Good practices of alumni relations professionals leading engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions

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Academic Abstract

With each new cohort of directors entering the field of alumni relations in agriculture, a pattern emerges. They often are not adequately prepared to assume the responsibilities of the position. There is a perception that attention to detail and event planning skills are sufficient qualifications to manage an alumni volunteer program successfully. Managing the people and activities involved with the programs in the ever-growing field of alumni relations requires much more than event planning know-how. Implementing impactful alumni engagement programs requires knowledge of leading and managing programs, budgets, and people, specifically volunteers. Alumni engagement involves extensive communication skills and, depending on the institution, knowledge of board organization procedures.

As we all strive to advance agriculture, we must put in place qualified individuals to engage our alumni and stakeholders, specifically volunteers. Are there programs in place to provide training for the candidates selected? Are resources readily available that provide good practices for these individuals to follow as they build their alumni volunteer programs?

Although there is a demand for more rigorous and sophisticated professional practice, there continues to be a gap between research and practice in the field of volunteer administration (Seel, 2013). Resources available for volunteer managers are often how-to manuals with practical suggestions and approaches (Fisher & Cole, 1993). Associations such as the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), the National Agricultural Alumni and
Development Association (NAADA), and BoardSource® provide opportunities for networking with colleagues through conferences and online resources. Still, these are often costly and fragmented with regard to the presentation of content.

The purpose of the study was to examine how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions. The study sought to describe good practices for support, training, communication, and volunteer management that can be utilized by new members of the field and seasoned veterans alike. Thirteen current alumni relations professionals in agriculture at land-grant institutions who are members of NAADA were interviewed. Job descriptions were reviewed prior to each interview. Interviews were transcribed by TranscribeMe, Inc., analyzed using a form of whole text analysis with open coding. Common codes were merged to develop the themes.

Research Questions

1. How do alumni directors administer alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

2. What skills should alumni directors bring to their positions upon employment?

3. How do alumni directors identify individuals or groups to connect to in order to accomplish their goals?

4. How do alumni directors identify and implement communications strategies to make successful connections to use with individuals and/or groups?
5. How do alumni directors continue to improve their skills and knowledge to meet their job expectations related to administering alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

Through a thematic analysis of the data, the following themes emerged: management of volunteer boards; management of general volunteers; perceptions of alumni directors; engagement with alumni, faculty, and students through events and programs; partnerships with university-level advancement and college leadership; communications tools; and professional development.

Overall, the findings were not surprising other than lack of knowledge of volunteer management models or prior experience in volunteer management. Participants who had the support of leadership, who arrived to their positions with at least some background working with volunteers, and those who were willing to try new tactics to engage volunteers set an outstanding example of how success is possible in the role of an alumni director. Communications is a powerful tool for all alumni directors but can also be a significant challenge. Participants who expanded their definition of “volunteer” beyond alumni to include faculty, staff, and students appeared to have better-developed strategies to engage, empower, and lead individuals. Participants who partnered with colleagues in academic programs were better positioned to engage students in programming, find student volunteers and interns to assist in their efforts, and create and maintain stronger connections as they become young alumni.

Seven key good practices can be elevated from the data:
1. Familiarize with volunteer management models to understand how and why people are motivated to volunteer and develop skillsets and tactics to recruit, train, retain, and recognize volunteers

2. Empower volunteers to develop their own mission and goals, strategize their plan of work, and lead the execution of their programs and organization

3. Expand the definition of “volunteer”

4. Build collaborative partnerships across the team, college and university

5. Develop innovative approaches and partnerships to engage students

6. Expand professional development resources

7. Advocate for yourself and your program

After interviewing thirteen alumni relations professionals, it was clear that those land-grant institutions have passionate, volunteer-centric professionals who diligently work every day towards the mission and goals of the colleges they serve. But there is much work to be done to create an environment that is more supportive of them. Efforts should be made to help college and university leadership better understand the qualifications required for alumni relations positions, elevate alumni engagement and volunteers’ impact, and provide more targeted professional development opportunities.
General Audience Abstract

Good practices of alumni relations professionals leading engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions contribute to the advancement of agriculture. The purpose of the study was to examine how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions. The study sought to describe good practices for support, training, communication, and volunteer. Thirteen current alumni relations professionals in agriculture at land-grant institutions who are members of the National Alumni and Development Association (NAADA) were interviewed.

Research Questions:

1. How do alumni directors administer alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

2. What skills should alumni directors bring to their positions upon employment?

3. How do alumni directors identify individuals or groups to connect to in order to accomplish their goals?

4. How do alumni directors identify and implement communications strategies to make successful connections to use with individuals and/or groups?

5. How do alumni directors continue to improve their skills and knowledge to meet their job expectations related to administering alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?
Participants who had the support of leadership, who arrived to their positions with at least some background working with volunteers, and those who were willing to try new tactics to engage volunteers illustrated success in the position. Communications, while a powerful tool for all alumni directors, was often a significant challenge. Participants who expanded their definition of “volunteer” beyond alumni to include faculty, staff, and students appeared to have better-developed strategies to engage, empower, and lead individuals. Participants who partnered with colleagues in academic programs were better positioned to engage students in programming, find student volunteers and interns to assist in their efforts, and create and maintain stronger connections as they become young alumni.

Seven key good practices identified:

1. Familiarize with volunteer management models to understand how and why people are motivated to volunteer and develop skillsets and tactics to recruit, train, retain, and recognize volunteers
2. Empower volunteers to develop their own mission and goals, strategize their plan of work, and lead the execution of their programs and organization
3. Expand the definition of “volunteer”
4. Build collaborative partnerships across the team, college and university
5. Develop innovative approaches and partnerships to engage students
6. Expand professional development resources
7. Advocate for yourself and your program

Participants were passionate and volunteer-centric, diligently working every day towards the mission and goals of the colleges they serve. But there is much work to be done to create an
environment that is more supportive of them. Efforts should be made to help college and university leadership better understand the qualifications required for alumni relations positions, elevate alumni engagement and volunteers’ impact, and provide more targeted professional development opportunities.
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Chapter 1

An office of alumni relations represents all facets of the university to alumni: teaching, research, and outreach. When referring to colleges of agriculture in land-grant institutions, outreach often encompasses Cooperative Extension. In order for alumni relations professionals to effectively represent these entities, they must be well-versed in the latest programs, hires, student demographics, facilities, athletics, etc. and they must take the initiative to gather all of this information from the various units across the university. Alumni relations professionals have in-depth and regular interaction with volunteers of the university, whether they are alumni, friends, faculty, staff, or students.

Alumni relations professionals are charged with identifying the needs of the organization’s members and staff and meeting those needs with volunteers, a non-cash resource (Ellis, 2002). Alumni relations professionals are responsible for recruiting, training, and managing these volunteers for the various ways in which they will be assisting the university. Alumni relations professionals interact with alumni and students who often exhibit a strong affinity for their institution. Alumni relations professionals, in their interactions, help volunteers identify their passions so as to direct them to the most logical, useful, and motivating activities of engagement. Given the wide range of generations of volunteers, special attention must be paid to the methods of communication used. From millennials to baby boomers, each generation has a preferred means of communication (in-person, mail, email, phone, text message, social media, etc.).

Virginia Tech, along with many other institutions across the United States, has reorganized into an advancement model which combines the units of alumni relations, development, and university relations/communications to streamline and better align engagement
and fundraising efforts. Advancement professionals often refer to the three ways to involve alumni and stakeholders with the university as the 3 T’s—time, talent, and treasure. In the interest of consistency and context, this research will focus on the time and talent categories of engagement. Time and talent often lead to individuals ultimately contributing their treasure to complete the triangle of engagement. Alumni relations professionals are the key to recruiting individuals to devote their time and talent to the institution. They “build life-long relationships with alumni in support of the institution, facilitate two-way communication between the institution and alumni, leverage a powerful alumni voice on behalf of the institution, and maintain history and traditions and help secure a bright future for the institution” (What is “Advancement?”, 2015). Examples of this type of engagement are: serving as mentors, holding seats on advisory council and boards, speaking in classes or seminars, career networking with students, and leading chapters, clubs, or organizations that fall under college units or the central alumni association.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to examine how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions. With each new cohort of directors entering the field of alumni relations in agriculture a pattern emerges in which they often are not adequately prepared to assume the responsibilities of the position. There is a perception that attention to detail and event planning skills are sufficient qualifications to successfully manage an alumni relations program. Managing the people and activities involved with the programs in the ever-growing field of alumni relations requires much more than event planning know-how. Implementing impactful alumni engagement programs requires knowledge of leading and
managing programs, budgets, and people, specifically volunteers. Alumni engagement involves extensive communication skills and, depending on the institution, knowledge of board organization. A successful volunteer administrator doesn’t simply manage their volunteers, they engage them in a partnership with the organization. Volunteer administrators face many challenges, such as the lack of understanding of their role by boards of directors and others who influence policy and budgets of the organization (Seel, 2013).

As we all strive to advance the field of agriculture we must put in place qualified individuals to engage our alumni and stakeholders. But are we hiring the right candidates? Are the job descriptions accurate for the type of employees needed? Are there programs in place to provide training for the candidates selected? Are resources readily available that provide good practices for these individuals to follow as they build their alumni engagement programs?

Although there is a demand for more rigorous and sophisticated professional practice, there continues to be a gap between research and practice in the field of volunteer administration (Seel, 2013). Literature resources available for volunteer managers are often how-to manuals with practical suggestions and approaches (Fisher & Cole, 1993). Associations such as the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), the National Agricultural Alumni and Development Association (NAADA), and BoardSource® provide opportunities for networking with colleagues through conferences and online resources, but these are often costly and fragmented with regard to presentation of content. Peer-reviewed content produced from academic research, in addition to the publications produced by the organizations like those listed previously, addressing the topics of volunteer recruitment and management for colleges of agriculture would be beneficial to the field of advancement.
This study examined how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions by surveying current alumni directors in land-grant institutions who are members of the National Agricultural Alumni and Development Association (NAADA). The study sought to describe good practices of support, training, communication, and volunteer management that can be utilized by new members of the field and seasoned veterans alike. Specific topics of investigation are listed below.

Research Questions

1. How do alumni directors administer alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

2. What skills should alumni directors bring to their positions upon employment?

3. How do alumni directors identify individuals or groups to connect to in order to accomplish their goals?

4. How do alumni directors identify and implement communications strategies to make successful connections to use with individuals and groups?

5. How do alumni directors continue to improve their skills and knowledge to meet their job expectations related to administering alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

Core Beliefs and Values

During 15 years as a volunteer administrator, I have grown in my role and made significant changes with regard to how I work with volunteers. I experienced a transition from
working most closely with college student ambassadors to working with almost solely volunteers of our college alumni organization who come from a range of generations and volunteer experiences. I have completed several courses related to leadership, spend time reviewing volunteer management literature, benefit from the experiences of colleagues across the country, and make it a point to get to know our volunteers more personally.

These are my five guiding principles for working with volunteers of the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Alumni Organization: embody *Ut Prosim*, That I May Serve; provide guidance and structure for volunteers but remember that it is their organization to lead; empower volunteers to create and implement programming that they are passionate about so that their intrinsic and extrinsic motivational needs are met; remember that volunteers give in all different ways and be open to what they have to offer, and always show volunteers sincere appreciation in ways that appeal to them.

In 2006, I joined NAADA under an institutional membership when I assumed the role of director of alumni relations in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech. NAADA strives to provide professional development opportunities and resources for advancement professionals working within colleges of agriculture. I have been involved on the board of directors and have presented sessions at annual conferences and for virtual coffee breaks. In 2012, I held the position of alumni professionals track chair, then in 2013, I was appointed to education chair, responsible for leading the committee that planned the conference education sessions. From 2014-2016, I held the office of vice president. From 2016-2018, I served a two-year term as president of the organization. From 2018-2020, I served in the past president role of the organization.
Discussions on organization listservs, personal emails and phone calls, and conference sessions, etc., consistently revolve around the issues addressed in this research. A thorough study of alumni relations professionals at land-grant institutions and sharing the findings with the membership at the annual conference and through electronic publications will bring concerns and current practices to the attention of members for their use and further discussion. I also hope that this knowledge sharing will lead to additional peer-reviewed academic research shared across the organization.

Definitions of Terms

This section defines terms commonly used in the field and throughout this thesis. The definitions are provided from existing literature.

**Advancement:** “a strategic, integrated method of managing relationships to increase understanding and support among an educational institution’s key constituents, including alumni and friends, government policy makers, the media, members of the community and philanthropic entities of all types” (What is “Advancement?”, 2015)

**Alumni relations:** “build and strengthen relations with students, former students, faculty, friends and others” (What is “Advancement?”, 2015)

**Development/fundraising:** “secure private support in the form of annual gifts, major gifts, planned gifts and corporate and foundation gifts, often through strategically developed fundraising campaigns” (What is “Advancement?”, 2015)
University Relations/communications and marketing: “engage constituents in two-way conversation and promote the institution using a variety of strategies and tools” (What is “Advancement?”, 2015)

Volunteer, verb: “to choose to act in recognition of a need, with an attitude of social responsibility and without concern for monetary profit, going beyond one’s basic obligations” (Ellis, n.d.)

Volunteer, noun: “from the perspective of the doer: someone who gives time, effort and talent to a need or cause without profiting monetarily” (Ellis, n.d.)

Volunteer, noun: “from the perspective of the recipient of service: someone who contributes time, effort and talent to meet a need or further a mission, without going on the payroll” (Ellis, n.d.)

Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions.

This section provided background in advancement, specifically alumni relations, within higher education and illustrated a need for identifying good practices in order to assist professionals in the field. The following section provides a review of the literature relevant to volunteer administration, including volunteer management and leadership models and motivational theory.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The Alumni Relations Professional as a Volunteer Administrator

The profession of volunteer administration is filling a great need for non-profit organizations around the globe. Citizens want to make a difference in their communities. They want to help shape the world around them in a meaningful way (Seel, 2013). “The United Nations defines volunteerism as having three characteristics: the activity is not undertaken for financial rewards, the activity is taken according to one’s own free will, and the activity should be of benefit to someone other than the volunteer or to society at large” (Seel, 2013, p. 11).

Stedman and Rudd (2004) developed the dimensions of the volunteer administration model that grounds the discipline in a theoretical base of psychology and sociology. Foundational disciplines of leadership and management, community development, and teaching and learning tie in with the important processes in volunteer administration of organizational leadership, systems leadership, accountability, management skills, personal skills, organizational culture, and commitment to the profession (Stedman & Rudd, 2004). As we look at models and management techniques of volunteer administrators, it is evident why each of these processes is instrumental in a successful volunteer program.

According to Penrod (1991), guiding volunteers is showing leadership. Northouse defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (2016, p. 6). A successful volunteer administrator must be an effective leader (Dodd & Boleman, 2007). “Organizational leadership,” as defined by House et al. (1999, p. 184), in Seel (2013), “is the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to
contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are a member.” Sashkin and Burke (as cited in Penrod 1991) describe leaders as those who direct their actions to influence others in ways that benefit others and the organization. Dedicated alumni relations professionals are leaders. In order to be successful leaders, leadership development should be a priority of the alumni relations professional. Understanding one’s own leadership style is a first step in building the skills needed to lead an organization and its volunteers.

Alumni relations professionals should look to transformational leadership methods to inspire and motivate their volunteers. The same influences a transformational leader has in the workplace with employees can be seen in organizations working with volunteers. Transformational leadership theory suggests that positive outcomes such as self-expression, confidence, and group identification and cohesion may result (Dwyer, et al., 2013). These outcomes are applicable at the volunteer level as well.

Self-determination theory, as studied by Ryan and Deci, 2000, describes the internalization that occurs when one experiences feelings of relatedness with other people (Dwyer et al., 2013). New volunteers who do not put effort into being connected to the people of the organization do not thrive. Volunteer administrators, if leading in a transformational model, can help create environments in which positive relationships can be developed, leading to better group cohesion and a more satisfactory volunteer experience. “Transformational leaders who are inspirational, are concerned about the development of their volunteers, involve their volunteers in decisions, and who focus on the meaning of the work also positively impact the satisfaction of their volunteers” (Dwyer, et al., 2013. p. 185). Volunteer satisfaction doesn’t necessarily lead to more contribution, however. Dwyer, et al. (2013) found that when volunteers were motivated by learning and understanding humanitarian values, they were more likely to contribute more. To
maximize satisfaction and contribution of their volunteer teams, the volunteer administrator needs to understand what drives their volunteers to direct them to projects or activities that meet their individual needs in addition to the needs of the organization.

However, leadership is different from management. Volunteer administrators need to strategically manage. In order to strategically manage they must be able to: “understand and assess program context, plan volunteer programs, focus and prioritize, and strategize” (Seel, 2013, p. 134). Volunteer administrators are responsible for designing and guiding strategic, operational, and project planning to align with the mission and vision of the organization (Seel, 2013). It is a delicate balance of encouraging volunteers to think outside of the box but to set goals that are attainable and will result in desired outcomes. Fisher and Cole (1993) found volunteer administrators to be overwhelmed, with little support from their organization and lacking in the formal training in administering volunteer programs, management theory, or personnel administration. Alumni relations professionals are also managers and are expected to be skillful in program planning and organization and managing both financial and human resources (Fisher & Cole, 1993; Wilson 1976).

The traditional models of managing volunteers may actually be a hindrance to recruitment (Brudney, et al., 2009). Using the workplace analogy, in which volunteers are seen as part-time employees, may not be the best method, especially for alumni and student volunteers who are more episodic and are more program oriented (ex. Mentoring) or want to serve in a more advisory role. According to Brudney et al., (2009), there needs to be more attention to the management and retention of volunteers so as not to constantly need to recruit. Large non-profits have a difficult time following this practice. In alumni relations, resources usually do not allow for the time devoted to constantly recruit new volunteers, so better managing and retaining
current people makes sense. Brudney et al. (2009, p. 577) proposed looking at volunteers and the energy they provide as a “human-made renewable resource that can be grown and recycled.”

