

In early February, the Alumni Association and the university came to an agreement that opens the door for a closer relationship between the two organizations.

The first question we heard from many alumni was: “You mean you weren’t already a part of the university?” The answer to that question is: Officially? No. In our organizational mission? Yes. The Alumni Association has existed for more than 130 years to serve the university and its accomplished alumni. The only real distinction is that as a separate non-profit entity, the Association has been a largely self-supporting organization funded primarily by member dues.

The next question we received was perhaps the most natural one: “What is going to change for me?” I want to re-emphasize that the commitments alumni made to us via membership dues will be honored. It would not be right for us to take away things that have been promised, and we have no intention of doing that.

This brings me to the third common question, “OK, so why make this change now?”

For starters, I can say that much thought and effort went into considering all aspects of the change. A joint university and Alumni Association task force led by our former board chair, Bill Lhota, and former board member, Tami Longaberger, spent many months studying best practices in alumni engagement at leading public and private universities. The task force adopted the best elements they saw in their final recommendations. It was important that we give careful consideration to make certain the change would result in a win for all parties involved.

Ultimately, we decided to make the move. Two important reasons factored in the decision.

One, there is nothing to be lost by strengthening our relationship in the university. Although it is more of an internal issue than one that is of concern to alumni, a more formalized reporting structure will undoubtedly enhance our ability to work closely and effectively with the university. Ohio State is a huge place, and although all university entities are working toward common goals, we feel that this aligned partnership will better define our role. It also more clearly defines our working relationship with university communications and university development, two entities with which we share many audiences and practices.

Two, this does offer the Alumni Association the potential for greater resources. This is not to say that the university will issue us a blank check and let us do with it what we want. A part of the more formalized agreement is a process by which we can develop important projects that will benefit alumni and Ohio State, then pursue the funding necessary to bring projects to reality.

So what kinds of things are we talking about? Many of them are things we have wanted to do in the past but did not have the resources necessary to realistically accomplish. We have long desired to do a more effective job of providing job and career networking services for our alumni, and we feel that our strengthened partnership will better position us to achieve that goal.

Some other initial discussions have centered on providing better lifelong learning opportunities and more cohesive volunteer recruiting and coordination efforts, among others.

There is no doubt that we will also work to enhance the efforts and breadth of our constituent groups around the country and here in central Ohio. The Alumni Association and the university share the view that alumni are this university's most enduring asset. It is our goal to better leverage these vast talents for the benefit of you and your university.

I wish I had more specifics to offer now but at this early point in the process we have not delved deeply into how exactly we can achieve our shared goals. The establishment of this powerful partnership is just the first step in what will be a long journey that will strengthen Ohio State and benefit its alumni. I hope you are ready to join us on this exciting path, because it is going to be a great ride.