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Structuring University Advancement Operations:

The Role of a Vice President of External Relations

Custom Research Brief

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I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Council with the following questions:

- *What areas does the vice president of external relations oversee (e.g., fundraising, communications, alumni affairs, government relations, etc.)?*

- *What type of expertise is more valuable in the position: specialized knowledge of one or more reporting units or leadership and management capabilities?*

- *Does the vice president of external relations manage domestic and international initiatives (e.g., international fundraising, alumni engagement, and recruitment of students)?*

- *What challenges have institutions faced in defining this position?*

Project Sources

- Education Advisory Board's internal and online (www.educationadvisoryboard.com) research libraries
- National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (http://nces.ed.gov/)

Research Parameters

The Council targeted its outreach to senior leaders who oversee advancement, external relations, communications, and government affairs at large research institutions in urban and suburban areas throughout Canada and the United States.

I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

				A Guide to the Institutions Profiled in this Brief	
Institution	Geographic Location	Advancement Structure*	Type	Approximate Enrollment (Total/Undergraduate)	Carnegie Classification
University A	Midwest: Large City	Decentralized	Public	30,000/ 22,000	Research Universities (high research activity)
University B	Eastern Canada	Centralized	Public	29,000/ 25,000	N/A
University C	South: Large City	Centralized	Public	34,000/ 25,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University D	Northeast: Large City	Decentralized	Private	28,000/ 19,000	Research Universities (high research activity)
University E	Southwest: Large City	Decentralized	Public	39,000/ 30,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University F	Midwest: Large City	Decentralized	Public	41,000/ 22,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University G	Eastern Canada	Centralized	Public	25,000/ 23,000	N/A
University H	Midwest: Large City	Decentralized	Public	27,000/ 16,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University I	Southwest: Midsize City	Centralized	Public	29,000/ 23,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University J	West: Midsize City	Decentralized	Public	22,000/ 19,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University K	Western Canada	Centralized	Public	20,000/ 17,000	N/A

*Centralized indicates that one vice president oversees all advancement operations; decentralized indicates that two or more senior leaders oversee advancement operations.

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada

II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

University advancement is critical to the success of an institution, particularly in an era of shifting budgetary priorities and a continuous media cycle. An institution that identifies its strategic priorities, determines what division of responsibility best fits its institutional culture, and finds an individual whose personality and expertise matches those goals is often poised to establish a successful advancement operation.

Nevertheless, a leader will always have to balance the voices of its various audiences. For example, alumni, filled with feelings of nostalgia, may want an institution that resembles the one they attended, while government officials and community members, focused on visions for future success, may encourage the institution to chart a new direction. Ultimately, contacts describe that the vice president's role is to convey and help implement the president's vision for the institution.

Key Observations

❖ **Institutions with a centralized model unite most operations (e.g. fundraising, communications, alumni relations, and government relations) under one vice president, while those that operate under a decentralized structure divide the responsibilities across two or more senior leaders.** Contacts describe that institutional culture significantly influences the effectiveness of a given model.

❖ **Contacts suggest that collaboration across departments is vital to the success of advancement operations, regardless of reporting structure.** Reporting structure can help facilitate cooperation if it is not part of an institution's organizational culture. Contacts use a variety of strategies (e.g. staff meetings, leadership retreats) to update reporting units on university initiatives and develop coordinated strategies for university advancement.

❖ **Regardless of organizational model, institutions with clearly defined expectations for each senior leader and department may find it easier to operate efficiently and collaboratively.** For example, if the president seeks to launch a development campaign, each vice president at a decentralized institution must understand which components of the initiative they are expected to complete and which will involve collaboration with other departments. At a centralized institution where the vice president will likely be responsible for the entire campaign, individual departments must know what role they play in the campaign's design. This frees the vice president to focus on his or her top priorities. Clear expectations may help staff across various departments maintain a unified message while serving different audiences.

❖ **Most contacts do not directly oversee international initiatives, but many work with their institution's office of international programs when related matters arise.** Some contacts provide communications materials for international initiatives; others help plan trips for the institution's leadership that focus on student recruitment, donor development, and research partnerships. Two contacts report they help coordinate international guest visits to campus.

❖ **Fundraising experience is crucial for individuals at centralized institutions, while communications experience is generally emphasized more at decentralized institutions.** Prior experience in higher education or a similar setting is extremely valuable regardless of organizational model, as is having a staff that complements the strengths and weaknesses of the vice president. Hiring an alumnus or someone with an advanced degree may also bolster the person's credibility among faculty and staff.

III. THE STRUCTURE OF UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT

Organizational Models

University advancement functions can be defined as those that engage external audiences to promote the university and its accomplishments. This typically includes fundraising, alumni relations, data management (usually called advancement services), communications and marketing, and government relations. Some institutions also include community relations, corporate relations, or management of a campus facility such as an art gallery or garden. While individual institutions structure these responsibilities differently, two general models emerge.

