



NEAT Grant Report

NEAT Institution: Western Kentucky University

Project Title: Engaging the Next Generation: A Strategic Digital Outreach Initiative for Young Alumni

Project Dates: July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

Contact information: Audrey Hood, audrey.hood@wku.edu

Executive Summary

Western Kentucky University (WKU) is a comprehensive public university located in Bowling Green, Kentucky, serving more than 16,000 students and supporting more than 150,000 living alumni worldwide through the WKU Alumni Association. The Association's mission is to foster lifelong relationships between alumni and the University through meaningful opportunities for connection, engagement, advocacy, volunteerism, and philanthropy.

Through funding provided by NEAT, the WKU Alumni Engagement team implemented a strategic digital engagement initiative focused on increasing awareness of career development resources, alumni benefits, networking opportunities, and engagement pathways among graduates within their first ten years after graduation. Recognizing that young alumni consume information differently than previous generations, the project focused on creating audience-centered content and utilizing social media marketing strategies that resonate with younger audiences. In partnership with MadeWith Brands, the team received consultation and training on social media strategy, digital storytelling, and trend-driven content creation while implementing targeted campaigns promoting alumni resources, career mentorship opportunities, and alumni success stories.

The project resulted in significant growth in young alumni engagement across social media platforms. From January through May 2026, campaign efforts generated more than 4.5 million views, 69,900 content interactions, 33,000 page and profile visits, and 3,300 new followers across Facebook and Instagram. These results demonstrated substantial increases in awareness, engagement, and visibility among young alumni audiences.

Most importantly, the project reinforced the role of meaningful engagement as a critical component of the philanthropic pipeline. By strengthening connections with young alumni early in their post-graduate journey, WKU is creating pathways for future volunteerism, advocacy, leadership, and philanthropic support. The strategies, training, and insights gained through this grant have established a sustainable framework for future young alumni engagement efforts and will continue to shape the WKU Alumni Association's approach to reaching and serving recent graduates.



Project Purpose

The purpose of this grant project was to enhance young alumni engagement by increasing awareness of career development resources and professional growth opportunities available through the WKU Alumni Association. We sought NEAT Grant funding to strengthen our ability to communicate with recent graduates in ways that are relevant, accessible, and engaging through digital storytelling, targeted social media outreach, and strategic marketing efforts.

As young alumni navigate significant life and career transitions after graduation, we recognized an opportunity to better position the WKU Alumni Association as a lifelong partner in their personal and professional success. Through this project, we aimed to reach young alumni earlier and more effectively, increase awareness of available resources, and build stronger long-term connections to WKU.

Project Scope

This grant project focused on developing and implementing engagement strategies designed specifically for graduates within the last ten years. The project explored how digital communications, social media content, trend-driven marketing, and storytelling can be used to connect young alumni with alumni resources and one another.

The primary constituency group involved was young alumni. Additional collaborators included WKU Alumni Association staff, university partners, alumni volunteers, and MadeWith Brands, a marketing and social media agency that provided strategic consultation and training.

The project included the creation and promotion of digital content, targeted social media campaigns, expanded communication efforts, staff training, and audience engagement initiatives designed to build awareness of alumni resources and strengthen young alumni connections to the University.

Process and Timeline

Summer and Fall 2025

- Evaluated current young alumni communication strategies, social media performance, and engagement trends.
- Identified opportunities to improve awareness of career development resources, alumni benefits, and engagement opportunities among recent graduates.
- Developed content strategies and messaging focused on young alumni needs, interests,



and digital behaviors.

- Partnered with MadeWith Brands to assess current marketing efforts and identify opportunities for growth.
- Hosted training sessions for cross-functional Alumni Association staff to better understand social media marketing best practices, audience engagement strategies, trend-driven content creation, and digital storytelling techniques.
- Established a foundation for a more strategic, data-informed approach to reaching and engaging young alumni through digital channels.