A study with 4-H youth development professionals found a significant gap between the actual competencies and level of importance of those competencies in relation to several volunteer management constructs of the Certified Volunteer Administrator (CVA) credentialing process (Schmiesing & Safrit, 2007). Alumni relations professionals could possibly demonstrate the same competency gaps given the lack of formalized training typically received. Schmiesing and Safrit found evaluation, impact, and accountability to be ranked at the lowest level of confidence (2007). With new advancement models being developed at institutions of higher education, alumni relations professionals are being asked to measure the impact of their programs on the overall goals of the advancement approach. The impact of volunteers and the resources devoted to their management and engagement are one such resource. Similar to 4-H, alumni relations offices often lack strategies to effectively evaluate the impact of their programs.

Sinasky and Bruce (2007) examined volunteers’ perceptions of their 4-H agents’ volunteer management practices. A few key findings were the need to inspire volunteers’ commitment to the organization, the importance of opportunities for personal growth, strong teams, and recognizing accomplishments. These same expectations of 4-H volunteers could also describe the expectations of alumni volunteers.

The Volunteer

Volunteer administrators are tasked with guiding volunteers to help meet the missions of their organizations while also helping to meet the motivational needs of the individuals. It is helpful to understand the underlying reasons why people volunteer, and part of that
understanding is related to altruism. Altruism is defined as “an aspect of human motivation that is present to the degree that the individual derives intrinsic satisfaction or psychic rewards from attempting to optimize the intrinsic satisfaction of one or more other persons without the conscious expectation of participating in an exchange relationship whereby those “others” would be obligated to make similar/related satisfaction optimization efforts in return” (Smith, 1981, p. 23). “Intrinsic motivation exists when the source of motivation lies within the individual and task, in contrast to extrinsic motivation which exists when the source of motivation lies outside the individual and the task being performed” (Ormrod, 2012, p. 428). “Incentives for volunteering are material (tangible rewards such as goods, services, money, etc.), solidary (interpersonal rewards such as fellowship, friendship, and prestige), and purposive (intrinsic, intangible rewards that result from feeling as one has contributed to a purpose or helped reach a goal)” (Smith, 1981, p.31). Alumni board members fit well within the purposive incentives, as they are serving in a role in which a mission has been developed for the organization and they are a key part of accomplishing the associated purposes or goals. They are committed to a board seat because they value creating opportunities for other volunteers who may be seeking ways to fulfill their solidary incentives for participating.

Dwyer, et al., (2013) references several researchers who have concluded that people are more likely to be satisfied with their work and more willing to help others when the task at hand is personally meaningful, or they are autonomously motivated. But motivations to volunteer are different from person to person. Clary et al. (1998) developed the Volunteer Functions Inventory consisting of six functions: “expressing humanitarian values; searching for understanding; obtaining career benefits; gaining protection from feelings of guilt about being more fortunate than others; enhancing feelings of self-esteem or self-worth; and fitting in with important social
groups” (Dwyer, et al., 2013, p. 183). Several of these functions can be applied to the motivations of alumni giving back to their institutions, especially humanitarian values, career benefits, and social.

Volunteers differ greatly in the ways in which they want to be engaged. Modern volunteerism must take into consideration busy schedules, competition between organizations for a volunteer’s time, and a desire of volunteers to make episodic or short-term commitments. Micro-volunteering, a recent addition to the types of volunteering, engages volunteers for small increments of time, usually through technology (Browne, Jochum, & Paylor, 2013).

Alumni Relations “professionals recruit, train, and manage volunteers all in an effort to prepare for the future of their organization” (Herman, 1994). Volunteers’ enthusiasm needs to be steered to the right priorities, they should be encouraged to develop their skills, and they must be shown appreciation. (Wilson, 1976). An effective volunteer administrator sees the value in the social and community building roles that volunteers bring to the organization. In the advancement field, the work of alumni relations is often referred to as friend-raising. Ellis (2002) refers to the involvement of volunteers as a form of resource development or people-raising.

Volunteers are “advocates” for our organizations (Luaffer, 1977). The mission, vision, and goals of the organization must be communicated effectively to volunteers (Penrod, 1991) because volunteers for college alumni groups are often asked to assist with recruiting of students and other volunteers, fundraising, to serve in an advisory capacity to academic departments on curriculum and job skill preparation of students, to participate in mentoring programs for students, and to assist with legislative issues. Volunteers can only be effective advocates for an organization if they are provided with the most current information. The information must flow
to them in the format in which they prefer to communicate with others if it has the hopes of being utilized effectively.

The volunteer manager should design programs for volunteers that are dualistic in purpose (Meier, 2012). Volunteers are recruited not only to help develop the organization and its community, but they should be provided the opportunity to develop and strengthen their leadership skills (Meier, 2012). When recruiting new volunteers, it is important to communicate the value of volunteers to the organization. A volunteer administrator can validate their remarks by designing job descriptions, providing orientation and training programs, and developing projects that volunteers will find motivating and mutually beneficial (Penrod, 1991). Volunteers’ skills and energy must be guided and invested wisely (Penrod, 1991).

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service (2013), volunteering increases one's odds of finding employment as they are able to transfer skills learned as a volunteer, and volunteers are twice as likely to provide philanthropic support to a charity. These characteristics could translate into our organization playing a role in alumni making career transitions or volunteers contributing to funds in support of students, research, or alumni activities.

The typical volunteer is white, middle aged, and middle class (Lopez, 2001). But volunteer administrators should be investing considerable time and effort into engaging a more diverse population. As the enrollment of females and minorities increases at our institutions, this diversity should be reflected in alumni organization boards and other volunteer groups associated with our institutions. There should be purposeful efforts made to seek out diverse skillsets and ethnic groups and intentionality in reaching gender and age equality.
Volunteer Administration Approaches

There are several models utilized by volunteer administrators to guide them in their work with volunteers, such as ISOTURE, L-O-O-P, SERVE, and GEMS (Culp, 2012).

The ISOTURE Model (acronym for Identification, Selection, Orientation, Training, Utilization, Recognition, and Evaluation) was introduced as a volunteer management tool by Boyce in 1971, who drew upon the work of Dolan whose original model was designed for leadership development (Dodd & Boleman, 2007). This model focuses on the growth and development of the volunteer and has been used by Cooperative Extension since the 70’s (Connors, 2012).

The L-O-O-P model (acronym for Locating, Orienting, Operating, and Perpetuating) proposed by Penrod (1991) is a leadership model that provides a structured way for guiding volunteers. Utilizing L-O-O-P as a guide links volunteers to the organization’s mission, project goals, personal interests, significant accomplishments, and recognition (Penrod, 1991). If a volunteer administrator progresses through the phases of the model, projects should be completed efficiently and effectively (Penrod, 1991).

The SERVE model, developed for 4-H Extension Agents (acronym for Strategize/Search, Educate/Energize, Recruit/Resource, Volunteer/Volunteer Administrator, and Evaluation), operates on the basis of teamwork and cooperation between the volunteer and volunteer administrator as opposed to management of the volunteer by the volunteer administrator (Whitson, 2008). Volunteers and volunteer administrators work together on projects in an effort to fulfill each other’s needs (Whitson, 2008).
The GEMS model (acronym for Generate, Educate, Mobilize, and Sustain), another model developed for Cooperative Extension, consists of 18 steps within the aforementioned four categories (Culp, 2012). “Volunteers move from step to step as they progress throughout the process” (Culp, 2012), while volunteer administrators are able to achieve their organization’s goals and serve more clientele (Culp, 2012).

Finding qualified and engaged volunteers can be a challenge, but there are several ways to approach the mission. Volunteers can be targeted or found through an annual campaign open to all. Mini-campaigns can be implemented to find qualified volunteers for specific tasks (Ellis, 2002). Data management, a necessary component of a volunteer program, can be challenging at universities. Alumni databases are often incomplete due to the lack of alumni providing updates and the university’s interpretation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). If access to data is limited and there is a restriction in the ways in which it can be used, it can present a major barrier to implementing marketing strategies for recruiting volunteers.

Alumni, while they may be interested in volunteering, have many demands on their time by work and family. Organizations must structure volunteer opportunities in ways that provide flexibility, the ability to move in and out of volunteer roles easily, and the ability to share responsibilities with a team (Safrit & Merrill, 2002). Giving consideration to generational differences across baby boomers, generation x, millennials, etc., can also help volunteer administrators meet the expectations of their volunteers. Each generation has preferences for how they balance their personal and professional lives, which will affect volunteer management practices. Volunteer administrators will be challenged with finding the best ways for multiple generations to work together. But rather than allowing generational differences to create conflict among volunteers, there are opportunities to create synergy (Bianchi, 2014) and put to good use
the knowledge of the general preferences of each generation, such as experienced leaders in their profession (baby boomers), the need to not be micromanaged (generation x), or the preference to work in groups (millennials) (Kendrick, S., 2011).

A consistent trend since the 1990s has seen volunteers across all generations seeking episodic volunteer opportunities (Saffrit & Merrill, 2002). Episodic volunteers present a special challenge in effectively integrating them into events and activities of the organization. However, organizations that can meet the needs of volunteers to engage in shorter timeframes will be more successful in attracting a wider, more diverse group of volunteers (Saffrit & Merrill, 2002). Although a very successful strategy to recruit new volunteers is by personal invitation, this may be a detriment to diversity efforts as volunteers may recruit others very similar to themselves (Saffrit & Merrill, 2002). Therefore, the volunteer administrator must employ a variety of recruitment efforts.

Volunteers should be provided with clearly defined roles and how they align with a well-defined vision and mission of the organization (Safrit & Merrill, 2002). Volunteers value the ability to have direct contact with the mission of the organization (Safrit & Merrill, 2002). A university’s mission is tied to the student experience. Volunteers find meaning and enrichment in the experiences of direct interactions with those who are impacted by the mission. It should be a priority of the alumni professional to provide opportunities for their volunteers to engage with students, faculty, programs, and facilities of the university.

Volunteers expect their experiences with a volunteer organization to model the less authoritative management styles now seen in the workplace. As a volunteer, they want to be treated professionally, be a part of the planning and decisions surrounding their volunteer work,
and be offered clearly defined tasks, training and support, and performance evaluations (Saffrit & Merrill, 2002).

Once volunteers have been identified, it is important to provide them with an orientation to the organization and their roles. “Providing training opportunities to volunteers not only during orientation but throughout their tenure with the organization, can build rapport, help steer their enthusiasm, and guide them in applying their skills to the appropriate tasks” (Wilson, 1976). Orientation programs can be in-person and/or virtual. Blending learning techniques utilizing e-learning modules and face-to-face interactions while avoiding unnecessary repetition are an effective way to train volunteers (Lobley et al., 2013). Assessments such as True Colors™, StrengthsFinder, and The Kurton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI) can provide the tools to each volunteer to create an environment of mutual respect and understanding of different personality traits and work habits.

True Colors™ was developed in 1978 by Don Lowry. In an attempt to establish a personality assessment that was easy to understand, apply, and retain, Lowry, blended education and entertainment by combining audience interaction with insightful materials (True Colors™ website). The mission of the program is to enhance the way we live, work, communicate, and interact with those around us (True Colors™ website). Having studied the work of David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates, Lowry developed a color spectrum that represents four different temperament types or “personality styles”: Blue, Gold, Green, and Orange (True Colors™ website; Miscisin, 2005). Honaker (2001) describes each of the four temperament types with the following adjectives: Blue represents a personality who is harmonious, compassionate, and communicative; Gold represents a personality who is organized, responsible, and orderly; Green represents a personality who is inventive, theoretical, and philosophical; and Orange represents a
personality who is spontaneous, active, and realistic. It is important to note that the True Colors™ programs recognize that all people are a unique blend of characteristics and the four colors (Miscisin, 2005). Each color has particular strengths and analyzes, conceptualizes, understands, interacts, and learns differently (True Colors™ web site).

Clifton StrengthsFinder, a Gallup Organization product, measures personal talent and identifies areas in which an individual has the greatest potential for building strength in that talent (Asplund, et al., 2007). The assessment identifies top themes of talent and provides supporting materials to help build upon those talents. Although its main application is in the workplace, it can be used by individuals for building their strengths in relation to many settings – such as a student, in the family setting, and personal development (Asplund, et al., 2007). It is proposed that these strengths are attributes that volunteers bring to organizations. By understanding individuals’ strengths, volunteer administrators can better develop assignments and teams to meet the organization’s needs while promoting a positive volunteer experience.

Developed by Kirton in 1976, Adaption-Innovation Theory (AI-Theory) describes a person’s preferred, individual differences with regard to the way they solve problems. The “…theory attempts to explain differences in creativity and”… “create more cohesion and collaboration among team members” (Stum, 2009, p. 66). Kirton developed the theory in order to help organizations understand that each person is creative within his or her cognitive style (Stum, 2009). Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI), also created in 1976, is a 32-item assessment that measures innovative and adaptive problem solving styles of individuals (Im & Hu, 2005). “KAI does not measure personality” (von Wittich & Antonakis, 2011), nor does it measure intelligence (Samms & Friedel, 2012). “One style is not better than the other and both are needed in organizations” (Stum, 2009, p. 75 “Research shows that understanding adaptive
and innovative styles of team members can greatly enhance the effectiveness of the organization” (Stum, 2009, p. 67).

Managing volunteers who are a part of an organization with a board of directors presents additional responsibilities for the alumni relations professional. One of the challenges is aligning the goals of the organization with the goals of the college as staff and volunteers often have different perspectives. Strategic planning, goal setting, and employing the use of dashboards and work plans are all effective means to work with a board and reach the goals of all involved. Evaluating both the organization’s programs and leadership are of the utmost importance to keep the organization relevant to its members and the institution. Meier (2012) highlights several skills an alumni board could build upon as a group of volunteers for the organization: networking, listening, communication, problem solving, collaboration, conflict management, strategic planning, and learning how to lead, build community and take action as a part of a group. The alumni relations professional should be intentional about capitalizing on the skills that volunteers bring to the boardroom table.

Motivating, engaging, recognizing, and ultimately retaining volunteers are some of the most important but difficult duties of managing a volunteer program. The challenge is to transform volunteers into active workers while avoiding burnout. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are all at work and a basic knowledge of motivational theory and principles can help guide the volunteer administrator. Lammers (1991) found that the reasons volunteers stay depend on the positive experiences related to tasks completed and their relationships with other volunteers. They value the intrinsic rewards along with new skills attained (Lammers, 1991). Recognizing volunteers appropriately is tied to their motivation and retention. As discussed previously, people are motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically. To motivate them
extrinsically, they may be shown appreciation through awards, gifts, and public verbal recognition (to a live audience or in writing). Penrod (1991) stated that volunteers are rewarded for their service through exposure to new ideas, people, and methods of learning. Because many volunteers won’t give themselves credit, it is important for the volunteer administrator to recognize their time, show them attention, and express a sincere respect for their contribution (Penrod, 1991). There also is value in keeping former volunteers engaged with the organization. Although they may not be actively involved in the day-to-day activities, they may still serve in an advocacy role.

As universities transition to an advancement model, alumni relations is being expected to measure and evaluate the impacts of their programs in more definitive and formalized ways. There is an expectation that allocation of what are already limited resources that are used to provide programs to alumni, including the resources devoted to volunteer management, be translated into philanthropic dollars raised. As a result, evaluating the impact of volunteer programs has become an important management focus (Safrit & Merrill, 1998).

Evaluations of both volunteers and the volunteer administrators can examine the effect of management style on climate and effectiveness of the organization and the effect of climate of the organization on volunteers and staff (Wilson, 1976; Luaffer, 1977). Evaluations provide an opportunity to more easily remove ineffective or problem volunteers. And most importantly, evaluations create an opportunity to make the necessary changes to keep the organization relevant and moving forward.

Bennett and Rockwell developed the Targeting Outcomes of Programs (TOP) model for Cooperative Extension in 1994 which targets outcomes, tracks achievement of reaching the outcomes, and evaluates the program performance toward reaching the outcomes (Safrit &
Merrill, 1998). The model may be useful in evaluating alumni programming and volunteer administration.

Summary

While there exists much literature related to volunteer management in large non-profit organization and there are quality volunteer management models to utilize from Cooperative Extension, there lacks peer-reviewed literature in the field of advancement, specifically alumni relations. Through this study the researcher identified good practices by those in the alumni relations profession and connected theories in volunteer management to the administration of volunteers in advancement.
Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of the study was to examine how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions.

This study surveyed current alumni directors in land-grant institutions who are members of the National Agricultural Alumni and Development Association (NAADA). The study sought to describe good practices of support, training, communication, and volunteer administration that can be utilized by new members of the field and seasoned veterans alike.

Research Questions:

1. How do alumni directors administer alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

2. What skills should alumni directors bring to their positions upon employment?

3. How do alumni directors identify individuals or groups to connect to in order to accomplish their goals?

4. How do alumni directors identify and implement communications strategies to make successful connections to use with individuals and/or groups?

5. How do alumni directors continue to improve their skills and knowledge to meet their job expectations related to administering alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?
Rationale for qualitative case study design. According to Yin (as cited in Rossman & Rallis, 2012), case studies depict events, processes, and perspectives, and build explanations. The detail and complexity that case studies provide extend comprehension of events or circumstances (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Case studies rely on a variety of data gathering techniques such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, and analyzing documents which translate into rich descriptions (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Case studies use both categorizing and holistic strategies to analyze data (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). “Categorizing strategies identify similarities and differences among the data, coding and sorting them into appropriate categories. The categories may be generated from the theories in which the conceptual framework is grounded. Holistic strategies describe connections among the data to a narrative of the individual or program” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). In order to generate a report of good practices of alumni professionals who administer alumni and volunteer programs, the researcher will need rich descriptions of their processes and a case study design will provide such descriptions.

