

# Northwestern University

## Multi-Year Screening Strategy Propels Prospect Pool and Parents' Fund



Eight years ago, Northwestern University laid the groundwork for a systematic prospect identification and management program. At the time, the development office struggled to define and segment the university's prospect pool—only 2,200 individuals carried any sort of qualification rating, and many of the ratings were arbitrary and had not been validated by the research department. As Northwestern prepared for their first major screening of 112,000 alumni records, they carefully defined two types of qualification ratings for prospects:

1. An officer rating applied by a development officer takes into account the officer's knowledge of the prospect's inclination and readiness to give, as well as capacity
2. A research capacity evaluation determined by the research department is based on wealth and asset screening results and other prospect data sources, and is then validated by the researcher

Following the screening, more than 10,000 prospects were identified, defined and deemed actionable. Within three months, research had identified and validated the top 1,000 to target. Today, they have 20,000 households and organizations representing more than 25,000 individual entities in their prospect pool, the result of a routine screening schedule and a well-planned system of prospect identification and portfolio management.

### Multi-Year Screening Strategy

When Northwestern conducted the initial alumni wealth and asset screening, they set in motion a schedule to screen reunion class alumni every year (approximately 17,000-20,000 records annually) to ensure that all alumni records are refreshed on a five-year basis. Rather than conduct large screenings every five years, this strategy ensures a live feed of fresh data, as well as a proactive and manageable workflow for the research team. Jennifer Fry, Director of Development Research and Prospect Management at Northwestern, supervises a team of 17 prospect research and information management specialists who find these annual screenings "completely essential to our prospect identification strategy."

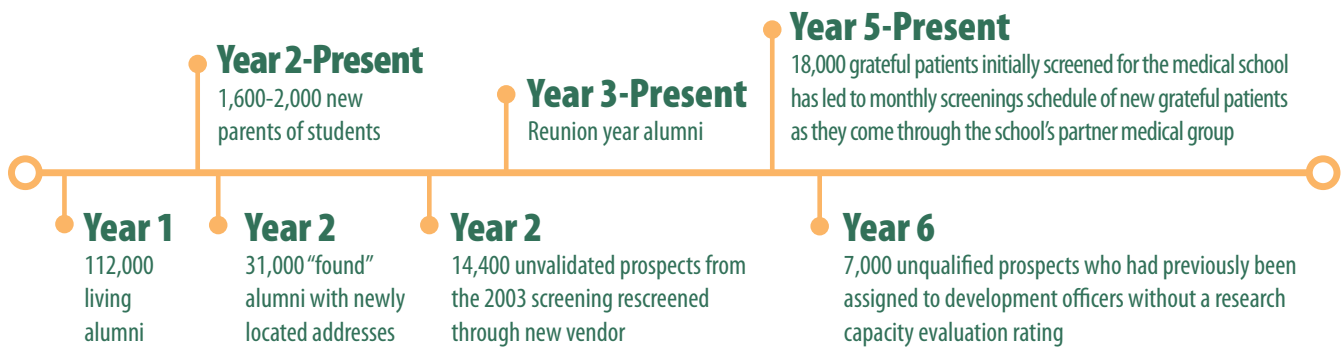
"We started by screening all living alumni with accurate addresses," explains Fry. "We had some issues with the results, so we decided to switch screening vendors, moving to WealthEngine the following year to re-screen the 14,360 invalidated records remaining from the larger screening. That year, we also conducted a "found" alumni screening of 31,000 alumni with newly located addresses, to strengthen our alumni data. As we progressed, we began to venture

*"Our return on investment (ROI) is clear when you consider how we used screenings to double our Parents' Fund within a year and more than triple it within four years. My advice is to focus on specific groups, rather than overwhelming numbers of records, and plan accordingly. Make sure the data doesn't sit—allocate an adequate 'quiet period' to evaluate results and carefully record your findings. You'll find that the strategy really works."*

- Jennifer Fry, Director of Development Research & Prospect Management, Northwestern University

beyond our alumni screenings to special projects that support the requests and needs of university initiatives, such as a grateful patient screening with the medical school.”

## Northwestern’s Screening Strategy Timeline



Adds Fry, “We use screening as our first point of reference when identifying new prospects. We access current information using WealthEngine’s FindWealth Online tool, and then apply our own formulas for the research capacity evaluation rating.”

## Parent Screening Results

In addition to alumni, parent screenings are a critical element to the prospect identification program; they have shown a dramatic return on investment (ROI) over the past five years. Northwestern only screens non-alumni parents (alumni parents are picked up in the routine alumni screening), averaging approximately 1,600-2,000 per year. Prior to the first parent screening, the Parents’ Fund raised approximately \$500,000 annually. Within the first year of screening, the Fund doubled. Within four years, the Fund had grown to \$1.75M. Despite tight economic times in 2008-09, the Fund held steady and has continued to grow, raising nearly \$1.9 million in 2011 – almost quadrupling in six years.

“The ability to identify new parents who are capable of major gifts has been a huge benefit for Northwestern. Prior to beginning the parent screening program, it took much longer to determine which parents were major gift prospects. This meant that sometimes we didn’t start cultivating parents until their children had been at Northwestern for a year or two, or were even about to graduate. By screening new parents of enrolled students annually, we can target those who are major gift prospects and connect with them immediately through high level parent welcome events, rather than play catch-up with current and past parents,” explains Fry.

## Ongoing Screening Strategy

Special project screenings continue to support other university areas and programs, including the Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern's elementary and pre-college enrichment programs, and predictive analytics:

» **Grateful Patient Screenings – Feinberg School of Medicine**

Fry and the medical school development office saw a need for access to hard asset data on grateful patients, and after an initial screening of 18,000 grateful patient records, have worked together to set up ongoing monthly screenings. "Grateful patient screenings have helped the medical school become more self-sufficient in their prospecting efforts, and my team's research support points them in the right direction," explains Fry.

» **Elementary and Pre-College Enrichment Programs**

Northwestern is also working to extend the success of its Parents Fund screenings to other university programs offered to elementary and pre-college students and families. Many of the parents of participants in these highly-regarded educational programs are not Northwestern alumni or current donors, and represent a new and rich constituency for engagement and support.

» **Predictive Analytics**

An ongoing screening strategy, including regular annual processes and targeted prospect identification screenings, has built a solid base of data to support Northwestern's predictive analytics efforts, which address a range of advancement needs, from annual fund likelihood scoring to alumni engagement to major gift and bequest prospect identification. "Now," says Fry, "We're applying analytics to further segment and clarify the prospect pipeline, as well as target our most likely prospective donors."