

THE **2024** Alumni Trends Report

What alumni say about the value of engagement, mentorship and giving, and how institutions can better reach them.

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THE 2024 Alumni Trends Report

Introduction

It hasn't been easy for institutions to keep their alumni bases active and engaged in recent years. With COVID drastically changing the landscape of alumni events and challenging schools to take a digital-first approach to engagement, alumni engagement teams have had to test, pivot and optimize their strategies.

We set out to take a quick pulse on the state of alumni engagement today. We listened to what alumni told us about their behaviors and preferences, and the results indicate a clear path for institutions to optimize their engagement strategies to deliver impact and lasting value for their alumni communities. And fortunately, institutions seem to be listening. Alumni indicate through their responses that their alma maters are reaching them where they already are – in digital spaces.

This report outlines our findings from surveying nearly 600 4-year college or university alumni from across the U.S., demonstrating the lasting impact of a meaningful relationship between alumni and an institution.

Executive Summary

In order to reach alumni in meaningful (and measurable) ways, it's critical for alumni engagement teams to hear directly from their alumni bases. What kind of services and programs do alumni want from their alma maters? How do they prefer to be engaged?

We asked these questions and more to provide a snapshot of alumni engagement today, and uncovered key themes.



Thanks to digital channels, alumni across generations are more connected to their alma mater than ever.

60% of alumni are using virtual networks, such as an alumni portal or social media platform, to connect with fellow alumni.



Alumni seek and value connection with the broader alumni community.

Respondents across all generations ranked "networking opportunities" as the #1 most valuable service their alumni program could provide.



Alumni engagement is the key to philanthropy.

Alumni who are active in their alumni portal have a higher tendency to give. Over 93% of alums who are donors engage with their institutions through an alumni portal. The second most used engagement channel of donor alums is texting.






Mentorship matters.

Alumni who participate in a mentoring program are 156% more likely to have donated to their alma mater, and 209% more likely to donate in the future, compared to those who haven't participated in mentoring.

Trends

Unlocking the Value of Alumni Programs

When it comes to defining the value of their alumni programs, respondents made their preferences clear:

-  **Career support** and **networking** are the most valuable or meaningful services that their alma mater can offer.
-  48% of alums say they find **local chapters** valuable when it comes to peer-to-peer mentoring and networking.
-  Nearly 40% of alumni say getting **communication and updates** about their alma mater is the most valuable alumni service.

All generations consider networking the most valuable service that their alumni program can offer, with **Millennials** leading the pack at **51%**, vs. **Gen Z (50%)** and **Gen X (38%)**.



What types of alumni services are most valuable or meaningful to you?