The Research Design

Contacting the case study group. Upon receipt of IRB approval, members of NAADA who are affiliated most closely with the professional track of alumni relations and who administer volunteers were invited to participate in the study. The researcher shared a description of the case study on the NAADA alumni relations track email listserv one week prior to the NAADA annual conference (Appendix A).

Sampling and participant selection. In-person meetings during the conference or phone calls after the conference, were arranged with all potential participants who responded to the initial email, to review the case study, consent forms (Appendix B), and interview protocol (Appendix C). Participant consent forms (Appendix B) were collected by email. Following
receipt of the consent form, a phone interview was scheduled within the next month at the convenience of the participant.

**Preliminary work.** The *a priori* propositions proposed in Table 1 will assist the researcher in the planning and development of the interview guide. Table 1 explains how the propositions are correlated with the participant interview guide, as well as supporting literature.
### Table 1

**A Priori Propositions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposition</th>
<th>Supporting Literature</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>Observation Guide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities of agriculture alumni relations professionals vary across universities in the land grant system</td>
<td>Alumni relations professionals are charged with identifying the needs of the organization’s members and staff and meeting those needs with volunteers, a non-cash resource (Ellis, 2002). Alumni relations professionals “build life-long relationships with alumni in support of the institution, facilitate two-way communication between the institution and alumni, leverage a powerful alumni voice on behalf of the institution, and maintain history and traditions and help secure a bright future for the institution” (What is “Advancement?”, 2015).</td>
<td>1. How do alumni directors administer alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?</td>
<td>Share what a typical day/month/year is like. Describe your interaction with alumni (boards, events, fundraising)</td>
<td>a. How are responsibilities similar or different across the country?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni directors bring organizational and event planning skills to</td>
<td>Volunteer administrators need to strategically manage. In order to strategically manage</td>
<td>2. What skills should alumni directors bring to their positions</td>
<td>Were particular competencies expected of you or were they</td>
<td>a. What prior knowledge was expected and what</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Volunteer administrators are responsible for designing and guiding strategic, operational, and project planning to align with the mission and vision of the organization (Seel, 2013). According to Penrod (1991), guiding volunteers is showing leadership. Northouse defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (2016, p. 6). A successful volunteer administrator must be an effective leader (Dodd & Boleman, 2007).

### Alumni and volunteer programs depend on the buy-in and volunteer time of members, administration, and alumni directors

Volunteer administrators face many challenges, such as the lack of understanding of their role by boards of directors and others who influence policy and budgets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Knowledge Did You Have?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. What resources do veterans (10+ years) and those in the field 5-9 years utilize in improving/making</td>
<td>b. How could we standardize the minimal expectations listed in job descriptions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. How do you recruit, manage, retain, and recognize volunteers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and others to be successful.

of the organization (Seel, 2013).

accomplish their goals?

vision? Who carries out the mission and vision?

What are the main focuses of the association? How are those decided from year to year?

Describe your relationship with board leadership, if applicable. How do you accomplish the goals of the association?

Who are your programs’ advocates? Volunteers, you, dean, etc.?

If applicable, how do you leverage relationships across the college to recruit volunteers?

Are faculty or students considered volunteers for your office/organization/association?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A variety of communication</th>
<th>An effective volunteer</th>
<th>4. How do alumni directors</th>
<th>What communication</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
strategies lead to successful collaborations, networks, and advocates for alumni and volunteer programs.

| A study with 4-H youth development professionals found a significant gap between the actual competencies and level of importance of those competencies in relation to several volunteer management constructs of the Certified Volunteer Administrator (CVA) credentialing process (Schmiesing & Safrit, 2007). Alumni relations professionals could possibly demonstrate the same competency gaps given the lack of formalized training typically received. |
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Successful alumni directors seek professional development opportunities for themselves to continue to build their skills in volunteer administration.

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| a. Seeking rich descriptions of alumni directors’ experiences when they were new to their roles (less than 1 year), settled in, and veterans |

administrator sees the value in the social and community building roles that volunteers bring to the organization. In the advancement field, the work of alumni relations is often referred to as friend-raising. Ellis (2002) refers to the involvement of volunteers as a form of resource development or people-raising.

identify and implement communications strategies to make successful connections to use with individuals and/or groups?

s tools do you find most effective in connecting with alumni, both the general population and volunteers?

Ask each survey respondent to illustrate networks/collaborators/advocates

Successful alumni directors seek professional development opportunities for themselves to continue to build their skills in volunteer administration.

A study with 4-H youth development professionals found a significant gap between the actual competencies and level of importance of those competencies in relation to several volunteer management constructs of the Certified Volunteer Administrator (CVA) credentialing process (Schmiesing & Safrit, 2007). Alumni relations professionals could possibly demonstrate the same competency gaps given the lack of formalized training typically received.

5. How do alumni directors continue to improve their skills and knowledge to meet their job expectations related to administering alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers? What was offered in terms of training and orientation to the field of alumni relations? Is professional development encouraged and supported with resources? What continuing education do you seek for yourself? Is it supported and valued?

a. Seeking rich descriptions of alumni directors’ experiences when they were new to their roles (less than 1 year), settled in, and veterans
Data Collection

**Document analysis.** Position descriptions were requested from each participant and are included as additional qualitative data. Descriptions were reviewed to prior to the interviews to familiarize the researcher with each participant’s position.

**Participant interviews.** “Interviews were conducted in order to understand individual perspectives, deepen understanding, generate rich descriptive data, gather insights into the participants’ thinking, and learn more about the context” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 176). The guided interview method was used: “introduction (overview and purpose, informed consent, tape recording, ownership of content), body of interview (themes or topics, elaborations, transitions and summaries), summary and closure (thanks, keeping the door open, review process for sharing transcript, next steps)” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 178). The interview guide and protocol were modeled after EDRE 6504 Guidelines for Conducting the Structuring and Data Gathering Interviews (Heim, 2014). The interview guide can be found in Appendix C. The researcher identified five topics/research questions which were addressed with several open-ended questions followed by probing questions seeking elaboration. The interview protocol was designed for a 60-90 minute timeframe. Upon completion of the interviews and transcribing of the recordings, the researcher shared a report of identified themes with the participants for their feedback. If further clarification was needed after preliminary findings, additional interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participant(s).

Data Analysis
The purpose of the study was to examine how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions.

The interviews were analyzed using a form of whole text analysis. The analysis was informed by the procedures developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967, as cited in Hein, 2014) and Corbin and Strauss (2008, as cited in Hein, 2014). The process of analysis began when the interviews were transcribed. The interviews were transcribed by TranscribeMe, Inc.

The next step in the analysis involved the identification of excerpts in the interview transcripts. The unit analysis used was a sentence. The interview transcripts were analyzed by means of a line-by-line approach for information that was revealing of an aspect of the phenomenon. Excerpts consisted of one or more sentences that captured an aspect of the phenomenon; excerpts are self-contained, as far as the meaning that they contain. If two or more excerpts communicate exactly the same meaning, only one will be included in the analysis.

Each excerpt was coded. Coding is the process of identifying the implicit and explicit meanings contained in each excerpt. A code consists of a series of words or a phrase that captures the meaning of the excerpt. An excerpt can contain more than one code. Each excerpt will be coded prior to identifying the next excerpt. Codes were revisited throughout the analysis and changes made as necessary. After all of the excerpts were coded, the codes were clustered into groups based on similarity of meaning. Each grouping represented a category. Categories capture meaning at a higher level of abstraction than codes. Categories are further refined based on their internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. To meet the qualifier of internally homogeneous, data within a category must be related or cohesive. Categories or the data within the categories are considered externally heterogeneous when they are mutually exclusive.
Memos, which are a written record of the researcher’s thoughts, were developed during each phase of the process to provide an opportunity to document important ideas, issues, or questions that were of potential significance for the remainder of the analysis.

Reliability

Content analysis.

In order to make sense of the data, analysis occurred through the interrogation and organization of data for the production, synthesis, and evaluations of patterns, along with identification of themes and relationships (Hatch, 2002). Interviews were open-coded (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) by assigning descriptive labels for the production of significant characteristics (Bailey, 2018), with line-by-line coding utilized. An iterative, inductive process was then used “to form increasingly more abstract units of information” (Creswell, 2013, pg. 186) for comprehensive themes production. As multiple interviews were coded, each set of codes were likened through a constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to check for accuracy and to produce qualitative validity (Creswell, 2013). This assessment of similarities and differences “allows the researcher to differentiate one category/theme from another and to identify properties and dimensions specific to that category/theme” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, pg. 73) while systematically producing themes that are “consistent, plausible, and close to the data” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pg. 103) without utilizing provisional testing of hypotheses (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Researcher Bias and Limitations
Insider/outsider considerations. The researcher holds an insider stance as an alumni relations professional who administers alumni and volunteer programs. The researcher is a colleague, former fellow board member, and personal friend of several of the participants.

Limitations. The qualitative study was a study of interviews that represented a small group of volunteer participants within the alumni professionals track of NAADA, so, the study was not representative of the entire population of alumni professionals in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions. Data was triangulated and saturated by the content of the interviews with common codes appearing in multiple interviews.

Summary

This chapter described the rationale for a qualitative case study design and methodology for examining how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions. Methods for data collection included document analysis and participant interviews. Finally, this chapter explained the means of identifying participants, the process for data analysis, reliability of the findings, and researcher bias and limitations of the study.
Chapter 4

Findings: Qualitative interviews and observations

The purpose of the study was to examine how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions.

This study surveyed current alumni directors in land-grant institutions who are members of the National Agricultural Alumni and Development Association (NAADA). The study sought to describe good practices of support, training, communication, and volunteer administration that can be utilized by new members of the field and seasoned veterans alike.

Five major questions guided the study:

1. How do alumni directors administer alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

2. What skills should alumni directors bring to their positions upon employment?

3. How do alumni directors identify individuals or groups to connect to in order to accomplish their goals?

4. How do alumni directors identify and implement communications strategies to make successful connections to use with individuals and/or groups?

5. How do alumni directors continue to improve their skills and knowledge to meet their job expectations related to administering alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

Through a thematic analysis of the data, the following themes emerged and organized this chapter:
1. Management of volunteer boards
2. Management of general volunteers
3. Perceptions of alumni directors
4. Engagement with alumni, faculty, and students through events and programs
5. Partnerships with university-level advancement and college leadership
6. Communications tools
7. Professional development

Content Analysis

Research question 1: How do alumni directors administer alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

Theme: Management of volunteer boards

Recruitment of board members and committee volunteers

Recruitment is the first step in managing a board. It should include personal conversations, rather than email, to determine the volunteer's goals and how to best align those goals with those of the organization. Participant Four recognized the need to understand why an alumnus has chosen to serve, “And just talk to them about, "Why did you agree to serve on this board?"... So why are you on this board? What is it you hope to do? What would you like to see--and what's been nice about those are, I think because it's just them with us and that they are really, really honest in those conversations.” Participant Three takes time to learn about each individual during the recruitment process, “What do they need? What do they want? And how do they want to volunteer for us? … hear them talk about what has meaning and value to them in terms of their
engagement with this college, why they volunteer, what they want to accomplish, what they want to walk away with when they leave our board.” Participant Nine reflected on a past tactic of relying on email to recruit volunteers, admitting that it was no longer effective and that it takes a personal ask from the alumni director or a board member. Part of the recruitment of board members for Participant Seven involved “Getting people to be willing to step down so others can serve.”

Having geographically, demographically, skillset and degree diverse board membership should be a priority when recruiting new volunteers, so the breadth of the college is represented. Beyond alumni, faculty and student representatives play a key role in accomplishing board goals by bringing the on-campus perspective to discussions. Participant Two recognized the need for more diversity of departments represented on the alumni board, “When I started four years ago, a lot of the board membership, while they were in the different geographical locations, a lot of them were AGED graduates…. They're easily just going to turn to their friends who happen to be in the same either degree focus or profession." So, I'm trying to figure out how we still let the board have a say and identify some of those individuals but also working very closely with our development team. And identifying some of those individuals who it would enhance their experience or it might make sense for them through their cultivation process to be involved at this level.”. Participant Twelve described their executive team’s realization that they needed to recruit a more diverse board with specific skillsets to complement the board's goals, “We are…looking at…this person-- are they strong in this? What are we missing on our board that we really need somebody? Do we need somebody that's a good fundraiser right now? Do we need somebody that is really good in one area versus another? Several years ago, our board looked like a typical, very senior alumni, very male-oriented. And some of those white men were taking
a look around, and they said, "You know, this is not the way we should be looking. We need to be looking for some females. We need to be looking for younger alumni to be on this board." So, they made a real effort to put some candidates on the ballot that were younger, that were female.” Participant Ten has seen a higher level of advocacy and willingness to recruit fellow alumni in their current involved volunteers, “The volunteers who are involved in the program, especially if they have an active role in matching or in leading the steering committee, they're also the ones who are like, "Hey I talked to someone, they're interested, could you send them that email that you sent to everyone. So, I think the second that an alumni starts to feel a little bit more ownership over their little section of the program they start being our advocates and recruiters.”

Participant Three looks for ways to better engage out-of-state board members beyond conference calls, “We're looking at ways to try and incorporate some WebEx or something for our board meetings. We have had the opportunity for remote participation, but it's just been via conference call. And so, we're trying to figure out ways that board members because it's so important that I get board members who have experiences broader than just [our state]. But when you get those people, it's harder to get them to meetings. And so, we've got to find other ways for them to participate.”

Participant Thirteen’s alumni board has alumni representatives from each academic department who are required to provide departmental updates at each meeting. Recognizing the representatives struggled with connecting with department heads, individual meetings were held with the alumni, department head, and alumni director to establish a relationship and create a process. These efforts resulted in increased engagement to the benefit of all involved. For Participant Twelve, affiliate program groups (APG) residing in departments are a feeder for
future college alumni society board members. The participant is not responsible for managing APGs but is able to interact with those individuals who represent their APG on the alumni society board and by attending and providing reports at APG board meetings.

The inclusion of faculty and/or student representatives on the alumni board varied across institutions but it was generally recognized there is a benefit to having them. Participant Nine includes four student representatives on their board: undergraduate student board president, a student ambassador, MANRRS, and a graduate student. The hope is that relationships with graduate students will be strengthened through their involvement. Participant Thirteen recognized the benefits of having strong student representatives, “The board looks to them for advice, which I appreciate. And bringing ideas up, and so they have a very strong voice if you have the right person in that position.”

**Board structure/leadership/training**

Frequent communication with board leadership and a thorough onboarding program for new members are key to a positive volunteer experience. Participant Nine valued a monthly call with the executive team and a weekly call with the president. Having not communicated as frequently with board leadership in the past, they reflected, “I don't know how the heck I worked with presidents before, when we didn't have the regular connection that we do now. It's just been super helpful to have that relationship.” Participant Six saw the board president as a key player in setting high expectations for board member engagement. Participant Thirteen described their board’s onboarding process, “They all go through board orientation or a sit-down one-on-one with me to review things. So, they all are, hopefully, understanding what their role is and what
they have to do to prepare for meetings, and what their responsibilities are outside of meetings, what events they need to attend.”

Committees that are inclusive of non-board members are a strategic way to accomplish goals, but also important pathways to board membership. Participant Nine values the potential of committee members from outside of the board being a potential feeder into future board membership. Participant Seven recognized that a working board required a committee structure, “It took probably a good three to five years to transition into a working board, and it was finally when we got a committee structure, it now is truly is operating as a working board. And the constant messages going out from the chairs. We're responsible for accomplishing these goals, [staff] are here for support, but we got to recognize that it's up to us.” … Committee members that are not on the board…just serving on the committee. So that has proved to become helpful in that we're getting people involved there with the goal of seeing how good they are, and how engaged they are, and working them toward being a part of the Alumni Board.”

**Board purpose, strategic planning and annual work plans**

Having a solid understanding of the purpose of the organization and its board and how they align with the college creates synergy and opportunities to create meaningful programs. Strategic planning along with the development and implementation of annual work plans and evaluations help volunteers remain engaged and focused on accomplishing their goals. Participant Three described the shift to empowering the board to create their own strategic plan as opposed to college objectives driving their work, “And so we took it in stages, and just bit off chunks that the board could handle, and let them tell us what they wanted to work on, what they felt was important; we hadn't done that in my whole time here. We had always-- we had
objectives, we want to recruit students, we want to promote this program. We need a new
building over here so we need alumni talking to legislators. We defined ourselves by the
college's objectives, which is certainly something we have to do. We can't lose sight of that, but
we can't just always be the tail that the dog is whipping around. I think it has to come from the
board. That's the big thing from me in terms of engaging them in programming, was starting with
them and figuring out who, and what they want to do.”

As only the fifth professional to hold the position of alumni director since it was
established, Participant Eight has seen strategic planning work effectively for the board, “And
about 10 years ago, I had an incredible combination of presidents who, in the annual meeting,
…crafted this format where we broke down into groups to solve problems and issues….That
statement had stayed pretty true for ten years. I have had four development directors who've
supervised me in that time and they haven't seen the need to change that mission statement
either.”

Participant Six was proud to be managing a working board, “We give them meaningful
jobs to do. They get to decide what that plan is. They're part of that process. They're part of
setting the objectives that's the whole work plan process, annual planning process. And then on
occasion we do the larger strategic planning session where they get to think big and pie in the
sky.” Participant Six can illustrate to the dean that the priorities of the alumni association align
with the strategic initiatives of the college.

