

# Cultivating Lifelong Supporters:

## A Strategic Approach to Alumni Engagement

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KCK Catholic School Advancement Conference | May 2026

*Presented by CCS Fundraising*



# Your Alumni Are Your Most Underutilized Asset

8%

of independent school  
alumni give

CASE-NAIS 2024 data

20%

of higher ed alumni rank  
their alma mater as a high  
philanthropic priority

RNL National Alumni Survey

Alumni are your most multi-dimensional constituency:

- Lifelong **ambassadors** for your mission
- Donors, volunteers, and event **advocates**
- **Future** parents and grandparents
- **Pipeline** for annual giving and major gifts

*The relationship doesn't end at graduation — it begins there.*

## Where Is Your Program Today?

**1** Do you have a **formal alumni engagement** function on your advancement team?

**2** Do you have **contact information for more than 70%** of your alumni base?

**3** Are you **confident that contact information is current**?

**4** Do you **segment alumni by life stage**?  
(post-grad, young alum, new family, older alum)

***Our goal today:** Provide tangible tools to take your engagement up a notch, wherever you're starting from.*

## What the Data Tells Us

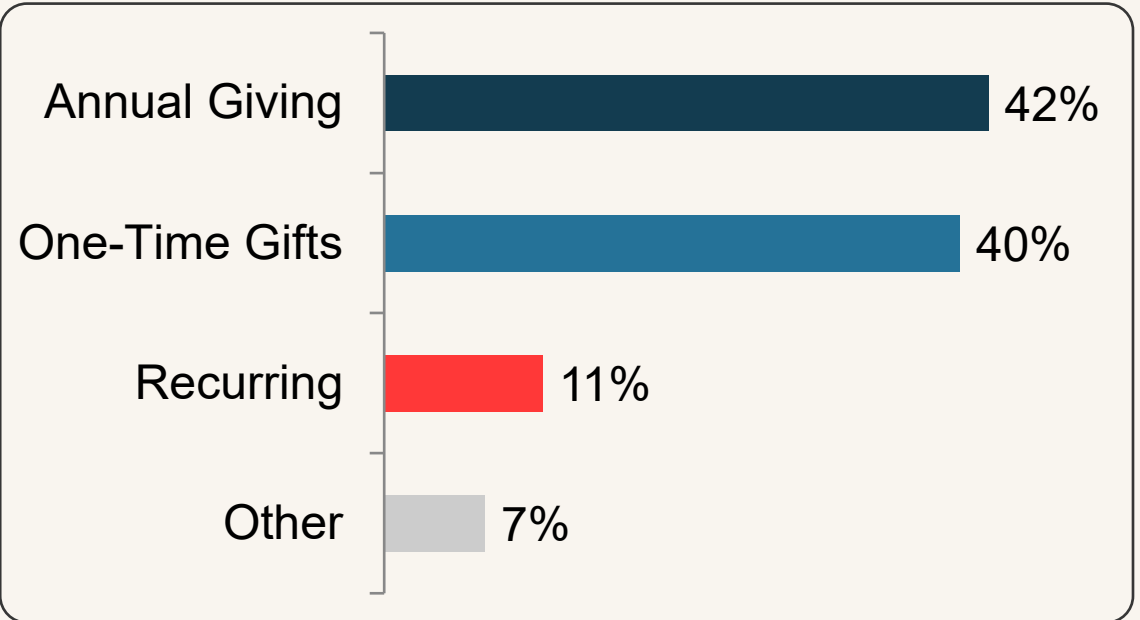
### 2026 CCS Pulse Primary & Secondary Schools

**63%** of schools increased new donor acquisition

**24%** reported no change in acquisition

**45%** retained  $\geq 60\%$  of donors acquired over 3 years

### Giving Frequency



While 63% of independent schools grew donor acquisition in 2026, retention lags – 40% of all gifts are one-time only. Schools are filling the pipeline, but losing regular donors to this intermittent giving is unsustainable. **A structured alumni engagement strategy can help convert these one-time gifts into lasting relationships and recurring revenue.**

THE FRAMEWORK

# The Alumni Lifecycle

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# The Last Touchpoint as a Student Is The First Alumni Strategy Moment

**01** **Capture Lifelong Contact Info**  
Personal email, LinkedIn, and family addresses are most relevant as students matriculate. Graduation is the most reliable window to collect data that can last.

**02** **Launch the Giving Habit**  
Consider inviting students to make a graduation gift tied to the class year – a lower, participatory gift is more feasible for recent grads, and anchors giving as a habit from Day 1.

**03** **Build the Value of Giving**  
Frame the first gift as joining a community, not making a transaction. This is formation, not simply fundraising.

## Cultivating Connection – Build the Relationship First

- **Career + Community**  
Alumni speakers, campus visits, city-based networks. Give them a reason to stay connected beyond nostalgia.
- **Track Engagement — Not Just Giving**  
Event attendance, email opens, volunteer activity. A young alum who attends 3 events is a high-value prospect even if they've never written a check.
- **Digital-First Outreach**  
63% of organizations use digital campaigns to engage next-gen philanthropists.

Connected alumni are **23x** more likely to give

### CCS INSIGHT

*Younger donors value transparency, authenticity, and impact over obligation.*

### DISCUSSION

*How are you engaging alumni under 30?  
What's working well?*

# Finding Your Alumni Prospects: A Practical Framework

*What makes a strong major gift prospect?*

## ABILITY

### Wealth Screening

**What is the prospect's capacity to give?** Consider tools like iWave, DonorSearch, or built-in CRM screening tools.

## AFFINITY

### Engagement Scoring

**How is the prospect connected to the institution?** Do they have a giving, volunteering, or event attendance history? Do they serve on a committee or board?