Winter and Spring 2026

- Implemented targeted social media and digital communication campaigns aimed at increasing young alumni engagement.
- Promoted alumni career resources, volunteer opportunities, networking events, and the value of alumni engagement through enhanced digital outreach.
- Leveraged trend-driven content and audience-focused storytelling to increase engagement and visibility among young alumni.
- Collected engagement metrics and audience feedback throughout the campaign period.

Spring and Summer 2026

- Evaluated participation and engagement outcomes.
- Assessed the effectiveness of communication efforts and campaign performance.
- Identified opportunities for continued growth and future young alumni engagement initiatives.

Budget

Grant funding supported:

- Consulting and training services provided by MadeWith Brands to strengthen the WKU Alumni Association's internal capacity for digital storytelling, social media strategy, and audience engagement.
- Development and implementation of a targeted young alumni social media campaign focused on increasing awareness of career development resources, networking opportunities, volunteer engagement pathways, alumni benefits, and alumni success stories.
- Promotional giveaways and incentive items used to increase engagement, participation, and follower growth across WKU Alumni Association social media platforms.



- Marketing and promotion of young alumni programs, events, and career-focused resources through digital communications and social media advertising.
- Assessment and evaluation efforts, including social media analytics, audience feedback, and measurement of engagement outcomes to inform future young alumni outreach strategies.

Impact and Conclusions

Desired Outcomes Achieved

1. Expanded awareness of WKU Alumni Association resources among young alumni through targeted digital communications and social media outreach.
2. Increased engagement with young alumni through strategic social media campaigns that highlighted networking opportunities, professional development resources, volunteer pathways, and alumni success stories.
3. Strengthened relationships with recent graduates by creating more intentional communication strategies tailored to the needs and interests of early-career alumni.
4. Gathered valuable feedback regarding preferred communication methods and engagement opportunities, helping inform future alumni outreach efforts.
5. Enhanced the WKU Alumni Association's ability to create and deliver digital content that resonates with younger audiences and supports long-term engagement goals through training and consultation with MadeWith Brands.
6. Established a stronger foundation for future career-focused programming and communications that position the Alumni Association as a lifelong resource for WKU graduates.
7. Expanded digital engagement and awareness through a targeted social media campaign that generated more than 4.5 million views, 69,900 content interactions, 33,000 page and profile visits, and 3,300 new followers while promoting career development resources, networking opportunities, alumni benefits, and volunteer engagement pathways.

Key Results and Outcomes

Targeted Social Media Campaign



From January through May 2026, the WKU Alumni Association implemented a targeted social media campaign focused on increasing awareness and engagement among young alumni. The campaign promoted professional development opportunities, networking events, alumni resources, volunteer engagement opportunities, and stories showcasing recent graduate success.

Facebook Results

- 2.1 million views (+90.1% year-over-year)
- 29,700 content interactions (+117.5% year-over-year)
- 22,100 page visits (+175.2% year-over-year)
- 1,600 new followers (+371.7% year-over-year)
- 2,700 link clicks

Instagram Results

- 2.4 million views (+100% year-over-year)
- 146,300 accounts reached (+153.3% year-over-year)
- 40,200 content interactions (+2.0% year-over-year)
- 10,900 profile visits (+120.2% year-over-year)
- 1,700 new followers (+16,900% year-over-year)
- 415 link clicks (+19.3% year-over-year)

Combined Results

- 4.5 million total views
- 69,900 content interactions
- 33,000 page and profile visits
- 3,300 new followers
- 3,115 link clicks to alumni resources and engagement opportunities

These results demonstrate substantial growth in awareness, engagement, and visibility among young alumni audiences during the grant period. The campaign successfully increased traffic to alumni resources while strengthening the WKU Alumni Association's ability to connect with recent graduates through relevant, trend-driven content and strategic digital storytelling.

Career-Focused Content, Trend-Driven Marketing, and Alumni Storytelling

Throughout the grant period, the WKU Alumni Association expanded its digital storytelling efforts to showcase the value of alumni engagement, highlight alumni success stories, and



promote available career development resources. In partnership with MadeWith Brands, the Association focused on creating trend-right, audience-focused content designed to resonate with younger alumni and increase engagement across social media platforms.