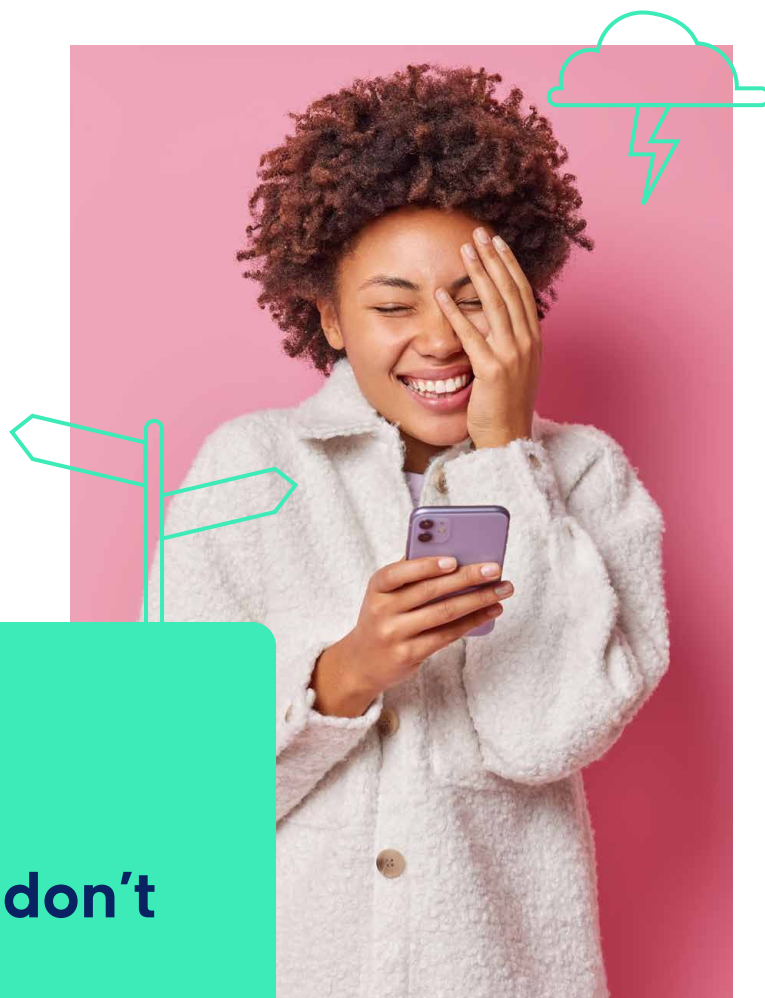


Room for Improvement

61% of alumni are currently utilizing their alumni network for career advice or advancement opportunities.

However, one quarter of alums (25.4%) say there is room for improvement, representing a huge opportunity for advancement offices to improve engagement and deliver greater value to their alumni.

Of the 39% of alumni that don't utilize their alumni's career or advancement services, the top reason cited is "the services offered don't meet my needs." "Lack of awareness" was the 2nd most cited reason.



18%

The services offered don't meet my needs

11%

I'm not aware of any career services offered by my alumni program

4%

Existing services are difficult to access or navigate

4%

There are no virtual or digital services that I'm aware of

3%

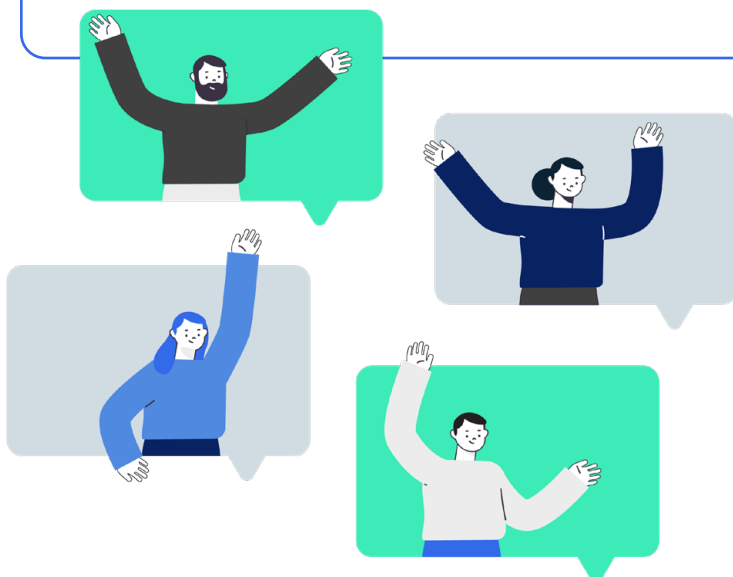
I'm using something else

The Value of Virtual Gathering Places

Most alumni prefer virtual networking and community platforms over email to connect with other alumni. The vast majority of alumni (82%) say their college or university has an online platform, and **nearly 40% use their alma mater's alumni portal to connect with other alums or mentors**. 60% are using multiple social platforms to stay connected to alumni.



What specifically do you use to connect with other alumni and/or mentors?



Over a third of alumni say they find value in being connected to the broader alumni community (35%) and **more than half (54%) enjoy networking opportunities within their alumni communities**.



Mentorship Matters

A mentoring program can offer tangible benefits to your alumni community, such as building a professional network, connecting with like-minded peers, and providing real-world career guidance.

It's encouraging to see that **almost half (48%) of respondents have provided mentorship to fellow alumni**, and **over a third (36%) have received mentorship through their schools**.

Overall, it seems that mentorship tends to be a leading indicator for engagement. Mentorship participants are more active across a variety of alumni services and programs, compared to non-participants.