According to Participant Two, [their] “board has been continually kind of striving to find
their purpose over the last 10 or so years. Initially, it was founded as an advisory board for the
college, and a couple deanships ago, our dean decided that they wanted to have a handpicked
board of industry professionals as well, so more of a college advisory board with some of those external stakeholders specifically alumni. So, they created their own board, and we have two boards working together. But with that college advisory board establishing, it kind of took away some of the advisory responsibilities or opportunities for the alumni specific board, so that board still continues to facilitate our alumni awards process. It's really their biggest responsibility and through that constant communication throughout the year, keeping them updated on things that are happening in the college but also relying on them to facilitate that award process and then help out with executing the annual event.”

Participant Ten incorporates evaluations and feedback annually, “[With committees] at the very beginning, we review our goals from last year. How did we do? Did we reach them? Were they even SMART goals? …Determined based on either, evaluations that we had from the previous events or programs, and what are some goals from the board? …Let's find out, what's our data and how can we improve that?”

**Empowering board members**

Empowering board members in their roles can lead to more robust programming, more fully engaged volunteers, and alleviate staffing shortages in some instances. Participant Five described a more hands-off approach that empowered board committees to accomplish their goals, “Well, we always had an orientation early in the year with our volunteers and established the mission or the goal of the committee....And then I would be aware of … and approve those goals and to know that if they were having a conversation related to one of those goals that I did not necessarily have to be on the phone. And we talked about what questions they would come up with for me during the conference calls that I could answer for them on a later date.... So,
towards the end when I was in the college of Ag, it had gotten to where there was a lot of calls happening without me…. And it was important for them to feel like they could do that. And it was important for me because I would get on a call and it would be like, "Hey, let's do this. [Alumni director], can you do that?" They had grand ideas, but they were more grand ideas for me to implement as opposed to ideas that they could come up with that they could accomplish on their own.” Participant Seven’s strategy of empowering volunteers to be problem solvers has helped to identify and elevate quality leaders. For Participant Eight, a shift to a non-due paying structure helped to empower boards to think broader, "[they] don't have to work to encourage people to pay a membership due anymore. We're really finding out where their passions are in the university and we're spinning them off to other programs that need volunteers.”

Staffing shortages forced Participant Ten to empower their volunteers but also be cognoscente of burnout, “We've been trying to do more that gives our committee members more ownership…. And it's a hard transition because I think for a long time we've functioned off of the, "Well, they're just here to advise, and we do all the work." And so, I want it to be more of, "They're here to do the work." And really, we have a very active alumni board. We do. We have all sorts of different committees. I feel like I'm talking to our alumni board members or our committee chairs on a weekly basis, which is great. But there's that challenge between running them into the ground, working a lot, and making sure that they're personally invested and they're not just putting in their two cents and going back to work.”

Participant One would like to serve more as an advisor to than manager of the board, “You need to look at the structure of the overall model, in terms of your volunteer model…."They're not doing any of the back work and different things. And so, I think putting a little bit more responsibility on those executive officers on the board would be helpful for us. But
also setting those expectations too. And so being detailed, providing us lists. And then really the person that's in that role and really needs to serve more as an advisor to the group, and just when something comes up, and kind of let them run it. Because it is their organization.”

**Recognition of board members**

Recognition of volunteers is one of the most important roles of a volunteer manager. Whether an individual is intrinsically motivated or not, saying thank you in meaningful ways helps with retention. Participant Six appreciates that volunteers, “Know they're part of something bigger and more successful. And they like the recognition as a group, but they don't need it on an individual basis.” Participant Nine recognized the inadequacy of their recognition program, “We recognize them when they go off the board. And certainly, at events, those who were involved with planning the event. We, at meetings sometimes, we'll-- this is not a recognition per say, but if there's a decal that we got or some new tchotchke we'll bring that to the board so they have it as well. But I would say ongoing, other than when they go off the board, probably not good enough.”

Participant Twelve shared the most comprehensive recognition program, “At the end of the terms for folks, we have a tiered recognition program. So, it used to be that when folks went off the board, we just had these certain recognition items that they got. And they were presented at our annual ice cream social. But we-- one of the committees looked at it a few years ago, and said, "Well, you know what, people are working-- people are volunteering different lengths of time in different roles. So, we should really be tiering this based on what roles people are volunteering, based on the length of their terms. Are they volunteering for one term or are they volunteering for two terms? And we should also be giving people a choice, not just giving them
what-- they all get the same thing." So, the committee actually went through and they picked out, I think it's three or four items. So, we have a Tier 1, a Tier 2, and a Tier 3. And it's based on length of term and what role they were serving. And based on those, it determines if they can choose from Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3. And then, we send out a really nice email to the folks and say that they get to, based on their length of service for volunteering, they get to choose one of these items. And then, we send them a picture of the items that they get to choose from. And it's really made an impact on people, having the opportunity to choose from items. It makes them feel special. And it's the same. They're all the same dollar value. And they've made a really big deal about getting to choose what they want as their recognition gift so that not everybody is getting the same thing. And then, it's presented by the president and by the dean of the college at our ice cream social, at an event with 150 people. So, that's pretty nice. And then, I also send a personal, hand-written "Thank You" note that's-- I send it just from me. I try to make it really personable, something that really stands out from them. Something that's meaningful to each of them, I send to them.”

**Managing poor leadership and inactive board members**

Every volunteer manager will encounter situations where they must respond to a lack of board executive leadership and inactive board members over the course of their careers. By-laws are instrumental in being able to professionally remove inactive members. The volunteer manager may also have to step into more of a leadership role in the interest of maintaining momentum of board committee work and programs. Participant Twelve shared the struggle and response to lack of leadership in their board president, “So, right now, we are, kind of, in a little bit of a down dip in our leadership right now of our volunteers. Under our last president, things were in an upswing. We had very strong volunteer leadership. So, our committee members were
really strong at having an agenda set. They-- our committee chairs were very strong at running the conference calls. They were very going at having the minutes typed up and sent out. Right now, how our leadership is not very strong so our committees are not like that. So, I find myself- - right now, I'm the one that's really kind of setting the agendas and making sure that the conference calls are getting run.”

Participant Five stated they, “don't want to waste a board seat on somebody who's not active.” Participant Four recognized the need for turnover of board membership in order to engage more of their 15,000 alumni, “Take those 30 people off one by one….Because we have a lot of programming in place, and we have a lot of things in place that had to stay that way because of those 30 people…. involved getting some newer volunteers, some younger volunteers, sort of letting some of the older regime have their day and then move on. And we really moved into a much more hands-on task-oriented volunteer role.” Participant Thirteen leveraged by-laws to address inactive members, “But you always get the same excuses from the same people, and so we're enforcing some of the by-laws that we've probably never enforced before….Now what they're going to do is go back to those that haven't really been active, and say, “Our board has become much more engaged than maybe when you started and do you still have the time commitment for this?” Participant Seven described how by-laws can be used to remove an inactive member, “If somebody isn't coming to meetings we call them and have them step down themselves….The by-laws says, that if you miss so many meetings that you could be removed, and so we will do that. And we do it very graciously.”

Perceptions of the board and organization
Alumni, student, and faculty programming feedback and perceptions of the work of the board and organization should be considered by volunteers in leadership positions. Participant One encourages the board through young alumni and student feedback, “See people that are on there that have been on there for a very long time. And so, you're not engaging some of those young alums that would be really active. And that's the feedback that we've gotten from-- we'll do surveys with our graduates, too. And that was feedback that we've gotten, is the vision on the way for young alumni to plug in. And with the association the way it's structured, they run as their own business, their own model. And so, it's hard for our students to even understand what exactly they do other than they give that scholarship money. They need to do a better job of figuring out how to connect with that student body, and to do things a little bit more so they're more active, and they seem more active here, that they really are that integral piece.”

Participant Five shared faculty’s positive perception of the alumni association, “Faculty really got it and really appreciated what the Alumni Association was doing and how it was going to shape those students and some didn't. I think one of the most helpful things was when we started looking at the retention of those students. And when they recognized that the Alumni Association, while it was there to serve alumni, was also very-- wanted to be very hands-on on key issues like retention of our students. That all of a sudden, they were like, oh! They are involved in the whole process not just trying to get people to give them money.”

**Dean’s advisory boards**

Most participants in the study managed boards that led an alumni association rather than a group of advisors to the dean. Because of the different purposes of each of those groups of volunteers, different considerations regarding management style is required. Surprisingly, several
participants indicated a disconnect between their roles, the association boards, and the advisory boards. Participant Nine shared changes in involvement with the dean’s advisory board. Under former leadership, they would attend the meetings. Under new leadership, the plan to create an advisory board came to fruition with possible involvement of the alumni board president but there was also a strong focus on fundraising. Participant Two shared a similar example, “I do not [manage or have a representative on the dean’s advisory board]. So, our assistant dean for advancement for the college,…in her director role, she sits on that board. Historically I believe there had been a member from the alumni board that had rolled up into the dean's advisory board. For some reason, I don't know if that intentionally went away or that board member rotated off. But there is no representative from the alumni board on the advisory board. So, we basically receive all that information as it comes down through our advancement department.”

Participant Six, recognized that managing advisory boards comes with additional considerations, “It can be downright dangerous if you don't have the right kind of person in there [managing the board]. So, you get people who come to these meetings, they're mad because they aren't run well, they don't know why they're there, and you don't take their advice. You got to set them up with the right expectations so that they know what they're going to be doing there and how you take that advice or not.”

Theme: Management of general volunteers

Recruitment of general volunteers

In addition to recruiting volunteers for boards, participants spent a significant amount of time recruiting volunteers for episodic opportunities which can require a different strategy. Participant Ten described their recruitment strategy for general volunteers, “In terms of
recruiting, I think for some of our programs they've been around for so long that we rely on their constant visibility sort of. They're on our website. People talk about them. We get really wonderful support from career and internship services in terms of sharing information with students who are coming in. We send emails out. We remind past participants to reapply. So rarely are we launching a completely new volunteer program. … Because we have a pretty awesome group of volunteers who keep coming back. In terms of recruiting new volunteers, we do ask current volunteers to get the word. We ask current volunteers for recommendations for other people we might want to reach out to. So, at the end of the year for the mentor program for example, in their evaluation it ends with, "Do you have colleagues or friends who you think will be great for this program?" We reach out to them. Or we also have a list of industry contacts that have newsletters and things like that. And we usually get the word out through them. And we have our own strategies through social media, LinkedIn, our newsletters, and getting the word out through departments. So that plus a lot of information via tabling. So, at the career fair, we're usually walking around chatting with people especially the ones that have a [university] sticker on their nametag and saying, "Hey, we have this mentor program if you want to share more information about what you do and what your company does, here's a way to get involved."

Departments also help share Participant Ten’s volunteer opportunities with students and alumni. Participant Nine focuses on, “Just talking to people and letting them know about opportunities, and trying to connect their passion to something that we're doing.” Participant Five encouraged honesty during recruitment, “So I would say I don't know that we're ever really honest upfront with people when it comes to job descriptions as to what volunteer management is going to entail for that particular job. I think it's different for everybody, but I think it might scare people away.”
Not all alumni directors, as with Participant Eleven, manage board volunteers because their college doesn’t have an alumni association or an alumni board to direct or engage in alumni programming. When they needed to recruit volunteers for a new program Participant Eleven focused on personal connections, “So, these are young grads who maybe were ambassadors as a student for our student program. Maybe alums who I had featured in the magazine over the years who had connections with other folks. So that was kind of our pilot program. That's how we recruited them.” Participant Eleven also utilized what they referred to as “Engagement Indicators” to recruit volunteers to their pilot program, “We looked for indicators of engagement for alumni under forty. And we targeted those folks who met those indicators. So, an indicator of engagement would be: Have they donated to the College of Ag and Life Sciences? Are they a lifetime member of the Alumni Association? And then we also looked at some strategic recruiting indicators. Are they people who help prospective students make a decision to attend [the university]? Those people who research have identified include community veterinarians, SSA and Ag instructors, local extension personnel. And so, then we targeted those folks.”

Participant Eleven does request time from volunteers as event speakers which through their status in their community often helps the college connect with additional volunteers. Participant Eleven also relies on department faculty to recommend volunteers for programs.

Participant Three recognized the varied talents and passion individuals bring, “You have two kinds of people, you have people that are talented and need outlets for the talent, and then you have people who are passionate but may not have the talent. And they're just as valuable, so you've got to find ways to help them be successful and channel the passion that they have. So, you've got two main groups of people that can be contributors to you, and they are the talented
and the passionate and sometimes a person has both. But I think you can benefit as an organization if you can identify people in both of those categories.”

Participant Three utilized student interns to keep projects progressing. Although the students were paid their roles were similar to volunteers as they managed programs involving alumni and students, “It's just really changed things. And really has helped me to keep some things going, because it's just so hard. If you don't come in every day, you have all these things that your board wants to get done, and getting it done is so hard when you're pulled four, five, or for 35 directions. And you need somebody who comes in everyday and says, "Okay, what's next on this? What's next on this?" And that's been the great thing about the students, is that they will stay on task with those, and gotten some really great things done. And I couldn't do my student mentoring program without it, there's no way that I could have kept that program up and going, because that one is so important because we only do a semester long program. And if you get behind, you never catch up. And so, I couldn't do that one without a student manager.”

**Recognition of general volunteers**

Recognizing all different levels of volunteers is important for future recruitment, continued engagement, and the overall success of programs that require volunteer assistance. Participants shared a general consensus that they wished they would have or could do more to recognize volunteers. Participant One described their recognition approach, “We do a service award and we do a College of Ag alumni awards program in the spring. And so, with that program, you have alums that are recognized for their contributions and just their career achievements and one is recognized from each department and then we also do a service award. And so that's where we get to pull out some of those people that have been influential in what we
do every year and showing up at things and getting involved and so they're recognized at a program in front of the college faculty and staff and then we do a dinner for them that evening as well, that you provide a plaque and do a recognition in a smaller more intimate setting. And that's been really well received and then that kind of encourages alum to get engaged even more and that was a way for us to kind of reach out to people that we knew.” Participant Five understood the value of recognizing volunteers but wished they had done more, “I know we needed to do more of was that whole appreciation of volunteers. We did have the things we did. Volunteer days and things like that. But there were so many cute, interesting, entertaining ways that you can recognize volunteers that I never seemed to have time to do.” Participant Ten would also like to increase efforts around recognition, “The alumni association creates certificates that they give to all of the mentors during the mentor appreciation dinner at the end of the year that they also host. But for the other volunteers, usually, if there's speakers at an event we provide them with a gift afterward. Or we honor volunteer five and ten-year mentors at our annual rewards reception. So, it's really a case by case thing. I think for the most part it's a thank you and a gift. But we barely ever send them in the mail. Usually, a gift in person. And for the mentor program, we make the students write thank you letters but we also send them thank yous ourselves. It's something that-- I think recognition is the part that gets missed most often for us just because so frequently it's on to the next thing. And we've talked about doing a volunteer recognition event but I don't know where-- when, where, and how and who would do that.”

**Intentional volunteer management styles with general volunteers**

A knowledge of and implementation of volunteer management models were missing from most of the participants’ experiences. But generally, all had developed a management style that suited their individual situations. The style of volunteer management can depend on one’s
specific role in the college and the kind of programs volunteers are involved with. A team approach for volunteer management capitalized on individual staff skill sets. Previous employment in 4-H where volunteer programs and resources were created prepared Participant Thirteen for an alumni volunteer management role. Participant Ten would like to implement a management style during certain programs that empowers volunteers, “So I want to do more of that for event-specific things where I want to give volunteers a bit more of a leadership role so that they feel more invested and are more present. Because otherwise, they're coming to me with a bunch of questions, whereas they could really be the one answering them. So, I'm trying to do more of that. But it's hard because it requires-- I mean, all of this requires more of our time to prep people to be ready to do other things. In the end, it's worth it.” Participant Four recognized the value of proactive engagement of volunteers, “When I took this role about five, six years ago… I specifically didn't reach out to alumni until we needed them for one of those three things, whether that was a capital campaign, or it was an upcoming silent auction, or it was a please call your state senator we're in big trouble kind of thing, but as I have been in the role longer, we've definitely progressed more to where we're always on the proactive side of the house.”
Research question 2: What skills should alumni directors bring to their positions upon employment?

Theme: Perceptions of alumni directors

Soft skills

Soft skills were recognized as the most important in the toolbox of skillsets that led to the success of an alumni director in their role. Alumni engagement is first and foremost about relationships, whether creating or maintaining them, whether between individuals or groups of people. Participant Seven shared his perception of what traits are shared by alumni directors, “I think this is true of quality alumni directors, they're some innate personality skills that can't, necessarily, be learned that are very beneficial for the job. And not that it's all the same for everybody. But I believe there's an aspect of having a genuine affection for people that is crucial and vital as a soft skill, that I believe is what leads to longevity and ultimate success; that there's a genuine care that the person has for those that are leading and working with and a passion for the institution. Those are very soft skills. They're hard to measure with questions, or even put in a job description…. I think, being a detail person helps you, especially if event planning is part of what you do. What's interesting is you can be a kind of chaotic, creative person, that's not necessarily messy, but you can still pull off events, working with teams. But the other thing too is that I don't think clock watchers make good alumni directors. You need to have the frame of reference that it's a mission, not a job, I think is vitally important.” Participant One stressed that gaining trust was important by being “open and humble. It's the way that I do things. And…building up credibility to be able to ask for help and be organized.” Participant Six highlighted the need for strength in the role of an alumni professional, “Being somebody really
confident in a number of different areas because you're going to be dealing with so many
different personalities and people coming to the board with different agendas, and you've got to
be strong.” Participant Twelve recognized the interpersonal challenges with working with
volunteers, “Yes. I mean I came in much more prepared just because I understood boards and
how they worked. However, I don't think anything actually prepares you for boards and
personalities and what actually happens and the challenges that come with working with boards.
Until you actually do it. I think it's one of those things, trial by fire. I mean, I don't think you're
actually prepared for it until you're really in the nitty gritty.”

