

5 Ways to Engage Young Alumni





Meet Gen Z

Until recently, there's been surprisingly little research on the philanthropic values of Generation Z (Gen Z). For the record, that's anyone born from 1997 onward (Pew Research 2019). The lack of giving data is especially surprising because this particular cohort is so deeply passionate and vocal about the issues they support.

According to a recent "Trust" survey conducted by the Edelman research firm, 70 percent of Gen Zers are actively involved in a cause. They're also the generation most likely to boycott a product, business, or institution based on a political, social, or environmental stance (Edelman 2021).

As so-called "digital natives," Gen Zers have grown up under the ubiquitous influence of social media, many sporting a mobile device as soon as their tiny toddler hands could physically grasp a tablet or smartphone. As a result, they're the most tech-savvy of generations and wield formidable power in the digital spaces they call home. They're also uniquely capable of mobilizing and rallying support for the issues they care about in a way that no other generation before them has—with many engaging in global activism from their early teen years on.

These passionate—and it turns out deeply philanthropic—individuals comprise your institution's young alumni cohort. But some don't see their alma mater as a worthy cause. Why is that? And what can you do to win them over?



Earn their trust and support

A new study on Gen Z attitudes toward charitable giving sheds light on the influences and characteristics of this sizable cohort and provides a path forward for nonprofits looking to engage them (Konstantinou, Jones 2022). In this guide, we'll explore what you as an educational fundraiser can do to earn the trust and support of this powerful and passionate constituency.



In the pages that follow, we'll detail five steps you can start taking now to better tailor your fundraising communications to this key donor segment:

1. Meet them where they are—on mobile
2. Be honest and authentic
3. Make giving fun and inclusive
4. Give them agency and autonomy
5. Frame education as a worthy cause

Understanding how to break through the noise and build meaningful relationships with these constituents is imperative to the future of educational fundraising. Let's get into it.





1. Meet them where they are—on mobile

Gen Zers are the first generation to have never known a time without digital connectivity via the Internet. For them, smartphones are akin to a fifth appendage and if you want to have a meaningful exchange with them, you'll need to meet them where they are—on mobile.

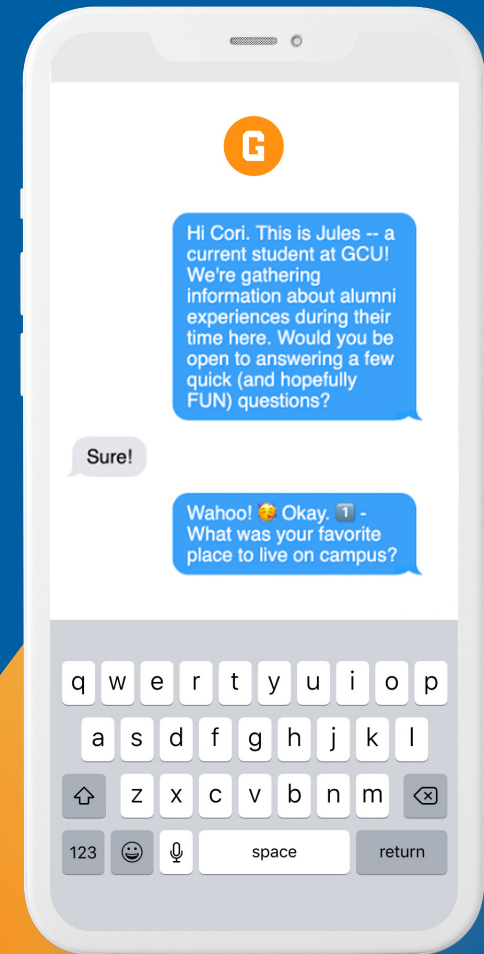
They prefer texting to calling and would rather open an app than an envelope (or their front door)—so tailor your outreach accordingly.

Use their preferred communication channels

If your school hasn't embraced short message service (SMS) marketing yet, now is the time. Text messages check all the boxes for effective outreach: they're easy to personalize, segment, and scale—and surprisingly cost-effective too.

Plus, the open and read rates blow every other channel out of the water. This is especially true for students and young alumni for whom texting is their preferred communication channel.