## ACCESS

### Relationship Mapping

**Does your institution have a clear path to connecting with this prospect?** Can include personal connection, board member intro, peer-to-peer ask, class reunion link, faculty connection.

## TIERED OUTREACH

**Tier 1: High ability + affinity + access = Immediate discovery meeting**

Tier 2: High ability, limited giving history = Qualification + relationship mapping

Tier 3: High affinity, unknown capacity = Wealth screening and cultivation

## Stability + Capacity = An Opportunity for Action

### Screen for Capacity

Run wealth screenings on alumni in their 30s and 40s as earning power peaks. Flag high-capacity individuals to match outreach intensity to giving potential.

### Sync Advancement and Enrollment

Establish a regular data share between advancement and enrollment teams. When an alumnus enrolls a child, both teams should know.

### Build Your Major Gifts Pipeline

Combine capacity data with engagement signals like event attendance, volunteer history, and parent status to identify the strongest mid-level and major gift prospects at this life stage.

### Activate the Parent Re-Entry

Flag every incoming parent who is also an alumnus and create a dedicated welcome-back touchpoint at enrollment.



# A Letter from the President Changed Everything: The St. John's Story

## THE APPROACH

1. **Research** disengaged, successful alumni via public databases and Google
2. **Send** a personal letter from the president: congratulate on success, invite back to campus
3. **Conduct** a personal interview with a Gift Officer
4. **Share** a photo/article, publish an alumni profile, promote across the school community
5. **Capture** updated data, relationships, and giving indicators in CRM

## THE RESULTS

75%

response rate to presidential letters

*"How was St. John's instrumental  
in your life?"*

# Reunions as a Strategy, Not Only an Event

## 01 PRE-EVENT

- Data updates & contact verification
- Personalized outreach to key alumni
- Early registration and engagement
- Leveraging personal relationships and class networks
- Recruit class committees
- Thoughtful gift ask with reunion context

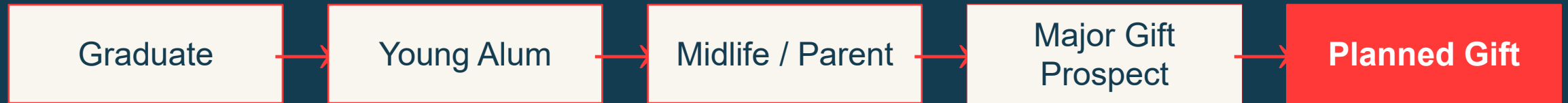
## 02 ON-SITE

- Campus tours showcasing new facilities
- Student panels and mission moments
- Legacy recognition for long-time donors
- Meaningful touchpoints beyond dinner, including school leadership
- Updates on the state of the school and future vision

## 03 FOLLOW-UP

- Personal thank-you within 48 hours
- 5-year connection plan initiated
- CRM update with new data captured
- Follow up gift ask as applicable

# Alumni → Parents → Grandparents → Legacy Donors: The Full Circle



- **Sustain engagement at every life stage** – Maintain a steady drumbeat of activity tailored to each phase of the alumni journey so your institution stays top-of-mind and its impact on their family remains tangible.
- **Tailor your ask to each donor's chapter** – Map giving and engagement opportunities to where each alumnus sits in their personal lifecycle with the school and customize outreach to deepen long-term connections.
- **Introduce planned giving conversations early** – Plant the seed for legacy commitments well before donors reach retirement, building familiarity and comfort with the idea over time.

# Data Is the Foundation

36%

of nonprofits struggle with using data for decision making

## CRM Foundation

- Regular data updates and hygiene audits
- Clean and properly link household records
- Capture full-picture engagement tracking, not just giving
- Standardize fields to enable reliable reporting

## Segmentation

- By life phase: recent grad, young alum, midlife, legacy
- By engagement level and giving behavior
- By affinity and location

***Even simple segmentation can dramatically improve results***

## Engagement Tracking

- Event attendance and campus visits
- Email open rates and click-throughs
- Volunteer activity and committee involvement
- Family connections to the school, including children/grandchildren ages

## DISCUSSION

*Where are your largest data gaps?  
What strategies have been helpful to close these gaps?*

## What Success Looks Like

**01**

### **Increase Contactable Alumni**

Grow the percentage of your alumni base with current, verified contact information.

**02**

### **Higher Participation Rates**

Alumni attending events, volunteering, and engaging with your institution beyond giving.

**03**

### **Consistent Giving**

Convert one-time donors to recurring and/or annual givers.

**04**

### **Strong Reunion Engagement**

Focused, year-round strategy to engage alumni beyond the annual events.

*Focus on relationships, not just dollars  
Find opportunities to invite the habit of giving into every engagement touchpoint*

### **DISCUSSION**

*Do you have a dedicated alumni engagement role on your team?  
Does that person carry a fundraising portfolio?*

## Let's Learn from Each Other

- 1** Where is your biggest alumni gap?  
(Data? Contact info? Engagement? Giving?)

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- 2** Which lifecycle stage needs the most attention at your school right now?

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- 3** What is your biggest alumni engagement pride point?

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- 4** What is one action you can commit to for the year ahead to enhance your alumni engagement efforts?

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## Four Principles to Take Home

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- 1** Start with data
- 2** Segment by lifecycle
- 3** Build belonging and connection
- 4** Think long-term

# Thank You

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## 2026 Philanthropy Pulse Report



## Donor Acquisition and Retention Strategies for 2026