Participant Three didn’t consider her role to encompass volunteer management, “I can't
even tell you what my skills are in terms of managing volunteers. I can tell you more because I
don't think of myself in terms of managing volunteers. My job is as a relationship builder for the
college. I really don't look at myself as a volunteer manager.” Participant Three also used
engagement and psychology to describe her skillsets, “Alumni relations is all about psychology.
About what is it that has made people feel valued? What is it that makes them happy about this
relationship? And then how do I encourage others to behave in the way that the best among us
behave? How do I encourage other faculty to be like the good one? How do I encourage students
to be like the other good ones? And likewise, with alumni.”

Participant Ten’s experiences as a volunteer helped shape her work along with the
willingness to be creative, “I wouldn't have been able to get any training on, "How to alumni
respond to this kind of stuff." Because I had been working primarily with just community
members. Not people who were already, in some way, connected to the college and university. I
also came in with the experience of being an alumni volunteer. So, I'm a pretty active volunteer
for my own alma mater. So, I kind of knew what worked for me personally and what worked for
my friends in terms of getting involved. I think that was helpful experience. Just from being from the other side of things.” Participant Ten shared her approach to outreach, “Be willing to just to put yourself out there too. So, you have to be willing to call people, and follow up with them, and be that persistence piece…. I sent a ton of emails. I try to craft things in different ways. I try to be creative with my communications strategies for our recruitment, and for keeping people engaged and in the know about what's going on on-campus, and what's going on in our programs. But I think if you're not willing to try new things and continuously improve-- I think one of the things that I found really fun about this job is being able to have some autonomy over the direction that some of our programs go. And that's been a privilege. I don't think that's going to be the same across the board but I think you have to be willing to take that on and get creative with it because otherwise, it can get stale. Because the way that the university cycle is, you are kind of approaching the same events, the same programs year to year. So, you have to be willing to be creative and also patient because things take up a while to change sometimes.”

**Leading and empowering volunteers**

The abilities to lead by example and empower volunteers were recognized across all participants as important skillsets of volunteer managers. Participant Twelve stated the value of empowering others, “So I want to do more of that for event-specific things where I want to give volunteers a bit more of a leadership role so that they feel more invested and are more present. Because otherwise, they're coming to me with a bunch of questions, whereas they could really be the one answering them.... All of this requires more of our time to prep people to be ready to do other things. In the end, it's worth it.” Participant Five described tactics to transition volunteers to more active roles, “But I think it helped that I was new and young and energetic at the time and could do it in a way that they didn't feel like I was all of a sudden giving them work to do.
But making it their idea and giving that ownership back. And so that also involved getting some newer volunteers, some younger volunteers, sort of letting some of the older regime have their day and then move on. And we really moved into a much more hands-on task-oriented volunteer role.” Participant Ten described the value of empowering committee chairs, “So I think there's a balance there between this is what we hope to see from you as a committee and having the chair really push that instead of us. So, if they're being led by someone who has those kinds of expectations for an active group, that changes everything.” Participant Nine shared their philosophy of utilizing volunteers, “I think one of the key ones when it comes to working with volunteers is letting go or delegating or being able to articulate clear expectations, sharing those expectations or those opportunities and then following through on that. … I think I've gotten to be really good at asking people to do things and then reminding them that they need to tell me no if they really don't want to do it. At sometimes you see volunteer managers doing all the work and then it's like well, why do you even have the volunteers there? They signed up to do something. Give them something to do. And it's a fine balance I think between dumping on the volunteer and giving them space to do what they need to do.”

Participant Three described the value of setting positive examples, “And so, it's acknowledging these relationships and building programs that honor that and really put it on display as an example for others. I mean, I really think that's what we do is that we model behavior that we want others to follow for our institutions, and so I want to hold up those faculty who are great advisors and great teachers and great relationship builders, and so I want to have programs that acknowledge that. I want to acknowledge alumni who do great things for us….Acknowledge those relationships and build programs that give opportunities to show that to others.”
Participant Five described managing volunteer experiences, “And if there's a bad situation there then you can't help but worry about what the impact is going to be down the line. And when you're working with as many [volunteers] as we're all working with there's bound to be some. So, I guess when you're in development and you don't have a good development experience or you manage to upset a donor then it's pretty cut and dry. You know that that's what has happened. In volunteering and alumni relations, you don't know down the line how that's going to look….It kind of leaves you with a feeling of unknown fear of what might happen.”

**Motivators and challenges**

Lack of clarity in alumni director job descriptions, the lack of tools to measure the impact of engagement, and the differences in communications practices within advancement can lead to challenges in managing volunteers but ultimately belief in the mission and promoting success in more creative ways can be motivational. The conflict between engagement and fundraising was illustrated by Participant Three, “I believe that an alumni organization's job is to communicate with everybody. When you communicate with people only because they give you money, you've sent a really bad message as an alumni organization.” Participant Ten shared her motivators in the role, “So it would be very hard for me to be so persistent with potential volunteers if I didn't really believe in the power of some of the programs that we run, and the importance of them, particularly for students. So, I think you really have to believe in student development, you have to believe in the kind of people-- or what is it: friend-raising? And you have to believe in the importance of building relationships. So that means that year-to-year maybe these volunteers …they've felt needed, and felt wanted by the college, and by me, and by our office. And that changes everything about their experience.”

Participant Ten raised concern about position descriptions not effectively describing the
roles of alumni professionals, “So I think on the front end, the way that alumni relations officer positions are phrased are not in the way that you think volunteer management positions are kind of defined. So, I think I do way more volunteer management than the position seems to indicate that I do, and I think that probably goes for all alumni relations people.”

Analytics or metrics are known challenges in alumni relations. Participant Three recognized the need to address those challenges, “And so I've got some things that are better able to measure my progress, because alumni relations is so very hard to find metrics. Butts in seats is not a measure of success in alumni program, and I don't care what anybody says.”

Participant Six highlighted that, “We need to do a better job as alumni directors in promoting our successes.”
Research question 3: How do alumni directors identify individuals or groups to connect to in order to accomplish their goals?

Theme: Engagement with alumni, faculty, and students through events and programs

Although engagement and volunteerism are shown to lead to a greater trend of giving and advocacy, measuring the impact of alumni relations programs is one of the biggest challenges facing the profession. Regardless of the available tools to measure impact, engagement goals must be met and alumni directors depend on multiple volunteer groups to be successful. Participant Three stated, “Alumni relations is so very hard to find metrics. Butts in seats is not a measure of success in an alumni program, and I don’t care what anybody says.” When defining goals, Participant Three has been able to measure success of individual programs: “so I have begun to do a lot more active defining of what will be successful for this program. And my board has helped me figure that out. And now I know when I get to those targets, I know, without asking them again, I know that I have done the things they want. I know that I have done things that have provided satisfaction to them. And that’s the measure of success for me.” Participant Six includes energizing individuals as an impact: “That meaningful engagement, that just being part of the energy that is our society, really energizes folks. So, I think we have more of an impact than sometimes is recognized, maybe.”

Alumni engagement

A multitude of opportunities exists to engage alumni within the university campus community and beyond. Due to the nature of all of the participants’ connections to the agricultural industry similar programming and strategies were evident across all of the interviews. On-campus events provide an incredible opportunity for alumni to engage with the college. Bringing alumni back on campus to experience programs that prepare students for the
industry and to talk with faculty about research that will have an impact on their communities are the ultimate engagement opportunities. Engaging with students and faculty encourages alumni and employers to support the college with their time, talent, and treasure. Off-campus events allow engagement of a much broader group of alumni, many of which may have not returned to campus for years. Taking the college to them through faculty presentations and opportunities to engage with leadership of the college was a strategy across all universities. There were two schools of thought related to participating in industry and trade show events as a way to engage alumni. Participant Ten, while recognizing that industry/trade shows were a good way to reach alumni face-to-face who often feel forgotten because they are not able to visit campus often and also provide an environment to interact with numerous alumni, questioned if those interactions were meaningful enough to justify the expense of the booth space, the travel costs of having staff there to host the booth, time spent away from the office, and the inability to measure impact. This participant valued attending social gatherings within the agenda of the events as an alternative way to engage with alumni. Participant Nine highly valued the interaction with alumni and industry as a part of the booth/exhibit environment and as a result, her job title changed to include constituent relations.

One of the key engagement strategies across participants was an alumni awards program. Whether providing an opportunity for board members to be involved in the nomination or selection of recipients or receiving an award, these programs not only bring recognition to the recipient but also to their industry, the college, and to the act of engagement encouraging others to do the same. Participant One shared their strategy for recognizing not only career achievements but also engagement with a service award, “That's where we get to pull out some of those people that have been influential in what we do every year and showing up at things and
getting involved. … They’re recognized at a program in front of the college faculty and staff and then we do a dinner… provide a plaque and do a recognition in a smaller more intimate setting. And that's been really well received and then that kind of encourages alums to get engaged even more and that was a way for us to kind of reach out to people that we knew.”

Serving as a member of a college alumni board or advisory council was an engagement opportunity across all universities. While each college had unique goals and management strategies for their respective groups, this kind of engagement was an important part of the overall engagement program.

Alumni assist with fundraising in a multitude of ways whether serving on a committee leading a scholarship fundraising effort such as a golf tournament, donating personal resources, or advocating for state support from legislators. In some colleges of agriculture, there are membership programs in which alumni volunteers are a part of the marketing strategies to collect dues. Paid memberships and playing a role in fundraising are strong indicators of interest in being more engaged. With more universities moving to an advancement model bringing communications, fundraising, and alumni relations together, this statement by Participant Three is a good example of how why integrating all three areas leads to the most opportunity for alumni engagement, whether it be to volunteer their time, talent, or treasure, “I believe that an alumni organization’s job is to communicate with everybody. When you communicate with people only because they give you money, you’ve sent a really bad message as an alumni organization.” When alumni give financially to the institution stewardship plans go into action providing for additional meaningful engagement with programs, faculty, students, and volunteer opportunities.

At one university, alumni volunteer boards have been eliminated but alumni have been
asked to be a part of short-term projects within the colleges. Alumni board committees is an
opportunity for volunteers to be involved along with providing insight into possible future board
director appointments. Participant Seven utilizes this strategy, “…there are committee members
that are not on the board. They’re just serving on the committee. So that has proved to become
helpful in that we’re getting people involved there with the goal of seeing how good they are,
and how engaged they are, and working them toward being a part of the alumni board.”

Alumni engagement can be outside of the direction of the alumni relations professional
and may even go beyond the parameters of university events and programs. There are both
positives and negatives associated with these engagement strategies. Participant Eleven assisted
with connecting alumni to volunteer opportunities for an international agricultural industry event.
Another participant helped connect alumni to another university office’s need, but expressed
concerns for doing so because of the inability to manage the expectations and experiences of the
alumni. Leveraging university alumni events and programs to highlight college priorities and
engage alumni beyond the college can lead to connections with more individuals interested in
college programs.

A key concern was the struggle in keeping alumni engaged between volunteer
opportunities and/or event attendance. Participants recognized that if the college only reaches
out to alumni when they need help with donations or advocacy, for example, it is not a good
strategy for alumni engagement. Participant Four described it as being, "on the proactive side of
the house”. Participant Two shared, “And then continuing to keep in touch with them, not just
letting them drop off until the next event pops up but continuing on the traditional donor
engagement or volunteer engagement, really. To keep them active and know what’s going on.”
A key comment made by Participant Four, “they were just waiting to be asked to participate”,

should encourage all alumni relations professionals not to hesitate to ask when there are opportunities for engagement.

**Faculty engagement**

Several participants were surprised when asked how faculty engaged with their programs as volunteers as they had not thought of them in that way before. After discussion, they realized faculty were some of their most engaged, hardworking, and devoted volunteers. The overall observations are that faculty at all levels want to be recognized for the effort they put into building relationships and they want to volunteer for things that are well organized and of which they can be proud.

Participant Ten described a department council on alumni relations that they convene monthly in order to broaden their access to updating alumni records as alumni engage with the departments. This council also helps faculty and staff who are typically student-focused understand these current students will be alumni and the value of continued engagement. As Participant Three stated, “no alumni relations program can ever succeed if people haven’t had a good student experience”. This statement supports Participant Ten’s theory of having current faculty and staff understand that student engagement completes the full circle of alumni engagement.

Faculty who promote mentoring programs or engage with alumni serving as mentors help alumni feel more connected with their departments. Faculty leaders who fully participate in council or board meetings of alumni illustrate their commitment to engagement and afford alumni to learn more about the about the college and departments. Department-level alumni affinity groups who have the full support of faculty leadership either by dedicating staff time to support the group and/or attending their meetings create opportunities for much stronger alumni engagement.
connections to the department.

The popularity of Giving Day implementation across the country provides another avenue to engage faculty and staff with the work of advancement. Participant Two described the excitement generated through department challenges and asking faculty to serve as ambassadors to spread the word.

Communications professionals or staff with communications responsibilities within the departments are an important group to assist with alumni engagement efforts. Participant Nine recognizes the challenges associated with said staff’s lack of understanding that engagement is the first step in the fundraising process, especially when capital campaigns are so important. Participant Nine encourages them to build relationships with alumni by utilizing standing college alumni events and programs to engage rather than creating their own.

Participant Nine has observed a shift in departments’ realization that they need to have relationships with their alumni. This has translated into hosting their own alumni events.

Partnerships with and inclusion of Cooperative Extension professionals with alumni engagement efforts vary across the colleges and are not numerous. For Participant Thirteen, Cooperative Extension played a significant role in establishing the college’s alumni association. Recruiting of board members took place within Cooperative Extension district zones. Although Cooperative Extension is mostly disconnected now from their recruiting process, Cooperative Extension staff are always included in invitations to attend alumni events in their areas. Participant Two’s alumni board has two seats designated for Cooperative Extension representatives, but no on-campus teaching faculty have representation.

Retired faculty are engaged in several ways across the colleges. Participant Two shared several examples of the roles retirees play in engagement of alumni and students: “They know all
of the people that students thought fondly of when they were here, or they're great people to engage when we bring alums back, say, for the Alumni Awards Banquet that we have in the fall. We ask all of the alums who are receiving an award and coming back, "Who was an influential professor during your time?" And then if they're living and local here, we invite them to the banquet. So, using them as a tool to help recreate some of those fond memories for alums that are coming back is a really great way that we've been using them.” In addition, Participant Two’s retirees volunteer to help at annual events. They also make sure they engage with this group beyond asking them to volunteer by holding events specifically for them and providing special updates from the dean. Surprisingly, some alumni professionals did not originally identify retired faculty as a volunteer group until asked directly about their engagement with that group. However, they are a part of the long list of individuals that being asked to help the colleges accomplish their fundraising goals and are being intentionally stewarded. Participant Eleven addressed the challenge of being able to track retired faculty in their database. There lacks a system to add new retirees to the database automatically. Often, a retiree is added only after they have given a gift of over $500 to the college. Participant Ten shared an additional challenge with navigating the engagement of retired faculty: “There've been a few times where retired professors especially really want to stay in touch with the students. And maybe they're doing more research these days. If they're not retired maybe they're doing more research then student advising. So, they want to connect with students again. But we really try to emphasize that we want to get the students off campus to expand their network beyond what's going on here.”

Participant Three is intentional about honoring faculty who prioritize building relationships with students and alumni. They recognize them publicly and call attention to their model behavior. They build programs that acknowledge their efforts just as they do for alumni
who support the university and student experience. However, over time, Participant Three has witnessed a shift in the culture of younger faculty engaging with students. Work-life balance has changed the amount of time faculty spend with students which could impact alumni engagement in the future.

**Student engagement**

One of the most meaningful engagement strategies is to connect alumni with future or current students. Whether speaking to high school and middle school students, helping with events alongside students, or serving as a mentor, fostering connections between alumni and students can have significant positive impacts for all involved. Young alumni are a group targeted by alumni professionals because of the value in perspective they bring to interactions with students and for the social media networks they can access. Active young alumni are often those who benefited from alumni engagement programs such as mentoring or receiving scholarships as students. Participants expressed the challenges associated with boards with long-term members engaging with the next generation. Participant One observed, “…see people that are on there [board] that have been on there for a very long time. And so, you're not engaging some of those young alums that would be really active. And that's the feedback that we've gotten from-- we'll do surveys with our graduates, too. And that was feedback that we've gotten, is the vision on the way for young alumni to plug in. And with the association the way it's structured, they run as their own business, their own model. And so, it's hard for our students to even understand what exactly they do other than they give that scholarship money. They need to do a better job of figuring out how to connect with that student body, and to do things a little bit more so they're more active, and they seem more active here, that they really are that integral piece.”

Participant Five shared a strategy of engaging young alums with students, “…we just selected a
young alum that was very involved on our board to speak instead of the president, and they seemed to resonate more with somebody that's just getting out. And that always went over well. And instead of them talking about-- as much about the alumni association. They made the plug for the alumni association, but then they kind of wrote to, “You got to let it be what it's going to be for you. And he or she didn't talk about what we're expecting of you or vice-versa but more this is your opportunity to set the tone for how you're going to be as an alum this is what we hope.” And that was kind of helpful that it was not as canned. But still got to get that stuff in there.” Significant effort in colleges of agriculture across the United States is spent in engaging current students through programming provided in partnership with alumni and college alumni associations. This effort is often referred to as “filling the pipeline” by advancement professionals. “Filling the pipeline” describes engaging and introducing students to the opportunities they will have as alumni to stay connected to the university, whether that is volunteering or giving.

