

WHEN DOES ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT START?

December 9, 2020



- **Why should you work on alumni engagement?**
- **What can you do now?**



This presentation addresses these two questions to provide a frame for further discussion.

Firstly, it outlines the reasons why school leaders, managers and proprietors should focus on alumni engagement. While it may seem at first that alumni are outside of your immediate area of focus, there is clear evidence that alumni networks are resources that can enable you to better achieve your mission to positively transform the lives of young people you serve. Engaging your alumni through networks is a way to strengthen your work with young people, and therefore is not really separate from your core goals. At the same time, alumni engagement is a way to ensure their success beyond their time with you.

No matter how old your institution is and irrespective of how much funding you have, you can start the alumni engagement work. You do not have to be the Aitchison College in Pakistan or Eton College in the UK that produce prime ministers with big endowment funds to have alumni networks.



What is important is set the right expectations of what alumni engagement can be and what it can do in your institutional, national or community context as shown in the pictures here.

We know from inHive’s 2013 study (at the time called Future First Global) <http://www.inhiveglobal.org/project/inhive-every-school-a-community-2013/> that that it does not matter if your school is urban or rural, in a developing or developed country. Across these contexts, nearly half would be keen to be engaged with their former school, but only 2% of people give back to their former schools because there is no alumni engagement infrastructure to do so.

Of course in many poor communities alumni might not be able to give large financial donations, but they can contribute their time, experiences, and insights. Similarly, alumni engagement may not necessarily mean investing into bespoke online engagement platforms or lavish banquet events. By putting into place certain soft infrastructure, be it governance and leadership bodies or a communications strategy, you can make sure that the alumni become a self-organized, sustainable and self-sustaining network that is context relevant.

Project Websites:

Connect Futures: <http://www.inhiveglobal.org/project/tawai-takapiri-connect-futures-inspiring-a-new-organisation-for-alumni-networks-in-new-zealand/>

Our School: <http://www.inhiveglobal.org/project/supporting-the-first-state-school-alumni-networks-in-australia>

Alumni for current learners

- **School to work transition**
 - Different careers role models
 - Job application support
 - Interview practice
 - University options support
 - Work-based learning opportunities
- **Resilience**
 - Pastoral mentors
 - Inspirational and relatable role models
- **Academic performance**
 - In-curriculum support



CARE Foundation school students and alumni, Lahore, Pakistan, 2019 [funded by UK AID]



Firstly, your alumni can be a resource for your current learners.

For example, you would have encountered the critique that education institutions do not prepare young people for the labour market with the right skills. Alumni can plug that gap.

It can be an architect coming to speak in a math class to demonstrate why math matters in their daily work; or an alumna business woman in the construction business offering insights into her career that is non-traditional for women in her community. This way she broadens children's horizons beyond the professions like doctors, lawyers and teachers that they usually think about.

We have seen career talks to be some of the most frequent and desired way for alumni to support schools in our partnership with the CARE Foundation, where we have worked with 20 schools and nearly 30,000 students at primary and secondary level.

Website Links:

CARE Foundation, Pakistan:

<http://www.inhiveglobal.org/project/care-foundation-inspiring-girls-to-go-to-school-in-pakistan>

Alumni for school operations & management

- Governance of the school or in leadership positions
- **Staff** members, especially teachers
- Student recruitment support and PR – **evidence of impact**
- Insights into the world of work for teachers
- Extra-curricular club volunteers
- Fundraising (e.g. school projects or scholarships) and in-kind donations



[PEDN and Opportunity International-led Empowerment for Girls' Education Programme](#), Old Boys' and Old Girls'-led and Community-led skills classes, 2019, Uganda [funded by UKAID]



Similarly to the career interventions with students, teachers also feel more motivated when they have support from alumni who know world of work and can make the teaching more enjoyable. Hence, it improves the quality of the education at the school and ultimately produces successful alumni who are the evidence of your school's impact. This in turn quite pragmatically helps schools to recruit more students or staff.

With our project with PEDN and Opportunity international, we worked for 1 year in 82 low cost private secondary and primary schools. We started old boys and old girls' clubs here, and as you see here brought alumni and community members to help students get practical skills such as tailoring or making sweets. Several schools that we visited told us that engaged alumni, who speak positively about the school in the community, have driven the numbers of interested students and parents.

