

The Missing Pieces of a Healthy Pipeline

What today's acquisition strategies are missing and how advancement leaders can fill the gaps

Every advancement leader is feeling the pressure: declining donor counts, stagnant alumni participation, and growing expectations to deliver more revenue with fewer resources. But while the need to expand the pipeline is clear, many teams are still relying on the same audiences, the same channels, and the same playbook.

EAB's latest survey of more than 160 advancement leaders uncovered a clear pattern: **Even high-performing teams are missing key pieces of a modern acquisition strategy.** Here's what our research found and a few ways to start closing the gaps.

A Digital-First Engagement Strategy

Many advancement teams are focused on traditional outreach and lack the time, tools, or expertise to fully leverage digital marketing.

WHAT WE FOUND		
100%	50%	1 in 3
use email, but only 56% use digital ads to expand reach	are not using data insights to adjust their engagement strategies	teams don't track alumni online or via email activity

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Donor engagement today requires more than email. A modern acquisition strategy depends on reaching prospects across multiple channels, with digital playing a central role. Leading teams are combining email with digital ads, retargeting, and social content, and they're using behavioral data to guide both timing and messaging. Institutions that invest in digital as a core capability are seeing stronger acquisition results and more consistent donor engagement.

A Focus on Broader, More Diverse Audiences

Too many advancement teams are focused on familiar donor segments and not actively working to engage new audiences.

WHAT WE FOUND		
55%	44%	28%
do not collect DEI data from donors	of advancement teams are not prioritizing acquisition of new donor populations such as parents or community members	are not actively engaging recent graduates (within the past 10 years)

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

A sustainable pipeline requires consistently bringing in new types of donors—not just engaging familiar ones. Institutions need to expand beyond traditional methods and build strategies that resonate with younger, more diverse prospects. That includes aligning acquisition with institutional DEI goals, reengaging alumni early in their journey, and creating entry points for donor segments that historically have been overlooked.

A Willingness to Rethink the Approach

Advancement leaders recognize the importance of acquiring new donors—but few are changing how they pursue them.

WHAT WE FOUND		
80%	34%	29%
of advancement teams are concerned about declining donor counts	are not prioritizing expansion of their donor pipeline	are not prioritizing annual giving, a primary engine for acquisition

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

While acquisition is a widely shared goal, most teams continue to use the same strategies that no longer meet today's challenges. **Growing the donor base now demands new tactics, new channels, and new ways of thinking.** The strongest advancement programs are reimagining how acquisition fits into their overall fundraising strategy, building cross-functional alignment, and investing in modern tools and approaches that help them reach and convert a broader range of supporters.