THE RUTGERS UNIVERSITY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION STRATEGIC PLAN

STRENGTHENING RUTGERS BY REAFFIRMING VALUES, IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES, AND IMPLEMENTING NEW STRATEGIES
Dear members of the Rutgers alumni community,

A great university acknowledges the importance of its alumni and does everything possible to keep them engaged, connected, and filled with pride. For that very reason, the Rutgers University Alumni Association (RUAA) formed 10 years ago, enhancing and unifying the alumni experience that is woven into the fabric of this historic institution.

Over the past decade we have accomplished a great deal. We have empowered chartered organizations to engage more alumni than ever; we have created partnerships to establish alumni career services; and we have helped strengthen Rutgers’ culture of philanthropy through a student group, the Scarlet Council. But there is much more to do. To address the ongoing needs of Rutgers alumni—who now number more than 500,000 worldwide—we must set our sights on transformative strategic goals.

This strategic plan is designed to complement those of the university and Rutgers University Foundation. It embraces national best practices adapted to our community and focuses on increasing alumni engagement, adding value to the alumni experience, and aligning our priorities across the organization. At its core is a deep commitment to all Rutgers alumni, and to upholding the role they play in keeping Rutgers strong.

Scarlet Forever,

Joseph H. Lemkin RC’90
Chair, RUAA Board of Directors

Donna K. Thornton
Vice President for Alumni Relations, Annual Giving, and Communications
A NEW CHAPTER

In 2017, Rutgers University Foundation adopted a new strategic plan, designed to cultivate best practices that inspire greater philanthropic support and foster enduring connections with Rutgers alumni and friends.

The RUAA Board of Directors met to assess the need for a new alumni association plan that would align with the foundation’s latest roadmap. The board tasked the RUAA staff with identifying current trends in alumni relations and laying out the future priorities of the RUAA.

As part of this process, RUAA staff members met with alumni, university partners, foundation staff, and academic leadership. The conversations were insightful and provided direction on how the RUAA can add value to the alumni experience and further advance Rutgers causes.

The process culminated in this strategic plan, highlighting five major priorities to accomplish over three years.

OUR PROCESS

Our strategic planning effort focused on addressing how we can position the RUAA for the future. We asked key questions of each stakeholder group:

» What is our fundamental purpose?
» Who are our alumni and what are their interests, expectations, and needs?
» How can we better support our foundation and university partners?
» How can we further engage more than 500,000 alumni by adopting industry best practices?

OUR ASPIRATIONS

Tasked with engaging all alumni, the RUAA is vital to the success of Rutgers University Foundation’s efforts to create a culture of philanthropy. The association is uniquely positioned to help develop a pipeline of future donors while inspiring lifelong pride in, engagement with, and support for Rutgers.

FOUNDATION AND ALUMNI RELATIONS CORE PURPOSE

We promote philanthropic support and enduring connections with alumni and friends, enabling Rutgers to transform lives.

RUAA VISION

To inspire a sense of lifelong pride in the university, the RUAA empowers Rutgers alumni to engage with and support their alma mater.

RUAA MISSION

To strengthen Rutgers, the alumni association builds community and fosters scarlet pride through the meaningful engagement of all current and future alumni.

RUAA VALUES

Our values guide our perspective and our actions, as described on the following page.
Our plan identifies five strategic priorities, which focus our efforts on engaging alumni and advancing Rutgers. Building on the realized efforts of the 2014 RUAA Strategic Plan, these priorities allow us to set specific goals: adding value to the alumni experience and aligning our efforts with university partners and colleagues in Rutgers University Foundation.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1:**
Meaningfully engage and communicate with current and future alumni based on their needs, interests, and life stages

**HISTORY**
In the past, all of our alumni received all of our communications. Alumni were sent a one-size-fits-all version of our monthly enewsletter, and we planned our events to be large and to appeal to the majority of alumni at each university location. We cast a wide net, hoping to interest some participants in opportunities for engagement. These efforts left room for growth and improvement—opportunities that have become easier to seize in recent years as communications resources and tools have evolved.

