



Mapping the Participant Journey: An Evaluation of Braven's Participant Communications Efforts

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	Page 4
Introduction.....	Page 6
Organizational Context.....	Page 7
Program Design.....	Page 7
Programmatic Outcomes.....	Page 10
Marketing and Communications Infrastructure.....	Page 11
Problem of Practice.....	Page 11
Literature Review.....	Page 12
Social Support for Underrepresented Students in the College to Career Transition.....	Page 12
The Power of Narrative in Periods of Change.....	Page 13
Customer Experience and Journey Mapping.....	Page 14
Conceptual Framework: Customer Journey Mapping.....	Page 16
Research Questions.....	Page 18
Project Design.....	Page 19
Data Collection.....	Page 19
Data Analysis.....	Page 26
Findings.....	Page 27
Research Question #1. How are Braven Participants Interacting with the Organization?.....	Page 27
Research Question #2. How are Braven’s Messages Shaping Participant Experience?.....	Page 32
Research Question #3. What are Other High-Performing Organizations Doing to Engage their Alumni Community?.....	Page 42
Recommendations.....	Page 45
Recommendation #1: Develop a Logic Model for Alumni Programming.....	Page 46
Recommendation #2: Create an Ideal Participant Journey Map.....	Page 47
Recommendation #3: Apply Sensegiving Theory to the Arc of Communications.....	Page 48
Recommendation #4: Expand the Use of Centralized Tracking and Measurement Tools.....	Page 49
Discussion.....	Page 51
References.....	Page 53
Appendices.....	Page 56
Appendix A. Research Questions and Their Data Sources.....	Page 56
Appendix B. Braven’s Post-Course Survey Questions.....	Page 58
Appendix C. Braven PAF Survey Questions.....	Page 60
Appendix D. Focus Group Protocols.....	Page 61
Appendix E. Interview Protocols.....	Page 63
Appendix F. Braven’s Participant Journey Map.....	Page 73
Appendix G. Evaluation-focused Participant Journey Map.....	Page 74
Appendix H. Best Parts of the Braven Experience Identified by Fellows.....	Page 76
Appendix I. Changed to Make Braven Even Better Suggested by Fellows.....	Page 76

Executive Summary

Braven, a national nonprofit in the emerging college to career space, addresses an under-recognized challenge: although earning a college degree is often considered a steppingstone to social mobility for students growing up in poverty, “only 30 percent of the 1.3 million low-income or first-generation college enrollees each year will attain a strong first job or enter graduate school” (Braven, 2021, p. 3). Braven helps underrepresented college students build job search and career-readiness skills, so they are prepared to land a strong first job and build a career of purpose. Their program logic model includes a credit-bearing, university-based, one-semester course and follow-on development opportunities through college graduation. This mixed-method formative evaluation explores how Braven can develop their alumni strategy post-graduation and utilize their communications channels to promote ongoing participant engagement from recruitment through alumni-hood.

Problem of Practice

Braven’s strong programmatic results have fueled opportunities to scale. Riding that momentum, Braven has prioritized sustainable growth (Bain and Company, 2020), which requires the organization be able to successfully recruit a growing number of Fellows, ensure they complete the Accelerator Course, and that they continue to engage in Braven programming through college graduation and into alumni-hood. This project sought to help Braven leaders prepare for their growing participant network size by taking stock of how Braven’s communications work currently shapes participant experience and informing the development of an engagement strategy specifically designed for Braven alumni post college graduation.

Conceptual Framework

This evaluation utilizes the customer journey framework to guide research design and data analysis. Customer journey maps are grounded in the idea that every interaction an individual has with a brand (or organization) over time shapes their experience in a positive or negative way. Positive experience is cultivated when a product or service meets the customer’s expectations, effectively satisfies a need, and the interaction provokes a positive emotional response (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009). Positive experience, in turn, promotes brand loyalty.

Research Questions

The project sought to answer the following questions:

1. How are Braven participants interacting with the organization?
2. How does Braven’s messaging shape participant experience?
3. What are other high-performing organizations doing to engage their alumni community?

Project Design

To gain a holistic view of how Braven’s participant communications strategy is being implemented and experienced by its intended audience, this study employs a mixed-method approach. The formative evaluation seeks to answer its research questions using data gathered from document review, content analysis of email and social media communications, digital marketing analytics, participant surveys and focus groups, and interviews with participants, staff, and peer organizations. Answering the research

questions provides the building blocks to construct a participant journey map that illustrates the typical pathway of engagement for current Braven participants.