✓ **Centralized** operations integrate most, if not all responsibilities under one senior leader.
✓ **Decentralized** operations separate the responsibilities, usually between fundraising and communications, under two or more senior leaders.

All contacts report to the institution's president or chancellor. Advancement at the 11 institutions profiled usually includes four to six divisions; staff size ranges from 30-120 people.

Selecting a Model

Contacts explain that organizational culture significantly influences what type of model an institution implements. They recommend four primary factors for an administration to consider as it structures advancement:

✓ **Advancement Philosophy:** Does the institution view interaction with all constituents under the umbrella of relationship-building, or does it distinguish among different audiences (e.g. donors, legislators, alumni, prospective students, media organizations)?
✓ **Strategic Priorities:** How important is fundraising to the institution? What is the university's brand? What skills does the institution need in a person to accomplish its goals?
✓ **Personality:** How well do senior leaders currently work together? Do staffers in different divisions collaborate independently, or do leaders have to encourage them to do so? Is there a spirit of cooperation on campus?
✓ **Leadership Style:** What is the president's approach to leadership? In what issues does the president require extensive involvement, and where is he or she willing to delegate?

Administrators at centralized institutions typically believe:
✓ Individual department missions are too interconnected to separate
✓ Successful fundraising relies on leverage from other departments
✓ Collaboration may be easier to foster when departments report to the same leader
✓ Unification facilitates president's ability to accomplish his or her goals

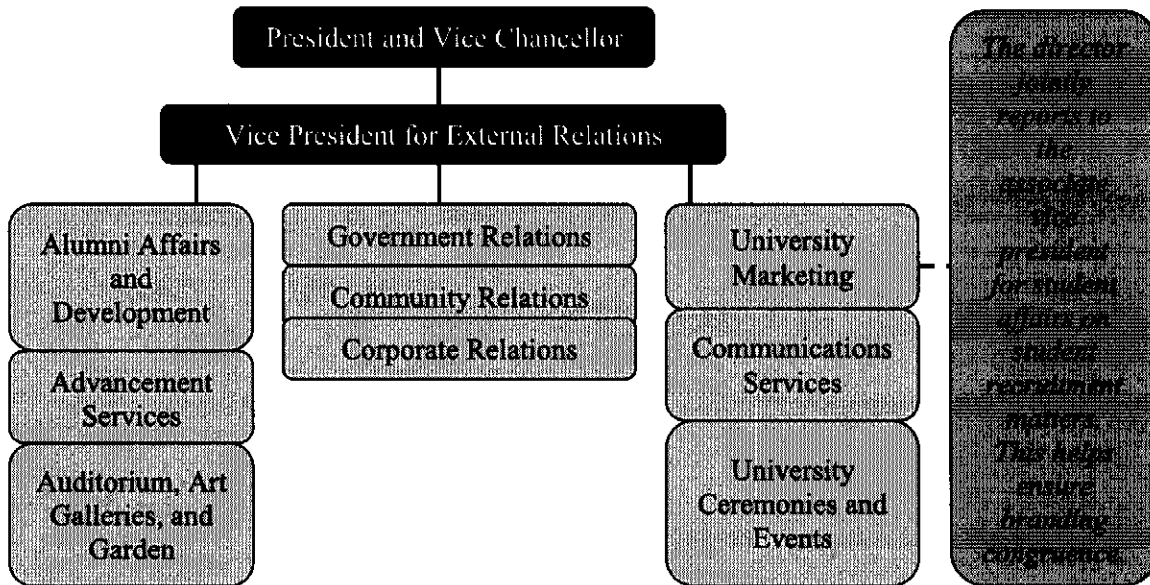**Administrators at decentralized institutions typically believe:**
✓ Fundraising serves donor interests, which differ from those of other audiences
✓ Entire advancement portfolio is too much for one person to manage
✓ Collaboration can occur naturally, regardless of reporting structure
✓ President benefits when he or she receives multiple perspectives on issues