Not only do texts have a 99 percent open rate, but 95 percent of texts are read within three minutes of being sent. If you have a message you want delivered—and read—at a specific time, there's really no better channel than texting.



You don't always have to ask for money. Start by building relationships.





Make it easy to give

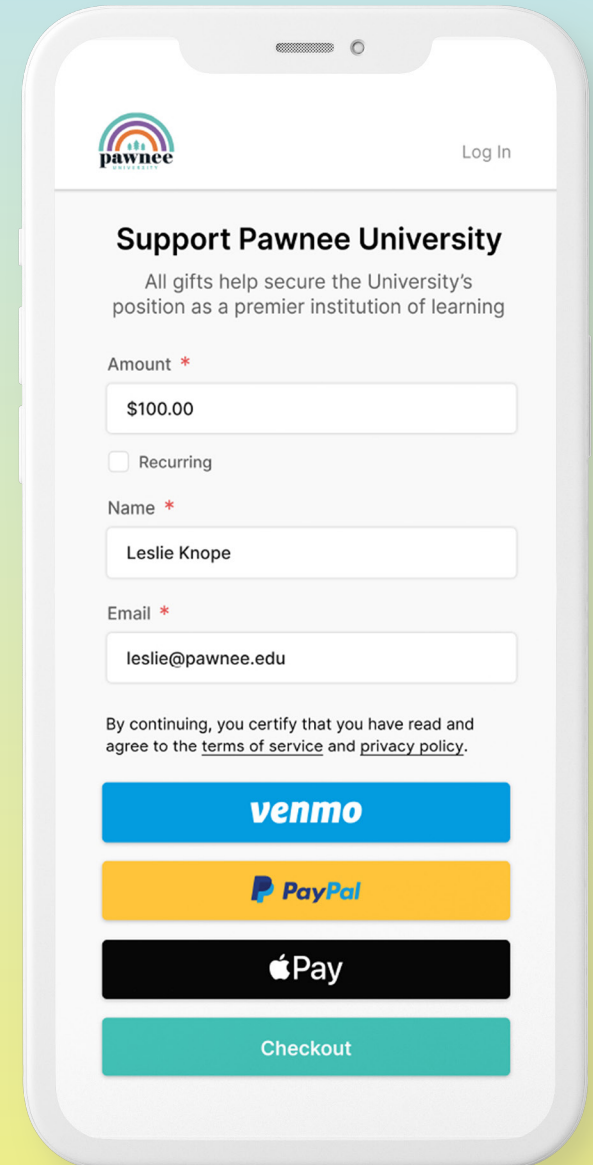
Never underestimate the importance of a fast and frictionless checkout experience. Participants in the study specifically called out ease of giving as a determining factor in whether or not they make a donation. In short, if Gen Zers can make a gift quickly from their phone and it's a cause that they believe in, "there's no excuse not to do it" (Konstantinou, Jones 2022).

Mind the thumb zone

Make sure your giving form has been optimized for mobile. You don't want to lose young alums due to a poor checkout experience.

At GiveCampus, we actually take optimization a step further and employ a mobile-first design. That means our forms are specifically optimized for engagement on a smartphone or handheld device and then adapted for the desktop. So things like the size and placement of fields and buttons have been expressly designed and rigorously tested to ensure they are easy to access.

We also make sure that content is tappable within the thumb zone (the area that your thumbs can reach) and that features like Google auto-complete, mobile wallets, and more are baked right into the form so donors can quickly make their gift and move on.





