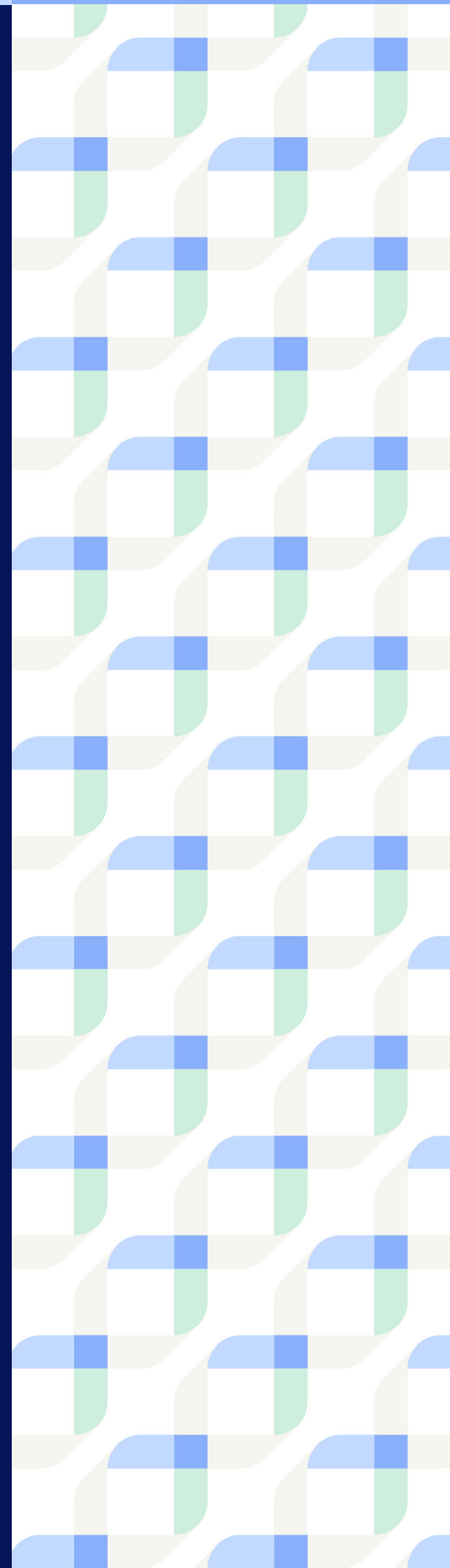


Advancement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Leveraging data and
promoting engagement



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About the TIAA Institute

The TIAA Institute helps advance the ways individuals and institutions plan for financial security and organizational effectiveness. The Institute conducts in-depth research, provides access to a network of thought leaders, and enables those it serves to anticipate trends, plan future strategies, and maximize opportunities for success.

To learn more, visit tiaainstitute.org.

About CASE

As the world leader in offering data about advancement outcomes provided through its CASE InsightsSM division, Council for Advancement and Support of Education helps professionals in the education sector achieve their objectives by making data-driven decisions. CASE provides detailed benchmarking data that enable colleges, universities, and independent schools to compare themselves with peer and aspirant institutions as well as with themselves over time. In addition, CASE publishes research reports about emerging issues and summary information relative to advancement.

To learn more, visit case.org.

Foreword

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) is proud to present the inaugural *Advancement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, CASE Insights*SM sponsored by the TIAA Institute. This report reflects a commitment to strengthening advancement across all institutions and honoring the vital role Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) play in shaping higher education.

HBCUs have long fostered cultural pride, leadership, and community engagement, creating deep bonds that fuel philanthropy and institutional resilience. Our findings highlight both opportunities and achievements: While resources vary widely, every participating HBCU reported strong year-over-year growth, demonstrating strategic focus and perseverance. Alumni engagement remains a powerful force, with HBCU graduates continuing to give, volunteer, and advocate at rates that inspire the broader education community.

According to CASE, **Advancement** is the strategic, integrated management of relationships with constituents (alumni, donors, and others) using alumni relations, communications, marketing, and fundraising to build support for an educational

institution's mission, goals, and financial health, aiming to foster positive impact and transformation. It's about strategically increasing understanding and support for the institution through coordinated efforts across these disciplines.¹

This research underscores the importance of investing in advancement capacity—especially staffing and data-driven strategies—to sustain momentum and amplify impact. Together, we aim to provide insights that inform practice, celebrate success, and catalyze future learning.