Professional development programs are provided by college alumni associations in the form of alumni mentoring programs, funding of club activities through grant programs, and scholarships, just to name a few. Participant One described alumni society members serving as presenters for a student professional development conference. This same institution has also seen an increase in the number of alumni who benefited from having an alumni mentor as a student serving as mentors. Participant Eight described the partnership the alumni association has with student organizations in hosting their annual tailgate. The students volunteer to help with the event, host exhibits and provide interactive activities. In return, the organizations are eligible to apply for student club grants. Marketing is an important part of all of the programs provided by alumni. When students understand where the opportunities are coming from it leads to their
increased engagement and volunteerism as alumni.

Students serving as representatives to alumni boards has the potential to illustrate what it means to be engaged alumni, but Participant Seven’s experience with student representatives to the board were that attendance at meetings was inconsistent. If the student representative attended two meetings a year that was considered successful. Participant Twelve’s experience was similar with regard to student representative attendance for three in-person meetings a year. Often, participants requested that their paid student intern attend to represent the student body. Participant Nine engages four students with their board: the undergraduate student board president, a representative from MANRRS, a representative from the college student ambassadors, and a graduate student from a recently organized graduate student board. The graduate student board, according to Participant Nine, could help strengthen relationships with graduate students.

Partnering with the office of academic programs/affairs is a key route to a successful and strong student and alumni engagement program. Participant Six described their successful partnership with their academic colleagues, “You've got to engage the students while they're here. And I think we're doing an awesome job at that. We know a lot more students. Especially partnering with undergraduate education. They know who we are. We know who they are. Our affiliate alumni groups are doing a lot with students. So, when we did a student survey and asked them if they were aware-- have you heard of the alumni society? 72% said they did.” Participant Twelve had a similar experience, “…our recruiter in undergrad ed. I have been working with her a lot right now on a lot of projects. And I think it's been really, really successful getting involved a lot with the students. I mean, we've already been involved with the students, and I think over the years it's really been paying off. The students are really aware of the Ag Alumni Society, and
they're really understanding what the society is and how it's benefiting them. So, it's getting to be a lot easier to educate the new students as they're coming in. We're just incorporating that so much more into the student experience, so I would have to say that through undergrad ed, we're really making a difference.”

Through the budgetary support of their academic dean, Participant Five was able to hire student workers in the alumni relations office where they get firsthand experience with alumni programming. Participant Three utilizes interns for project-based work as opposed to menial tasks leading to better understanding of the impact of alumni on the student experience. When needing to recruit student volunteers, Participant Three relies on student interns to make those connections: “So that gives me a front door, too, to a lot of students when we need students for volunteers, because I have, really, some of the best ones already in my office. And of course, they have lots of connections. So, I work through them a lot of times for the recruitment of student volunteers.” When recruiting alumni volunteers, Participant Eleven found success by seeking out alumni they had formed personal connections with through student ambassador programs. Serving as a student on advancement councils, ambassador groups, volunteering at events, and employment as advancement office interns are all valuable experiences that introduce students to what it means to be an engaged alumni. Participant One shared, “But then you also see, like our ag ambassadors that have graduated, they come back and they want to help with things just because we have that relationship. They want to give back to the college. It's something that their passionate about. And so, working with your current students, making sure that they are having the best experience makes more productive alumni later on.”

**Events and other programming**

As Participant Five stated, “Because everybody is so diverse. But you are constantly
trying to find that sweet spot of what it is that gets people and keeps them involved.” Below are several additional examples shared by participants of the strategies and programs they use to involve the many diverse members of alumni and other constituencies with which they work. For many individuals, according to Participant Four, “they were just waiting to be asked to participate”. For many colleges, it is common practice to include alumni, especially board members, in the event planning process by encouraging them to share ideas and in the implementation/execution of programs by including them as day-of event volunteers. Participant Two shared an example of how they include alumni in their annual homecoming event. “So, everything from helping with registration, to helping set up, to serving meals, to serving on committees to help determine the theme of the weekend or the programmatic elements. We involve alumni throughout that whole process”.

For Participant Three, allowing their board’s alumni awards committee to have autonomy in selecting award recipients has been a shift from how their other board committees are managed. The awards committee has strong ownership of the awards process, so she limits her involvement even though the committee has never specifically asked her to do so. Participant Two described departmental boards as, “extremely well-connected and engaged alums that are some of our biggest advocates from what we’re doing, both from an alumni engagement and development perspective”.

Many alumni boards have created mentoring programs to match students with alumni for professional growth opportunities. Because of the connection to the alumni board, alumni are often involved in the development and implementation of the programs as long and short-term volunteers. Mentoring programs also provide opportunities to engage with industry members, faculty, and students who volunteer to help match students with mentors. Mentoring programs
can be a significant source of networking for all volunteers and participants involved which is highly valued by alumni and students.

Over the last decade, several institutions have begun to move away from a dues paying structure of membership for their university alumni associations. Participant Eight shared that with the transition away from dues at their institution, their board members, rather than spending time encouraging alumni to join the association, can now direct their time towards programs they are passionate about that need volunteer leadership.

Participant Eleven’s experience with communicating with younger alumni has led their institution to focus more on social media and e-newsletters to help share the impact of events and programs. The results of a young alumni survey showed that social media, followed by email, were the primary and secondary sources, respectively, for how this constituency engages with their college. The college has encouraged departments to implement similar communications strategies to share relevant news with their alumni through these mediums. The success of Participant Eleven’s programming with young alumni may be attributed to the philosophy that varying degrees of volunteerism are all welcomed and valued. It is about what works for the volunteer. As stated by Participant Eleven, “…try to offer an a-la-carte approach to [their young] volunteers.” This approach can be allowing alumni to select the kinds of experience, the length of time devoted, not having to meet a minimum requirement of participation, etc. Participant Eleven implemented a strategy for identifying engaged alumni under the age of 40. They targeted individuals who met indicators of engagement, such as, had they given a gift to the college, were they lifetime members of the university’s alumni association, were they individuals who could help prospective students make their decision to attend their university, and were they active members of their local communities.
Participant Eleven has seen success with engaging young alumni in the student recruitment process. Through a formal young alumni program, working with academic programs, they are able to equip individuals with the tools they need to share information about the college within their communities, with prospective parents, and with prospective students. They are able to deploy young alumni to various events where they can share their experiences as former students. They are not speaking/representing the college in any official capacity but they are an important partner in helping the college be visible in more areas when they are short-staffed.

Participant Eight helps alumni connect with other offices across campus, such as the university’s government relations office. After completing training, alumni are able to be boots on the ground lobbyists for the university.

Giving Days have become an important strategy for fundraising and they involve many and all levels of volunteers. Participant Two shared their experience with their university’s first Giving Day, “…we relied on a lot of volunteers to help spread the message and communicate. So, we reached out to all of our external advisory boards, we relied on faculty and staff, and students to be ambassadors for this giving day. It was really fun to see how invested people got in the competition amongst faculty and staff for instance.”

Participant Three has utilized student employees to keep large board projects such as mentoring programs moving forward. Student employees take responsibility for the day-to-day tasks of a project. With the many demands on professional staff time, it is easy for projects to fall behind and fail. Another strategy to managing projects is the establishment an internship program through a gift. Participant Two’s office has, “9 to 11 interns in advancement, all assisting in various capacities from alumni, to events, to marketing communications, development specific projects, so the internships only exist if they add value to the projects, or
the individual that they are working with.” One could speculate that this kind of internship experience as a student could help foster volunteer interest as alumni.

To charge or not to charge a fee to attend is a question asked by every event planner. Participant Four described how they try to balance their free versus pay-to-attend events: “... we try to be pretty diplomatic in making sure that they're getting invited to enough free and fun events per year, in relation to anything we're actually asking them to pay to participate, or donate to participate.”

An important piece of any program is evaluating impact. Alumni professionals help volunteers, especially alumni boards, develop clear and realistic goals around programming while also reconciling the difference between staff goals and volunteer goals. Participant Three has worked with their alumni board to better define success for programs, which ultimately leads to better satisfaction for individual board members.

**Theme: Partnerships with university-level advancement and college leadership**

**Leadership’s priorities for alumni engagement**

University and college leadership that values, prioritizes, and funds alumni engagement can have a significantly positive impact on the success of alumni directors. Participant Five’s experience illustrates the continued struggle for alumni relations professionals when university administration influences college administration, “I would say as far as administrative support that I think that the problems still exist that existed 10 and 20 years ago and maybe more than ever. The focus from senior administration down to our college administration is on development and the fundraising component. And it's making it harder and harder argument for alumni relations. In my opinion. And some deans get it and go, "Oh. I can't have one without the other's success." But then others are like, "I don't have time to even think about you know, those that are
not giving money, yet. Because all that I can focus on is getting that bottom dollar brought in. And that, I think, going to be a challenge. It's gotten-- it just seems-- it's gotten even harder, because our administration is very development focused right now.” Participant Five did work with deans who saw the value in partnering with alumni associations to meet their own goals, “let’s see, I had three while I was there and-- well sort of, two alums and both of them were very strong advocates for the association too, recognizing that they were such a strong group and could really offer a lot of advice. And council and accomplish some things that the dean might not-- could accomplish his own.”

Participant Thirteen has experienced the impact of a change in leadership, “I think the administrative staff are extremely supportive, including the dean, even though our dean's had some highs and lows. I think our new dean coming in is extremely supportive of alumni relations. Her priority is to get out and see alumni. I mean I'm very excited about what's in store for us because I think it's just a different environment. I think she's probably more extroverted than our current dean. And so, I think she'll just be-- she wants to get out and meet people. So, I think that will be a wonderful, wonderful opportunity.”

Participant Two described the flow of information from college leadership as it impacts their alumni engagement work, “So we have our Dean and Directors group - I would say any directive or priorities that the Dean sets at that level, that information is brought down and we interpret that information as it relays to the board. So not necessarily direct, but coming from that group of college administrators I would say we try to apply that to our alumni interactions as best we can.”

Participant Five leveraged the Dean’s signature to elevate their programming to the college community, “we used the Dean's listserv to get out invitations and things, anything that
the Alumni Association wanted to communicate that was of really importance information. The Dean's office would send out for us from the Dean. So that it looked like this was a Dean sanctioned thing that was happening. And then the same thing with Academic Affairs. If he sent it out then it was something that he-- that the faculty would then recognize was important to him and therefore should be important to them”

Participant Nine expressed what a more involved partnership from development colleagues could do for their alumni engagement efforts, “I love our development colleagues, but I really feel like there's a lot more they could do that would help them by connecting to what we're doing. And so, I wouldn't say that they're holding us back, but I think that if they thought about it a little bit differently, we could both benefit more.” Participant Nine illustrated the value of having a supportive dean and department heads, “Our dean, currently, is super-supportive. He comes to almost every board meeting, interacts with the group. And I think that demonstrates to them how much he values them. And the dean's before, I don't think that they saw how important that was and what an impact it could make. There are a couple of department heads, who are super-huge advocates. “

Participant Six acknowledged that, “We've got to be our own best advocates. And you've got to be able to show your relevance all through the year. So, you're first in line when it's merit increase time. When you're first in line when it's time to ask for funds to do something cool and interesting. That, yeah, they trust you, they'll want to invest in you because they know you're a good return investment.”

**Reporting lines and the advancement structure**

Participant Nine brought to light the impacts of reporting lines impacting the work of alumni professionals, “is the reporting line and how does that impact what you focus on. Because
right now, up until a couple months ago I was pretty much autonomous, I reported to the Chief of Staff, and now I'm reporting to the Chief Advancement Officer who oversees communications and alumni, and I see alumni becoming more marginalized, and if you're in a situation where you're reporting to development, how does that impact”.

Participant Ten was hopeful that by creating a new chief advancement officer position there would be more involvement of fundraisers in alumni engagement programming, “So I think I'm hopeful that means that communications and development will have more of a vested interest in the work that our board is doing and, in our events, and programs. I think it's been a challenge in the past sometimes when we're like, "Look at this great opportunity, this event we're putting on. There's lots of alums here, potential donors," and then development doesn't show up. I think what we're trying to do more of is make sure that they know the opportunities that they would be missing if they don't attend and engage with people. I'm hopeful that that investment will increase, I can't remember how you phrased it, who is contributing or who cares essentially.”

**University alumni associations**

While the partnerships of college alumni associations with central university alumni associations varied across the participants, Participant Two has seen an ally in theirs, “And so to me they've turned into our best allies because some colleges like I said, most colleges don't have their own group. Which I know that creates its own challenges that we do have our own group, but I think the fact that we're also always working that Alumni circuit has made our flagship Alumni Association like, "Hey I have an ally there," rather than an enemy. So, I would say they're probably our biggest helper at the moment.” Participant Eleven also saw the benefits of a stronger partnership with the university alumni association, “We want to strengthen the collaboration between colleges and the alumni association for the university," and really have
worked to make some of those things happen.” Participant Eleven described the shift in dynamics between the college and the university alumni association, “We want to strengthen the collaboration between colleges and the alumni association for the university,” and really have worked to make some of those things happen.” Participant Nine described the evolving partnerships resulting from shifts in reporting structures of college alumni professionals, “The alumni association, I would say, has been an advocate and a partner. It's been sort of up and down. Originally, when I started 20 years ago, it was-- I would say that the line was through the college, but there was a line to the alumni association, and they provided half of the funding. Ten years ago, they said, "We'll provide a stipend, but we can't do half the funding," because salaries were kind of getting all wonky and inconsistent, but we do have a compact agreement that we complete with them, and that we will promote membership and we'll do this and they'll do that for us.” Participant Thirteen illustrated their model of shared support, “I also tap into our University Alumni Association. They're struggling a lot. But I've been an advocate for them. And they've been an advocate for us. Promoting events and activities or trying to do events together. We have a board member, or alum, currently on the university’s alumni association board. She's an advocate.” Participant Seven’s approach to fostering support from central offices was tied into promoting agriculture, “also worked to make sure we have the support of our centralized alumni group, our centralized development, centralized career services, and admissions. We work very hard to keep strong relationships with them by making sure they're getting fun food stuff from us all the time and just being exposed to agriculture in countless ways so that we stay on their positive side.”

**Partnerships with academic programs**

Participant Five experienced strong support from leadership in academic affairs, “academic
affairs dean that had spent his entire career at the university at the College of Ag. And because he was an alum and also spent his career here, and several of his family members were also alums. He was just really engaged in the process of Alumni Relations. And so, I would say he was a really big advocate. As to always supporting the programs, always putting resources from his office as much as he could into-- he actually helped pay for our student workers that would come through and help us with Alumni Relations programs. So, I'd say our Academic Affairs Dean was a huge advocate for alumni programs.”

Participant Seven has successfully partnered with multiple areas of the college, both those areas within and outside of advancement, “Let's say all of my student services folks, our development individuals, and our marketing folks all embrace alumni as a vital part.”

**Dean’s advisory councils**

Participant Two shared the disconnect between alumni association boards and alumni professionals and dean’s advisory boards when asked if they had a role with managing or having representation on the dean’s advisory council, “I do not. So, our assistant dean for advancement for the college sits on that board. Historically I believe there had been a member from the alumni board that had rolled up into the dean's advisory board. For some reason, I don't know if that intentionally went away or that board member rotated off. But there is no representative from the alumni board on the advisory board. So, we basically receive all that information as it comes down through our advancement department.” The creation of a new advisory board in a college that already had an established alumni board with an advisory role created some challenges as described by Participant Two, “board has been continually kind of striving to find their purpose over the last ten or so years. Initially, it was founded as an advisory board for the college, and a couple of deanships ago, our dean decided that they wanted to have a handpicked board of
industry professionals as well, so more of a college advisory board with some of those external stakeholders specifically alumni. So, they created their own board, and we have two boards working together. But with that college advisory board establishing, it kind of took away some of the advisory responsibilities or opportunities for the alumni specific board, so that board still continues to facilitate our alumni awards process. It's really their biggest responsibility and through that constant communication throughout the year, keeping them updated on things that are happening in the college but also relying on them to facilitate that award process and then help out with executing the annual event". 
Research question 4: How do alumni directors identify and implement communications strategies to make successful connections to use with individuals and/or groups?

Theme: Communications tools

Means of communications: email, mail, magazines/newsletters, social media, exhibits

Communication skills and a variety of means to distribute this important tool is of the utmost importance in a successful alumni engagement program. As new technology is developed alumni directors have to be adaptable and quick to implement new strategies while considering generational differences of their audiences. Budgets can have a significant impact on what communications tools are available. Communications strategies are often program and/or audience dependent often requiring a multi-pronged approach to reach target audiences. The most successful communications strategies described by participants were those that involved partners to help craft and implement them. Participant Three shared their philosophy around why they communicate to all alumni, rather than a segment of the population “If you mail your communications only to dues-paying members that in my mind is the most counter-productive thing an alumni organization has ever decided to do…. I believe that an alumni organization's job is to communicate with everybody. When you communicate with people only because they give you money, you've sent a really bad message as an alumni organization.” Participant Four placed value on continuous and frequent communication with alumni, “They get, here's a faculty spotlight, here's a student spotlight, here's an alumni spotlight, here are some social media posts you might have missed, here's some news stories you might have missed. So, we try to keep in constant contact with them, that way as something does come up at the legislature, or right now we're getting ready to fundraise for a new library. It's not out of the blue
that they're hearing from us.” Participant Nine shared concerns that departmental communicators are driven by alumni giving rather than alumni engagement in their communication efforts. Participant Four utilizes a media strategy to inform the use of stories in their bi-annual print publication. Stories are shared through additional outlets such as social media, email, or a direct mail to add an additional dimension beyond event invitations to their communications with alumni.