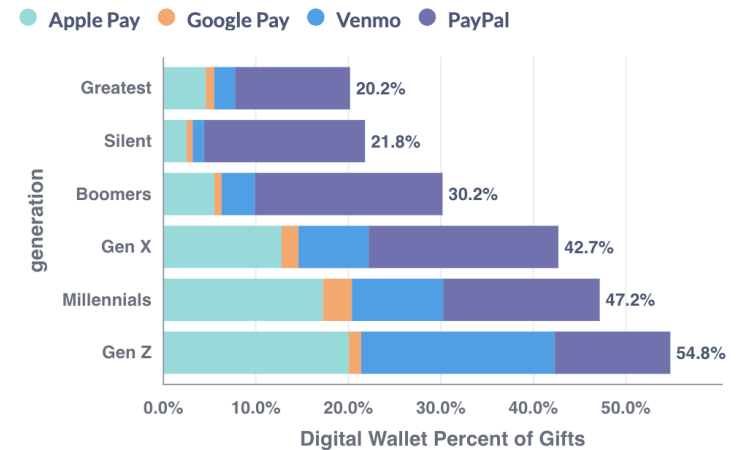
Accept more ways to pay

Digital wallets are increasingly popular across all demographics. In fact, the vast majority of GiveCampus partner schools—more than 72 percent—currently accept mobile wallets. And those that do, see higher conversion rates (+2.36 percentage points). Plus younger donors—specifically students—are 3.6x more likely to make a gift via Venmo than other wallet options.

Younger donors prefer digital. An incredible 91.6 percent of the donations received in support of the Davidson College 2022 Senior Senior Class Gift campaign were made using a digital wallet—62 percent paid with Venmo.



Digital Wallet Usage by Generation: 2022





Embrace the subscription economy

Gen Zers are accustomed to paying for subscription services like Netflix, Spotify, and StitchFix. Consider positioning a gift to your school as a recurring subscription that makes a big impact.

A smaller monthly gift may feel more manageable than a larger one-time gift—especially for young alums on a budget. Also, if possible, work with your major gifts office to lock down a strong matching challenge from a trusted source. The ability to make their gift go further is likely to resonate with this cause-driven and community-minded cohort.

A lower initial ask often results in a longer lifetime gift.



The screenshot displays a donation interface with two main columns: "One-Time" and "Recurring".

One-Time	Recurring
\$5 per month	\$10 per month
\$50 per year	\$100 per year

Amount *

5

Support our students year round with a monthly or yearly gift.
This gift will recur indefinitely on a monthly basis

Campus Cause *

Make your selection(s):

Select a campus cause or initiative to support ^

- Access to Education (+)
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Programming (+)
- Student Health and Wellness (+)
- Your Choice (Other) (+)



2. Be honest and authentic

When Gen Zers were asked how they found out about causes to support, the majority cited social media as their main source and influence. Their feeds are flooded with links to charities and crowdfunding campaigns—and they often look to their peer networks for guidance on which are the most trustworthy.

Authenticity is everything with this generational cohort. They've grown up online and been marketed to their whole lives. And while they don't mind being targeted with ads, they insist on authenticity. If your message is vague, irrelevant, or simply doesn't ring true they'll just keep scrolling. With this in mind, here are some tips for keeping it real.

Save the institutional voice for an older demographic

This cohort is more likely to support a cause than an institution, a person over a generic fund—so lose the institutional voice.

The About section of this Giving Tuesday social fundraising campaign is a great example of how to frame an institutional ask in a way that puts the cause first.



Miss Porter's School focused their campaign on empowering female leaders rather than funding their institution. The appeal is about equipping young girls with the skills to "shape a changing world."



Be clear about impact

Another key finding from the study of Gen Z charitable behaviors, suggests that transparency around how donations are used is especially important to this demographic (Konstantinou, Jones 2022). Young alums want to know they're making a difference.

Tell them exactly where their donated dollars go and who benefits. And don't be afraid to put your school's mission front and center. Quality education is expensive and being explicit about what a dollar buys can go a long way toward winning support and earning trust.

Finally, be sure to follow up on any donations (be they time, talent, or treasure) with a clear accounting of the impact of that gift. Younger donors are community-minded and want confirmation that their support is part of something bigger.





how your CHANGE makes CHANGE

Does a \$5 donation really make that much of an impact on our campuses? The answer is a resounding **YES**. Gifts of all sizes matter and you can have an even greater impact with monthly giving.

It may seem like small change, but when young alumni come together, \$5 or \$10 monthly donations add up to thousands of dollars over time.

Those dollars allow SYA to provide the experience we know and love. Support of the SYA Fund is essential to providing the exceptional experience to today's students that our school is known for.

Your monthly donation has a direct impact on all aspects of the education you experienced firsthand:

-  Innovative curriculum in and out of the classroom
-  Immersive fieldwork opportunities
-  Caring host families
-  Engaging teachers

This School Year Abroad campaign page highlights the impact of small monthly gifts.