III. THE STRUCTURE OF UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT

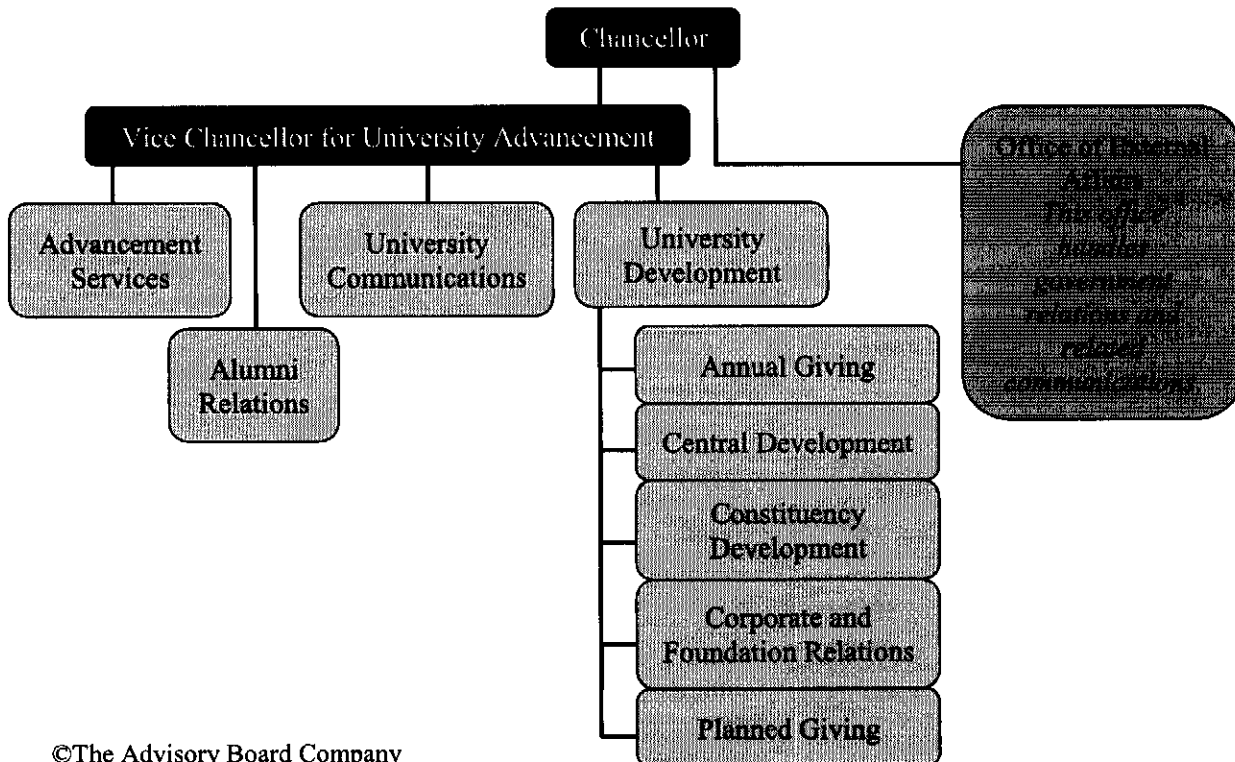## Centralized Organizational Charts

University K

Contacts indicate the institution's organizational style is to have few vice presidents, so an associate vice president oversees alumni affairs and development.

President and Vice Chancellor
- Vice President for External Relations
  - Alumni Affairs and Development
    - Advancement Services
    - Auditorium, Art Galleries, and Garden
  - Government Relations
    - Community Relations
    - Corporate Relations
  - University Marketing
    - Communications Services
    - University Ceremonies and Events

The director family reports to the associate vice president for student affairs on student recruitment matters. This helps ensure branding congruence.

University C

The government relations portfolio plays a significant role in the institution's budget and research agenda. An assistant to the chancellor for external affairs serves as a liaison between the institution and elected and appointed officials. A director of federal research affairs works in conjunction with the institution's vice chancellor for research and innovation.
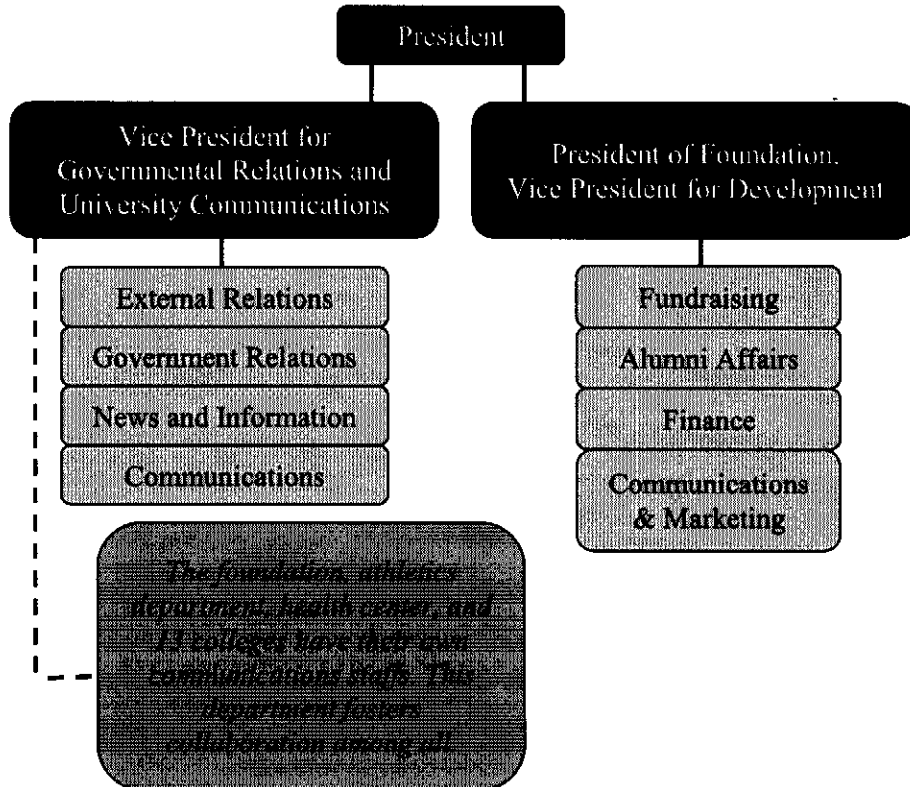