By leveraging current social media trends, platform best practices, and authentic storytelling, the WKU Alumni Association was able to connect with young alumni in a more meaningful and relevant way. Content highlighted career resources, networking opportunities, volunteer pathways, alumni achievements, and the lifelong value of staying connected to WKU after graduation.

- **Content examples linked:**

- [Alumni Association Awareness](#)
- [Career Mentorship](#)
- [Alumni Success Story](#)
- [Young Alumni Spotlight](#)
- [Membership Matters](#)
- [Alumni Resources](#)
- [Networking Opportunities](#)
- [Young Alumni Council Recruitment](#)
- [Engagement and Awareness Giveaway Campaign](#)
- [Trend-Driven Social Content](#) (Valentines Day)
- [Trend-Driven Social Content](#) (Commencement)
- [Trend-Driven Social Content](#) (Commencement)

CONNECTION + ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN POSTS:





A photograph of a large crowd of people at an outdoor event, many wearing red hats. A text overlay in the center reads "It's more than a membership." In the background, a stage features a banner that says "WELCOME TO BIG RED'S ROAR!" and a mascot character.

wku **wkualumni**

wku **wkualumni** What is the WKU Alumni Association?

A network. A tradition. A community that never stops growing.

This month, we're focusing on connection—because every Hilltopper has a story worth sharing. ❤️

Follow along to learn how to get involved, reconnect with your WKU roots and support the next generation of students.

Once a Hilltopper, always a Hilltopper.

15w

coachkylejones Alumni in Florida, shoot me a message!

15w Reply

View insights [Boost post](#)

❤️ 🔍 ↻ 🗑️

👍👍👍 Liked by **chhs_wku** and 192 others

January 28

🗨️ Add a comment... Post

A group of four people (two men and two women) standing together. One man is holding a basketball. A woman is holding a red sign that says "WKU ALUMNI". Another woman is holding a white sign that says "UMNI". Above them is a red banner that says "Your next WKU chapter starts here!" and a white banner that says "Young Alumni Council Recruitment is OPEN!".

wku **wkualumni**

Eva and Jim Martens Alumni Center

wku **wkualumni** WKU Young Alumni Council Recruitment is open! YAC is made up of recent grads who are building community, giving back, and helping shape what the alumni experience looks like! If you've been looking for a way to stay plugged in and make an impact—this is it.

📅 Nominations open now through April 17

📅 Service begins July 1

📍 Apply at the link in bio OR wkualumni.org/YAC2026

We'd love to have you. ❤️

10w

owen.posey YAC forever!! ❤️

10w 1 like Reply

audreyhood the best 🍌🍌🍌

10w 1 like Reply

gannon_00 Love YAC so much!! ❤️❤️❤️

10w 1 like Reply

👤 1 comment from Facebook

View insights [Boost post](#)