Findings

The evaluation findings are presented in response to the three primary research questions that were developed to illuminate the touchpoints Braven participants typically experience and the impact they have on brand experience. Qualitative and quantitative data findings are reported to provide a robust answer to each research question that triangulates experience using measures of behavior and perception. Data analysis revealed:

- Braven participants are having a largely positive experience and achieving Braven’s desired outcomes
- Braven is leveraging participants’ preferred communications channels and seeing strong levels of engagement with email and social media content
- Content tends to be focused on the tactical elements of enrollment, course completion, and enrichment opportunities
- There is some mismatch between the expectations set and participants’ program experience. While participants expect a less rigorous course heavily focused on job search skills, they report highly valuing the soft skills, relationship building, and ongoing support also delivered by the program but are surprised by the workload
- Top-tier universities and peer talent pipeline nonprofits offer a framework for strategic alumni engagement

Recommendations

The evaluation findings supported four recommendations to expand on the successes of the current plan and address challenges as needed:

1. Develop a logic model for alumni programming and use it as the foundation to build out the alumni engagement strategy cycle.
2. Create an ideal participant journey map that maintains high points and addresses current pain points.
3. Apply sensegiving theory to the arc of communication to increase alignment of expectations and experience and deepen participant investment in long-term membership in the Braven community.
4. Expand the use of centralized digital marketing tracking and measurement tools.

Introduction

Braven, a national nonprofit in the emerging college to career space based in Chicago, addresses an under-recognized challenge: although earning a college degree is often considered a steppingstone to social mobility for students growing up in poverty, “only 30 percent of the 1.3 million low-income or first-generation college enrollees each year will attain a strong first job or enter graduate school” (Braven, 2021, p. 3). As a result, some 900,000 college students every year are unable to fully leverage their education, get on a path to economic freedom, and pursue the American Dream (Braven, 2021, p. 3). Braven envisions an alternate future in which “our country’s next generation of leaders will emerge from everywhere” (Braven, n.d.a, p. 1). To achieve that vision, Braven offers underrepresented college students a credit-bearing, university-based, one-semester course that builds job search and career-readiness skills as well as follow-on development opportunities for program completers so they are ready to secure and thrive in a strong first job after college that will anchor a meaningful career and life of impact.

Early research indicates that Braven’s program yields meaningful gains in college graduation rate, strong job attainment, and income (Braven, 2021) for its participants at a pivotal moment of transition from college student to young professional. To fully realize its potential impact expanding economic opportunity for underrepresented college students, Braven aims to successfully enroll college students who would benefit from the program, provide a positive experience that promotes program completion, and continue to engage participants throughout college and into their careers. Braven leadership recognizes that its ability to effectively communicate with its participants through the recruitment process, during the fellowship, and beyond undergirds Braven’s ability to build relationships with them and engage this critical audience over time.

While Braven has invested extensively in measuring its programmatic outcomes, it has not yet had the opportunity to explore in depth how its participant communications strategy is in practice creating touchpoints (Rosenbaum, Otolara & Ramirez, 2016) that shape participants’ cognitive, emotional, and sensory perceptions of the organization, forming an overall experience (De Keyser, Klaus & Kenningham, 2015). That experience influences their willingness to actively engage with Braven and its network (De Keyser, Klaus & Kenningham, 2015). Furthermore, Braven’s program logic model currently covers the first two stages of programmatic engagement – Fellows enrolled in the Accelerator Course and Post-Accelerator Fellows (PAFs) eligible for follow-on supports until college graduation – but does not delineate the phase of their experience that will ultimately be the longest – the alumni phase, which begins with college graduation. Their alumni are currently included in most PAF programming and communications. As Braven’s early cohorts land strong first jobs and move into the workplace, the organization is turning its attention to developing its alumni logic model.

Therefore, this mixed-method formative evaluation leverages qualitative and quantitative data to map the participant journey (Rosenbaum, Otolara & Ramirez, 2016) – comprised of all the touch points a participant has with Braven – that begins with participant recruitment and extends through the alumni phase of participation. The data gathered triangulate participants’ and staff members’ actions and perceptions to identify the most influential touchpoints participants are currently having and whether or not those are accumulating to foster an experience that encourages ongoing engagement. Informed by marketing, business management, and higher education research, the research design utilizes survey data, focus groups, interviews, digital analytics, and content analysis to unpack the implementation of

Braven's current participant communications strategy. It teases out what is currently being communicated, whether that content paints a compelling and accurate picture of the Braven experience, and how well it fulfills the needs of its target participant audience. From there, the study explores the alumni engagement strategy of peer organizations to inform the development of Braven's alumni logic model and associated participant journey.

Based on the evaluation findings and relevant literature, four recommendations were offered to Braven to promote positive participant experience and engagement:

1. Develop an alumni logic model rooted in understanding of the value proposition that the organization and alumni offer one another;
2. Create an ideal participant journey map inclusive of the communications and programmatic touch points that a participant has from recruitment through alumni-hood;
3. Craft a narrative arc for participant communications that follows the sensegiving framework to stewards them through the transition from college to career, and
4. Expand central tracking of digital communications platforms to achieve more robust measurement of participant touchpoints.