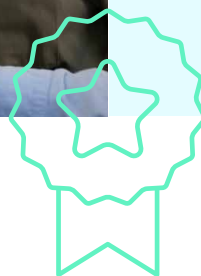


The career services connection

Mentorship program participation correlates with increased engagement of career services, too. **Mentors and mentees are 335% more likely to utilize their alumni networks for career advice** and advancement opportunities than those who don't participate in mentoring.

Mentorship participants use multiple channels

Mentorship program participants are more connected with their alma maters and engage more holistically than non-participants. They prefer an omni-channel approach to communication from their alma mater, including video, text, alumni portal and newsletters.



Generational Trends in Engagement

There seem to be a lot more similarities than differences in generational dynamics among alumni. All generations prefer digital to non-digital communications with their alma mater, with email being their most preferred channel. Video is surprising: **28% of Gen X prefer video compared to 17% millennials and 9% Gen Z.** With Gen X being most likely to donate, there's a huge opportunity to engage Gen X more meaningfully through new, digital channels.

The top two most valuable alumni programs across all generations are networking and career support. However when it comes to third place, Gen Z value sporting events, Millennials value school and alumni updates, and Gen X value regional events.

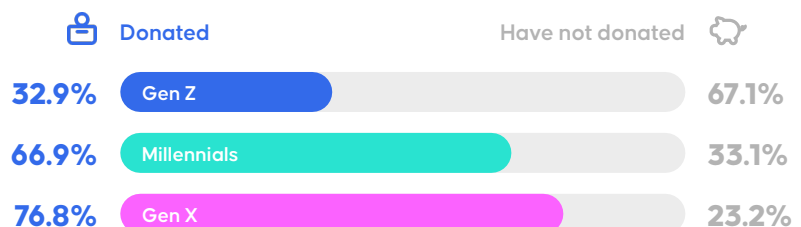
RANK	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X
#1	Networking or peer mentoring	Networking or peer mentoring	Networking or peer mentoring
#2	Career support	Career support	Career support
#3	Sporting event	School & alumni updates	Regional events



Less than half (41.4%) of young alums are currently utilizing their alumni network for career advice or advancement opportunities, and 24% say the services offered don't meet their needs.

Generosity by generation

As Gen Z is the newest generation to enter the workforce, it's unsurprising they are the least likely to have given to their alma mater. About one-third (33%) say they have previously donated, while comparatively, **an overwhelming majority of Gen X (77%) have given.**



Trends

Alumni Giving

Overall, 67% of alumni say they have previously donated to their college or university. A **majority (60%) of alumni say they are likely or very likely to donate in the future**. Just 21% say they are unlikely. As advancement and development teams look to the future of alumni engagement, understanding the link between an engaged alumni base and alumni giving becomes critical.