Website Links:

PEDN and OI: <http://www.inhiveglobal.org/project/pedn-empowering-under-resourced-schools-in-uganda-with-alumni-support/>

Alumni for other alumni & the community

- **Alumni opportunities**
 - Career networking opportunities
 - Business development support (e.g. someone with finance skills helping someone else do a budget)
 - Sense of belonging/addressing isolation
- **Community**
 - Shifting attitudes (esp. carers'/parents') around education and career pathways
 - Community teaching



Health Poverty Action led [Rwandan Girl Education Advancement Programme 2](#) partner school, Nyarugu, Rwanda, 2019 [funded by UKAID]

Last but not least, alumni are a resource for each other – being engaged in a network gives them something in return and keeps them engaged.

Between 2017 and 2020 we worked with 20 schools that provided education to over 28,000 boys and girls in primary and secondary levels in Nyarugu district of Rwanda together with Health Poverty Action and other partners. In many schools, alumni committees started savings clubs for its members, some of which went to the running of the alumni networks and for the support of the alumni.

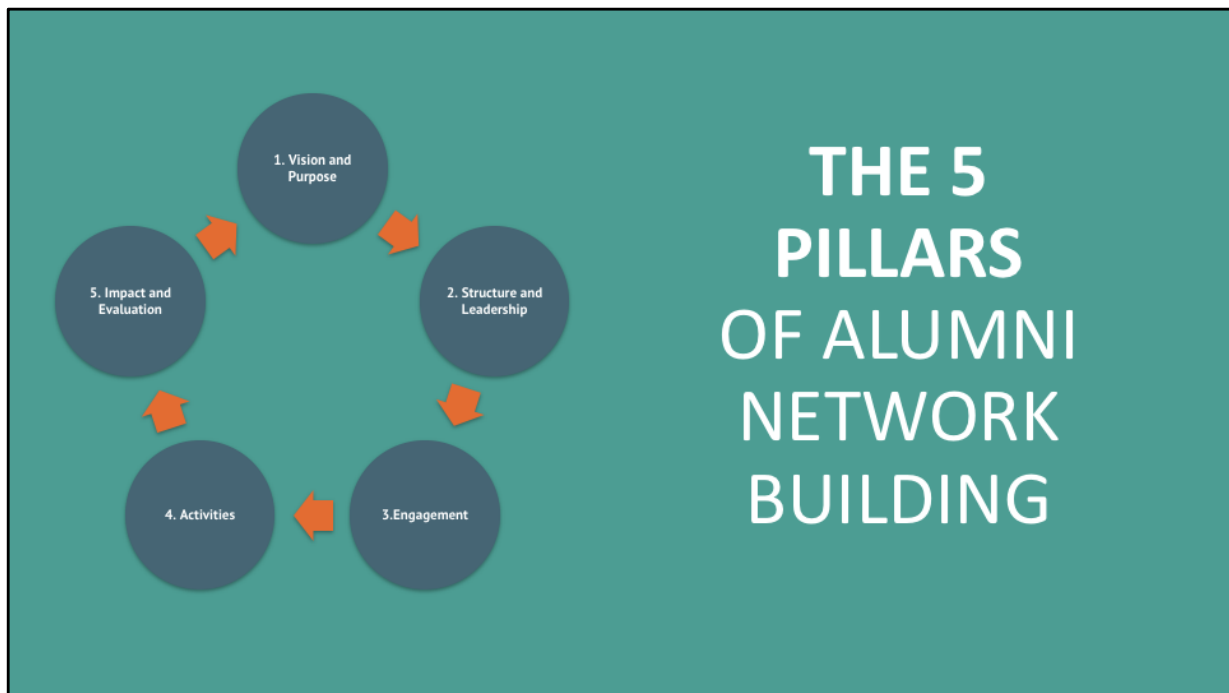
Several alumni associations we know from Kenya supported their members as they lost jobs due to COVID and created hardship funds for which alumni can apply.

On the slide you can see a few more examples, including fostering a sense of belonging for example groups of young people who received leadership training or who received a specific scholarship and want to maintain connection with like minded individuals after leaving the school or programme.

