale among staff if expectations of program funding are not met.

**Growth Perception vs. Reality:** Despite the reported increase in FTEs and some budget increases, the perception of budget growth has not kept pace. This might reflect a qualitative experience of the budget changes where even nominal increases do not meet the rising costs or expanding needs of alumni programs, thus feeling like a decrease or stagnation to those managing the programs.

These insights suggest that while alumni relations staffing might be increasing, the financial support for activities that engage alumni might not be keeping pace, leading to potential inefficiencies or unrealized opportunities in alumni engagement efforts.

## 5. ALUMNI/ADVANCEMENT INTEGRATION

How would you describe your alumni organization's connection with your institution/school?					Type of Institution		NCAA Division 1 Conf. vs. Non-Division 1 Conference		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees equivalent)		
n=367	Overall 2024	2020	2016	% difference 2024 vs. 2016	USA Private	USA Public	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
Autonomous / Independent	9.0%	9.7%	11.0%	-18%	3%	17%	14%	9%	9%	12%	18%
Semi-autonomous / Inter-dependent	37.0%	38.0%	49.0%	-24%	28%	54%	42%	57%	41%	50%	37%
Not autonomous / Dependent	54.0%	52.0%	40.0%	35%	69%	29%	44%	34%	50%	38%	45%

How would you describe your alumni organization's integration with your development/fundraising operation?					Type of Institution		NCAA Division 1 Conf. vs. Non-Division 1 Conference		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees equivalent)		
n=367	Overall 2024	2020	2016	% difference 2024 vs. 2020	USA Private	USA Public	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
We are fully integrated, and share people and other resources	59%	62%	53%	11%	70%	50%	50%	68%	61%	52%	51%
We are not integrated, but collaborate with each other.	22%	24%	28%	-21%	16%	30%	32%	8%	20%	26%	31%
We are partially integrated, but are working toward integration.	14%	8%	8%	73%	10%	18%	14%	16%	13%	17%	16%
We have discussed integration, or are in the planning stages.	2%	3%	5%	-60%	3%	0%	2%	1%	2%	0%	2%
We are not integrated, and don't have plans to integrate.	3%	2%	5%	-39%	2%	2%	2%	7%	5%	5%	0%

### Summary Analysis:

**Increased Inter-dependency:** A significant majority of alumni organizations (54% in 2024) are no longer autonomous, showing a substantial increase (35%) in the number of schools that have integrated their alumni operations under the umbrella of the institution since 2016.

**Integration with Fundraising:** Since the first study in 2016, this data suggests an increase in the number of alumni operations that are now fully integrated with development/fundraising operations (from 53% in 2016 to 59% in 2024). The number of institutions that are not integrated has decreased 21% since 2016.

**Institutional Differences:** Private institutions have a higher tendency towards inter-dependency (69%) than public ones. Larger institutions with 10+ FTEs are less likely to be fully integrated than smaller ones.

## 6. ALUMNI BUDGET DASHBOARD

Alumni budget and related metrics	Average vs. Median			Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	Overall Average	Adjusted for Inflation	Overall Median	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
General budget including salaries	\$ 887,549	\$ 667,192	\$ 240,852	\$ 321,982	\$ 1,265,417	\$ 196,242	\$ 1,507,091	\$ 688,911	\$ 163,912	\$ 696,875	\$ 2,833,345
Programming-only budget (excluding salaries)	\$ 298,146	\$ 224,124	\$ 125,022	\$ 171,805	\$ 608,804	\$ 127,778	\$ 538,427	\$ 250,305	\$ 88,105	\$ 388,125	\$ 1,045,434
% of overall budget that goes to programming	34%	34%	52%	53%	48%	65%	36%	36%	54%	56%	37%
% of overall budget dedicated to salaries	66%	66%	48%	47%	52%	35%	64%	64%	46%	44%	63%
Dollars spent Per Alumni (DPA overall budget)	\$ 5.28	\$ 3.97	\$ 3.08	\$ 2.63	\$ 5.62	\$ 2.55	\$ 6.54	\$ 8.30	\$ 1.78	\$ 3.99	\$ 8.49
Dollars spent Per Alumni (DPA programing budget)	\$ 1.78	\$ 1.33	\$ 1.60	\$ 1.40	\$ 2.70	\$ 1.66	\$ 2.34	\$ 3.02	\$ 0.96	\$ 2.22	\$ 3.13
Number Total FTEs	8.6	8.6	3.1	6.1	9.9	12.6	14.1	6.9	1.7	6.3	27.9
Number of Alumni	167,961	167,961	78,100	122,514	225,196	77,012	230,493	82,988	91,896	174,646	333,584
Staff to Alumni Ratio (1:X)	19,500	19,500	25,113	19,969	22,773	6,109	16,405	11,992	53,740	27,943	11,974