Participant Eleven stressed the importance having the knowledge to know what communications tool is right for the job, for example, when is email appropriate versus a phone call. Social media is the strongest communication tool for Participant Six. Participant Ten recognized that phone calls are the most effective but the least efficient way to communicate with alumni and that they rarely have time to make the calls. Participant Ten leverages LinkedIn to reach potential volunteers, “LinkedIn on the other hand, I've gotten a few phone calls and a few mentor applications as a result of it. So, I send out announcements instead of just posting on the page, which means that for the people who have it set up this way, they get an email from LinkedIn but also from us and they get a notification on LinkedIn. … I also think LinkedIn personalized messages via LinkedIn I get much more return on than even email sometimes.”

Participant One focused on online communication, a web page for alumni, and Facebook. Facebook is used for not only the alumni association, but also to highlight news of interest to any graduate or friend of the college. Through LinkedIn, Participant Two, posts bi-weekly updates covering career fairs, alumni profiles, and events providing a way for alumni to share with their connections. Participant One utilizes LinkedIn to identify alumni to recruit to volunteer roles.

Participant Eleven recognized the need for adapting communications tools to different generations, “What surprised me the most is how low social media ranks in our terms of
communication. Alumni really didn't look at that as a way to engage with us, but if you look at our [involved young alumni] they do. That's where you look at a smaller segment. Our alums under 40, especially those involved [young alumni], do look at social media as a way to engage with us. Because of some of the initiatives that we're doing, and how we look at bringing events to social media to kind of share their impact - with photo albums for example, or other things like that - I think we'll see that needle shift over the years. I wouldn't be surprised if in two years - I hope we get to do our survey again - if in two years that's much higher. But based on our results, some things we're looking at doing more is refining our email newsletters to them, because of that being identified as their secondary source, and making that better and more relevant to them. We also encourage departments, if they're not already doing an email newsletter, to encourage to consider doing so. And that that didn't have to be a monthly thing, it could be an annual thing, it could be a twice-a-year thing.” Participant Eleven described additional communications preferences of alumni, “alumni felt that Stories Magazine was really their number one way to engage with the college. They really [inaudible] about it as their main outlet. Now, we've kind of built on the Stories brand over the years to also include a monthly email newsletter. So, email I would say was their-- that email was kind of their secondary, or their kind of second go-to that they looked at. That said, if they get an email from a faculty member or a personal connection, that bests everybody.”

Participant Ten prioritizes being, “present as an alumni relations office and representing the college because especially in parts of the state, outside of the metro area, people feel like the [university] has forgotten about them a little bit. And so, for us to be there and to be able to say, like, "Yeah, we're doing stuff with alums," we have other opportunities to engage outside of the metro area, thanks to some of the work of the Alumni Association. The in-person stuff has been
pretty important. And I think it's really hard to quantify that and to report out on it. And that's been a challenge of time spent away from the office, time spent at these trade shows…. But I think that face-to-face stuff is really important.” Participant Five also supported the use of face-to-face meetings as an effective communications tool.

Participant Twelve described the challenges of integrating the college magazine as part of communications strategies, “We do have magazine, it goes out twice a year, in one issue that has our election ballot and that's it for our alumni society stuff. Now, in every issue we have-- alumni is incorporated in the article but it's not like-- it's not like, "In your face, this is alumni," it's like interweaved. The other issue-- we have a whole alumni section and yes, I do have input and I'm getting more and more input…which is a lot different than where it was 12 years ago, 12 years ago we had nothing, so we've come a long way but I still get a lot of push back.” Participant Five described similar challenges, “We had a college-wide magazine that was not specific to alumni activities. We did not have-- one of the goals I had but then left was that we were hoping to eventually go to a e-newsletter for your alumni association. You know, it would be-- the magazine's much more elaborate, you know. We had the back page was usually a letter from the president of the alumni association or, you know, an address of some sort for them to talk about what was happening in the newsletter and that kind of thing. And then down at the bottom was maybe save the dates for big events that we knew at the time. And maybe a call to action at the bottom page. But it was usually just one page.” Participant Ten indicated that within the college magazine, mailed to many alumni, there is periodically a page dedicated to alumni.

Participant Two empowers departments to communicate with alumni through newsletters with provided templates to promote consistency and assistance in generating content. Participant Four, however, was directed by college leadership to pull multiple departmental newsletters
under one college magazine. Participant Eleven creates a targeted newsletter for a society of around 200 members. Participant Thirteen was the only participant to state that an annual report of the alumni association was created and shared with alumni; metrics to indicate whether the report was read were unknown. Participant Two’s college moved away from and expensive and time-consuming bi-annual magazine to a dean’s e-newsletter every two weeks resulting in more relevant news and an opportunity to feature department news which is of more interest to alumni.

**Integrating technology**

Technological advances have provided alumni directors with additional ways to reach their wide array of volunteers. Participant Three planned to integrate addition technology beyond conference calls with engage with volunteers, “We're looking at ways to try and incorporate some WebEx or something for our board meetings. We have had the opportunity for remote participation, but it's just been via conference call. And so, we're trying to figure out ways that board members, because it's so important that I get board members who have experiences broader than just the state of Indiana. But when you get those people, it's harder to get them to meetings. And so, we've got to find other ways for them to participate.” Participant Eight was further in their adaption of technology by utilizing ZOOM for board members to attend meetings. Participant Five, in addition to email and conference calls, utilized GoToMeeting and webinars to meet with volunteers.

Participant Nine warned against launching technology that isn’t used effectively, “If you create a website, but you don't drive anybody to it, then it's partly our faults too.” Referencing an online survey to accept volunteers, Participant Nine’s concerns where what happens with the survey submissions when there isn’t ample time to respond.
Participant Eight’s magazine mailing list is impacted by budget it would require to send to the number of living alumni (65,000) in the college. The mailing list is narrowed utilizing parameters such as volunteer or donor. They have created a quarterly e-newsletter that uninterested alumni can opt out of in an attempt to reach as many of their constituents as possible. For Participant Seven the cost of mailings limits most of their communications to digital format with only a small percentage of older alumni or alumni with preferences receiving hard copy mail.

Participant Two leveraged technology and event remarks to improve demographic records, “trying to capture accurate information at most of our alumni events that we're doing, our advancement team, we purchased two iPads….we have sign up pages for this e-newsletter. So, we ensure that the dean has included it in his remarks. Like, "Before you are leaving" or "after enjoying the event, make sure you-- if you're not receiving updates from the college, there's a portal here on site. We'll give your information, we'll get it updated in the system so that you can be receiving that information."

Partnering with others

Partnering with leadership, communications colleagues, and others across the college and university can add reach and validity to an alumni director’s messages. Participant Three indicated that communications should be a shared responsibility, “If you're talking about best practices in alumni relations it would be that you have communications professionals that work with you, that you are not the only one responsible for communications.” Participant Seven received the assistance of several members of the communications team with pre- and post-event news stories, website design and editing, and social media.
Participant Nine meets monthly with the director of external relations and colleagues in development, student services, career services, study abroad where each shares updates that may relate to external groups which include alumni. Participant Nine also partners with departmental staff by providing content for the to post on their social channels resulting in broader outreach and connections back to the college. Participant Seven encourages university communications colleagues to feature stories and programs on the university webpage and utilizes the university Flickr account.

Participant Five leveraged the dean’s email signature to bring awareness to alumni association programs, “we used the Dean's listserv to get out invitations and things, anything that the Alumni Association wanted to communicate that was of really importance information. The Dean's office would send out for us from the Dean. So that it looked like this was a Dean sanctioned thing that was happening. And then the same thing with Academic Affairs. If he sent it out then it was something that he-- that the faculty would then recognize was important to him and therefore should be important to them.”

Participant Five implemented a meeting strategy that included volunteers in meetings to address questions she was receiving from communications colleagues regarding alumni association activities, “I would say, " Yeah, let's just get together and let them tell you all the things that they're doing so that there might be a story there that I don't know about that you do," so we started involving the chair of the communications and marketing committee in meetings, if at all possible, when we would meet and talk about communications strategies. Sometimes, it'd just be on the phone, but it was helpful for them to find out what was hot topics in the college and what the communications department saw as a hot topic and then decide if they could bank off of that. So, I would say it was, overall, pretty receptive.”
Participant Five extends the connection of volunteers beyond communications colleagues to other staff in the college, “they're so integral to what we were doing and important to the college in how they were wanting to make an impact, but yet they were isolated to one individual, one staff person, which was the alumni person and that didn't allow them to see all the gears and cogs in the process and how things work. And so, if they were willing, that's what we would try to do, was introduce them to the people that could really get them the right information.”
Research question 5: How do alumni directors continue to improve their skills and knowledge to meet their job expectations related to administering alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

Theme: Professional development

While no participants received formal training in the areas of volunteer management or other areas of their job descriptions, overall, participants were strongly supported by leadership to seek out professional development opportunities. All of the participants are members of NAADA and several participate in CASE and have memberships in BoardSource®. Many participants had already completed advanced degrees for little to no cost at their institutions. It was surprising, however, that only one of their degrees focused in the area of volunteer management or non-profit leadership. Peer-to-peer education was of significant importance to many participants, sighting university colleagues and NAADA as their resources.

Participant Two shared an interesting observation of the advancement profession, “How do people end up in the development and donor relations, and stewardship, and alumni professions? There's not a degree program.” This reality results in professional development opportunities being integral to the successful management of alumni engagement programs. Participant Three recognized that professional development needs to be devoted time other than when attended a conference away from campus.

Association memberships, conferences, webinars

Participants Six and Twelve had similar professional development experiences consisting of memberships in BoardSource®, CASE, and NAADA which also included online webinars and the purchase of publications. Participant Five shared the importance of NAADA, “starting
attending NAADA and that was huge for me because I was able to figure out what my colleagues were doing in ag schools around the US. And have an opportunity to vet ideas and vent…. Always been a huge advocate of NAADA because my colleagues in family and consumer sciences or forestry or vet med did not have that same type of organization that was so specific to them.”

Support of leadership

“Professional development has always been something that has been supported by the dean for the alumni position.”, according to Participant Six. Participant Two’s leadership advocates for professional development and makes it accessible for the entire team. Participant Eleven has had a similar experience, “Our supervisor, even in tight budget years, has always made professional development an opportunity for us. It's presented to us as one conference per year, but he'll make an exception often if we are receiving an award or something because then sometimes he will find funds for us to attend the second conference. … I’m a member of two professional associations. I’m a member of ACE and NAADA. And having grown up as a communications person, I have those ties in ACE but having grown in to an alumni relations person, I looked to NAADA for alumni relations professional development and connections as well. So, the current model I'm on right now is attending every other year which has its benefits and its challenges. One is that I don't necessarily get to connect with colleagues like you consistently every year. I've kind of bailed upon those relationships. But the positive part is that I still get really strong kind of communications professional development that I look forward to refine our communications tools. And I can kind of keep those connections in ACE. And then I can make new connections through NAADA and look at how we can build an alumni relations programs specially if we add people … who in [their] role definitely is 100% alumni relations.”
Participant One was able to convince leadership of the benefits of attending NAADA, “The first year I was here, our dean was not super supportive, didn't have an understanding of the organization. And then after, I'm like, "I really need to go to this and this is why," and kind of showed the sessions. And I'm like, "And I'm presenting so, you need to let me go. And then so that has been outstanding, honestly. In terms of professional development and what I do and giving ideas and being able to talk with a group of people to get feedback, just because I feel like what we do within colleges of agriculture are so unique. Principles are the same, I understand that, across institutions. But the group that we work with, programs that work, it's just a great resource for that. To be able to steal ideas, and figure out what's going to work and what's not going to work, and see common struggles across the board with some of those problems that we face. And again, that was kind of my own initiative to kind of go and be like, "I really want to go and do this," but outside of that, there has not been a ton of support. And I think that's an area that they struggle with, just because they've got to define this position. They need to define an alumni role, what they want from that person, what the expectations are, and give some more parameters on it.” As supervisors changed over the years, Participant Five had to continuously demonstrate return of investment of attending NAADA to the new leadership. Participant Eight, however, was only restricted in conference attendance by limitations in budget.

**Peer-to-peer**

Participant Two described several peer-to-peer development opportunities within university advancement, “So there are ongoing webinars and professional development opportunities. As far as it relates specifically to alumni relations, not so much in that capacity or specifically development. We do at the university have an advancement council, and so that is also to touch any realm of advancement throughout the university. There is a monthly meeting,
and so there's meeting day every first or second Tuesday of the month. There's advancement council so the whole advancement team meets as a group. And then development council, all of the development officers meet as a group. And then there's kind of a social networking hour. Through that our new vice president for advancement has developed a task force to look at opportunities for professional development. So, my colleague …here in the college of ag and life science chaired that committee and one of her great ideas was to establish, before those advancement councils, a brown bag lunch session where we essentially have our own beg, borrow and steal with ideas throughout the university. So that, I would say, is a great opportunity to continue pushing each other forward and showing that support. But they're also looking at having a seminar built into that meeting day at some point that focusses on advancement related professional development opportunities.” Participant Thirteen described a former beneficial peer-to-peer learning opportunity, “We did a lot of professional development at one time with our Campus Council of Alumni Relations group, which was called CCAR, which was out of the University Alumni Association. But again, as changes have unfolded, we lost some of that, and I'm surprised how many alumni directors-- there's really only three full-time alumni directors on this campus.” Participant Nine relies on alumni relations colleagues across the university for support and guidance and tips and best practices. Participant Twelve described the benefits of learning from peers, “You try to find what other people are doing that is working for them. And I do think you try different things. Certainly, you want to be strategic about what you're trying, but you want to set up processes procedures and you do want to have a plan. But certainly, look at what other groups and what other people are doing and seeing, again, what's working best for them. And see how you can apply it to your own group. Because I don't think there's any answers out there that's going to work best for everyone. One, because you are dealing with-- You know,
when you're dealing with people, you're dealing with a lot of different personalities. No groups are ever going to be the same. So, I think that the more you can take ideas from others and structure them to your own board and see how they might work.”

**University provided/funded training**

Participant Ten described university resources but was looking for a more pro-active approach to development, “And that's been a great-- it's been a great resource but it also has-- I've been meaning to take a supervision one, because I advise two students. And it has that kind of resource. So, I have-- all these things are available, but I don't think they're presented in a way that's like, "Here's a way you can learn how to do your job better." It's more, if you have a need, it's more-- it's active versus passive. Not actively put out there as things we should do to improve ourselves. And more like, "When you need it, this is the way you address it.'"

Participant Eight participated in a leadership academy where curriculum included decision-making skills which they utilize often with their alumni board. Participant Nine’s college provided funding for a personal coach which has helped with addressing following through with projects and tasks. Participant Nine also referenced available university training in diversity and inclusion along with other job skills. They did admit that they are, “not one that has really taken the time to think about what could help me do my job better and then actually do that.”

**Training specific to volunteer management**

Although something that was seen as a position responsibility, no training specific to volunteer management was provided to Participant Eleven. Participant Three described a need for training specific to volunteer management but hasn’t found a program that is a good fit. Participant Ten came into the role with volunteer management knowledge, “Because it was in
2010, I was still pretty fresh out of college and still learned about that stuff before I did it. So, while I was actually recruiting, managing, and recognizing volunteers, I wasn't getting ongoing training about it. And so, I feel like that would have been helpful in terms of actively being able to use it while I was learning about it. So, coming in to this role, I definitely had a background in what-- in like the different pieces of volunteer management and what that looks like, and what it's supposed to look like versus what it sometimes looks like.”

**Advanced degrees**

Participant Twelve, while not having the interest in pursuing an advanced degree, expected that it would be supported by college leadership. After completion of five years of employment, all employees are eligible to continue their education at the cost of the university for Participant Eight. Participant Seven describes their doctoral program, which was approved and funded by the college, as, “a true professional development experience, being that I'm working at academic institution and what all that means to knowing and understanding what we're doing.” Participant Eleven experienced similar support for an advanced degree, “Through the university employees can apply for a tuition grant of up to three credits per semester. Personally, that's how I funded my entire master's degree program, which was wonderful, and usually, it depends on who your supervisor is. I was very fortunate that my supervisor provided me time as well during the day and other support. For example, paid for my travel to do my focus groups for my research, let me use office equipment to record and type and office time as well. And so, it was really-- that, to me, is much of a support as the tuition, I think.”

Participant Five, who earned a Master’s degree in non-profit management with an emphasis in volunteer management, was disappointed following completion of an advanced degree, “It was not recognized and a big deal when I finished. Like, if you're a county agent and
you go and you get a different degree, or you are a teacher and you get a master's degree it's an automatic pay raise. It was not that for me. And I'm very glad I did it, and it helped me get other opportunities, and particularly this job that I'm in now, but for the first two or three years after I was done it was kind of a letdown that it did not me in the minds of certain individuals. But they were very supportive of me at the time, getting it.”

**Summary**

This chapter provided the findings that resulted from the qualitative analysis of participant interviews. Four themes emerged from the data, which addressed each of the research questions that guided the study.

For the first research question, “How do alumni directors administer alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?” participants described their methods of managing volunteers on boards and committees and general volunteers. Methods consisted of recruitment of new board members, development and implementation of board structure/leadership/training, establishing purpose, strategic plans and work plans to carry out the work, empowering board members to lead and make decisions, recognizing board volunteers, managing poor leadership and inactive board members. Within general volunteer management, methods of recruitment and recognition were the focus of participants’ responses.