Chancellor
- Vice Chancellor for University Advancement
  - Advancement Services
  - University Communications
    - Alumni Relations
  - University Development
    - Annual Giving
    - Central Development
    - Constituency Development
    - Corporate and Foundation Relations
    - Planned Giving
- Office of External Affairs

This office handles government relations and related communications.

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III. THE STRUCTURE OF UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT

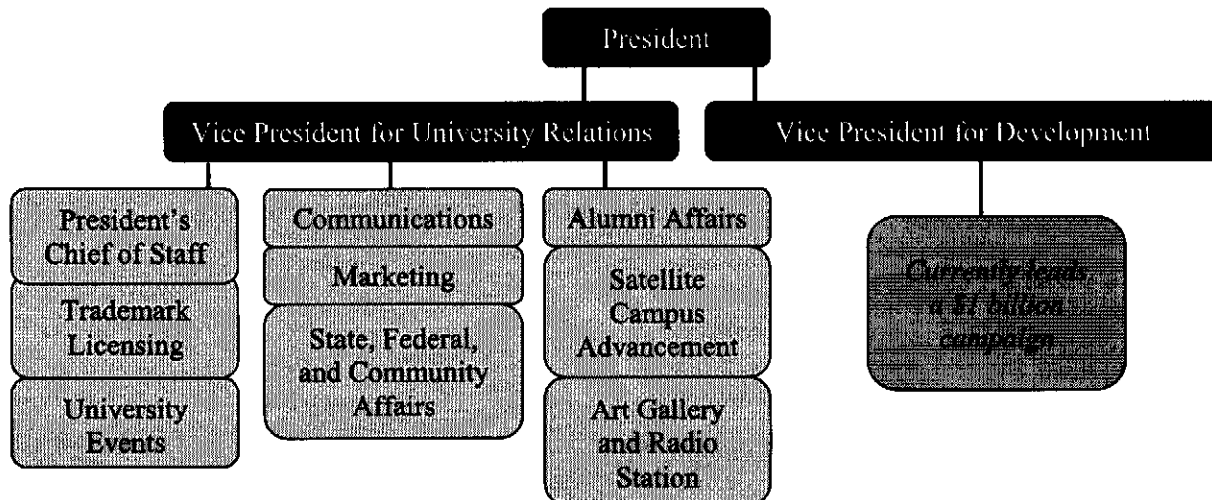## Decentralized Organizational Charts

University F

Though not indicated on the institution's organizational chart, the vice president for governmental relations and university communications also helps manage the president's office. For example, the vice president and his or her staff will review a speech the president plans to deliver, call a senator who changed positions on a policy important to the institution, or answer phones if the president's staff is out of the office.

President

Vice President for Governmental Relations and University Communications

President of Foundation, Vice President for Development

External Relations
Government Relations
News and Information
Communications

The foundation, athletics departments, health center, and 13 colleges have their own communications staff. This department fosters collaboration among all.

Fundraising
Alumni Affairs
Finance
Communications & Marketing

University J

University J transitioned from a centralized model to a decentralized one in 2010. While most institutions house alumni relations under fundraising, the institution left it under university relations. Contacts describe this arrangement facilitates alumni engagement in areas such as student recruitment that lie beyond the solicitation of donations.

President

Vice President for University Relations

Vice President for Development

President's Chief of Staff
Trademark Licensing
University Events

Communications
Marketing
State, Federal, and Community Affairs

Alumni Affairs
Satellite Campus Advancement
Art Gallery and Radio Station

Currently leads a $1 billion campaign.

III. THE STRUCTURE OF UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT

Advantages of the Centralized Model

Contacts at centralized institutions describe how integration fits their philosophical view of advancement and helps streamline operations.

Consistent Messaging

An institution engages various audiences, and the institution's brand may suffer if these constituencies receive mixed messages. In addition, the audiences often overlap. For example, the government is a significant donor, and parents of current students may also be alumni. Contacts describe that advancement seeks to build relationships, not simply solicit donations. Those at centralized institutions believe that, given the intertwined priorities of each advancement function, unification naturally follows. In addition, a unified advancement department may find it easier to incorporate priorities from the fundraising and communication units into campus-wide strategic goals for external engagement.