### 2016

	Average vs. Median			Type of Institution		
	Overall Average	Overall Median		USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA
General budget including salaries	\$ 796,040	\$ 796,040	\$ 234,907	\$ 471,654	\$ 1,160,875	\$ 138,663
Programming-only budget (excluding salaries)	\$ 274,746	\$ 274,746	\$ 119,406	\$ 237,468	\$ 554,716	\$ 98,115

### Difference 2020 vs 2016

General Budget difference	11%	-16%	3%	-32%	9%	42%
Program Budget difference	9%	-18%	5%	-28%	10%	30%

## 6. ALUMNI BUDGETS DASHBOARD (CONTINUED)

### Summary Analysis

**Decreased Real Budgets:** Considering a 30% cumulative rate of inflation since 2016, budgets have declined significantly. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics consumer price index, when considering the average budget of \$887,549, in 2016 dollars, this amount would have an equivalent buying power of just \$667,192 today. After adjusting for inflation, the general budget for alumni relations, including salaries, has effectively decreased by 16% from 2016 to 2024, and the programming-only budget saw a decrease of 18%, indicating reduced spending power in real terms.

**Investment per Alumnus Reduced:** The dollars spent per alumnus (DPA) for both the overall budget and the programming budget have decreased after adjusting for inflation, showing a contraction in per capita investment in alumni engagement.

**Proportion of Budget Allocation Unchanged:** The percentage of the overall budget dedicated to programming and salaries has remained constant at 34% and 66% respectively, suggesting that the strategic allocation between staffing and direct engagement costs has not shifted despite the reduction in real budgets.

## 7. ALUMNI EMAIL DASHBOARD

Email metrics		Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	Overall	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
n=241									
Avg. Number of emails sent per month to all alumni	7.6	6.1	9.3	3.1	14.3	8.5	3.6	8.4	8.3
What is your typical email OPEN rate?	25.8	30.0	21.5	29.3	23.7	23.2	27.1	25.9	24.0
What is your typical email CLICK rate?	12.7	13.4	12.1	13.1	10.6	9.0	14.9	12.4	12.2
What is your typical email UNSUBSCRIBE rate?	0.6%	0.4%	0.8%	0.4%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.8%

### Summary Analysis

**Higher Engagement in Private Institutions:** Private institutions have a higher email open rate (30.0%) compared to public institutions (21.5%), suggesting that alumni from private institutions may be more engaged or the content more tailored to their interests.

**Increased Volume at Public Institutions:** Public institutions send more emails per month (9.3) than private institutions (6.1), which could contribute to their lower open rates, potentially indicating email fatigue among recipients, or a lack of relevance or value.

**Division 1 Schools Drive High Volume:** NCAA Division 1 schools send the most emails per month (14.3) but also have lower open (23.7%) and click rates (10.6%) compared to Non-Division 1 schools. The challenge of maintaining engagement amidst high email volumes generally comes down to relevance and value, so the lower open rates at Division 1 schools and large public schools likely relates to a higher volume of solicitations related to their acquisition and retention of dues-paying members.

### 8. WHAT WOULD BE THE PRIMARY ROLE OF A NEW EMPLOYEE?

If your organization were unexpectedly authorized to hire a new full-time employee, what would be the primary role of that new employee? (select one)		Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	Overall	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
n=228									
Fundraising	20%	19%	18%	16%	13%	36%	26%	14%	13%
Online/ mobile/ social media engagement	16%	14%	14%	20%	17%	7%	14%	18%	17%
Event management	11%	12%	13%	1%	17%	0%	8%	14%	22%
Volunteer Management	9%	10%	9%	0%	7%	7%	6%	14%	9%
Chapter Development	8%	12%	3%	0%	9%	0%	8%	5%	4%
Database (management or analysis)	7%	3%	8%	26%	9%	0%	6%	5%	13%
Membership acquisition/retention	7%	3%	13%	9%	13%	7%	5%	9%	9%
Alumni/Student mentoring	6%	7%	3%	11%	4%	14%	8%	9%	0%
Career Services programming	6%	5%	9%	3%	6%	0%	4%	14%	9%
Administrative or clerical	4%	5%	3%	1%	0%	14%	6%	0%	0%
Student/ campus engagement	3%	3%	3%	6%	2%	0%	4%	0%	0%
Technical (web, data, digital)	3%	5%	2%	1%	2%	7%	3%	0%	4%

