



## Expanding Capacity

*Farmington/Farmington Hills Education Foundation fulfills goal of engaging former students thanks to Alumni Nation's turnkey solution*



When the Farmington/Farmington Hills Education Foundation (FFHEF) first launched in 2012, its Board of Directors immediately made alumni engagement one of its priorities for the organization. However, while the foundation had made marginal progress over the next several years, it had not yet gained a solid foothold in ensuring the school district's former students were truly engaged and had a voice.

FFHEF Executive Director Nancy Jennings initially came across Alumni Nations at the annual National School Foundation Association Conference. As the only staff person at the foundation, she was limited in terms of capacity to focus on engagement. In Alumni Nations, she found a turnkey solution that would expand this capacity and allow for the development of a robust alumni database.

"We didn't have a database. We didn't have staff," Jennings says. "Our district had never done anything with alumni in terms of outreach. They just saw it as outside of their space. Realizing we have a very small organization, with no database and no infrastructure, it seemed like a pretty Herculean task to launch an effective and sustainable [alumni engagement] effort."

When Jennings encountered Alumni Nations at the conference, she was intrigued with the possibilities.

"It answered several of the issues that we had, and it provided pretty robust support," she says. "You got a database, you got the support and you got the infrastructure to do your work. They made it clear that, even with a very small staff, it would be possible."

### Making the move

After some deliberation, Jennings and the board decided to move forward with Alumni Nations. To start, it gave FFEHF a "launchpad" to attract volunteers. This has been critical, as it allowed the organization to get a number of engaged volunteers more involved with its work on a regular basis.

The turnkey nature of Alumni Nations provided another enormous benefit for FFEHF. While there was some work to be done on the front end, including populating lists and completing some planning tasks, the firm provided all the tools necessary to conduct active and effective alumni outreach almost immediately.



Perhaps most helpful was the fact that Alumni Nations could use FFEHF's existing database, which went back decades, and add emails to it. The existing data only had mailing addresses—and many were out of date.

In the fall, the foundation officially launched the Farmington Public Schools Alumni Association, complete with an online community and a survey to determine how it could best engage the district's former students.

The timing of the launch ended up being ideal. It just so happened that, after many years of futility, the North Farmington High School football team had a historic season. Many alumni and community members were excited about the chance to root on the Raiders as they went to the playoffs for the first time in recent memory.

"We leveraged that to reach out to the school's alumni to say, 'Hey, this cool thing is going on. Join us in supporting the Raiders!,'" says Jennings. "We were also able to do outreach for a big event in the fall. So, we've been able to quickly begin to actually use the tools provided [by Alumni Nations]."

According to Jennings, there has been significant enthusiasm for the alumni association in a relatively short amount of time. She has received numerous messages and emails from alumni, who have been sharing incredibly positive things about their time spent in Farmington schools. They are also expressing excitement about getting more involved with FFHEF in the future.

"We got a lot of positive responses, but someone even said 'add me to the list.' Nowadays, when most people want to be off your email list, that tells me we are headed in the right direction!" Jennings says.

### The best solution for the foundation's needs

Jennings says she would definitely recommend Alumni Nations to any educational foundation or school district looking to significantly increase its alumni engagement.

"You get what you pay for. I think we in the nonprofit world are always trying to do things on the cheap because we don't have a lot of money or we don't want to invest," Jennings says. "So, if you want to launch quickly and be ready to have immediate success and invest in yourself, this is the easiest way to do that."

The services provided to FFHEF have already made a big difference for the organization, according to Jennings.

"If you are not in a district that has had a history of engaging your alumni, you have to start somewhere," she says. "And in today's world, you must have access to the data and you need email addresses. So, unless you've done a phenomenal job of collecting email addresses, where are you going to get that data file? I'm definitely a fan of Alumni Nations."

Overall, Jennings says Alumni Nations offers a great opportunity to make a sound investment in the future of an educational foundation.

"You get a functional database. They can take your current donors, as well as any alumni donors, and you have it all in one place. Now you can really communicate," she says. "That alone is worth a big chunk of the investment we are making."

