



**2019-2020**  
**NEAT Grant Program Report**

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## **Project Purpose**

The K-State Alumni Association strives to continuously improve its membership experience and encourage all K-State alumni to join as a member of the Alumni Association after they graduate. One of the K-State Alumni Associations' core values is "excellence." It is described as "we strive to exceed expectations and be a leading Alumni Association among our peers." To carry out the core value of excellence and to remain No. 1 in the Big 12 for the percentage of graduates who are members, it is our responsibility to ask our alumni base as well as friends and family (non-graduates) who are members of the association, what they believe can be improved in our membership program.

The goal of this project was to gain insight into ways the K-State Alumni Association can improve its membership program, strengthen membership retention, and continue to grow the number of members. The information and data obtained from this project will be used to boost member satisfaction within the Alumni Association for three groups; nonmembers, members, and even more specifically, recent graduates.

## **Scope of the Project**

### ***Survey:***

For this project, surveys were created for three separate groups. The three groups consisted of current members of the Alumni Association, alumni of K-State who are not members of the Alumni Association, and recent graduates of K-State (one-year post-grad). While there were some overlapping questions, such as preferred ways the Alumni Association communicates with alumni, most questions were created to target each group individually.

Current members of the Alumni Association were targeted to discover what changes they would like to see regarding the membership program and its benefits. One question included in the survey asks members how satisfied they are with the K-State Alumni Association's efforts to keep them informed about association events. They are then asked to rate the Alumni Association's efforts from poor to excellent.

K-State alumni who are not members of the Alumni Association were targeted to understand why they discontinued their membership or have chosen not to join the Alumni Association. After asking the question if they have ever been a member of the K-State Alumni Association, if they answer yes they were then asked why they chose to discontinue their membership. They were given options to choose from including: benefits did not meet expectations, did not use enough member benefits, not financially feasible, busy in life and just forgot, and was not asked to renew.

Recent graduates of K-State were the most segmented and small group in this project and only included those alumni who graduated from K-State over a year ago, but less than 2 years post-grad. These alumni received a free year of membership with the K-State Alumni Association when they graduated but did not renew their membership after that year was up. The goal of targeting this group was to understand how recent graduates would like to be communicated with and how they engage with their alma mater, so we can then encourage them to continue to build a relationship with K-State after graduation. One question asked was what Alumni Association social media channels they follow. We also asked them why they let their membership lapse.

### ***Grad Expo:***

Grad Expo is one of the first ways the K-State Alumni Association reaches out to those soon-to-be K-State alumni. They are informed of the benefits they will receive during their free year as an Alumni Association member and the event also gives seniors a chance to come to the Alumni Center to interact and begin to start their relationship with the Alumni Association.

Grad Expo is branded as the “one-stop-shop” for all graduating seniors. Graduates can pick up their cap and gown, order graduation announcements, purchase a class ring, update their information with the career center as well as enter to win prizes from both the Alumni Association and athletics.

The total number of attendees over both days was 275 students. The vendors that were available for students to speak to were Church Hill Classics (diploma frame company), Balfour (class rings), K-State Athletics, the Career Center, the K-State Alumni Association, and the K-State Campus Store. There was a drawing for a football signed by Bill Snyder, a \$50 VISA gift card, a \$100 VISA gift card, and a diploma frame to help get seniors excited for graduation and enhance their first true experience with the Alumni Association.

While gathering research for the surveys, it was decided that the Grad Expo event would be included in this project to reflect the importance of building a relationship with seniors and an understanding of what soon to be recent graduates want in a relationship with their alma mater. Sophia, NEAT Grant Intern, was asked to execute both days of the Grad Expo. This also included being one of the main liaisons to communicate between the Alumni Association, vendors, and students who attended.

### ***Survey Postponement:***

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alumni Association chose to delay the release of all three surveys until this coming fall. The K-State Alumni Association is planning a tentative release date in early September. We felt it was important to send these surveys out at a time that everyone was truly in the right frame of mind with their thoughts on their membership experience. The third week in March when the surveys were supposed to launch was when schools started shutting down in Kansas for the rest of the year, sporting events were canceled, etc. With history being made during life changing events and health concerns for families, we felt our constituents would have other priorities on their mind. Sending the survey during this time wouldn't give us a true reflection of data to analyze or send a good message to alumni of our intention for the survey, so we made the decision to postpone.

### ***Marketing Plan for Recent graduates:***

With the survey being postponed, there was time to help develop a marketing plan to target K-State recent graduates. The goal of the marketing plan was to increase retention of recent graduates as members and work on building a relationship between K-State grads and their alma mater immediately after graduation. Keeping in mind that this plan will be tweaked once survey results come in, the marketing plan was laid out month by month for fiscal year 2020-21. Most tactics include social media promotions, social media shout outs, and giveaways. Traditional marketing including mailings and emails will also be used.