#### Summary Analysis

**Priority on Fundraising:** Fundraising is the top role organizations would fill if a new position were authorized, with both private and public institutions in the USA showing similar focus, highlighting its centrality to alumni relations strategy. Finding ways to generate non-dues revenue will likely be a greater focus in the coming years.

**Inflation Impacting Strategic Hiring:** Given the budget dataset which shows a real-term decrease in alumni budgets due to inflation, the focus on hiring for fundraising roles could also be a direct response to the need for increased revenue generation to offset this financial pressure and maintain program viability.

**Digital Engagement Growth:** Online, mobile, and social media engagement is a significant priority, reflecting the importance of digital platforms in maintaining and growing alumni relations.

**Special Attention by Larger Schools:** Non-Division 1 schools notably prioritize fundraising (36%) far more than Division 1 schools, and larger institutions with 10+ FTEs focus significantly on event management (22%), suggesting a strategic emphasis based on the institution’s size and possibly its alumni engagement model.

## 9. TOP GOAL FOR NEXT YEAR

What is your alumni organization's top goal for next year?		Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	Overall	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
n=323									
Increasing the number of alumni who engage	65%	65%	67%	60%	60%	56%	67%	72%	70%
Increasing donor revenue (i.e. non-dues related donations, revenue from events)	9%	10%	6%	15%	9%	9%	9%	11%	4%
Increasing dues-paying revenue, membership acquisition/retention	6%	4%	8%	10%	9%	19%	6%	6%	7%
Integrating with fundraising / development/ advancement	4%	6%	3%	5%	6%	1%	4%	7%	3%
Increasing overall volunteer participation	4%	3%	6%	0%	6%	6%	4%	1%	4%
Integrating with or expanding career services programs	3%	3%	3%	5%	2%	0%	1%	1%	7%
Increasing the degree/frequency of alumni who are already engaged	3%	1%	4%	5%	3%	6%	3%	1%	1%
Increasing diversity of alumni who engage	3%	4%	1%	0%	0%	2%	4%	1%	1%
Increasing our staff/organization size	3%	3%	3%	0%	5%	1%	3%	0%	3%

### Summary Analysis

**Engagement vs. Fundraising:** The primary stated goal is to increase alumni engagement (65%), yet the immediate hiring priority is for fundraising roles. This could suggest that while engagement is the stated mission, there’s an underlying recognition of the need to secure funding to support these engagement activities, indicating a pragmatic approach where engagement and fundraising are seen as interdependent.

**Alignment Across Institution Types:** Across both private and public USA institutions and different school sizes, the emphasis on increasing engagement remains consistent. This highlights a universal understanding that active alumni form the bedrock of support for the institution’s goals, including financial contributions.

**Fundraising as a Means to an End:** Despite the data in graph #8 (speculating about a new employee,) this seeming contradiction may not necessarily be in conflict; rather, is likely complementary. Fundraising efforts can be an outcome of successful engagement strategies, suggesting organizations view increased engagement as a pathway to increased revenue, rather than an end in isolation. It’s clear however, that with an overall decrease in real dollars, alumni leaders are eagerly seeking new and innovative solutions to their budget woes.

The data implies a strategy where alumni relations organizations prioritize engagement to build a robust community, from which fundraising success naturally follows.

