NIU Alumni Association
DIY Alumni Engagement Activity Guide

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Alumni Engagement Guide Overview

Welcome to the NIU Alumni Association's DIY Alumni Engagement Activity Guide! This resource is designed to empower NIU's incredible volunteer leaders to take the lead in hosting meaningful activities that connect Huskies. While NIUAA staff may not be physically present, you'll have behind-the-scenes support along the way to help bring your vision to life. Together, we're building a strong and rewarding partnership that strengthens alumni engagement and celebrates the spirit of NIU, wherever Huskies gather.

This guide should be used as a launching pad for volunteers to identify how to host a variety of engaging activities. From social gatherings like Huskie Hours and game watch events to service-oriented activities like food drives and postcard decorating, these activities offer meaningful ways to connect with the NIU community. You can also use this guide to help you build a vision of your own.

By hosting one of these activities, alumni can enjoy valuable personal and professional benefits such as gaining hands-on leadership experience, expanding their social and career networks, and being recognized as key ambassadors of NIU within respective communities. These activities provide opportunities to reconnect with the University, foster a sense of belonging among Huskies, and create traditions that bring alumni together year after year.

Support Provided by the NIU Alumni Association

Volunteer leaders are empowered to take the lead in planning and organizing the activities outlined in this guide. They will have also have access, as applicable, to the following support from NIU Alumni Association staff to help them succeed in their role.

1. *Registration & Marketing Support*
   The NIU Alumni Association seeks to market activities at least three times prior to the activity. This is achieved through a variety of communication channels such as all-alumni newsletters and geographically targeted emails. To achieve these outreach goals, activity leaders must work with NIUAA staff to launch the activity online at least two months prior to the **registration deadline**. This maximizes visibility and engagement across the alumni network. In most cases, this will not apply to Huskie Food Pantry donation drives, which rely heavily on personal networks for success.

2. *Welcome & Check-In Materials (mailed to volunteer)*
   To create a simple check-in arrival experience, each activity leader will be provided with a QR code for check-in and, where applicable, nametags, writing utensils and décor to help guests feel welcomed and connected from the start.

3. *NIU Alumni Association Information (mailed to volunteer)*
   When appropriate, to promote ongoing engagement, informational materials are provided to share volunteer opportunities and upcoming events.

4. *Activity-Specific Supplies (mailed to volunteer)*
   To ensure each activity runs smoothly, additional customized items are included based on the specific needs or theme. Examples include giveaway items to encourage participation.

Questions? Ask for a member of the volunteer team at 815-753-2586 or email us at volunteer@niu.edu.

HUSKIE HOUR
(Anytime)

Activity Description:
A Huskie Hour is a casual, alumni-led gathering that brings NIU graduates together for connection, conversation, and community. Whether you are planning a stand-alone event (e.g., a happy hour, industry-specific networking gathering, game night, volunteer outing) or a social gathering before an activity hosted or ticketed by another organization, such as an athletic event, play or any other type of performance, or celebration, you can shape the experience to fit your style. It is all about bringing Huskies together wherever you are!

Volunteer Role:
Volunteer hosts support this activity by identifying a space host the event, sharing details with NIU Alumni Association staff, helping recruit within their network, and acting as host on the day of the event. We recommend spaces with no cost associated, as the NIU Foundation is not able to provide funds to reserve a space.

Planning Timeline:
1. Inform NIUAA point of contact of interest in hosting (14 weeks prior to event)
2. Confirm event location (12 weeks prior to event)
3. Attendee registration deadline (Two days prior to event date)
4. Host(s) must meet with NIUAA staff for a virtual debrief (Two weeks after event)
5. Email any photos taken at your event to volunteer@niu.edu (1 day after event)
6. Provide attendance data to NIUAA staff (1 day after event)

Support Provided by NIU Alumni Association:
1. A package will be sent to host with the following materials (*this can vary depending on the event)*: QR codes for registration and link to NIU alumni resources, sticker name tags and pens, minimal swag for decoration, Door prizes and leave-behind info cards
2. Registration and marketing support
3. Staff support including one 1:1 virtual training/consultation with host(s) to discuss plans and ongoing email communications. Additional virtual meetings can be scheduled as necessary.

Point of Contact: Melissa Ouimette, Assistant Director of Affinity Groups, mouimette@niu.edu or 815-753-9057.