Lean in to peer-to-peer fundraising

Word of mouth is a key driver for Gen Zers and the testimony of a trusted peer is by far the most persuasive call to action. This is true across most demographics, but more so with Gen Zers who said that a recommendation from a friend online was more valuable than a recommendation from an influencer (Konstantinou, Jones 2022).

Online social fundraising platforms like GiveCampus make it easy for friends to invite friends to give with built-in advocacy tools, matches and challenges, incentives, and more.

Union College's recent #ADAY4U campaign is a master class in this kind of peer-to-peer fundraising. A whopping 61.1 percent of the gifts made and 43.7 percent of dollars raised came directly from online advocacy.



Union College Track and Field and Cross Country

🚩 generated 580 clicks and 100 gifts, totaling \$3,559



Union College Field Hockey

🚩 generated 190 clicks and 47 gifts, totaling \$2,929



Union College Swimming and Diving

🚩 generated 272 clicks and 34 gifts, totaling \$2,635

Union College's campaign page displayed the number of clicks, gifts, and dollars raised by each advocate in real time to help to drive engagement.





3. Make giving fun and inclusive

Numerous studies have reported on the enormous appeal of gaming for this generational cohort, so it should come as no surprise that a gamified online giving experience would resonate with young alums.

Because Gen Zers have always had the Internet at their fingertips they've come to expect instant access to information. **They like real-time data and instant feedback, and they value recognition and rewards for their efforts.** They're also competitive by nature and enjoy the social and community aspects of gaming. These are all features of a well-crafted online social fundraising experience.

Crowdfunding is inherently competitive—especially when you layer on visuals and components that emphasize the impact individuals are making in real time. Leaderboards, heat maps, and incentives all give donors one more reason to make a gift—and get recognition for their contribution.

When you make a fundraising campaign engaging by design, you give young alumni more reasons to participate and feel the impact of their gift—especially when you're highlighting a participation goal over a dollar goal. It's part of the reason why Athletics fundraisers are so popular and effective, but the same principle applies when you're fundraising to support any aspect of your educational community.

Support Your Sport - Alumni Athletics Giving
Athletic Teams are competing for prizes and bragging rights! We're tracking the top teams with the highest ATHLETICS ALUMNI (former student-athlete) participation to see who takes home the trophy! Go, Foresters!

Quick Search

Show 10 entries

Teams	Donors	Raised (\$)	%
Cross Country & Distance Track	3	\$260	0.9%
Football	61	\$8,084	4.5%
Golf-Men	12	\$1,368	17.4%
Golf-Women	5	\$250	20.8%
Handball	3	\$250	1.1%
Hockey-Men	21	\$2,390	3.2%
Hockey-Women	5	\$525	3.2%
Lacrosse-Men	5	\$495	1.6%
Lacrosse-Women	4	\$300	1.5%
Soccer-Men	10	\$605	1.7%

Showing 1 to 10 of 16 entries

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This is just one of five different leaderboards that appear on the **Lake Forest College** annual spring giving day page. Spoiler alert: They crushed their participation goals.



4. Give them agency and autonomy

There are many ways to make a difference, and when you give Gen Zers agency and options you increase the likelihood of participation.

Ask if they would like to record a personal plea video, volunteer as a mentor or connector for Career Services, or just send your campaign link along to a friend.

According to the Gen Z charitable behavior study, this cohort considers “giving additional exposure from personal networks via likes and shares” a form of donation (Konstantinou, Jones 2022). The Edlemen study confirms this finding noting that 66 percent of Gen Zers believe that social “sharing is a form of activism” (Edelman 2021).