## 10. PERCENTAGE OF YOUR ALUMNI LISTED AS “DO NOT SOLICIT” OR “DO NOT CONTACT”

Approximately what percentage of your alumni/ae and/or friends have asked to be listed as "Do Not Call," "Do Not Contact," "Do Not Solicit" or similar restriction (Opting out)				Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	2024	2020	2016	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
n=233											
Average Percent	8.8	9.4	11.4	9.3	9.5	7.0	9.1	5.7	7.3	7.8	13.1

Within the past five years, has the number of alumni/ae who have asked to be listed as "Do Not Call," "Do Not Contact," "Do Not Solicit" etc., increased, decreased, or remained the same?				Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	2024	2020	2016	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
n=432											
Increased	31%	30%	25%	30.0%	34.3%	40%	34.4%	31.3%	30.5%	40%	23%
Decreased	3%	4%	7%	0.0%	6.9%	15%	4.7%	6.3%	1.2%	12%	0%
Remained the same	35%	34%	35%	35.7%	30.1%	35%	25.0%	37.5%	41.5%	24%	23%
Do not know/ Do Not Track	31%	33%	33%	34.3%	28.8%	10%	35.9%	25.0%	26.8%	24%	53%

### Summary Analysis

**Opt-Out Rates Are Notable:** The opt-out rates have decreased slightly from 11.4% in 2016 to 8.8% in 2024, but they still represent a significant portion of the alumni base, indicating a clear need for organizations to evaluate and potentially recalibrate their engagement strategies.

**Increasing Opt-Out Trend:** There has been an increase in the number of alumni opting out over the last eight years, which could suggest growing dissatisfaction with the communication or engagement efforts, reinforcing the need for organizations to refine their outreach methods. Oversoliciting alumni is a likely cause of the increased number of alumni opting out, but this phenomenon can be mitigated by delivering value-added benefits as a means of giving alumni an incentive to stay engaged.

**Lack of Opt-Out Data Is Concerning:** A substantial percentage of institutions do not track opt-out data, with 31% in 2024 indicating they do not know or do not track this information. Not monitoring these trends can lead to wasted resources on ineffective strategies and potentially harm to your organization’s reputation. This is likely to lead to a further increase in disengagement and lost opportunities for reconnection and support.



## 11. ROADBLOCKS TO INCREASING ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

What is the biggest roadblock to increasing the number alumni/ae who engage with your institution?				Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	2024	2020	2016	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
n=282											
Lack of compelling, relevant value for alumni	22%	15%	13%	20%	24%	16%	22%	38%	24%	18%	18%
Lack of alumni staff	21%	15%	15%	20%	20%	11%	20%	15%	24%	14%	14%
Too much competition for the attention of your alumni	15%	21%	NA	11%	18%	16%	15%	8%	15%	18%	11%
Difficulty communicating the value of being engaged	12%	13%	20%	15%	11%	26%	15%	0%	12%	9%	25%
Difficulty engaging GOLDs/ young alumni	10%	3%	3%	14%	8%	5%	3%	31%	5%	14%	14%
Lack of organizational budget resources	7%	8%	11%	3%	12%	5%	14%	0%	4%	18%	4%
Lack of a marketing plan or strategy	5%	12%	22%	8%	5%	16%	3%	8%	4%	9%	11%
Diversity of our alumni / can't meet needs of each segment	3%	8%	8%	2%	2%	2%	2%	0%	4%	0%	4%
Too many gift solicitations/ fear of being asked to give	2%	2%	NA	2%	2%	3%	3%	0%	4%	0%	0%
Economic hardship of your alumni (i.e. student loan debt)	2%	3%	8%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%
Conflict with chapters/regional	1%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Conflict with athletics	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

### Summary Analysis

**Value Proposition Is Key:** The primary roadblock identified is a lack of compelling, relevant value for alumni (22%). It suggests that increasing engagement may require better articulation of value, which could support the addition of new types of engagement programs that alumni find valuable yet can also generate revenue for the organization.

**Staffing Constraints Impact Engagement:** The second major roadblock is the lack of alumni staff (21%), aligning with previous data that indicates organizations would prioritize hiring for fundraising roles. This underscores the pressure to grow teams to manage and improve engagement efforts, which may be currently hampered by staffing limitations.

**Competition for Attention:** There's a concern about the high competition for alumni attention (15%), which, coupled with declining email engagement rates, suggests that alumni organizations are struggling to break through the noise of every other company or organization that is similarly vying for the attention of your alumni. The most successful organizations understand the critical need to focus on their value proposition. Although alumni organizations aim to increase engagement, they face significant challenges as it relates to delivering real, meaningful value to their alumni, while also lacking sufficient staff (whether real or perceived) to execute on new engagement strategies. This conundrum will continue to plague alumni organizations, and will require creative, unconventional solutions to add value, drive increased engagement, and do it all with minimal staff involvement.