Website Links:

HPA: <http://www.inhiveglobal.org/project/health-poverty-action-improving-life->

[chances-of-marginalised-girls-in-rwanda/](#)



So, in this next section, you will see (1) The overarching pillars we live and breathe in order to support our partners in creating sustainable alumni networks, then (2) Focusing in on examples of work in different contexts across 2 pillars specifically.

So, what are our 5 pillars?

The network must define a shared **Vision and Purpose**. Why does it exist, what unites it, and what is it trying to achieve?

A framework outlining the network's **structure and leadership**, which should guide the network, and there should be clear processes in place to support and empower the network now and in the future.

(3) Consistent, timely and relevant **engagement** of the network. What messaging does the network communicate, and how does the messaging influence how others see value in the network? A database or system to record this all is crucial.

(4) Energising, tailored **activities** are a must. This could be anything from mentoring & coaching opportunities, to alumni running extra-curricular activities around a certain skill set they have.

(5) **Impact and evaluation**. Defining key success criteria, and tools to evaluate the network are key for the network to reflect, learn and adapt.



Pillar 3: Engagement

- **PEDN, Uganda** - Run a WhatsApp group for all alumni. Engaging alumni through friendship networks, establishing a database and setting targets for additions to it (5-10 each quarter). If no tech available, notebooks used to record alumni.
- **St George's School, Kenya** - set up a system so that each graduating class nominates a representative, responsible for mobilizing their year group – individuals are then part of a centralized WhatsApp group. Also set up a website, created a membership database, and facilitated communications platforms for alumni associations.

Tips & Tricks:

1. Engagement through human interest stories is always popular, as well as including photos of the school, of events, of other alumni in comms outreach.
2. Coverage of alumni activity is key: a good way to acknowledge the people who were there, and at the same time galvanise other alumni to 'give back'.

Pillar 3 Engagement:

Thinking about engagement, we tend to consider the following

- (1) Responding to the network's needs and tailoring communications in response to that
- (2) Exploring communications platforms and channels to share alumni activity – with both internal and external stakeholders
- (3) Managing data and insight for network sustainability

For example, we tend to see popular/ context specific mobile applications used – like WhatsApp or Telegram –to connect groups of alumni. PEDN in Uganda and St George's school in Kenya set up WhatsApp groups to connect to each other. In many of our projects, schools tend not to have the contact details for the alumni, but are likely to have contact details for their parents, which is a good place to start.

Building on from this, some schools we have worked with set up a way to systematically record details about alumni. In Uganda, this started with a notebook recording personal details. Where resource is available or an existing system exists, some have used databases to record who alumni are, and what they go on to do after

they leave school.

Tips and tricks. – Human stories as part of the network's communications are popular, and coverage of events is a great way to broadcast alumni presence and impact.

Pillar 4: Activities

- **Cathedral and John Connon School, India** - celebration tea for students when they are about to leave, and they are signed up as part of the alumni network.
- **Punahou School, Hawaii, U.S.** - asks students to volunteer at school events four years before they leave the school.
- **Future First, UK** – Encourages an end of school assembly, where the alumni network is explained, and all students are given a paper form to fill in their contact details.



Pillar 4: Activities

Something we often hear about this pillar ‘activities’ is that alumni need big, expensive events to bring everyone together. This is not always the case – if you have the resource to do this – great, but if not – there are equally important activities that happen more often and at a much smaller scale.

For example – In India, the Cathedral and John Connon School hold a celebration tea before students leave the school and get interest from these students about continuing their involvement in school activities. In a school in Hawaii, students are encouraged to volunteer at events on behalf of the school way before they graduate – this helps the school to identify some key potential ambassadors who they can work with after they leave. In the UK, Future First provide a platform for alumni through speaking opportunities at assemblies, and students can opt in to be more involved with the school after they leave.

Website links:

Future First: <https://futurefirst.org.uk>

Meet GSF Members



The Akanksha Foundation operates 21 schools in India, impacting over 9,300 students.

Their Alumni program covers 3100 alumni and by year 2021 will have over 4000 alumni in our fold.



African Leadership Academy
Developing the next generation of African leaders

ALA operates a two-year pre-university diploma program that is geared at young leaders aged 16-19 from across Africa.

ALA provides alumni with life-long access to powerful networks, support and opportunities that will accelerate their impact and leadership journeys.

Website links:

Akanksha: <https://www.akanksha.org>

ALA: <https://www.africanleadershipacademy.org>

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