**WHY IT MATTERS**
It is critical that we engage and communicate with our alumni based on their needs, interests, and life stages. Doing so will help imbue our outreach efforts with personal meaning and resonance, inspiring further engagement and action among our alumni and dissuading them from turning elsewhere to donate their time, skills, and financial resources.
1

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1

TACTICS

» Assess current alumni data
» In cooperation with the Office of Foundation and Alumni Communications, audit current alumni communications and develop communications plan
» Define life-stage segmentation best practices
» Diversify engagement efforts based on alumni needs, interests, and life stages
» To test new communications, engagement, and solicitation strategies, create an integrated pilot program focused on a group of millennial alumni

ONCE WE’VE ACCOMPLISHED IT

Alumni will receive more relevant versions of RUAA communications, tailored specifically to their needs. A wide variety of events will appeal to a spectrum of alumni interests and life stages. Individual graduates will be more likely to experience a personal connection with the RUAA and will develop and deepen their bonds with Rutgers.

2

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2:
Enhance the academic reputation of Rutgers through intentional, purpose-driven partnerships and engagement with academic units

HISTORY

Since its inception, the RUAA has promoted the university’s academic excellence. Out of the 115 RUAA chartered organizations, about one-third are school affiliated. Group volunteers have proven indispensable in spreading the word about the first-class research and education taking place at Rutgers.

Moving forward, the RUAA will take a more intentional approach to outreach, relationships, and collaborations with academic units to highlight how each chancellor-led unit is improving local communities, the state of New Jersey, and the world.

WHY IT MATTERS

Based on research conducted in 2014, a large percentage of alumni want to know about the academic side of Rutgers. Alumni interests vary—from serving students to networking with fellow alumni; from learning about a specific academic topic to attending athletic events. But we should never lose sight of the university’s primary purpose: education.

Highlighting Rutgers professors and their expertise inspires pride. In addition, making Rutgers expertise available to alumni can help build their skills and credentials, thus increasing alumni satisfaction and participation.
**2**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2**

**TACTICS**

- Develop processes to better identify alumni returning to campus
- Develop best practices for academic partners that host alumni
- Demonstrate RUAA value to academic leadership
- Develop opportunities to showcase faculty, research, and academic priorities
- Work with chancellors and deans to identify alumni engagement opportunities that support their academic priorities

**ONCE WE’VE ACCOMPLISHED IT**

We will have expanded engagement programming by adding academic content and academically renowned alumni experts to the already deep roster of activities we host. We will offer opportunities for alumni to expand their knowledge or learn new skills. This effort will position RUAA staff at all locations to be viewed as the “go-to” resources when community members want to feature alumni and faculty in workshops, lectures, classes, and other programming.

---

**3**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3:**

Connect with alumni where they live and work through increased regional and workplace engagement opportunities

**HISTORY**

While we work toward being the central source for alumni events, our efforts to promote workplace-focused programs have not been comprehensive. The current state of our workplace engagement is providing support for alumni networks and episodically hosting events at companies with high numbers of Rutgers alumni.

**WHY IT MATTERS**

Engaging alumni where they live and work makes the RUAA relevant across Rutgers and demonstrates to alumni that we understand and accommodate our stakeholders. A comprehensive, strategic, regional, and workplace-focused engagement program positions the RUAA to raise awareness, increase engagement, and significantly move the needle on philanthropic goals.

**TACTICS**

- Gather employee data
- Create a regional engagement plan
- Develop a workplace engagement program
- Identify key corporate partners and alumni champions

**ONCE WE’VE ACCOMPLISHED IT**

We will have transformed alumni engagement to be strategically communicative, relevant with alumni regionally, and visible where they work. We will raise alumni awareness of Rutgers’ academic excellence and brand presence; demonstrate value through partnerships and by supporting our college/unit partners in their strategic goals; and boost attendance and consumption of regional programs, workplace programs, and communication programs.

We will also expand contact and employment information in alumni records, leading to strengthened communication, programming, and more. We will improve the quality and quantity of leadership volunteers; build a stronger donor pipeline; transform our regional efforts; and align the RUAA with workplace engagement best practices.
STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4:
Provide value to Rutgers alumni through comprehensive career services

HISTORY
Rutgers’ delivery of career services to alumni has been sporadic and driven by campus career offices linked to the location where the alumna or alumnus earned his or her degree. Centralized services were inconsistent across Rutgers locations, and fee schedules varied.