HUSKIE HANGOUT: DECORATING HUSKIE FINALS NOTECARD
(December – February)

Activity Description:
Host a casual gathering for local alumni to connect and write uplifting notes that will be shared with students as they prepare for spring finals. Huskie Finals Notecards are collected from October through February, either individually or at decorating hangouts, and later packed into care packages distributed to students in April. Volunteers can host notecard decorating hangouts anytime between Dec. 1 and Feb. 28, which allows staff to support attendee recruitment. Generally, it takes about 2 months of attendee recruitment to meet event needs.

Blank notecards and return envelopes are provided to hosts, some decorating supplies are included. Cards created at these hangouts are either mailed or handed back to the NIU Alumni Association on the second floor of the Barsema Alumni & Visitors Center (231 N Annie Glidden Rd, DeKalb, IL 60115).

Volunteer Role:
Volunteer hosts support this activity by identifying a space for alumni to convene. We recommend that you identify free spaces, as the NIU Alumni Association is unable to pay any venue rental fees. Hosts also share details with NIU Alumni Association staff, helping recruit within their network, acting as host on the day of the event, and both collecting and returning notecards.

Important Dates:
Below is a general timeline for finalized event details, attendee recruitment, and event date(s). These are subject to change depending on the specific date of the event. Recruitment timelines under two months are not advised but may be approved by staff if needed. Holidays may cut effective recruitment time down.

1. Identify space to host event (3 months prior to event)
2. Individual Registration for Notecard Project Registration Open (Early/Mid-October)
4. Provide Event Details to Staff for Marketing Purposes (10 weeks prior to event)
5. Host Event & Track Attendance (Day of Event)
6. Provide Attendance Data and Event Photos to Staff (1 day after event)
7. Collect & Return Notecards to Staff (No later than 2 weeks after event)
8. Host debrief with staff (2 weeks after event)

Support Provided by NIU Alumni Association:
1. Activity Box Materials:
    a. Stack of Blank NIU Notecards (10-20 per attendee RSVP)
    b. Business Return Envelopes
    c. Notecard Instruction Sheets
2. Registration and marketing support
3. Staff support including 1:1 virtual training/consultation with host(s) to discuss plans and ongoing email communications. Additional virtual meetings can be scheduled as necessary.

Point of Contact: Taylor Curry, Assistant Director of Volunteer Engagement tcurry4@niu.edu or 815-753-3005

Notecard Example(s):

HUSKIE HANGOUT: RECRUIT A HUSKIE POSTCARD CAMPAIGN
(December - February)

Activity Description:
Host a casual gathering for local alumni to connect and write notes of encouragement to future and/or prospective students. Recruit a Huskie Postcards are collected from October through February, either individually or at writing hangouts, and mailed to prospective students during peak recruitment season in March and April. Volunteers can host postcard writing hangouts anytime between Dec. 1 and Feb. 28, which allows staff to support attendee recruitment. Generally, it takes about 2 months of attendee recruitment to meet event needs.

Blank postcards and return envelopes are provided to hosts, writing supplies are not included. Cards created at these hangouts are either mailed or handed back to the NIU Alumni Association on the second floor of the Barsema Alumni & Visitors Center (231 N Annie Glidden Rd, DeKalb, IL 60115).

Volunteer Role:
Volunteer hosts support this activity by identifying a space for alumni to convene. We recommend that you identify free spaces, as the NIU Alumni Association is unable to pay any venue rental fees. Hosts also share details with NIU Alumni Association staff, helping recruit within their network, acting as host on the day of the event, and both collecting and returning notecards.

Important Dates:
Below is a general timeline for finalized event details, attendee recruitment, and event date(s). These are subject to change depending on the specific date of the event. Recruitment timelines under two months are not advised but may be approved by staff if needed. Holidays may cut effective recruitment time down.

1. Identify space to host event (3 months prior to event)
2. Individual Registration for Postcard Campaign Registration Open (Early/Mid-October)
4. Provide Event Details to Staff for Marketing Purposes (10 weeks prior to event)
5. Host Event & Track Attendance (Day of Event)
6. Provide Attendance Data and Event Photos to Staff (1 day after event)
7. Collect & Return Notecards to Staff (2 weeks after event)
8. Host debrief with staff (2 weeks after event)

Support Provided by NIU Alumni Association:
1. Activity Box Materials:
    a. Stack of Blank NIU Postcards (10-20 per attendee RSVP)
    b. Business Return Envelopes
    c. Postcard Instruction Sheets
2. Registration and marketing support
3. Staff support including 1:1 virtual training/consultation with host(s) to discuss plans and ongoing email communications. Additional virtual meetings can be scheduled as necessary.

Point of Contact: Taylor Curry, Assistant Director of Volunteer Engagement tcurry4@niu.edu or 815-753-3005.