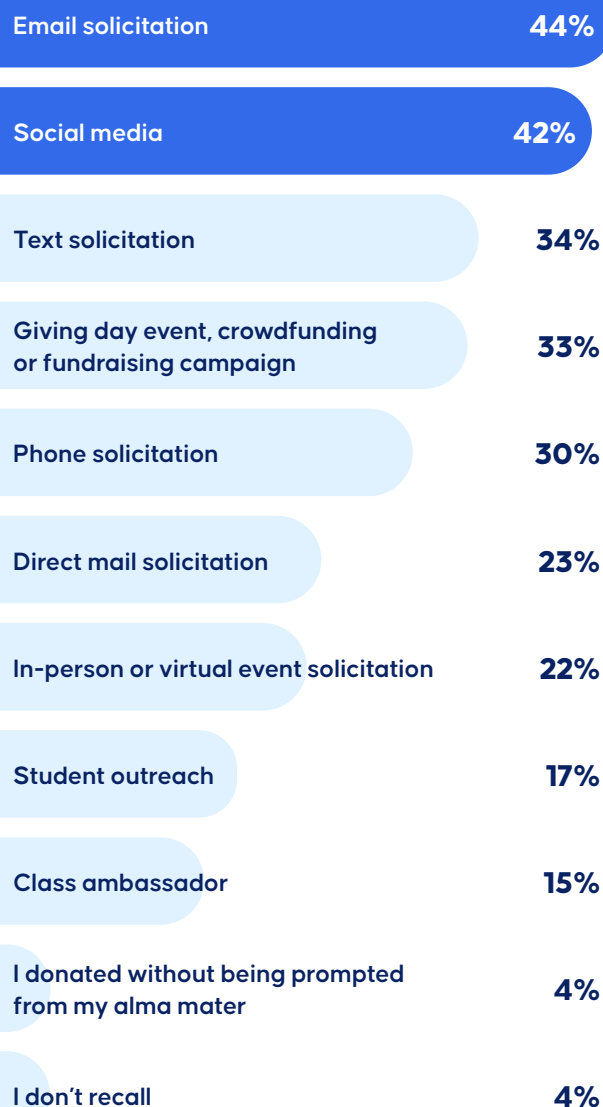


Digital: A Gateway to Giving

44% say an email solicitation prompted them to donate. **One third (33%) say a giving day or campaign prompted them to donate**, and roughly the same percentage (34%) say a text prompted them to donate.

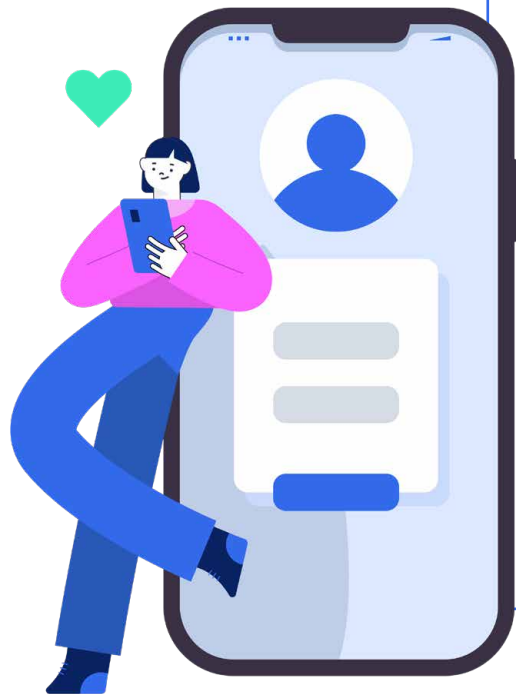
Among the least common channels that have prompted donations is outreach from class ambassadors (15%) and student outreach (17%). Institutions can seek to get better results from student and peer ambassador programs (historically reliant on phone outreach) by leaning into a digital-first approach, including channels like text, email and video.

What types of communication(s) prompted you to donate?

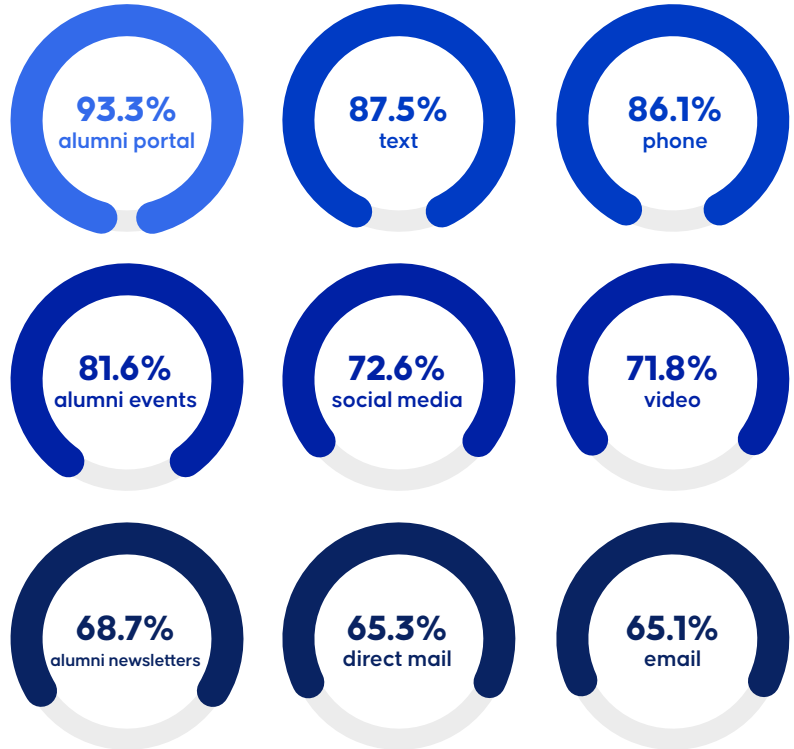


Portal to Success

The channel with the strongest correlation between donors and non-donors is an alumni portal. A staggering **93.3% of alums who have donated engage with their institutions through an alumni portal.**



