



Case Study

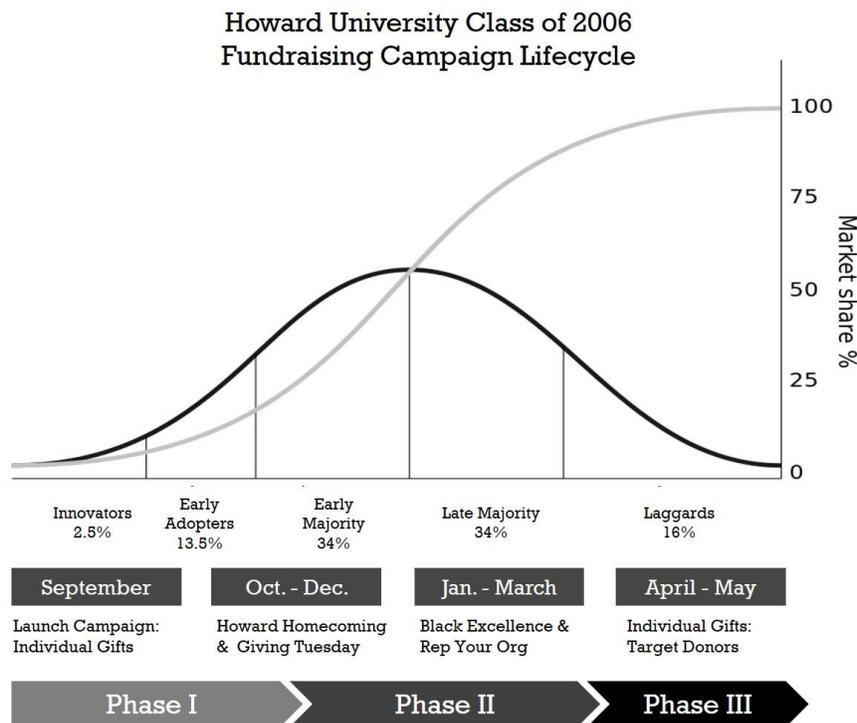
Situation

On May 7, 2016, the Howard University graduating class of 2006 celebrated its 10 Year Reunion. In the months leading up to the momentous occasion, the '06 Reunion Steering Committee united its classmates to contribute to its 10 Year Anniversary Gift. As a leader on the committee's fundraising team, Alison used her nonprofit development expertise to create and execute against a comprehensive campaign. The nine-month project would culminate in three days of reunion festivities during Howard's graduation weekend. Alison's combination of project management, grassroots fundraising and marketing strategy skills were assets to the team as it prepared for its decennial celebration.

Approach

The primary focus of the campaign was on individual gifts. The steering committee intended to solicit donations from the class of 2006, and hoped to secure corporate matching gifts from classmates' employers whenever possible. Though partnerships were not paramount to the success of the campaign, Alison knew that the committee's efforts still needed to be strategic, synergetic and social.

Accordingly, Alison drafted a 2015-2016 fundraising strategy modeled after the Diffusion of Innovations theory (also known as Roger's bell curve, or widely recognized as the Technology Adoption Lifecycle). In so doing, she pinpointed how, why, and at what rate the campaign would reach classmates and convert them into donors. She identified three phases, four desired outcomes and a series of fundraising and communications activities to tie the campaign together.





To convert classmates into donors, Alison worked with the steering committee to design a series of synergy-building cultivation events. Specifically, Alison understood that all of the team’s fundraising efforts needed to be coordinated in a way that produced a coherent, cohesive campaign. To kick off, the committee made targeted asks for donations during tent-pole occasions like Howard Homecoming, Giving Tuesday, and later, the weeks leading in to graduation weekend. The committee secured pledges, donations and registered a number of classmates to make recurring gifts to Howard for the subsequent twelve months. These efforts laid the foundation for the larger campaign.

The committee then featured prominent members of the class on all of its social media channels throughout Black History Month. The purpose of this mini-campaign, aptly titled “Black Excellence: Our History,” was to celebrate classmates’ achievements on the job and in the community. The committee fostered goodwill with the featured alumni, which subsequently helped to amplify awareness of the 10 Year Anniversary, as honorees promoted their featured posts to their respective networks.

Next, in an effort to capture the “late majority” of donors and also leverage newly created reunion evangelists, the fundraising team launched the “Rep Your Org Challenge”—a friendly competition among Howard organizations. The committee tapped into the class’s competitive spirit from undergraduate days by developing a race to see which organization could raise \$3,000 for Howard first. Various schools and colleges, sororities, fraternities, honor societies and even the school band rallied their internal members to donate to Howard. This grassroots approach fostered synergies between the class of 2006 and all Howard alumni by compelling all members of the competing organizations (regardless of each member’s graduation year) to help reach the fundraising goal.

After that, the committee began targeted outreach to affluent members of the class. The committee sought donations ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000 from select classmates as the campaign began to wind down. Serendipitously, around the same time, Howard (affectionately known as “The Mecca” by its alumni) announced that President Barack Obama would be the commencement speaker. At that point, the synergies at work were palatable. Donors explicitly expressed enthusiasm over the news, and made generous donations to Howard accordingly.

Finally, the committee used ticket sales and t-shirt sales for graduation weekend festivities as a vehicle for raising additional funds from the class. Various committee members planned regional happy hours as well, to gather classmates, raise money and generate excitement for the upcoming reunion. The social nature of the happy hours and upcoming three-day reunion, coupled with ongoing conversations via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, created a euphoric experience for all who participated.



Results

By May 2016, the Class of 2006 Reunion Steering Committee proudly presented a class gift of \$51,000 to its alma mater. This gift, however, did not include revenues from the committee’s ticket and t-shirt sales. Further, the committee intends to host one more fundraiser before the year’s end. Accordingly, by fall 2016, after just twelve months of campaigning, the steering committee will have raised approximately \$75,000 for Howard University. (Go Bison!)