Efficient Operations

Staff within a centralized advancement operation may find it easier to collaborate when everyone reports to the same senior leader. Contacts say centralization may also reduce tension among senior leaders. If a vice president of development and a vice president of external relations struggle to cooperate, different audiences may receive conflicting messages from the university.

Unification can also reduce bureaucracy. **University A** cut costs when its alumni association and foundation merged and reduced duplicative back office operations. However, contacts warn that centralization can make processes more cumbersome. For example, if all campus news for alumni had to be funneled through one office, a busy staff may overlook compelling stories.

Accountability Assurance

Contacts say that a centralized system reduces the chance of confusion over which vice president is responsible for components of advancement initiatives. And while contacts agree the advancement portfolio is broad, they mention that as long as the administration clearly describes what it expects from each department and who will be held accountable for their performance, it is possible for one person to manage the position. Unification and definition of responsibilities can mitigate any excuses for poor performance, such as a commonly heard complaint that those in fundraising do not have adequate access to communications staff.

Advantages of the Decentralized Model

Contacts at decentralized institutions describe how a divided model adds diverse viewpoints and offers flexibility in execution strategies.

"I can't imagine being able to adequately run a $1 billion campaign on top of [other advancement responsibilities]." -Council interview

Manageable Portfolios

Fundraising is crucial for public institutions that increasingly need private donors to offset cuts in government funding. The fast-paced media landscape demands that an institution constantly develop and preserve its image. Contacts at decentralized institutions acknowledge the difficulty of finding someone with expertise in both areas. They also describe the challenge presented when one person manages multiple critical areas. **University J** used to have an integrated advancement model, but contacts who oversaw it for 18 months found it difficult to attend to and cultivate donors, manage public relations crises, and oversee the alumni and government relations agendas. At the vice president's request, the institution's president hired a vice president for development.

Multiple Perspectives for President

Most contacts report that they are one of the president's closest advisors. In this vein, contacts at **University E** mention that a president needs someone with political intuition to spot trouble with any constituents, (e.g. legislators who want to cut funding or parents who worry about a new campus initiative.) Contacts agree that the president needs input on fundraising, but those at decentralized institutions argue the university's leader also needs someone to offer advice on the broader art of communication and political strategy. Finally, because fundraising focuses primarily on donors, some contacts say a leader responsible for development may hesitate to favor something that may impact donor relationships, such as a specific legislative action, even if it aligns with university's broader interests.

Tailored Messages

Contacts indicate a message defines the institution much like a brand identifies a corporation. Just as a company's acquisitions echo its brand, an institution's colleges and programs describe their unique qualities and compliment the university's message. Some contacts report the decentralized model gives communications staffers flexibility as they develop materials. For example, **University F** has a branding committee that meets monthly and advises the campus community on communications strategy. Faculty and staff are encouraged, though not required, to consult the committee as they design materials.

In addition, contacts at decentralized institutions caution that communications in an integrated department risks skewing its attention to donors at the expense of other audiences. Contacts mention that if development oversees communications and sets its priorities, leaders should ensure communications does not become an extension of fundraising.

IV. APPROACHES TO COLLABORATION

The Importance of Collaboration

Irrespective of department structure, all contacts emphasize the need for collaboration as a matter of institutional success. The various advancement functions tell the institution's compelling stories and engage external audiences in an effort to move the institution forward.

For example, marketing needs to understand the university's brand and how to target different audiences; communications ought to find prominent alumni to feature in media; and development should know the projected level of government funding.

> **Collaborative Structure**
> At decentralized University E, the vice president for external relations sits on the board of the institution's foundation. The vice president offers fundraising input while another campus leader directly oversees it.

Foster a Collaborative Environment

Contacts suggest that the ease with which work together is more important than to whom they report. A unified reporting structure can help facilitate collaboration, particularly if it is not natural within a department or if personality differences among leaders impede progress. However, administrators who work under a decentralized model have not found that the structure impedes their ability to develop strong working relationships with their counterparts. Contacts emphasize that collaboration should be organic, not imposed. Contacts at decentralized **University F** believe that a prescribed communications strategy may elicit compliance, but not necessarily buy-in.

Establish Clear Expectations

A precise definition of what the president expects from the department can help a vice president determine where to focus his or her time. A vice president who knows his or her own strengths and weaknesses can then hire staff with specific

> **Presidential Access**
> At University K, all staffers in the external relations department have access to the president. For example, the president goes to the communications director with questions about the website, and the corporate relations staff contacts the president directly with an engagement opportunity, while keeping the vice president informed.

expertise to supplement his or her performance gaps. Typically, vice presidents at centralized institutions concentrate on fundraising and hire a specialist to lead the communications division. For vice presidents operating under a decentralized model, clarification of where each individual has ownership can reduce the chance of conflict and also structuralize collaboration. For example, at centralized **University K**, fundraising plans must be approved by the vice president for external affairs and the provost to ensure they align with the institution's academic mission.