Correlation between engagement channels & giving



The ROI of Mentorship

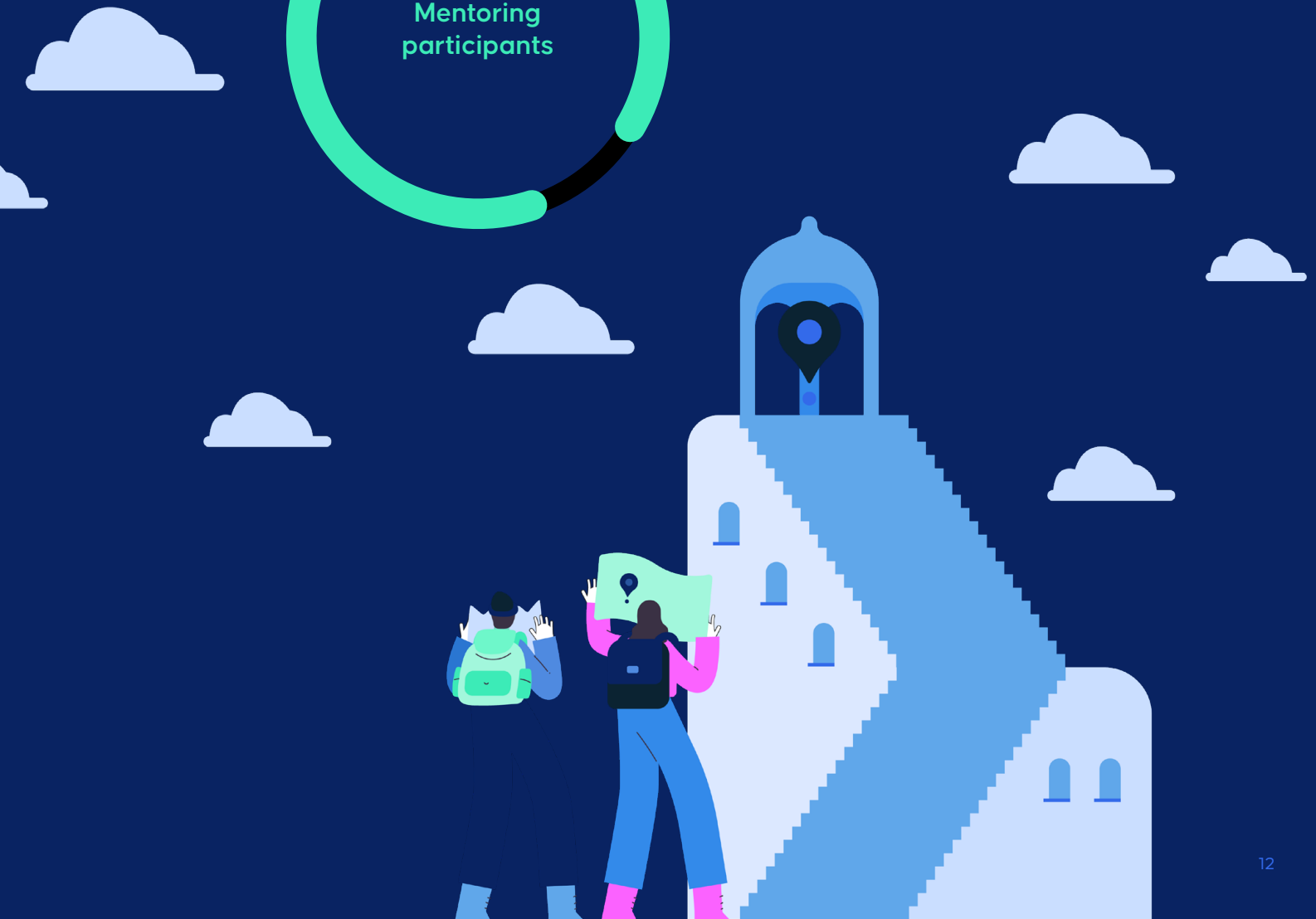
Institutions that invest in career support and mentorship see a strong correlation with alumni giving. A staggering majority **(88.4%) of alumni who participate in mentoring have already donated to their alma mater, and 82.5% said they were likely to donate in the future.** On the other hand, non-mentoring participants were significantly less likely to be current donors (34.5%) or future donors (26.7%).