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Introduction

HBCUs have been pillars of American higher education for more than 150 years. They're credited with creating the African American middle class² and producing generations of leaders across medicine, law, education, science, and public service. Despite their enduring impact, HBCUs continue to face significant challenges in building endowments, securing major gifts, and sustaining advancement operations.

This report, informed by surveys and focus groups with advancement professionals, explores the current state of advancement at HBCUs, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to strengthen alumni engagement and philanthropic support.

The aim of this project was to:

- Take stock in the current state of advancement at HBCUs
- Learn how employers, policymakers, professional associations, and other stakeholders can best support advancement professionals at HBCUs
- Gain insights from HBCUs that will help advancement professionals create stronger connections to their alumni and other key supporters

Context: Advancement challenges and opportunities nationally and at HBCUs

National advancement trends

Across U.S. higher education, philanthropy has become a critical engine for institutional revenue. Fundraising growth has outpaced tuition revenue growth, but public attitudes toward higher education have declined,³ and education has slipped to third place among philanthropic priorities.⁴

CASE Insights on Voluntary Support for Education, which has collected data on fundraising outcomes at higher education institutions since 1957, reports an increase in charitable giving dollars but a continued decrease in the number of donors, particularly among alumni, mirroring a trend among other nonprofit sectors in the United States.⁵ Volunteerism has also decreased, with fewer Americans contributing their time to nonprofit organizations. Despite these challenges, boards and presidents increasingly view advancement as part of the solution to revenue gaps, even as budgets tighten.

A positive development is the growing diversification of the donor base. Wealth is increasingly concentrated among women and people of color, signaling opportunities for institutions that can build inclusive engagement strategies.

HBCU advancement indicators, from *CASE Insights on Voluntary Support of Education*

As one might expect, philanthropic giving to HBCUs varies widely, reflecting the range of small regional institutions to national research universities. Data show:

- Funds received by institutions per full-time equivalent student ranged from \$270 to \$51,700.
- On average, the amount received from philanthropy offsets about 10% of all institutional expenditures, consistent with national benchmarks.
- For philanthropic funds received, the compound annual growth rate (CAGR), which is a measure of average growth over time, was robust at 10% (5% or more is considered ideal). Every survey participant had a positive CAGR.
- HBCUs tend to be more reliant on large gifts from corporations and foundations when compared to other U.S. institutions, with about one-third of funds coming from a small number of major gifts.



Advancement is an engine for institutional revenue.

- The alumni donor participation rate has declined at HBCUs from 6.3% in 2014 to 5% in 2023. In that same time period, the decline for all U.S. higher education was steeper, falling from 7.7% to 5.1%, reflecting the enduring loyalty of HBCU graduates. It's important to note that this rate is calculated by dividing the number of donors by the number of legally contactable alumni, so if the alumni base has grown, the rate can decline even if the absolute number of alumni donors has increased.

Challenges identified by advancement professionals

During focus groups held in spring 2025, HBCU advancement staff highlighted several pressing challenges.

- Political pressures: There were concerns about cuts to Title III federal funding and attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion policies. To combat these challenges, participants stressed the importance of informing and mobilizing key constituents to continue or increase support if federal funds are lost.
- Economic pressures: Inflation and potential downturns threaten donor capacity and institutional budgets, and donors often shift their giving priorities to health and human services, prioritizing these as greatest needs.
- Institutional pressures: Limited staffing and resources create a cycle where reduced giving leads to less support for advancement, further constraining fundraising capacity.

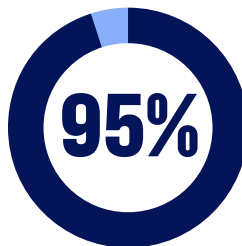
Focus group participants emphasized the importance of strong leadership support for advancement, noting that presidents and boards must act as visible champions for their institutions.

Leveraging data for advancement

Advancement professionals underscored the importance of data in telling their institution's story, demonstrating impact, and guiding strategy.