Postcard Example(s):

GAME WATCH HOST INSTRUCTIONS
(Day of Game)

Activity Description:
NIU Game Watch events bring Huskies together to cheer on the team and celebrate school spirit. Each season, volunteer hosts organize local gatherings to watch NIU games in real time. These events are held at community venues that can broadcast the game with sound and accommodate groups of alumni and friends. This activity brings Huskie pride to local communities across the country.

Volunteer Role:
Volunteer hosts support this activity by selecting a suitable venue, sharing venue details with NIU Foundation staff, promoting the event within their networks, and welcoming guests on game day.

Venues should have access to the channel/network broadcasting the game, be able to provide emailed permission to use their logo and ideally offer complimentary space or reserve a group of tables. To ensure a positive experience, venues should not have competing programming (e.g., bingo or karaoke) during the game and preferably should not charge for reservations. Attendees are expected to cover their own expenses, as the NIU Foundation is unable to reimburse costs. We recommend securing your venue at least three months before game day to allow time for planning and promotion. To share your interest in hosting, please fill out this form here.

Important Dates & Information:
1. Submit Application to Host a Game Watch Event (10 weeks prior to Game Day)
2. Identify a suitable venue (10 weeks prior to Game Day)
3. Attend a host training session with NIU Foundation staff (1-2 months prior to Game Day)
4. Promote your event (Ongoing)
5. Confirm venue details and game broadcast capabilities (2 weeks prior to Game Day)
6. Arrive one hour before kickoff to set up the space, welcome guests, and host (Game Day)
7. Take one group photo together with event attendees (Game Day)
8. Email attendee sheet/any photos taken at your event to volunteer@niu.edu (1 day after event)
9. Schedule a debrief with your NIUAA contact/liaison. (1 week after Game Day)

Support Provided by NIU Alumni Association:
1. Event kit including giveaways, games, sign-in sheets, and décor materials
2. Registration and marketing support
3. Staff support including one 1:1 virtual training/consultation with host(s) to discuss plans and ongoing email communications.

Point of Contact: Liz McKee, M.S.Ed ’14 at Lmckee1@niu.edu or 815-753-7400.

HUSKIE TREK TALK WATCH EVENT
April 18, 2026 - 3:30 - 5pm

Activity Description:
Huskie Trek Talks is a live and livestreamed event showcasing innovative, interdisciplinary work by NIU faculty and students. Each year, select presenters share projects in disciplines across the University from healthcare to sustainability to community engagement, and more. The NIU Foundation Board supports standout initiatives with funding to advance projects impact. Host a Huskie Trek Talk Watch Event to connect fellow Huskies and celebrate the exciting innovation happening at NIU!

Volunteer Role:
Volunteer hosts support this activity by identifying a space to show the livestream, sharing details with NIU Alumni Association staff, helping recruit within their network, and acting as host on the day of the event.

It is important to identify a space that is available and has the ability to display a zoom event on a screen for others to view **with sound on** (e.g. a community room at the local library). Spaces with no cost associated are optimal as the NIU Foundation is not able to provide funds to reserve a space. Ideally the watch event is hosted on the date and time that Huskie Trek Talks is hosted on campus.

Important Dates & Information:
1. Identify a viewing location (3 months prior to event)
2. Submit Application for Huskie Trek Talk Watch Event (8 weeks prior to event)
3. Promote Huskie Trek Talk Watch Event in your networks (Ongoing)
4. Attendee Registration Deadline (2 weeks prior to event)
5. Arrive early to venue to ensure that technology will work as planned and prepare to welcome guests! (Event Date)
6. Email any photos taken at your event to volunteer@niu.edu (1 day after event)
7. Schedule an activity debrief with your assigned NIUAA contact/liaison. (1 week after event)

Support Provided by NIU Alumni Association:
1. A package will be sent to host with the following materials (*this can vary depending on the event)*: QR codes for registration and link to NIU alumni resources, sticker name tags and pens, minimal swag for decoration, and leave-behind info cards.
2. Registration and marketing support
3. Staff support including one 1:1 virtual training/consultation with host(s) to discuss plans and ongoing email communications. Additional virtual meetings can be scheduled as necessary.

Point of Contact: Liz McKee, M.S.Ed ’14 at Lmckee1@niu.edu or 815-753-7400.

HUSKIE FOOD PANTRY FOOD/ITEM DRIVE
(Anytime)

Activity Description

The NIU Alumni Association invites volunteers to host a donation drive in support of the Huskie Food Pantry (HFP), which provides non-perishable food and essential hygiene items to NIU students in need. Volunteers can coordinate drives within their personal or professional networks to collect items that directly benefit students.

