

## Alumni engagement - Getting the best from volunteers



### Insights from the AROPS Videomeet: 29 October 2020

- The definition of a Volunteer is one who freely and generously gives of their time and experience.
- They have a reason for giving their time, e.g. love of the school, to enhance their CV, a purpose in their 'third life', to gain invites to events such as speech days. Sometimes they have a specific agenda, e.g. to market their business or gain access to the school management team. Most want to make a difference. We need to understand what drives a volunteer.
- Younger people mostly just don't have the time and it's a challenge to get them involved.
- Almost the worst thing you can do is to ask for volunteers – and then not use them. At least explain why you can't use them and keep them up to date. But also do not overload them or inadequately support what you are asking them to do.
- Associations are the lifeblood of volunteers. It's advantageous to bring in new people and ideas from time to time.
- They are free! So do thank them often. Give (invitations and attention) to volunteers before you ask something of them. Communicate in the way that works for them.
- Friendraising is an essential precursor to fundraising and there need to be clear boundaries so that volunteers (and alums) have no doubts about motives. (But volunteers can become substantial donors). Good relationships need a good long time to mature. Get to know your volunteers!
- Raise awareness of your alums among current pupils, e.g. by appointing some Y12/13 reps to liaise with the society or hiring students to do part of a gap year in the alumni office.
- A voluntary Association is a good 'brand' for the front end of friendraising.
- Maintaining a corporate memory (a.k.a. digital archive) can make alums feel remembered and cared about.
- Invite alums to take volunteer roles, e.g. to contact and support older alums during lockdown and calling alums on their birthdays ('telethon' or 'affinity calls').
- Retired staff can also be excellent volunteers, e.g. board members or Vice Presidents.
- Invite volunteers to help get special occasions together, e.g. 5, 50 and 60 year reunions.
- Clubs, interest groups and special interest events within the alumni society can create lots of roles for volunteers and be a great way of attracting alums. Collect members among school leavers.
- Volunteers can help to maintain a 'spider's web' of networking which is more far reaching than a 'star' model in which all comms come from the school. Year groups can be major strands in the web and mentoring also creates links.
- Fundraising can be put into a personal positive context – you benefitted from this sports facility; wouldn't you like those that come after you to benefit also?
- The pandemic has unexpectedly caused all kinds of pressures on young grads and others. Voluntary societies have an obligation to facilitate mentoring and support which has suddenly become much more needed.