## 12. LEVEL OF INVESTMENT IN ALUMNI BENEFITS AND SERVICES

When it comes to attracting and motivating alumni to engage, join or give, what approach best describes your institution?			Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	2024	2020	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
n=308										
We invest nothing to procure benefits for alumni/ae, but only on select, generalized program offerings to motivate our alumni to engage/join/give.	34%	31%	33%	34%	37%	28%	29%	37%	35%	21%
We invest a limited amount annually to procure benefits and services that will motivate our alumni to engage/join/give.	30%	41%	29%	31%	37%	31%	21%	24%	35%	43%
We rely solely on alumni/ae loyalty, nostalgia, and philanthropic generosity to motivate them to engage/join/give	28%	16%	29%	29%	16%	30%	36%	32%	30%	18%
We invest a significant amount annually to procure benefits and services that will motivate our alumni to engage/join/give.	9%	12%	9%	6%	11%	11%	14%	8%	0%	18%

### Summary Analysis

**The Lack of Value-Added Benefits in Alumni Engagement:** With companies like Amazon setting high benchmarks for membership value, it’s crucial for alumni organizations to offer incentives to boost engagement. Shockingly, this survey data reveals the vast majority of alumni organizations invest little to nothing in alumni benefits each year. Our research across various relationship-based organizations—like trade associations, unions and other membership groups—show a high degree of commitment to providing value-added benefits to attract and engage their members. Of all types of membership based organizations, for some reason, higher education alumni organizations are the least likely to offer meaningful and engaging benefits. Instead, too many organizations assume that alumni loyalty and philanthropy is sufficient to keep their constituents engaged. This baffling trend is at the heart of a growing decline in constituent loyalty and engagement in higher education.

### 13. POST COVID-19 IMPACT ON ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted alumni engagement at your institution?		Type of Institution		NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	Overall	USA Private	USA Public	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
n=311								
Our post-pandemic alumni engagement has increased significantly	10%	13%	3%	5%	7%	10%	4%	4%
Our post-pandemic alumni engagement has increased somewhat	29%	28%	34%	39%	27%	24%	26%	61%
Our post-pandemic alumni engagement is mostly unchanged	22%	24%	21%	19%	27%	31%	25%	4%
Our post-pandemic alumni engagement has decreased somewhat	27%	24%	32%	32%	13%	24%	30%	25%
Our post-pandemic alumni engagement has decreased significantly	7%	6%	7%	3%	7%	6%	13%	4%
Other (please specify)	5%	4%	3%	2%	20%	5%	1%	4%

#### Summary Analysis

**Varying Impact Across Institution Types:** The data shows significant variation in how the pandemic affected alumni engagement across different types of institutions. For instance, private institutions in the USA reported a somewhat higher increase in engagement significantly (13%) compared to public ones (3%). This might reflect differing strategies or resource allocations during the pandemic, emphasizing the previous concerns regarding the lack of compelling value for alumni in many institutions, potentially affecting their ability to effectively engage alumni during challenging times.

**Concerns About Engagement Declines:** A substantial proportion of respondents reported a decline in engagement, with 27% indicating that engagement decreased somewhat and 7% stating it decreased significantly. This trend was particularly pronounced in public institutions and highlights ongoing challenges in maintaining engagement amidst external pressures like the pandemic. The decline may also reflect insufficient adaptation in engagement strategies, such as a lack of investment in value-added benefits, which previous datasets identified as a gap in alumni engagement efforts.

These insights suggest that while some institutions successfully navigated the challenges posed by the pandemic, others struggled, possibly due to pre-existing issues like inadequate engagement strategies or a lack of compelling value propositions for alumni.