Spurring Innovation through Collaboration at *University I*

> Amidst a grassroots campaign to lobby state legislators for public funding, contacts at the centralized **University I** created an initiative where donors who pledged $150,000 could sponsor a professorship. This helped retain dozens of faculty positions the institution was in danger of losing. Contacts used the program's success to encourage legislators to sustain funding to the institution.
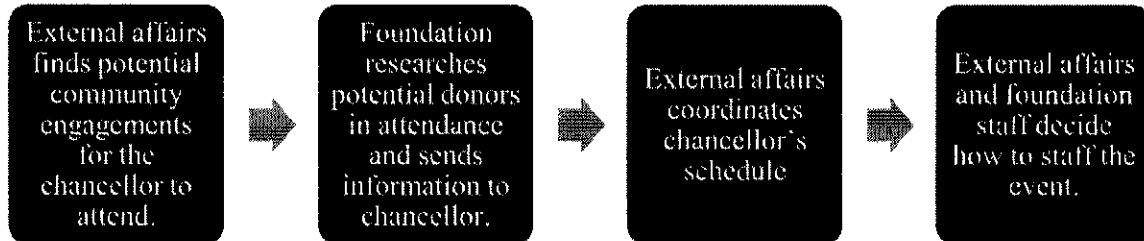
> *"There's a development idea that came out of government relations. I don't know if we would have come up with the idea had I not been so involved in advocacy."*
>
> *—Council interview*

IV. APPROACHES TO COLLABORATION

Contacts at decentralized University A advise that institutions delineate which departments have ownership over the different facets of the donor relationship. At University A, the vice chancellor for external affairs, the head of the University's foundation, and the chancellor manage high-level donor relationships. The external affairs department and foundation share responsibility for identifying promising donor engagement opportunities.

External affairs finds potential community engagements for the chancellor to attend. ➡ Foundation researches potential donors in attendance and sends information to chancellor. ➡ External affairs coordinates chancellor's schedule ➡ External affairs and foundation staff decide how to staff the event.

Collaboration Strategies

Institutions profiled convene a variety of formal and informal meetings to facilitate collaboration.

Staff Meetings

Type	Attendees	Frequency	Purpose
Senior Staff (individual and group)	Vice president's direct reports (University C includes director of finance and administration)	Weekly	Attendees track ongoing department projects, discuss any problems, and brainstorm new initiatives.
Communications Strategy	Staff from communications, web services, IT, planning and design, government relations, media relations and the president's office	Bi-weekly	University F uses these sessions to review issues the institution faces, plan for future activities, and receive updates on ongoing projects.
Presidential Cabinet*	Vice presidents; other senior aides	Weekly	Attendees evaluate institutional priorities, strategic goals, and upcoming events.
Department-wide	Entire staff that vice president oversees	Quarterly	University G holds retreats in which the first half focuses on mechanics and operations and the second half discusses strategy, teamwork, and building momentum.
Campus-wide	Any staffers who are interested in or work with communications, marketing, or branding	Every 2-3 months	University A has an external affairs coordinating council where different units consider how to implement campus messaging into their events.

*Most contacts report that they have daily conversations with the president and can speak with him or her privately if urgent matters arise.
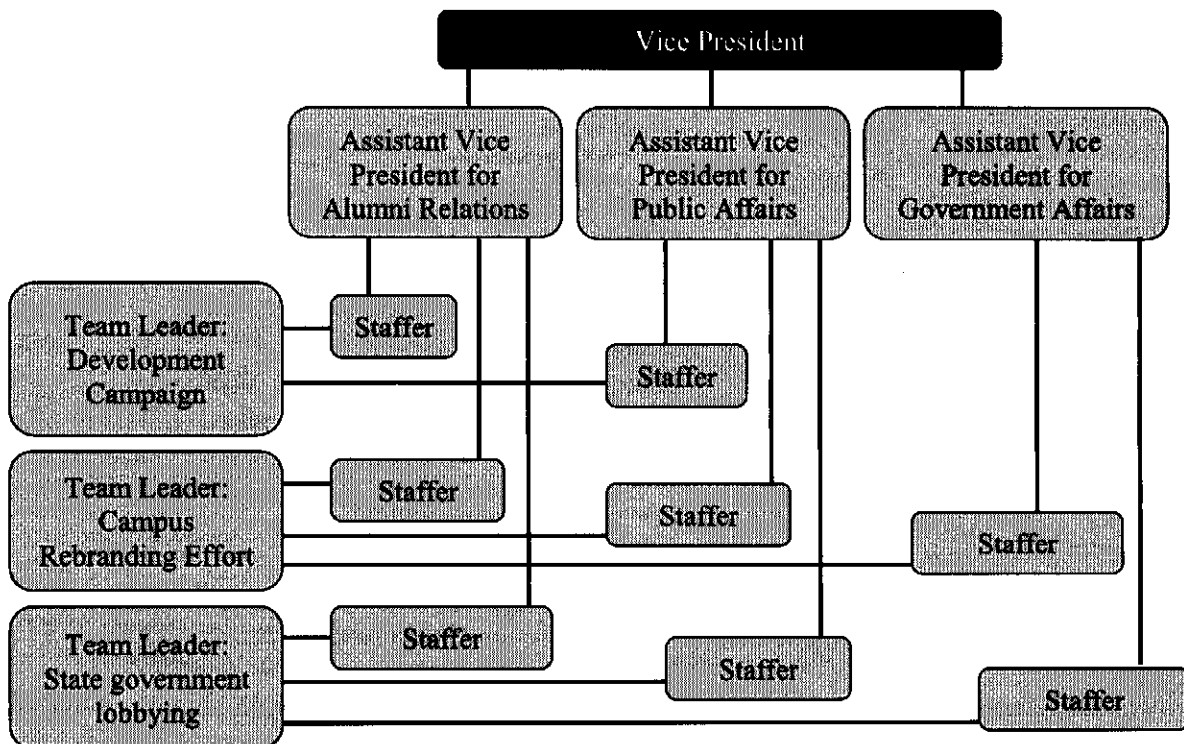
IV. APPROACHES TO COLLABORATION