Data helps highlight how philanthropy directly supports students. For example, 95% of endowment funds at HBCUs are directly designated for student aid, compared to 40% nationally. Institutions can also use data to show the financial shortfall many students face in completing degrees, making a compelling case for donor support, or "gap funding."

Prospect research tools help identify potential donors and board members, while alumni engagement surveys reveal which graduates are most active and likely to contribute as volunteers, advocates, and donors. Customized communication strategies, informed by data, allow institutions to tailor outreach and create meaningful touchpoints that build relationships beyond transactional giving.



of funds donated to endowments at HBCUs are directly designated to students

Data helps institutions tailor outreach, create strategies to engage potential donors and board members and identify which graduates are more likely to contribute as volunteers and advocates.

Promoting engagement

Cultivation of alumni relationships

Engagement strategies at HBCUs emphasize cultivating alumni relationships and broadening opportunities for involvement. This was a major topic in focus groups

Students

Participants emphasized that alumni relationships begin before students graduate. It's important for students to see their institution wants to have a long-term relationship and that their affiliation with the institution is lifelong.

Young alumni

Attendees reported young alumni, or recent graduates, are most interested in giving opportunities that have immediate impact, such as the "gap funding" noted above. As volunteers, young alumni often prefer to have specific roles and responsibilities that keep them engaged and motivated, and that result in tangible outcomes.

Meaningful events

Participants described several types of events that catalyze engagement and giving. Some of these events may be familiar but can be approached in new ways to more fully engage alumni. For example, events that highlight student success and alumni achievements can help to foster pride and encourage giving.

Planned giving

Though less developed than other giving strategies at many HBCUs, represents a growth opportunity for long-term sustainability. Attendees emphasized the importance of educating alumni about the concept and also branding it in a way that makes it more broadly accessible.

Next steps: Actionable recommendations

To translate these findings into practice, institutional leaders should consider the following priorities:

Invest in advancement infrastructure

Expand staffing, technology, and training to professionalize fundraising operations. Dedicated advancement teams are essential for sustaining donor relationships and leveraging data effectively.

Adopt data-driven strategies

Use analytics to identify donor segments, track alumni engagement, and measure the impact of fundraising campaigns. Data should inform both strategy and storytelling.

Broaden alumni pipelines

Cultivate lifelong relationships with alumni by offering diverse opportunities for involvement, including mentoring, volunteering, and advocacy. Engagement should not be limited to financial contributions.

Deepen external partnerships

Strengthen collaborations with corporations, foundations, and government agencies. These partnerships can provide both financial support and career opportunities for students.

Spotlight student success stories

Highlight the transformative impact of HBCUs on students' lives in donor communications. Personal narratives, combined with data, create compelling cases for support.

Engage leadership as champions

Presidents, boards, and senior administrators must act as visible advocates for advancement, using their networks and platforms to amplify institutional stories.





Conclusion

This report illustrates both the resilience and the vulnerabilities of HBCUs in the advancement landscape. While resource disparities remain, these institutions are innovating alumni engagement, leveraging data to strengthen fundraising narratives, and cultivating partnerships with corporations and foundations.

The path forward requires investment in advancement infrastructure, strategic use of data, and a commitment to centering student success stories in donor communications. Implementing these actionable recommendations can help HBCUs to thrive and fulfill their mission of expanding opportunity and equity in higher education.



Endnotes

- 1 Council for Advancement and Support of Education. (2024). *CASE Global Reporting Standards*. Second Edition.
- 2 Council for Advancement and Support of Education. (2025). *CASE Insights on Advancement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities*. TIAA Institute.
- 3 Pew Research Center. (2010). *Minorities and the Recession-Era College Enrollment Boom*.
- 4 Giving USA Foundation. (2023). *Giving USA 2023: The annual report on philanthropy for the year 2022*.
- 5 Council for Advancement and Support of Education. (2024). *CASE Insights on Voluntary Support of Education*. 2023 Report.

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Finally, this report is based on the information and insights that HBCU advancement professionals shared through polling and at two extended focus groups. We are grateful to them for generously giving their time and for candidly sharing their experience and expertise. This report reflects the excellent work that they do on behalf of their institutions, students, alumni, and broader communities. See the Appendix for a complete list of the institutions whose staff participated in this project.

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