## 14. POST-COVID-19 STRATEGIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered how many institutions go about engaging their alumni. Which of the following strategies have you used to adapt to this post-COVID environment? (check all that apply)		Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	Overall	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
n=309									
Enhanced Digital Communication: Our institution has focused more efforts on digital communications, including social media, email newsletters, and digital magazines, to stay connected with alumni.	73%	72%	72%	74%	75%	73%	75%	78%	54%
Increased Personalization of Engagement: We have made efforts to personalize our engagement efforts more through targeted communications, personalized outreach, and tailored events based on alumni interests and demographics.	57%	61%	62%	61%	63%	67%	53%	57%	61%
Strategic Re-evaluation and Planning: The pandemic has led us to conduct a comprehensive re-evaluation of our engagement strategies, resulting in a strategic pivot or overhaul of our approach.	51%	54%	53%	66%	61%	40%	41%	65%	64%
Adoption of New Technologies: We have adopted new technologies or platforms for alumni engagement, such as mobile apps, virtual reality tours, or alumni engagement platforms.	45%	48%	43%	47%	44%	60%	38%	52%	46%
Shift to Virtual Events: We have increased the number of virtual events, such as webinars, online reunions, and virtual networking sessions, to engage with alumni.	44%	54%	37%	48%	39%	40%	38%	48%	57%
Addition of Value Added Benefits: We have added new, compelling benefits to help us better attract and engage alumni.	16%	16%	22%	26%	15%	13%	13%	22%	34%
None of the above	3%	3%	3%	0%	2%	7%	5%	4%	0%
Other	3%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%

### Summary Analysis

**Strategic Re-evaluation Amidst Engagement Challenges:** Although 51% of institutions reported a strategic re-evaluation of their engagement strategies, this may highlight a reactive rather than proactive approach to addressing deeper issues of engagement, such as the declining email engagement rates and the significant roadblock of lacking compelling value for alumni. The high rate of re-evaluation suggests institutions recognize these issues but may struggle to implement effective changes that align with their stated goal of increasing alumni engagement.

**Reliance on Digital Communication Without Corresponding Increase in Perceived Value:** Despite a substantial increase in digital communication efforts (73%), there is a disconnection between these efforts and the effectiveness of engagement, as only 16% have added new benefits that directly increase value for alumni. This gap may contribute to ongoing issues with email engagement and opt-out rates, indicating that while communication methods evolve, the core value proposition may remain insufficient.

**Low Adoption of Value-Added Benefits:** The low percentage of institutions that have added significant new benefits (16%) contrasts sharply with the expressed need to offer more value to alumni, as identified in earlier datasets. This disconnect suggests that while institutions aim to increase engagement through digital and personalized strategies, they may not be fully addressing alumni desires for tangible benefits that justify their involvement and support.

These takeaways underscore a critical need for alignment between the strategies employed by institutions and the actual needs and preferences of alumni, particularly in enhancing the value proposition to effectively motivate alumni to engage, join, or give.

### 15. SOLICITING NEW GRADUATES

Within the first 12 months of graduation, how many gift solicitations does your institution typically send to a new graduate?				Type of Institution		NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
	2024	2020	2016	USA Private	USA Public	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
n=308										
Number of Solicitations Annually	2.90	3.40	3.92	3.8	2.6	4.5	2.2	2.1	3.1	5.8

**Summary Analysis:**

**Reduction in Solicitation Frequency:** There has been a clear trend towards fewer solicitations per year from 2016 to 2024. The average solicitations decreased from 3.92 in 2016 to 2.90 in 2024. This reduction may reflect institutions’ response to alumni feedback and higher opt-out rates, acknowledging that too frequent solicitations can lead to disengagement.

**Variability by Institution Type and Size:** The frequency of solicitations varies significantly between types of institutions and by the size of their alumni staff. NCAA Division 1 schools solicit more frequently (4.5 solicitations), particularly when compared to Non-Division 1 schools (2.2 solicitations). This could be indicative of the pressure on larger, possibly more sports-focused institutions to fund various programs. Institutions with larger alumni FTEs (10+ FTEs) also tend to solicit more (5.8 solicitations), possibly reflecting a more aggressive fundraising strategy (like a dues-paying alumni program) all of which is supported by larger staff resources.

**Impact of Engagement and Value Strategies:** Previous datasets indicated a disconnect between engagement strategies and alumni perceptions of value, which is critical when considering the effectiveness of solicitations. The reduction in solicitation frequency suggests a gradual shift towards more nuanced engagement strategies, likely incorporating enhanced digital communications and personalized engagement, which were noted as increased post-COVID strategies. Institutions are perhaps learning to balance the frequency of outreach with the quality and relevance of engagement efforts to avoid overwhelming new graduates.