88.4%
are donors



Those who have acted as mentors had the strongest likelihood to be donors, with 88.7% saying they were likely to donate in the future.



Demographics & Donations

To reach potential donors in personalized and effective ways, fundraising teams are tasked with tailoring their engagement through segmentation and solicitation outreach strategy.



Income

Alumni across different income brackets show differences in the channels which most commonly prompted donations from them.

Those with the highest household incomes most commonly give via an email solicitation, while donors with household incomes of less than \$75,000 are most commonly prompted to donate from a giving day or crowdfunding campaign. The average number of channels that prompt a donation are similar across the board, ranging between 2-3 channels.

Income level by preferred channel for giving

RANK	< \$75k	\$75k-\$150k	\$150k+
#1	36% giving day, crowdfunding	45% social	64% email
#2	34% email	39% text	42% social
#3	34% social	38% email	35% text



Gender

While females make up the majority of alumni respondents (54.9%), males are 23% more likely to be donors.

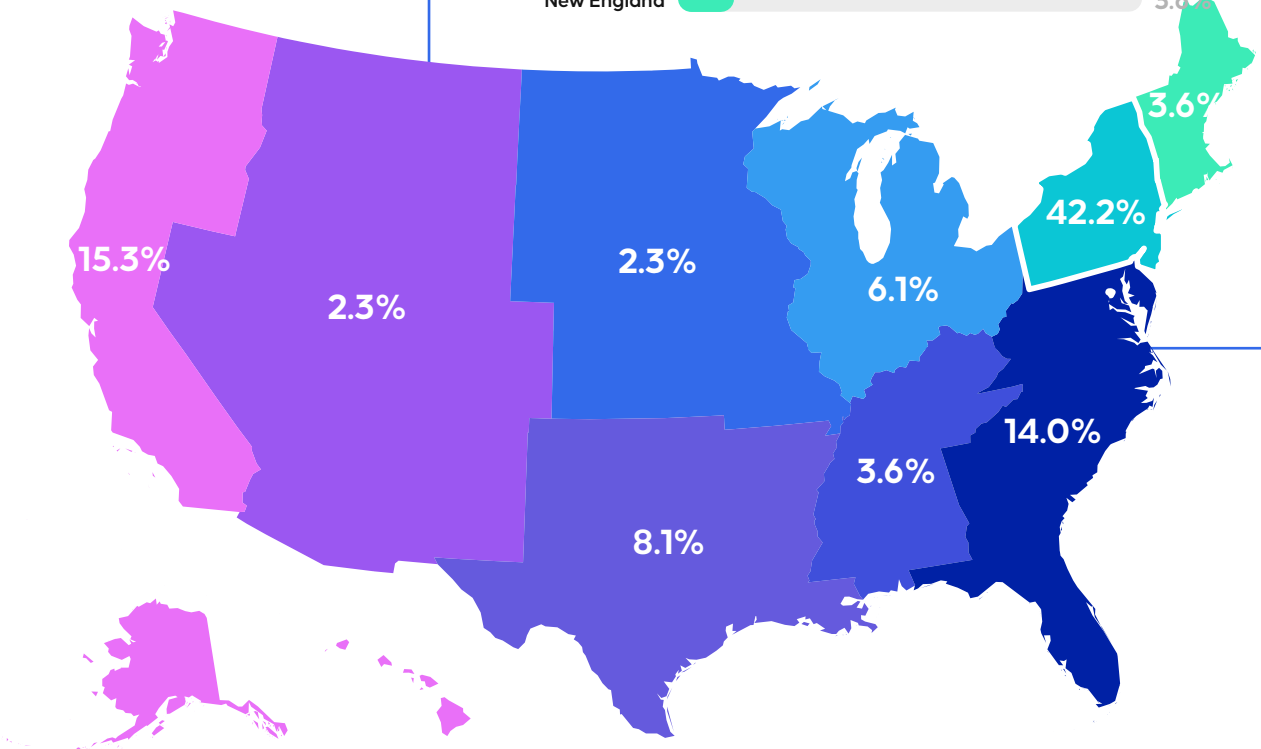
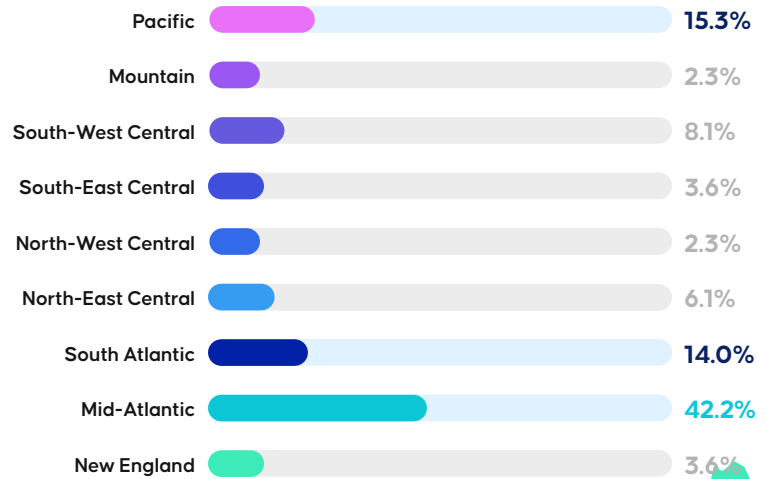