In 2017 the RUAA hired a dedicated alumni career service professional to develop inclusive and broadly reaching career-service features for alumni from all university locations, including Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS). While some of the advising and student service components are not yet available outside of New Brunswick, our full-time specialist has built bridges to alumni and academic partners to offer the newest module, Student-Alumni Career Connect, to all Rutgers alumni and students.

Career Connect follows the “clusters” model and allows alumni and students to customize their career connection experience within fields of work rather than restrict them to majors or degrees. Currently, the module is populated with more than 5,000 alumni, staff, faculty members, and students. The goal is to use a grassroots-style effort to build populations of alumni in student-requested areas such as medical, technical, and other professions requiring graduate education.

WHY IT MATTERS
Students now…alumni forever. The career services offered by the RUAA can span the lifetime of an alumnus or alumna and form a portal to new opportunities at any point along his or her career path. Offering a robust and inclusive menu of career services will allow us to reach current and future alumni across all dimensions of the job-search equation (seeking, mentoring, and hiring). It will amplify the relevance of their alma mater to the entire alumni community, both locally and globally.

TACTICS
» Identify certification/continued education opportunities through the workplace
» Create relevance for alumni in various career stages and with diverse needs
» Develop RUAA in-person career services programs
» Develop virtual career services programs
» Replicate alumni career services across locations

ONCE WE’VE ACCOMPLISHED IT
Creating relevance at all career stages means that Rutgers will stay top-of-mind for alumni, thus encouraging engagement in continuing education as well as career development. Depending on the program’s impact and/or the capacity of the alumni it serves, career services will likely have a positive effect on philanthropy and alumni gratitude.

Development of in-person and virtual career service programs will allow Rutgers to remain connected and relevant to alumni across the globe. This inclusive model reflects the personalization necessary to meet alumni where they are in any stage of their career path.

Replicating alumni career services at all university locations for all graduates will create a culture of equal treatment and inclusiveness for our alumni, and may pave the way for previously underrepresented graduates to become advocates for the university.
STRATEGIC PRIORITY #5:
Transform alumni engagement efforts with a data-driven culture of assessment, analysis, training, and action

HISTORY
Since its inception, the RUAA has tried to maximize the use of data collection and analysis. Recently, we undertook research to identify alumni interests and needs, collect alumni observations of Rutgers, and clarify alumni connections to their alma mater. The RUAA applied these findings to focus its work and provide intentional and unique programs, events, training, and communications.

We share tailored reports with university partners and alumni groups to provide broad demographic information that can help achieve desired outcomes. Areas of growth include greater depth of analytics and meaningfully engaging with alumni interests on social media platforms.

WHY IT MATTERS
Identifying alumni data is key to mastering the needs, wants, and interests of more than 500,000 alumni. Through analysis and reporting of data, we can assess trends and interests of alumni population segments and demographics to develop many intentional ways of communicating personally meaningful opportunities. It is mission-critical to engage young alumni early to develop personal, long-lasting ties to Rutgers that can occur only through a data-driven culture.

TACTICS
» Continue to evolve the engagement metric
» Develop best practices and effectiveness for data collection
» Identify reporting needs of RUAA
» Develop training for RUAA staff
» Identify methods to streamline data collection of volunteers and event attendees

ONCE WE’VE ACCOMPLISHED IT
The RUAA will become a leading higher education organization in data collection, analysis reporting, and intentional communication based on location, educational interests, workplace, life stage, and social interests.

Identifying alumni innovators with the interest and capacity to engage with Rutgers, the RUAA will continue to improve in providing value to individuals and the university. Our ability to promote data-driven, interest-based opportunities through strategic channels will greatly benefit alumni who share common interests.

MAKING THE PLAN A REALITY
Our commitment to support Rutgers and empower all alumni to positively impact the university guides every step we take. As we put this strategic plan into action, we will continue to ensure that the personnel, organizational structure, and day-to-day work of the RUAA closely mirror each of the stated priorities.

It is also vital that we work closely with our partners at Rutgers University Foundation and across the university to enrich the alumni experience while deploying the vast array of talents, resources, and ideas that Rutgers’ 500,000-plus graduates bring to the table. Rutgers always benefits when its alumni are energized and personally invested in its future.