## 16. USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN ALUMNI RELATIONS

As it relates to using artificial intelligence (AI) in alumni relations, please indicate your level of familiarity with using AI.		Type of Institution		NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
n=282	2024	USA Private	USA Public	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
I use AI on occasion in my work in alumni relations.	40%	40%	41%	52%	40%	35%	35%	43%
I am not familiar with how to use AI, but I would like to learn.	23%	27%	23%	20%	13%	27%	17%	29%
I don't use AI in my work in alumni relations, but I have used it for other purposes elsewhere.	16%	10%	16%	10%	31%	16%	17%	14%
I use AI on a daily or almost daily basis in my work in alumni relations.	12%	9%	13%	8%	7%	10%	13%	11%
I'm too busy to bother with learning how to use AI	4%	4%	3%	5%	6%	6%	4%	0%
None of the above	1%	0%	1%	2%	2%	0%	0%	4%
Other	5%	9%	3%	3%	1%	6%	13%	0%

### Summary Analysis

The dataset and comments reveal varying degrees of engagement with AI among alumni relations professionals, highlighting a readiness towards technology adoption. These insights indicate a gradual, albeit cautious shift towards embracing AI in alumni relations, balanced by a need for more targeted training and demonstrations of its value.

**Occasional Use of AI:** A significant number of respondents (40%) occasionally use AI in their work, indicating a moderate openness to integrating new technologies in alumni relations. This suggests recognition of AI’s potential benefits even if not fully embraced.

**Interest in AI Education:** About 23% of respondents are interested in learning more about AI, showing a proactive attitude towards understanding and potentially adopting new tools to enhance their effectiveness in alumni engagement.

**Barriers to Full Adoption:** Despite some interest, barriers like time constraints and a lack of understanding of AI’s practical benefits hinder wider adoption. Only a small fraction (4%) report being too busy to explore AI further, suggesting that more education on AI’s applicability and benefits could foster greater acceptance and usage.

**Strident Opposition:** It is interesting to note a surprising percentage (5%) of strong opinions against using AI. Several respondents made comments like “I have no interest in using AI in my work. I like doing my job myself,” or “I have absolutely ZERO interest in learning anything about AI,” and, “I’m not interested in using AI at all. Ever!”

### 17- DUES-PAYING ALUMNI PROGRAMS - TRENDS

With regard to a dues-paying or non-dues-paying membership model, what model best describes your organization?				Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
n=288	2024	2020	2016	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
A dues-paying alumni association that offers benefits for a paid membership.	17%	24%	26%	9%	29%	18%	27%	26%	17%	23%	18%
A non-dues-paying organization where alumni have equal access to alumni benefits/programming	80%	72%	69%	89%	68%	82%	68%	72%	80%	77%	79%
A tiered benefits model where alumni and non-alumni donors receive benefits according to their contribution level.	3%	4%	5%	2%	3%	0%	5%	1%	3%	0%	4%

As of January 1, 2024, how many active, dues-paying members were on your records?				Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
n=84	2024	2020	2016	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
Average # of dues paying members	31,686	37,308	62,719	778	32,184	1,640	43,571	1,984	1,099	6,439	86,765

Within the past year, when it comes to your membership, would you say your membership has increased, decreased or remained the same?				Type of Institution			NCAA Division 1 Conf. Schools vs. Non-Division 1 Conference Schools		Number of Alumni FTEs (Full Time Employees or equivalent)		
n=84	2024	2020	2016	USA Private	USA Public	Non-USA	D-1	Non D-1	1-3 FTE	4-9 FTE	10+ FTE
Increased	29%	32%	34%	25%	32%	60%	36%	20%	20%	21%	27%
Decreased	46%	25%	25%	52%	42%	0%	43%	55%	53%	60%	43%
Remained the same	25%	43%	41%	23%	26%	40%	21%	25%	27%	19%	30%

## 17- DUES-PAYING ALUMNI PROGRAMS - TRENDS (CONTINUED)

### Summary Analysis:

**Shift Towards Non-Dues-Paying Models:** We see a significant 16% increase in the number of non-dues paying programs from 2016 to 2024. This shift suggests that alumni organizations are seeing traditional dues-based systems as an “old-school” programming approach. The trend is clearly towards a more inclusive model where benefits and programming are accessible to all alumni regardless of their ability to pay membership dues.

**Decline in Active Dues-Paying Members:** The number of active dues-paying members has declined 98% since 2016, going from an average of 62,719 in 2016 to 31,686 in 2024. This decline is consistent across almost all institution types and sizes, indicating a broader disinterest or financial disinclination towards paid membership models among alumni.