Region

Interestingly, region plays a role in whether an alum is more or less likely to be a donor. Alumni in the Middle Atlantic (including states like New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Washington DC) are **109% more likely** to be donors than non-donors. Some regions, like East South Central and New England showed virtually no difference in likelihood of being a donor versus not a donor.

Giving by US region



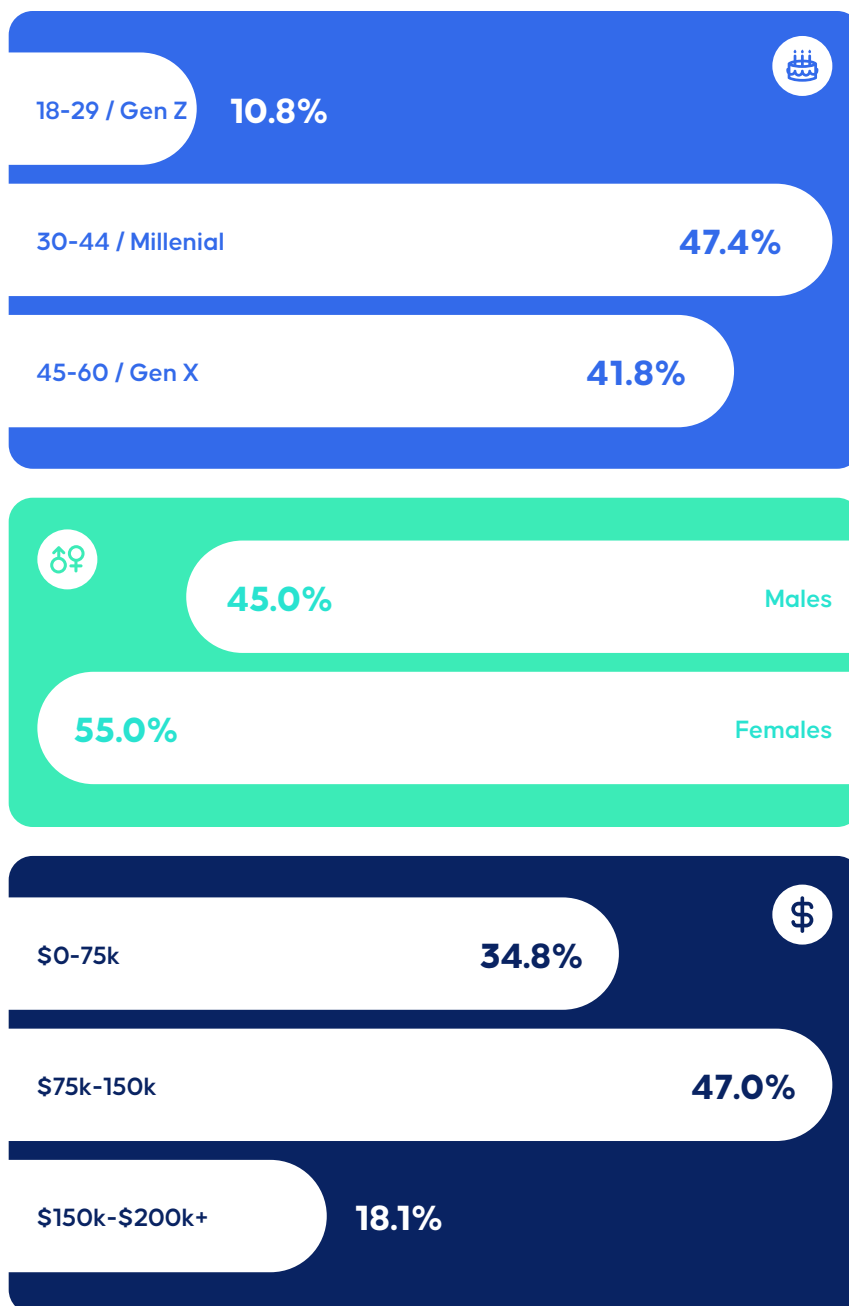
Methodology

This report represents the findings from 600 respondents who represent the U.S. adult census demographic of regions, incomes, and genders, from age 21 to 60. Questions covered topics including alumni programming and services, alma mater communication preferences, mentorship, and philanthropy.

Nearly half (47%) of alumni surveyed are between the ages of 30-44, firmly part of the Millennial generation. The next largest age demographic of alumni are those of Gen X, between the ages of 45-60 (42%).

A slightly larger portion of alumni surveyed identify as female (55%), with 45% identifying as male. There are nearly double the amount of female young alumni (ages 18-29) versus males (13.7% and 7.2% respectively).

The majority of alumni (47%) report a household income between \$75,000 - \$150,000, largely categorized as middle class. Unsurprisingly, age correlated with income levels. A little over a third (37%) of the youngest alumni between the ages of 18-29 have a household income within this range, while nearly half of the oldest alumni surveyed (46%) have an income in this range.



Key Takeaways

The insights gleaned from this survey give us a clearer picture of the alumni engagement today. As engagement and advancement departments seek to navigate this new alumni landscape, they can use the data covered in this report to get a better understanding of what alumni want, where they engage, and how they support their alma maters.

Advancement leaders should take steps to meet alumni where they are now to achieve better participation and more meaningful engagement:



Build a digital-first engagement strategy, using these data and internal insights to guide where, when and how to engage with alumni. Don't neglect new and growing channels like texting and video.



Provide alumni with valuable networking opportunities, especially for new graduates. Use an exclusive group or portal to provide a welcoming and connected environment of fellow alums.



Build lasting connections and support career development through structured and informal mentorship. Engage mentor program participants holistically through multiple channels.



Consider the links between engagement and giving, including how alumni give and factors that make them more likely to become donors, such as mentorship.



About Gravyty

Gravyty is an all-in-one alumni & donor engagement platform that empowers institutions to deliver best-in-class digital giving, build thriving communities and fundraise more effectively. Gravyty's alumni community platform enables alumni relations and career services teams to engage their alumni and constituents anytime, anywhere.

Gravyty empowers schools to build a thriving, supportive network to fuel their missions with features like automated mentoring, job and internship board, custom newsletters, dedicated affinity groups, and built-in video messaging. And it's proven — more than 2,000 leading colleges and universities around the world trust Graduway to power their alumni networks of more than 31 million members combined.

Learn more at gravyty.com