That’s especially good news for fundraisers because **alumni are 44 percent more likely to make a gift if someone they know invites them.**

66% of Gen Zers

believe social sharing is a form of activism



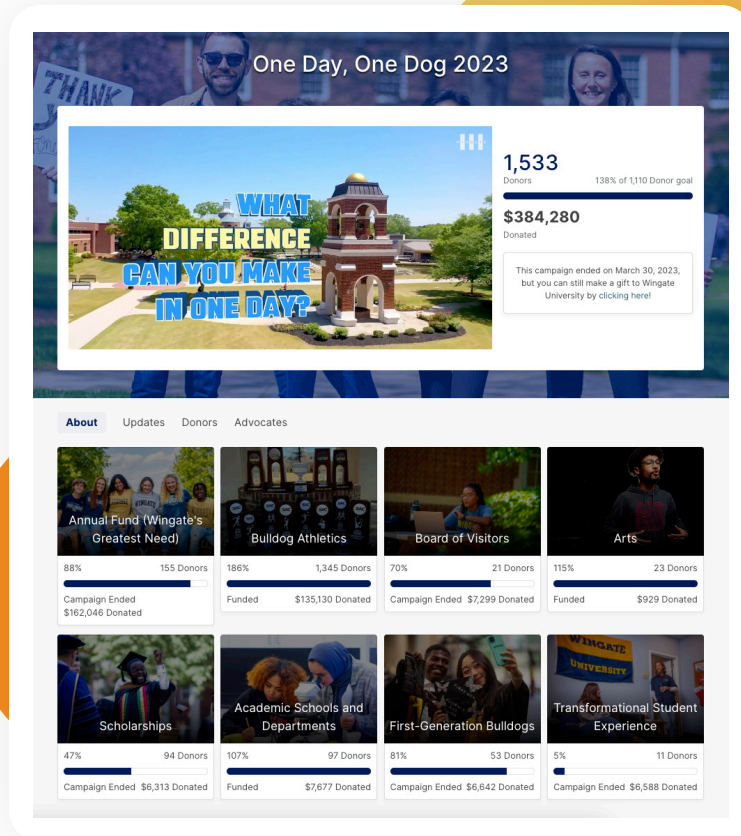
Let them support the causes they care about

Gen Zers want to feel personally connected to the causes they support. Being able to control their impact and direct their giving is key.

Many GiveCampus partners use designations or tiered campaigns to give donors a clear way to make a gift that reflects their priorities as a donor.

Tiered campaigns are especially impactful because they allow you to tailor your fundraising content and the overall giving experience to specific donor segments and interests.

If you're unfamiliar with tiered campaigns, here's how they work: You have a single umbrella campaign that's branded as a community-wide initiative, and then multiple secondary campaigns underneath that are tailored to appeal to donors who are from a particular affiliation or are excited about supporting a specific area of interest. GiveCampus is the only fundraising platform that makes it possible to run affiliation-based tiered appeals within an overarching campaign.



A tiered campaign, like this one launched by **Wingate University**, appeals to donor giving preferences and identities while simultaneously celebrating community-wide participation through aggregated totals.