Ad-hoc Meetings

Contacts report that staffers in different divisions often meet to discuss ongoing projects. The frequency of these meetings fluctuates as departments conclude projects and launch new initiatives. The illustration below depicts how one centralized institution coordinated its current fundraising initiative.

Organization of a Development Campaign at *University G*

Advancement and communications co-design campaign strategy and work with external consultants on how to execute branding strategy.

Ad-hoc committee composed of the director of communications and public affairs, registrar, and the vice president for advancement update the president on campaign's progress.

Campaign director and associate vice president for communications lead bi-weekly meetings with the campaign communications team.

Matrix Management Model

Contracts at decentralized **University J** report that the department's three assistant vice presidents organize their teams under a matrix model. Under this arrangement, reporting structure operates on a functional, as well as hierarchical, basis. When a division spearheads an initiative, staffers report to a team leader for the work they complete on the project. This approach formalizes the ad-hoc meeting strategy described above. While matrix management can help cut bureaucracy, its success depends on effective implementation. Clear expectations and reporting lines should be delineated at the start of each project. Below is a sample organizational chart based on the matrix model.

Vice President

Assistant Vice President for Alumni Relations

Assistant Vice President for Public Affairs

Assistant Vice President for Government Affairs

Team Leader: Development Campaign

Team Leader: Campus Rebranding Effort

Team Leader: State government lobbying

Staffer

V. INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

Most institutions have an international programs office that reports to the provost. Contacts usually do not directly oversee international initiatives as part of their external relations or advancement portfolios. Contacts at **University H** and **University E** say their external relations departments help coordinate international guest visits to campus and ensure compliance with diplomatic protocol, if required. Most contacts collaborate on some level with the international programs office on marketing, recruitment, alumni engagement, and donor development.

Those whose institutions have not developed extensive international initiatives identify global engagement as growing area of priority. At **University K**, the international programs office seeks to establish procedures to guide collaboration on initiatives among all vice presidents. One potential option includes the establishment of an advisory committee that would bring together a diverse group of administrators to discuss international priorities. The following chart details additional collaboration practices employed at contact institutions.

Marketing	The external affairs department at decentralized **University A** manages international web content and print communications at the direction of the international affairs office. The department's vice chancellor joins deans' meetings and strategic budget sessions to keep abreast of upcoming international initiatives that may need marketing materials.
Alumni Engagement	At decentralized **University J**, international alumni chapters tie closely into the agenda of the vice provost for international affairs, and contacts report that the offices meet often. Staffing for international chapters occurs through the alumni relations office, which is part of university relations. Those staffers, based abroad, help host events and raise scholarship funding for international students.
Donor Development	Centralized **University B** has a unit within its advancement department that focuses primarily on opportunities to develop alumni and philanthropic relationships in strategic regions outside the country. Contacts at centralized **University C** say that its budget for next year includes a staff position for international development and alumni relations that reports to the central development office. This person will help expand overseas alumni activities and major gift fundraising.
International Travel	At **University C**, contacts describe close collaboration between the vice chancellor for advancement and the associate vice provost for international programs to plan a 10-day trip to Asia for the institution's chancellor this autumn. The trip will focus on undergraduate admissions, alumni relations, and development, and will include meetings with government officials and high-wealth individuals. The provost and vice presidents for external relations and research at **University K** work with the international programs office to include exploration of global academic and research partnerships in international trips.