Volunteer Role

Volunteer hosts play a vital role in supporting the Huskie Food Pantry by organizing donation drives within their personal or professional networks. This includes selecting a timeframe and identifying how to collect items, promoting the drive through personal networks, and coordinating logistics. Hosts may choose to collect items on an ongoing basis throughout a specific period of time (generally a month), and/or organize a single day to collect items from those in their networks.

The Huskie Food Pantry accepts unopened food and hygiene items. Examples of preferred items include canned goods, boxed foods, toilet paper, paper towels, toothpaste, shampoo, and feminine care products. Used, opened, or perishable items should be avoided. Once the drive concludes, volunteers should confirm drop-off date/time with NIUAA staff, then plan to deliver donations to one of the designated locations. To confirm interest, please complete this form.

Drop-Off Locations:

- **NIU Barsema Alumni and Visitors Center (2nd Floor)**
  231 N. Annie Glidden Road, DeKalb, IL 60115
- **NIU Naperville Campus (Alumni Engagement Suite)**
  1120 E Diehl Rd., Naperville, IL 60563

Planning Timeline

1. Register your donation drive by completing the form above (2 months before drive)
2. Begin outreach planning and identify collection locations (2 months before drive)
3. Promote your drive within your network (e.g. social media, email, and word-of-mouth) (Ongoing)
4. Take photos of collected items and their contributors (Ongoing)
5. Confirm drop-off logistics with NIUAA staff (Day drive closes)
6. Deliver collected items to designated campus drop-off location (1 week after collection)
7. Ensure all items are dropped off successfully (1 week after collection)
8. Schedule a debrief with your NIUAA contact (1 week after collection)

Support Provided by NIU Alumni Association

1. Planning Support: One-on-one consultation with NIUAA staff to support organizing your drive.
2. Logistics Coordination: Assistance with drop-off scheduling and location access.
3. Recognition: Opportunities to be featured in NIUAA communications and social media.

Point of Contact

Ask For a member of Volunteer Engagement Team at volunteer@niu.edu or 815-753-7586.

PAWS FOR A CAUSE – DAYS OF SERVICE
(June 2026)

Activity Description:

Paws for a Cause Days of Service is a nationwide volunteer effort that unites NIU alumni and friends in giving back to their local communities while celebrating Huskie pride. Held annually during a week in June, alumni captains across the country select a date/time during that week and organize service projects that connect Huskies through meaningful acts of service. Each project, whether a cleanup, shelter service, or neighborhood initiative, demonstrates the collective spirit of the Huskie pack creating positive change nationwide.

Volunteer Role:

Team Captains play a key leadership role in Paws for a Cause service projects. They act as the primary on-site point of contact, ensuring the project runs smoothly from start to finish. The volunteer's responsibilities include identifying a site, coordinating logistics and sharing relevant details with NIU Alumni Association staff and registered volunteers. They are also expected to promote the project within their personal and professional networks to build awareness and encourage participation. Additionally, they play a key role in creating a positive experience for all volunteers by offering guidance and support throughout the event. In short, Team Captains help bring the project to life and make sure every participant feels engaged and valued.

Planning Timeline:

1. Alumni indicate their interest in being a team captain by completing this interest form. Applications are reviewed and accepted shortly after submission (12 weeks prior to event)
2. One-on-one captain training with NIU Alumni Association staff (10 weeks prior to event)
3. Service Project Site Evaluation Form completed and submitted (9 weeks prior to event)
4. Volunteer Registration launches (8 weeks prior to event)
5. Team member registration closes (2 weeks prior to event)
6. Captains send participants an email with all necessary details (1 week prior to event)
7. Paws for a Cause Days of Service will take place during the designated event week.
8. Captains share photo and event lists with staff via volunteer@niu.edu (1 day after event)
9. Complete event assessment survey and debrief meeting with staff (1-2 weeks after event)

Support Provided by NIU Alumni Association:

1. Support volunteer-driven efforts to assist in identifying and vetting community service sites to ensure each project is well organized and impactful.
2. Support recruitment efforts via promotion through targeted alumni emails and newsletters.
3. Offer personal one-on-one virtual training sessions to captains with NIUAA staff and continuous communication throughout the planning process.
4. If not provided by the site, each team captain will be sent nametags for volunteers to use.
5. After the event, NIUAA staff help collect attendance information, photos, and survey results to recognize and celebrate the volunteer efforts.

Point of Contact:

Ask For a member of Volunteer Engagement Team at volunteer@niu.edu or 815-753-7586.