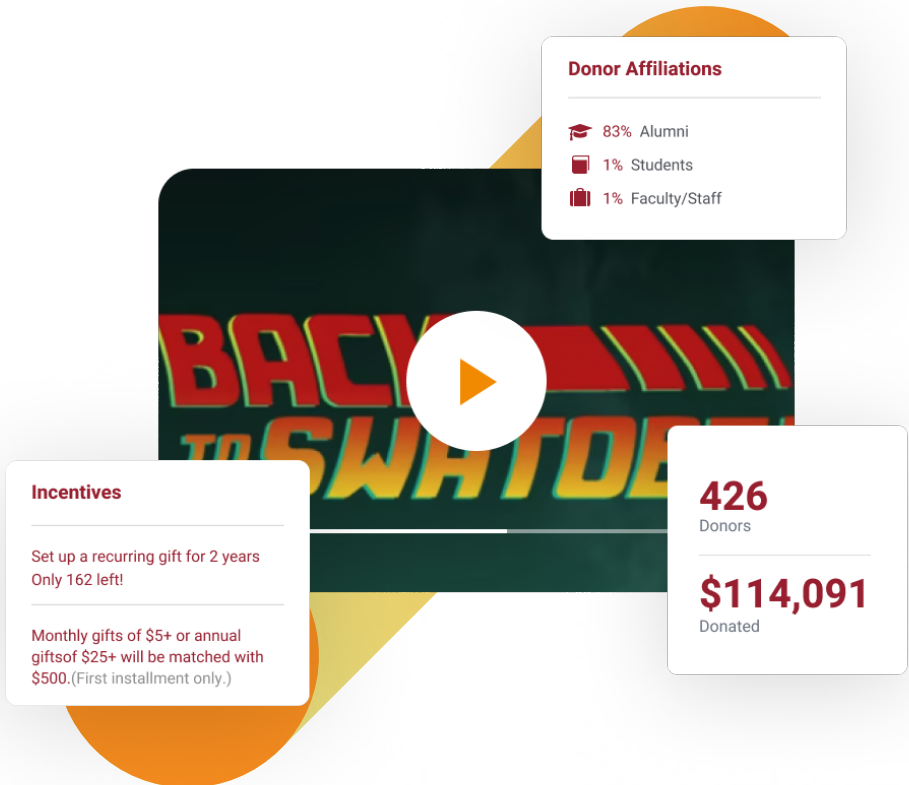


Invite them to the table

The best way to know if your campaign messaging will appeal to young alums is to ask them. When Swarthmore College began crafting their wildly successful “Back To Swatober” Young Alumni campaign they went straight to the source for confirmation that what they had in mind made sense and would resonate with their younger target audience. They reached out to their Young Alumni Ambassador volunteers, asking them for feedback on the theme, incentive, and messaging. Inviting them to the table not only helped staff gut check the campaign, it also helped secure buy-in from some powerful peer advocates.

Young alum response was unprecedented: 107 new recurring gifts were established by young alums during the campaign, accounting for 25 percent of the total Swatober gifts.

The Swarthmore College **Back to Swatober Young Alumni campaign** featured recurring gift messaging across all channels—email, text, and social media.





Make advocacy easy

Young alumni can be some of your best volunteers and advocates, especially in the lead-up to a big campaign or giving day. Many GiveCampus partner schools find that creating an **Advocate Toolkit** containing customizable social media posts, graphics, hashtags, and other resources makes it easier to mobilize their young volunteers.

Try conducting a 15-minute training session over a video chat with one clear ask—"post this to social at noon on our Giving Day"—to make it easy for young advocates to say yes.

Especially for young alumni who can't take chunks out of their work day to commit to larger projects, quick calls or discrete tasks they can fit in at lunch or in between other meetings can feel much more manageable.

Frostburg State University posts their Social Media Toolkit front and center on their **Giving Day social fundraising page**.





5. Frame education as a worthy cause

We made the case earlier that the social feeds of Gen Zers are flooded with links to charities and crowdfunding campaigns. As an educational fundraiser, you have your work cut out for you. You have to capture their attention and get them to care.

Unfortunately, our educational institutions are so long standing that they're often taken for granted. And as we've established, it's not the institutions that really drive giving, it's the impact of education.

To recapture hearts and minds, schools need to reframe education as a worthy cause—because it is. It's important to the future of our communities and our world—and you shouldn't be timid about positioning education as a critical piece of creating a better future.

The good news is that **Pew Research** says Gen Z is actually “on track to be the best-educated generation yet.” They're more likely to be enrolled in college and to have a college-educated parent than Millennials and Gen Xers at a comparable age (Pew Research 2020). Clearly this generation—and their parents—see the value of education. **Remind them every chance you get.**

Nelson Mandela famously said that. “Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world.” Investing in education and ensuring that every child has access is among the worthiest of causes and one that schools should lead with in their fundraising outreach—especially to young alums.

Nelson Mandela

“Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world.”



Put a human face on your appeal

One of the most effective and meaningful ways to demonstrate impact is through video—and it's a channel that's especially popular with young alumni. In fact, YouTube is this generation's most trusted social media platform (Edelman 2021).

Online fundraising solutions like GiveCampus make it easy for you to put video stewardship in the hands of students and other beneficiaries of your donors' generosity. It literally puts a face on your mission and makes the value of an individual's gift more tangible.

Featuring one scholarship student talking directly about the impact the school made on them or one professor sharing their plans to expand research opportunities can serve as a powerful testimonial about the importance of your Annual Fund and/or specific funds.

Video is an especially effective way to connect with this segment. With GiveCampus, you can easily embed livestream feeds or upload pre-recorded video content to your social fundraising campaign pages.