❤️ 🔍 ↻ 🗑️

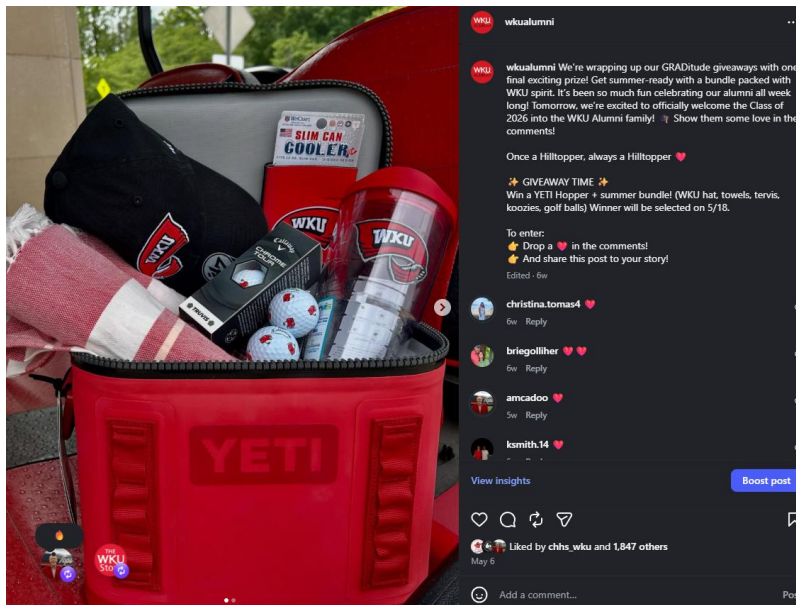
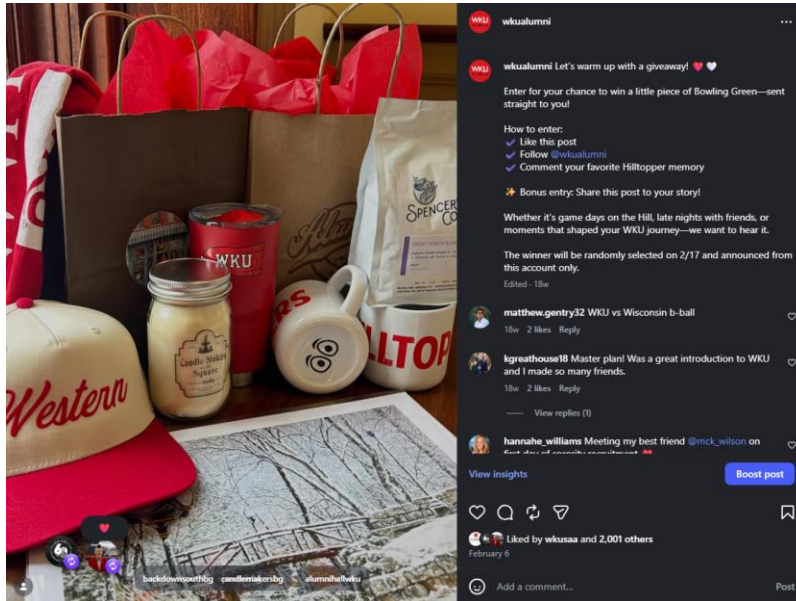
👍👍👍 Liked by **wkuhonors** and 155 others

April 6

🗨️ Add a comment... Post



ENGAGEMENT GIVEAWAY EXAMPLES:





YOUNG ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS:



These posts helped demonstrate the practical benefits of alumni engagement while increasing awareness of available resources and strengthening connections with recent graduates through content tailored to the interests, behaviors, and digital habits of younger audiences.

Conclusion

This grant provided the opportunity to experiment with new communication strategies, strengthen our digital engagement efforts, and invest in innovative approaches to young alumni outreach. Through strategic training, trend-driven content creation, and targeted digital engagement, we gained valuable insights into how recent graduates connect with their alma mater and what motivates continued involvement.

Most importantly, this project reinforced the importance of engagement as a key component of the philanthropic pipeline. By building meaningful relationships with young alumni early in their post-graduate journey, we are creating pathways for future volunteerism, advocacy, leadership, and philanthropy. The lessons learned through this grant will continue to shape our approach to young alumni engagement and position the WKU Alumni Association for sustained growth and long-term impact.



Thank you for supporting this important work and helping us create meaningful opportunities for WKU's newest generations of alumni to connect, engage, and remain lifelong Hilltoppers.

Audrey Hood ('15), Assistant Director



PHILANTHROPY &
ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

To inspire alumni to connect, engage, and pay it forward to the Western Kentucky University community.

Phone: 270.745.5314 | Email: audrey.hood@wku.edu

Main Line & Text: 270.745.2586 | Web: alumni.wku.edu



BUDGET:

Date	Description of Expense	Amount
8/27	Creative Marketing Agency - Social Media Training	350.00
12/2	Creative Marketing Agency - Jan Retainer	1,000.00
2/2	Jan Engagement Incentive - Giveaway Materials	133.58
1/2	Creative Marketing Agency - Feb Retainer	1,000.00
2/23	Creative Marketing Agency - March Retainer	1,000.00
4/30	May Engagement Incentive - Giveaway Materials	643.78
2/16-5/18	Basic analytics tools for data enrichment	96.00
6/23	Program Continuation - Promotional Items	809.00
Total		5,032.36