In response to the second research question, “What skills should alumni directors bring to their positions upon employment?” participants shared their backgrounds and skillsets relative to managing volunteers. Soft skills and the abilities to lead and empower volunteers were important skillsets identified. Participants also what motivates them and the challenges they face.
For the third research question, “How do alumni directors identify individuals or groups to connect to in order to accomplish their goals?” participants described their engagement of alumni, faculty, and students through volunteer assignments and events and programs and partnerships with university-level advancement and college leadership. Goals were more easily accomplished for those participants who had the support of leadership and worked within a positive reporting structure environment. University alumni association were key collaborators in reaching alumni while partnerships with college academic programs offices provided direct access to students in order to familiarize them with alumni programs.

In response to the fourth research question, “How do alumni directors identify and implement communications strategies to make successful connections to use with individuals and/or groups?”, participants described the communications tools they utilize such as email, mail, social media, and emerging technologies for the various demographics across their constituencies.

For the fifth research question, “How do alumni directors continue to improve their skills and knowledge to meet their job expectations related to managing alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?” participants described opportunities for professional development such as organizations like NAADA, CASE, and BoardSource®, learning from peers, and opportunities to seek advanced degrees. Participants’ leadership was supportive of professional development.
Conclusions, Discussion, Recommendations, and Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions.

This study surveyed current alumni directors in land-grant institutions who are members of the National Agricultural Alumni and Development Association (NAADA). The study sought to describe good practices of support, training, communication, and volunteer administration that can be utilized by new members of the field and seasoned veterans alike.

Five major questions guided the study:

1. How do alumni directors administer alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

2. What skills should alumni directors bring to their positions upon employment?

3. How do alumni directors identify individuals or groups to connect to in order to accomplish their goals?

4. How do alumni directors identify and implement communications strategies to make successful connections to use with individuals and/or groups?

5. How do alumni directors continue to improve their skills and knowledge to meet their job expectations related to administering alumni engagement programs and associated volunteers?

Through a thematic analysis of the data, the following themes emerged:
1. Management of volunteer boards
2. Management of general volunteers
3. Perceptions of alumni directors
4. Engagement with alumni, faculty, and students through events and programs
5. Partnerships with university-level advancement and college leadership
6. Communications tools
7. Professional development

The following sections of this chapter holistically present the conclusions, discussion of the findings of the study, and suggest recommendations for future practice and research.

**Conclusions and Discussion**

Having been in the alumni relations profession for 17 years, the overall findings of the study didn’t surprise me with the exception of the lack of knowledge of volunteer management models or prior experience in volunteer management. The participants’ experiences, both positive and negative, aligned well with my own and those of my colleagues at Virginia Tech. The challenges that the participants elevated are those that we have discussed as peers in NAADA for many years and have attempted to address through educational sessions and peer-to-peer coaching. There is an opportunity to learn from the many good practices shared across the interviews, develop targeted professional development opportunities, and provide recommendations for further study.

Participants who had the support of leadership, who arrived at their positions with at least some background working with volunteers, and those who were willing to try new tactics to engage volunteers set an outstanding example of how success is possible in the role of an alumni
director. The most positive experiences were shared by participants whose college leadership valued engagement of alumni, supported the mission of the board and appreciated working collaboratively with the organization, provided the resources needed to carry out engagement programming, and promoted professional development opportunities. Participants who were strategic in helping their board members develop and embrace a strong mission and vision for their organization created work plans that could be implemented by empowered board executive leadership and committee chairs and laid out clear expectations for board members regarding attendance and engagement with board work were more productive, impactful, and satisfied in their roles. Due to the overall lack of involvement with industry/alumni advisory boards, those efforts may be more focused. Still, it is a missed opportunity not to have alumni board volunteers involved in those efforts. While mentioned in a few interviews, Cooperative Extension colleagues could be a much more utilized resource for alumni volunteer recruitment. Cooperative Extension, and alumni relations could identify multiple volunteer opportunities for alumni engagement across their lives by working together.

Communications is a powerful tool for all alumni directors but can also be a significant challenge. From writing to editing websites to managing social media to building newsletters, all of these added responsibilities take away from the focus on managing volunteers and creating programming. For several participants, the craft of communications was not a strong personal skill set. Participants who were not included in the development of alumni publications or messaging often felt further siloed and unsupported. The most impactful alumni engagement resulted when the alumni director and communications staff were partners in developing stories, publications, marketing assets, and other communications tools.
Participants who expanded their definition of “volunteer” beyond alumni to include faculty, staff, and students appeared to have better-developed strategies to engage, empower, and lead individuals. It was clear that most volunteer engagement centered around board volunteers rather than more episodic volunteers, which led to a further disconnect of volunteer management strategies. A particular struggle of engaging new volunteers was a common thread throughout the interviews. When practices are not in place to rotate volunteers through their designated board terms or long-time volunteers for programs do not willingly step aside to open up opportunities to new volunteers, there can be a significant negative fallout when those who have raised their hand cannot to be involved.

Participants who partnered with colleagues in academic programs/affairs offices were better positioned to engage students in their student and alumni hosted programming, find student volunteers and interns to assist in their efforts, and create and maintain stronger connections as they become young alumni. Participants who partnered with departments for representatives to the college board witnessed greater alumni engagement and developed a strong feeder program for future college-level volunteers. This approach is very volunteer-centric, allowing volunteers to serve where they are often most passionate – within their department- and a sound way to implement the volunteer cycle, especially in the areas of recruiting and retaining.

The findings indicated several areas that could be addressed to improve the overall effectiveness of roles of alumni directors and the experiences of their volunteers. Surprisingly, only two participants had a background in volunteer management. While the job descriptions when they were hired did not specify a background in volunteer management as a required or preferred qualification, the job expectations require at least some knowledge of managing volunteers. Two of the most alarming consequences of not having a background in volunteer
management were participants’ struggles with removing or reassigning inactive volunteers and the lack of well-developed recognition programs. A background in volunteer management could have prepared the participant to assess and respond to many of the challenges expressed in the interviews.

One participant posed the question of whether it would be more helpful to someone coming into the role of an alumni director in a college of agriculture to have a background in agriculture, whether a degree or having been raised in the industry. I think there is validity in at least listing experience in agriculture as a preferred qualification in a job description. Alumni relations is about relationships and having a common ground, a shared language, and shared experiences can be immensely helpful in making initial connections and maintaining those relationships.

Professional development was strongly supported for participants by their leadership, but it was surprising that the majority utilized the same resources: NAADA, CASE, and BoardSource®. Except for two individuals, participants completed graduate degree programs and leadership programs that did not focus on volunteer management, which would have been beneficial in their roles as alumni directors. Aside from the participant who had previously worked as a 4-H agent, no one referenced the vast network of volunteer managers within each of their colleges in Cooperative Extension. No one referenced any Cooperative Extension publications that would provide education in volunteer management, strategic planning, or meeting facilitation. Not engaging with the vast human and research-based resources within Cooperative Extension is a significant missed opportunity for learning good practices in volunteer and program management. As described in the literature review, the ISOTURE model (Dodd & Boleman, 2007) developed in the 1970s for Cooperative Extension would provide an
easily interpreted and implementable tool to assist alumni relations professionals in administering their volunteers.

Before conducting the interviews, I expected to hear many references to the alumni directors’ experiences as members of the advancement team or, if there was no defined advancement structure, references to the working relationship with fundraisers. There is a national shift in more closely aligning alumni engagement with communications and fundraising, so it was surprising that when asked about the individuals or groups that helped them meet their goals, participants rarely described partnerships with fundraisers or even fundraising goals or strategies that involved alumni engagement. Giving Days are university-led initiatives to engage the masses that colleges are expected to support and that rely heavily on social media that is often managed by the communications team. A participant described the excitement within faculty and students as department competitions occurred, but there was no mention of engaging alumni as ambassadors or alumni board involvement in any part of Giving Day. Aside from a few references to engaging donor prospects with board volunteerism to help move them through the donor cycle, there was little to no mention of board members and alumni organizations playing a role in meeting the giving goals of the college.

The lack of uniform metrics to measure the impact of alumni programs is of significant concern, especially as advancement models become commonplace. Fundraising and, to some degree, communications have better-developed tools to measure their outcomes. To remain relevant and to garner the resources and support needed to carry out an alumni engagement program, we must find a way to measure engagement outcomes. As mentioned by a few participants, a good starting point was to utilize SMART goals to develop and evaluate annual
plans and specific programs. However, quantitative data would be much more aligned with the data captured by fundraisers and communicators.

While the transition to an advancement model that includes alumni relation, communications, and fundraising presents its challenges, there is a significant amount of synergy that can be recognized when all three areas contribute to the engagement of alumni and stakeholders that ultimately leads to philanthropic gifts. Several of the challenges presented by participants could have been reconciled by having a working advancement model within their college.

Several participants described their lack of connection with industry/advisory boards in the college. This divide or exclusion of the chief engagement officer in the college is a missed opportunity to engage further and steward more alumni and stakeholders. There is a synergy that can benefit the college when alumni boards and industry/advisory boards are managed by the same person or at the very least cross-collaborate and communicate on issues important to the college.

Several participants shared the value of student interns as a part of their offices, but no one mentioned support staff. It is not clear whether they do or don’t have access to support staff resources, or the interview questions did not lead to the participants sharing that information. Several participants expressed the feeling of being overwhelmed, which leads one to think that they lack in support.

Seven key good practices can be elevated from the data:
8. Become familiar with volunteer management models to understand how and why people are motivated to volunteer and develop skill sets and tactics to recruit, train, retain, and recognize volunteers

9. Empower volunteers to develop their own mission and goals, strategize their plan of work, and lead the execution of their programs and organization

10. Expand the definition of “volunteer”

11. Build collaborative partnerships across the team, college, and university

12. Develop innovative approaches and partnerships to engage students

13. Expand professional development resources

14. Advocate for yourself and your program

Recommendations

Recommendations for Further Research

Aside from challenges around volunteer management, one particular topic was elevated throughout the interviews: measuring alumni engagement work. CASE is developing criteria to identify alumni whose various levels of engagement and giving capacity are indicators of future giving. However, the profession is still lacking uniform tools to measure the impact of alumni engagement work. Suggested questions:

- How do we measure alumni engagement goals?
- How to we determine if a program is successful? What are standard data points that could be collected and measured against a standard scale?
- Could further indicators of engagement beyond those being developed by CASE be helpful tools for NAADA professionals in colleges of agriculture?
• Should we establish good practices around minimum levels of and kinds of communication to grow and maintain engagement?

• How can we measure and communicate the impact of alumni programming developed specifically for students? Does student recognition that such programming was provided by alumni impact their willingness to volunteer in the future as alumni?

• How can we measure and communicate the impact on future volunteerism as alumni of students who serve as volunteers for alumni programming?

• Are student advancement councils something every advancement office should implement? What are the success stories of engaging this particular group of students?

An additional suggestion for future research is to expand the survey to include non-active NAADA members, alumni professionals in colleges of agriculture who are not members of NAADA, and to additional CASE members in order to provide a broader representation of the profession than possible with just the thirteen participants of this study.

**Develop a volunteer management training module for the profession**

After completing this research and having served as a board volunteer for NAADA for eight years, working diligently beside other volunteers to provide meaningful educational opportunities to our members, I would suggest that NAADA, CASE, and other professional organizations develop a training module on volunteer management that all staff interacting with volunteers be encouraged to complete. While there exists much literature related to volunteer management in large non-profit organizations, and there are quality volunteer management models to utilize from Cooperative Extension, there lacks peer-reviewed literature in the field of
advancement, specifically alumni relations. Through this study, the researcher identified good practices by alumni relations professionals in colleges of agriculture. Connecting those good practices with theories and models in volunteer management could provide a much-needed resource.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions.

The study surveyed current alumni directors in land-grant institutions who are members of the National Agricultural Alumni and Development Association (NAADA). The study sought to describe good practices of support, training, communication, and volunteer administration that can be utilized by new members of the field and seasoned veterans alike.

After interviewing thirteen alumni relations professionals, it was clear that those land-grant institutions have passionate, volunteer-centric professionals who diligently work every day towards the mission and goals of the colleges they serve. But there is much work to be done to create an environment that is more supportive of them. Efforts should be made to help college and university leadership better understand the qualifications required for alumni relations positions, elevate alumni engagement and volunteers’ impact, and provide more targeted professional development opportunities.
References


Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Email

TO: NAADA-ALUMNIPROFESSIONALS@LISTS.UMN.EDU
FROM: Jamie Lucero (jlucero@vt.edu)

Colleagues,

Greetings from Virginia Tech.

I am currently pursuing an M.S. in agricultural, leadership, and community education at Virginia Tech and am reaching out to alumni relations professionals across the country to engage you in an interview for my thesis. I am examining how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni volunteer programs in colleges of agriculture at land-grant and 1890 institutions. The study will seek to describe best practices of support, training, communication, and volunteer management that can be utilized by new members of the alumni relations field and seasoned veterans alike.

My participation in NAADA has provided me with the opportunity to engage with you through our listservs and annual conference regarding our challenges and triumphs in our positions at our institutions. The research findings from this study will be shared at our 2017 NAADA annual conference as a continuation of our engagement.

Should you decide to participate, your commitment will consist of a 60 – 90 minutes phone interview, submission of your current job description, and review of the transcript and identified themes from the interview. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience within the next 15-30 days and conducted either by phone or video (Google Hangout or Skype). Your responses to the interview questions will be confidential and anonymity will be maintained in any publications and presentations of the findings.

I greatly appreciate your consideration in participating in the study. If you agree to participate please reply no later than ______.

Best regards,

Jamie
Appendix B

Consent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Title of Project: Best practices of alumni relations professionals as administrators of alumni volunteer programs in colleges of agriculture at land-grant and 1890 institutions

Investigator(s): Jamie Cowell-Lucero jlucero@vt.edu / 540-231-9666 Donna Westfall-Rudd mooredm@vt.edu / 540-231-5717

I. Purpose of this Research Project

The purpose of the study is to examine how alumni relations professionals are prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities as administrators of alumni volunteer programs in colleges of agriculture at land-grant and 1890 institutions. The study will seek to describe best practices of support, training, communication, and volunteer management that can be utilized by new members of the field and seasoned veterans alike.

Participants of the study will be alumni directors in colleges of agriculture at land-grant and 1890 institutions. There may be up to 20 participants in the study.

You will be asked to describe your experiences on the above topic during a one-on-one interview with the principal researcher.

Results will be published in the researcher’s thesis, submitted for peer-review and publication to the Journal of Extension, and presented at the National Agricultural Alumni and Development Association (NAADA) annual conference in Columbus, Ohio, June 2017. Published results will not include identifying information of the participants.

II. Procedures

Should you agree to participate, your commitment will consist of:

- 60 – 90 minutes audio-recorded phone or video interview during which you will share your experiences as an alumni relations Submission of your current job description
- The interview will be scheduled at your convenience within the next 15-30 days.
- You will have an opportunity to review the transcript and identified themes from your interview.
- Your responses to the interview questions will be confidential and anonymity will be maintained in any publications and presentations of the findings.
- Research findings will be shared at the 2017 NAADA annual conference.

III. Risks

Minimal to no risks are anticipated in association with your participation in this study.

IV. Benefits

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

The results of the study are intended to add knowledge to the field of alumni relations. You will have an opportunity to review the transcripts and identified themes from your interview. Research findings from the study will be shared at the 2017 NAADA annual conference.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality
Your identity, and that of any individuals who you mention, will be kept confidential at all times and will be known only to the principal researcher. Audio-recorded interviews, job descriptions, transcriptions, and all notes taken by the researcher will be data coded. Identifiable information will be stored separately and securely from coded data.

Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board Project No. 16-580
Approved July 22, 2016 to July 21, 2017
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Interview Guide:
Best practices of alumni relations professionals as administrators of alumni engagement programs and volunteers in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions

Thank you.

General conversation.

In interviewing you, I would like to learn about your professional practice of engaging alumni and volunteers. I have 5 overarching research questions as part of my thesis, so I have several questions within those 5 topic areas for us to discuss. Please describe your experiences in as much detail as possible. There are no right or wrong answers.

Do you have any questions?

If you are ready to begin I will start the recording.

Administration of alumni volunteer programs

I would like to start by having you focus on engagement and management of volunteers as part of your alumni programming.

Please share what a typical day/month/year is like in your position as an alumni professional.

-describe your interactions with volunteers (alumni, faculty, staff, students, other friends of the institution)

--describe your interactions with alumni boards and/or councils

Volunteer management skills alumni directors should bring to their positions upon employment

Now I would like to move on to the knowledge and skills required to be successful in your position.

Were particular competencies expected of you or were they learned on the job?
Do you feel required management skills were articulated well in the job description and/or interview?

Was experience in leading teams identified as a required or preferred qualification?

What program and volunteer management skills did you bring to the position?

How do you recruit, manage, retain, and recognize volunteers?

-specific volunteer management models

-boards and/or committee management (leadership training, retreats, orientations, conferences, dashboards, and by-laws)

**Identification of individuals or groups to connect to in order to accomplish alumni relations goals**

Now I would like to focus on how others may or may not support your goals concerning administering your alumni volunteer programs

Who develops the mission and vision of your college alumni association?

What are the main focuses of the association and how are they decided annually?

Describe your relationship with board leadership.

Describe the involvement of board leadership with the management of your volunteer program.

Who are your programs’ advocates?

Do you leverage relationships across the college to recruit volunteers? How?

Are faculty or students considered volunteers for your programs?

**Communications strategies implemented to make successful connections with alumni and others**

I would like to focus on your communications strategies.

What communications tools do you find most effective in connecting with alumni, both the general population and volunteers?

Briefly describe your networks/collaborators/advocates

**Professional development opportunities**
For our last set of questions, I would like to focus on your access to professional development.

What orientations/trainings have been offered to you related to your position?

Is professional development encouraged and supported with resources?

What continuing education do you seek for yourself? Is it is supported and valued?

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Stop recording

Thank you.