Summary

Young alumni represent the future philanthropic base for educational institutions—and cultivating their support early on can establish a pattern of giving that results in lifelong advocacy and support. Making the effort now to tailor your fundraising content and outreach to these passionate changemakers is more than just a winning strategy, it's an existential imperative.

Gen Z is the youngest, most ethnically-diverse, and largest generation in American history, comprising 27 percent of the US population (Pew Research 2020). Understanding how to break through the noise and build meaningful relationships with these constituents involves creativity and thoughtfulness.

At GiveCampus, we believe in best practices, and we also believe in finding what works best for your school and your donors. That's why our Partner Success program pairs each school that uses our platform with a dedicated Partner Success lead and fundraising expert who helps you strategize along the way. The content in this eBook is the brainchild of these same fundraising experts.

To find out how GiveCampus can help your school earn the trust and support of this powerful and passionate constituency, **schedule an intro call.**

Making the effort now to tailor your fundraising content and outreach to these passionate changemakers is more than just a winning strategy, it's an existential imperative.



Endnotes

Edelman (2022). Trust Barometer Special Report: The New Cascade of Influence. Retrieved from <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2022-trust-barometer/special-report-new-cascade-of-influence>

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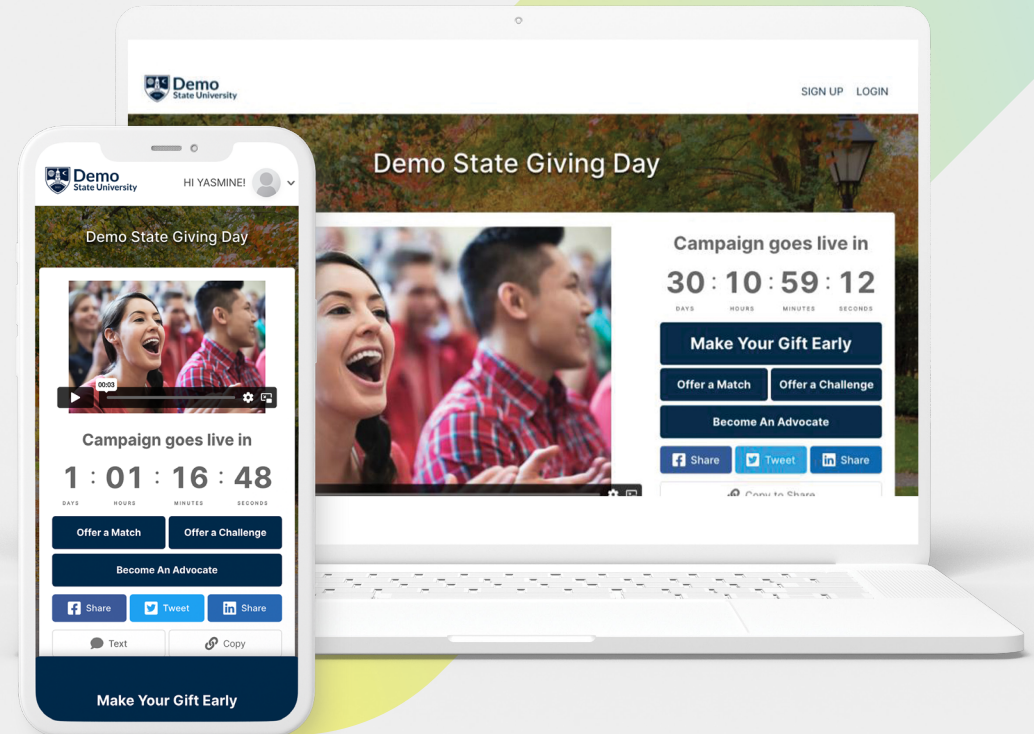
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About GiveCampus

GiveCampus is the world's leading digital fundraising platform for education. Trusted by more than 1,200 colleges, universities, K-12 schools, and millions of donors, our mission is to advance the quality, the affordability, and the accessibility of education. We provide software, services, and expertise that help schools raise more money, from more people, at a fraction of the cost of other fundraising methods.

To see GiveCampus in action, please visit: info.givecampus.com/schedule



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