## **Project Timeline**

\*Original timeline was adjusted based on the staff change in Director of Membership and Marketing position and COVID-19.

- August:
  - Reached out to the College of Business Administration for possible student candidates
- September – October:
  - Identified and interviewed student candidates for this project
- October:
  - Hired student (Sophia Hanson) and began training and research on the overall mission and membership program at the K-State Alumni Association
- October - December:
  - Researched and developed the 3 membership surveys
- February:
  - Organized and planned the Grad Expo event for the Spring Class of 2020
- March-April:
  - Held Grad Expo event
  - Began all operations from home and survey was postponed due to COVID-19
    - Original survey launch was scheduled for the third week in March
  - Worked on NEAT Grant Report
  - Completed marketing plan for recent K-State graduates
- May:
  - Report completed by mid-May
  - Reviewed marketing plan for recent graduates
- September (future):
  - Survey will be sent out by K-State Alumni Association staff
  - Results will be analyzed and shared with committee

## **Methodology**

For this project, research was done using previous surveys released by the K-State Alumni Association, surveys created from other Big 12 universities, and from researching the Alumni Association. After looking through the K-State Alumni Association website, questions were developed about membership, the benefits of membership, and how alumni viewed their relationship with the K-State Alumni Association.

The three surveys were designed using Qualtrics. Qualtrics is also where the responses from the surveys will be stored with the ability to analyze and interpret the data. The data obtained from the member survey will be used to increase member retention and improve the overall membership experience. The data collected from the nonmember and recent graduates' surveys will be used to continue to build a relationship with our alumni and friends and use their feedback to enhance our membership program. We are excited to see what the survey results show to see the importance of membership and its benefits and to see if membership benefits need to be changed, improved, removed, etc. We plan to use not only the recent graduates' comments and survey results but also the marketing plan created, for the ultimate alumni and membership experience for recent graduates. The hope with this is that we continue to show our young alumni what we can do for them and how important it is to stay connected to their alma mater.

To get a reliable number of responses for each of the survey groups, research was done on each of the three targeted groups. Each group was segmented and the number of people in each group was recorded. Then, the average response rates for each group was recorded. This percentage was taken from surveys and data previously collected by the Alumni Association. The anticipated response rate was then applied to a statistics formula which helped estimate how many people in each group to send the survey to, and out of those people, how many of them would likely complete the survey.

At the time the sample size data was collected, there were roughly 30,000 members of the Alumni Association that fit into the first member group we could potentially send to. The association typically has a response rate of 18%. To have a reliable number of responses from the members in this group, it was decided the survey should be sent to at least 2,111 members to receive at least 380 survey responses. The team decided to round up on this and send to 2,500 members.

Nonmembers are a much larger number at 90,000. Nonmembers have a very low response rate of 5% so to have a reliable number of responses for this target market, the survey should be sent out to 7,660 people. If the survey is sent out to that many people, with that typical response rate, the survey should receive around 383 responses. This number may decrease with the timing of the survey, to avoid non-members unsubscribing from other email communications.

Recent graduates also follow this same pattern, however, there is less data surrounding their response rates. Therefore, the Alumni Association will send the survey to all recent graduates who are 2 years out who have lapsed.

There will also be 5 incentives given out of \$50 Amazon gift cards, to increase overall participation in the survey.

## **Project Budget**

**Project budget = \$5,000**

**Total project expenses = \$4,017.43**

- Student Worker - **\$2412**
  - 268 hours total worked
- Incentives for survey - **\$250**
- Grad Expo - **\$1,355.43**
  - Gift cards for student drawings (\$250)
  - Display ads/posters for event (\$333.50)
  - Food/beverage for students and vendors (\$471.93)
  - Event rental space (\$300)

## **Summary of Findings**

After the surveys are published, there will be a waiting period until enough people have responded and a reliable number of responses can be collected. After a reliable number of responses are collected, the responses will be analyzed and the data from the surveys will help the Alumni Association improve the membership program, improve Alumni Association event communication, and increase awareness for all of the benefits included with an Alumni Association membership. The current plan is to send the first survey out with a reminder email to increase responses.

## **Summary of Conclusions**

From the beginning of the program until now, there were a lot of unforeseeable events that altered the survey and the project. The project evolved very quickly in response to changes in staff, the current pandemic postponing the survey release date, and working remotely. However, the overall impact by creating the survey and creating a marketing plan for recent graduates will hopefully provide resources and feedback for the K-State Alumni Association to have a lasting impact with their alumni base.