VI. THE VICE PRESIDENT'S ROLE

Main Priorities

Vice presidents at centralized institutions typically focus on development, while those at decentralized institutions usually spend more time on communications.

✓ **Centralized:** The vice president often concentrates on fundraising and hires strong individuals to lead other divisions. He or she helps develop donor strategy, assess performance, and engage prospective donors.

✓ **Decentralized:** The vice president usually works to balance institutional priorities and community expectations. Contacts describe that the vice president helps develop strategic communication between the campus and elected officials, community-based organizations, and the corporate sector.

Time Management

Contacts say the priorities of a vice president fluctuate daily and yearly. Tasks can range from reactive, such as crisis management, to proactive, such as the pursuit of new donors. Contacts explain that a vice president may move from the minutiae of a budget proposal to the broad-based development of a strategic plan within the span of one day.

Travel Schedule Advice

If securing international gifts is an important priority for the institution, contacts advise the administration consider how much the vice president will have to travel and adjust the position's responsibilities to ensure the individual does not overextend him or herself.

From a general perspective, two main events consume most of a vice president's time.

✓ **Legislative Session:** While the state legislature is in session, contacts lobby public officials, communicate with government agencies, examine policy issues, and lead grassroots efforts.

✓ **Development Campaign:** When a campaign is underway, contacts develop communications and branding strategy, distribute the institution's message across news, advertising, web, and in-house media, and engage donors.

Contacts at centralized **University G** describe how they divide their time before and during a development campaign.
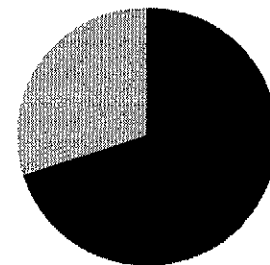
Before Campaign
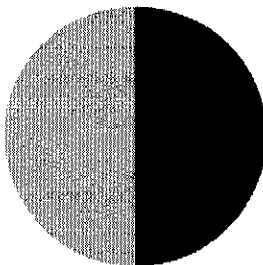
Internal (50 %)

External (50 %)

During Campaign

Internal (30 %)

External (70 %)

Internal: Restructure the department
External: Travel; build campaign momentum; cultivate relationships.

Internal: Develop strategy; organize campus activities; motivate staff
External: Monitor major giving; follow up with donors; draw interest from government agencies

Sample Schedule

Contacts at the centralized **University I** describe a typical day's schedule. Most of their time falls into donor engagement and strategic planning. Contacts report they never delegate the management of major donor relationships, and personally reach out to the institution's top 30 donors often.

Time	Activity
6 a.m. – 7 a.m.	Exercise at the gym
7 a.m. – 8 a.m.	Answer e-mails
8 a.m. – 10 a.m.	Meet one-on-one with a direct report
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.	Meet with president's cabinet
12 p.m. – 3 p.m.	Visit or call at least 3-4 major donors
3 p.m. – 4 p.m.	Follow up with department staff on a development project
4 p.m. – 6 p.m.	Discuss strategic planning with the president
6 p.m. – 8 p.m.	Attend a donor engagement dinner

Professional Qualities

Given the strategic importance this role plays in an institution's success, contacts describe the importance of hiring someone who fits well with the institution's culture and personalities. Contacts liken the role to that of a football coach, and say that a person in this position needs to be an experienced leader, communicator, and motivator with proven management and mentorship skills. Contacts suggest the institution look for a thought leader who aligns with the president's goals, understands the institution's role in the broader community, and can guide the institution through an implementation of a comprehensive, strategic vision. The following lists describe characteristics that contacts suggest an institution look for in candidates for the role.

Work Experience
- ✓ *Higher education background:* Understands how to serve multiple constituencies in a deliberative setting (experience at a large nonprofit such as a hospital or museum may also translate well)
- ✓ *Corporate background:* Knows how to manage external and internal communications in a fast-paced setting with few staff, but may struggle to adjust to academic environment unless institutional culture welcomes new approach
- ✓ *International experience:* Recognizes how to enhance an institution's global presence

Subject Knowledge
- ✓ *Fundraising:* Ability to secure private funding (especially important for a vice president in a centralized institution, as it is a quantitative measure of success).
- ✓ *Public Relations:* Ability to manage a bad story that spins out of control and promote a good story across media
- ✓ *Marketing/Branding:* Ability to use technology to advance university initiatives, (e.g. University E's use of Facebook to target high-achieving out-of-state students)
- ✓ *Local Environment:* Ability to navigate the surrounding community's political and business culture. For example, decision-making in the city near **University H** happens predominantly at board meetings. Contacts there sit on six boards which gives them accessibility to corporate, philanthropic, and nonprofit leaders.

Personal Characteristics
- ✓ Adaptability, flexibility, and persistence to balance the myriad expectations
- ✓ Listening and team-building skills to foster collaboration
- ✓ Positive, energetic, passionate personality, as he or she serves as the face of the university