

## Scholarship Recipient Engagement Strategies

Kids' Chance of America has collected best practices over the years on how to engage scholarship recipients.

In addition, the KCOA scholarship consultant searched for best practices in the National Scholarship Providers Association (NSPA) member portal and conducted three interviews with other scholarship providers who excel at student engagement. Two of the scholarship providers are national organizations that operate in collaboration with local leadership. One is a county-wide scholarship program that provides comprehensive student support beyond scholarships. This organization was also the NSPA 2015 Scholarship Provider of the Year. KCOA offers thanks to these organizations and individuals:

- Elks National Foundation, Chicago, IL – Debbie Doles
- George Snow Scholarship Program, Boca Raton, FL – Tim Snow (local)
- Phi Theta Kappa Foundation, Jackson, MS – Heather Johnson

Most recently, in 2022, KCOA hosted a roundtable discussion at the annual conference to fortify information on how to reach out to students. Those examples are interspersed below.



### Suggestions and Examples from Kids' Chance States

KCOA offers these examples and best practices distilled from state representatives.

## Cultivating New Students

- Gain access to information or referrals through state Worker's Comp Commission (WCC) or Department of Labor (DOL). Based on state law, there are varying levels of access to this information and in many cases, it is blocked. However, some states are more flexible. In one state the DOL sends Kids' Chance pamphlets directly to families *on behalf* of the KC organization. In another state, they get a quarterly report from the DOL. It is recommended that states explore opportunities to access this information with the appropriate state office.
- Build relationships and awareness with attorneys who are involved in Worker's Comp claims. In one state, the names of injured or deceased workers are acquired from the WCC. The state organization then sends the list of names to the attorneys asking them to pass along Kids' Chance information to the families, with good results.
- Send information directly to high school guidance counselors via postal mail or email. A few states have purchased lists of counselors and they maintain that list, whereas in other cases the counselor list is available from a state organization or is maintained by a Kids' Chance board member. It also may be possible to get school districts to post the scholarship information on their intranet or within student career and college information systems.
- Contact employers directly where there is a known accident or tragedy based on news reports or based on DOL Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) fatality reports. Visit [osha.gov](https://www.osha.gov) for federal reporting or contact state offices, to share information about Kids' Chance.
- Network with insurance administrators or claim adjustors. Distribute checklists and letter templates for third party administrators to send out to potential families. Attend conferences that target claims adjustors and ask them to look within their caseloads.
- Contact vocational rehabilitation counselors, as a group, or other state associations related to Worker's Comp and the insurance industry to promote awareness of the scholarship to larger groups.
- Ensure that the Kids' Chance scholarship is listed on local or state scholarship databases, including those that may be maintained by school districts or community foundations.
- Invite gatekeepers such as superintendents or state education officials to serve on your board or scholarship committee – with the intention of helping spread the word about the Kids' Chance scholarship at a state level.

## Keeping Active Recipients Engaged

- Use special events or fundraisers to drive engagement with students as speakers who tell their story, or simply invite them as guests. If individual speaking poses a challenge, ask students to participate on a panel at sponsor events or ask them to attend a luncheon with dignitaries or other stakeholders.
- Build in renewal check points (each semester) or other strategies via phone, email or text to gain access to information about how students are doing in college – academically, financially and socially. **Several states have learned that texting is best for quick communication with students.**
- Capture bios and photos for use on the state website. Include stories of students and their families that can showcase college success. A few states have tried video contests. In one example, the state organization offers a financial incentive for video “selfies,” where students can earn money to use for current college expenses or for student loan payments.
- Establish an e-newsletter with content about Kids’ Chance, upcoming opportunities or deadlines. The newsletter could also include student support tips such as reminders to complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), encouragement about what to expect in college or advice on how to overcome common barriers in college.
- Test and determine which types of social media resonate with students and their parents, not only as a way to share program information but also to help recipients connect and build community. Ask recipients to “follow” your Kids’ Chance social media accounts.
- Reach out to siblings and parents to help prompt current scholarship recipients to participate, respond, renew or otherwise stay engaged.
- Make the effort for personal outreach, to students and parents, instead of generic group emails.
- Many states found that personal family connections often yielded better results and relationships.

## Acknowledging or Celebrating Milestones

- Examples of celebrating students includes congratulatory calls, emails, graduation cards or plaques, with a few states asking students to connect on LinkedIn. Many states do not yet have large numbers of graduates but the overall sentiment is that they *should* do something to acknowledge this milestone.
- **Several states have initiated care package programs** and Kids' Chance provides a [care package program guide](#) on the resource page of its website. Several tips are also included in the next section from other scholarship providers.