**Membership Dynamics and Institutional Implications:** The rapid decline in dues-paying memberships, especially in the last year, where 46% reported a decrease, underlines challenges in maintaining financial support through traditional means. Despite efforts to increase membership or maintain stability, institutions are facing increasing difficulty, likely exacerbated by the lack of compelling value and engagement opportunities as evidenced in previous datasets. This reinforces the necessity for alumni associations to innovate in how they offer value to graduates to sustain support and engagement.

Since our first study, the percentage of dues-paying programs has been on the continual decline. It is unlikely for most schools to succeed with a dues-paying alumni program, unless you're at a large, Power 5 conference school. See the article here: [Run Away From Your Dues-Paying Alumni Program](#)



### 18. STRESSORS FOR ALUMNI PROFESSIONALS

When it comes to your work in alumni relations, please indicate your level of concern about the following:

	All Respondents				Weighted Average
	No Concern	A little concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Very Concerned	
Your fear of not having enough staff to complete necessary tasks	8%	18%	41%	33%	2.99
The lack of engagement among your alumni constituents	11%	38%	29%	23%	2.63
Your fear of having your organization's budget cut	20%	30%	23%	28%	2.59
Your fear that alumni relations is being neglected by the institution's administration	27%	26%	24%	23%	2.44
Your fear of not being able to catch up on your work	20%	36%	25%	19%	2.42
The lack of strategic leadership	25%	31%	24%	19%	2.38
Your fear of not being able to find a new job if you lost this job	34%	34%	19%	12%	2.09
Your fear that your alumni relations office will be reorganized	43%	31%	12%	14%	1.98
The increasing demands of technology on your job	39%	33%	19%	9%	1.98
Your fear of being ignored/neglected by your superior(s)	46%	23%	17%	14%	1.98
The lack of technological skills among your office staff	38%	38%	17%	7%	1.94
Your losing sleep about your work/job in alumni relations	42%	31%	17%	9%	1.93
The work ethic of your fellow employees in your office	54%	25%	14%	7%	1.75
Your fear of losing your job	53%	30%	12%	5%	1.68

#### Summary Analysis

**Significant Concern Over Staffing Levels:** The highest level of concern reported by alumni relations professionals relates to not having enough staff to complete necessary tasks, with a weighted average concern of 2.99. This indicates a widespread feeling of being understaffed, which is likely contributing to operational strain and could be impacting the efficacy of alumni relations programs.

**Budget and Engagement Concerns Are Also Prominent:** Concerns about budget cuts and lack of engagement from alumni constituents also feature prominently, with weighted averages of 2.59 and 2.63, respectively. These concerns are critical as they directly affect the ability to plan and execute meaningful alumni programs, potentially leading to a vicious cycle of decreased engagement and further budget cuts.

**Lower Concern for Personal Job Security:** Surprisingly, concerns about losing one’s job and being able to find new employment if laid off are less pronounced (weighted averages of 1.68 and 2.09, respectively). This may suggest that while professionals are worried about their work conditions and external factors affecting their jobs, they feel relatively secure in their employment status or confident in their employability.

(continued next page)

## 18. STRESSORS FOR ALUMNI PROFESSIONALS (CONTINUED)

### Discrepancies and Observations

**Contrast Between Staff Concerns and Institutional Priorities:** The high concern for staffing levels and budget cuts contrasts starkly with the responses indicating stability or increases in budgets and staffing in previous datasets. This might suggest that even when there are increases, they may not be sufficiently addressing the root concerns of staff or keeping pace with growing demands and expectations.

**Perceptual Gaps in Technology's Role:** While the concern for technological demands and skills is moderate, this could indicate a gap between the need for technological proficiency and the current capabilities of staff. Institutions might need to invest more in training and resources to bridge this gap, ensuring staff can effectively utilize technology in engaging alumni.

**Strategic Leadership:** The concern about the lack of strategic leadership, with a weighted average of 2.38, suggests an underlying issue with the direction or clarity in alumni relations strategies. This could be inhibiting the ability to effectively address other concerns such as engagement and budget management.

These takeaways indicate critical areas where institutions may need to focus to support their alumni relations teams better, thereby enhancing their overall effectiveness and reducing professional stress in the sector.

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1012 W. Beardsley Place,  
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