

What can be done to Improve or Encourage Donations from HBCUs' Alumni?

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Abstract

As a second-generation Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) graduate, I feel that attending an HBCU is one of the best experiences an individual can have. HBCUs will continue to evolve with diverse faculty, student population, and staff and professors dedicated to facilitating learning among all students. However, higher education institutions face several challenges. In this article, I have identified fundraising issues in higher education and provided ways for administrators, educators, students, and others to motivate HBCU alumni to contribute to their alma mater.

Keywords: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Higher Education, Fundraising.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) play a pivotal role in American society. An HBCU is federally designated as any college or university established before 1964 that has the principal mission of educating Black Americans (White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, n.d.). These institutions represent about three percent of two-year and four-year public and private nonprofit institutions that participate in federal student financial aid programs, but award 17 percent of all bachelor's degrees earned by Black students. Furthermore, HBCUs have awarded approximately a quarter (24 percent) of the bachelor's degrees earned by Black students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) since the early 2000s (Williams & Davis, 2019; Williams & Preston, 2017).

Higher education institutions always face challenges such as fiscal issues, declining enrollment, and cohort default rates. However, the Gallup-USA Funds Minority College Graduate Report found that HBCU graduates are more likely to prosper after graduation compared to graduates from non-HBCUs (Finley, 2015).

Due to the decline in federal and state resources available to colleges and universities, and the resulting institutional budget cuts, both private and public institutions have had to seek other means of financial support. One of the most highly targeted

populations for such solicitation is alumni. College and university fundraising administrators often look to their graduates as a major source of revenue (Harris-Vasser, 2003).

HBCU alumni annually donate millions of dollars to support increasing opportunities for students. We must not expect HBCU alumni to contribute to other colleges or universities. However, there are many reasons why alumni do not contribute to their alma mater. Everyone has different college experiences, relationships, and memories attached to their graduate years. Therefore, deciding to contribute may not be an easy decision in certain situations.

According to a study by Cygnus Applied Research, many college alumni do not donate to their alma mater because they think other charitable causes are worthier or more in need. In fact, almost 47 percent of alumni who do not donate to their alma mater say that other nonprofits need their money more. Additionally, more than 39 percent say other causes are worthier, and 25 percent say their philanthropy is committed to other causes (more than one answer was allowed). About one in four alumni who do not donate said that nothing would change their mind about donating, whereas a similar number said they would be more likely to donate if they had made more money or if they could allocate where their donation goes. About one in five alumni who do not donate say their college received enough money from their "expensive

education.” Moreover, only eight percent said they would not consider donating until their student debt was paid off.

Interestingly, the survey found that student debt was not a factor in whether alumni donated. About 38 percent of alumni who made donations had student debt in contrast to 37 percent of alumni who did not donate. Only 12 percent said they did not have enough money to consider donating, and about eight percent said their college had not asked them for money. The survey was completed among more than 6,200 college graduates who give to charity but have not donated to their alma mater (Russell, 2016).

Other reasons for fundraising issues in higher education include (1) a lower number of graduates due to a decreased student population, (2) bad college experiences (3) non-qualified staffing, and (4) financial stability, since alumni do not have disposable income (Lawal, 2014).

There are several ways to ensure HBCU's bright future. They can focus on motivating alumni to contribute by doing the following:

- Engaging with the media to highlight fundraising and public relations campaigns.
- Providing news stories highlighting students, staff, faculty, and alumni successes.
- Building a robust relationship with alumni donors through social media sites and special events.
- Forming partnerships with organizations, businesses, corporations, existing staff, board members, and trustees.
- Teaching students about philanthropy and how to give back to their institutions through service projects and orientations.

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