## Engaging Alumni

- Continue to communicate with alumni via newsletters or updates; ask students to “opt-in” and give permission for further communication to keep the relationship going.
- Continue to invite alumni to special events and fundraisers. Manage expectations about what is realistic knowing that these young adults have “moved on” in their lives and careers. Offer the option of video stories if alumni cannot attend an event in person or are uncomfortable being on stage.
- Encourage alumni involvement as board members or advisory council members to gain their perspective in a meaningful way.
- Provide a structure for past recipients to mentor or guide newer recipients on how to get involved with Kids' Chance or to provide public speaking tips before their first event.
- Offer to connect students with board members for job search assistance or career mentoring, as board members are willing and able.



## Suggestions and Examples from Other Scholarship Providers

- Determine holistically and proactively the “why” behind student and alumni engagement and build the Kids’ Chance state experience around that “why.”
- Leverage technology to the degree possible to contact with students as they matriculate, graduate and grow into their careers and lives. Make it easy in email or social media: opt-in, click, follow, etc.
- Support, recognize or engage students through awards, titles, designations, membership labels, categories or badges that acknowledge their status and can be promoted on their résumés or LinkedIn accounts. Examples include “chapter officer, state officer, spokesperson, mentor, member, volunteer,” etc. Formalize the process and designate a title based on what the students already may be doing for the organization.
- Provide a scholar orientation via webinar, Google hangout or conference call to help recipients understand how to use the scholarship, how to renew the scholarship and who to contact should they have problems or questions.
- Provide weekly motivational messages to scholarship recipients, especially during the first semester of college. These messages can be automated in an email program.

- Send care packages to students in their first semester and each subsequent year:
  - Leverage volunteer forces through the human resource departments at board members' or sponsors' places of employment.
  - Ask volunteers or board members to write letters of encouragement.
  - Conduct a care package drive or cookie drive and find a sponsor to pay for postage; send the packages to students at their college address.
  - Partner with other organizations such as fraternal or benevolent groups or Junior League to maximize efforts and defray costs.
  
- If hand-crafted care packages are not possible, send small care packages to the students at college via Amazon or another online retailer.
  
- Offer a grocery or supply stipend, extra book money, or emergency fund, beyond the scholarship.  
This could help students stay in school, reduce stress and fill a need that is often filled by a parent. (Kids' Chance acknowledges that scholarship recipients may have reduced parental support because one parent is injured or deceased).
  
- Negotiate and get other partners involved to enrich the student experience. Seek sponsors for little "extras" that can go a long way to building rapport with students and create memorable experiences they are not likely to forget.
  
- Invest in small graduation gifts or gift cards with a personal note to each student who reaches that milestone.
  
- Create and maintain a college advisory panel, comprised of volunteers who work in the college and university space. They could serve as a sounding board or respond to questions students may have about financial aid, enrollment, or other challenges for which Kids' Chance representatives are not equipped to answer or provide counsel. These are vulnerable students who may not have the support they need at home. The point is to add value and expertise beyond the scholarship.
  
- Maintain a post-college database with fields of information such as major, employer, spouse's name, permission to text, social media presence (especially LinkedIn or the next iteration of career-focused social media) sibling or family information, current address, and primary email. Losing touch students is the biggest risk to future engagement.

- Encourage alumni to give back by volunteering in the office or at events, even if the alumni do not wish to be featured publicly or appear on stage. Ask for help in tracking down other alumni, updating databases, creating awareness of the scholarship, etc., depending on the person's interests or skills.
- Ask alumni how they want to be involved, if at all, and listen to what they say. Their ideas are more likely to be generationally and culturally relevant than something designed by a person 20- 30 years older than them.
- Form opportunities for alumni to give back financially, no matter how small, to current students, and acknowledge this as part of the Kids' Chance culture and circle of support.
- Instead of student engagement being driven by staff or volunteers, ask *alumni* to help think through an effective process and provide direction based on their own experiences.
- For students or alumni who are willing to share their story, consider the *emotional intelligence* of the student ahead of time so their story is not perceived as a "pity party." Storylines should focus more on the student's accomplishments and less on the backstory.
- Show a video of a student spokesperson's story *before* they appear on stage at large events or fundraisers, because it is more likely that the student will remain calm and maintain composure as they talk in front of a large crowd.
- Create peer support opportunities (which some states already have done) among students who have been through similar situations with injury or loss of a parent as they attempt to earn their degree.
- Codify the level or type of mentoring the program can offer, if at all, and the degree of formality that the students and Kids' Chance volunteers can handle and sustain.
- Find marketing and messaging opportunities in interactions with current students and alumni stating that "Kids' Chance Cares."