For Braven, this evaluation offers the opportunity to strengthen participant communications strategy and implementation in service of their mission to empower underrepresented college students with resources too often unavailable to them as they build their careers. For a broader audience of practitioners, this research offers an informative case study because it extends the application of existing marketing research on customer experience and how to map it from its traditional domain of for-profit business to the nonprofit sector. Understanding how to leverage communications strategy in efforts to expand economic opportunity for underrepresented young people is of special consequence to advocates in this moment in time when there is increasing interest in addressing the structural elements that reinforce economic inequality along lines of race and class in our nation.

Organization Context

Program Design

Founded in 2013, Braven is working to build a force of 100,000 emerging leaders who will be prepared to secure and thrive in strong first jobs after college graduation that anchor meaningful careers and lives of purpose. To do so, Braven offers underrepresented college students – first-generation colleges students, students receiving Pell grants, and students of color – a credit-bearing, one-semester course that builds job search and career-readiness skills as well as alumni support services, such as one-on-one mentoring, networking opportunities, and other development opportunities through college graduation. At the time of this evaluation, Braven had served more than 3,300 Fellows and expected to enroll more than 2,000 Fellows in the next year (Braven, n.d.b).

Braven currently partners with four universities that serve large populations of underrepresented students – Lehman College, National Louis University, Rutgers University-Newark, and Jose State University, to offer its flagship program: the one-semester, mixed-delivery, credit-bearing, university-embedded Accelerator Course. The course combines online self-paced modules and in-person cohort experiences, which include a culminating group project designed to increase career-applicable

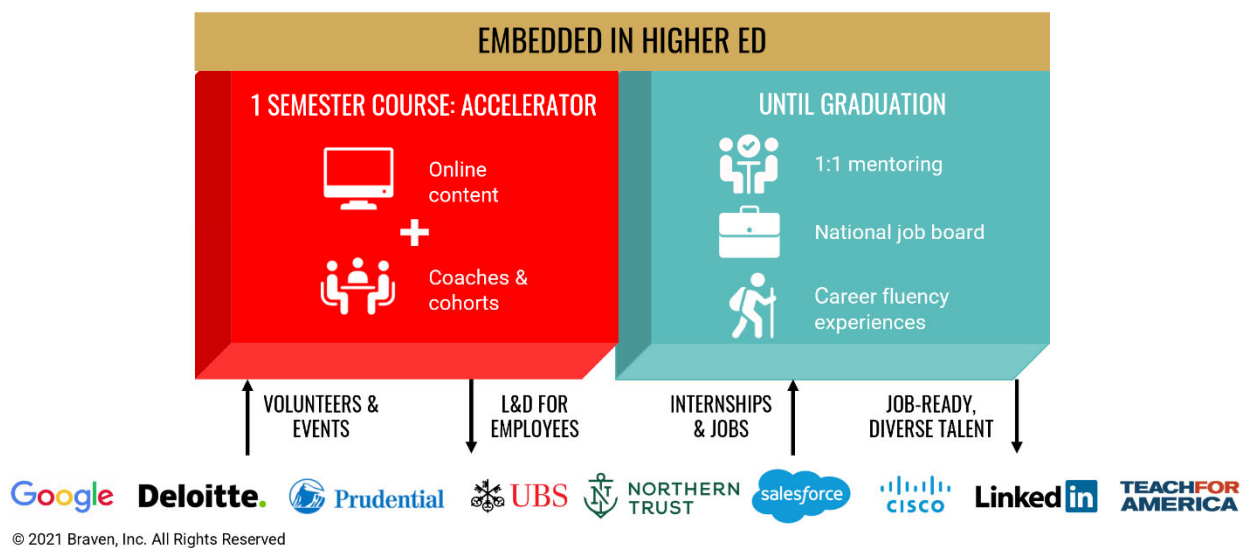
experience. The synchronous elements of the course are led by volunteers known as Leadership Coaches, typically young professionals who also benefit by gaining experience leading diverse teams. In-person meetings typically occur on campus but shifted to an online format during the pandemic.

In the past year, Braven piloted an adjacent delivery model, BravenX, that is anchored to college-readiness programs rather than specific universities. Through BravenX, the nonprofit delivered their Accelerator Course to Chicago-area college students affiliated with college success organizations. While they plan to focus on the university partnership model, Braven will continue to explore the viability of BravenX on a small scale (Bain and Company, 2020).

After completing the Accelerator Course, Braven Fellows in both the traditional Accelerator Course and the BravenX model can access additional development resources. These include the one-on-one Professional Mentor (PM) Program, which pairs Post-Accelerator Fellows with a mentor in their career field, as well as networking events, skill development sessions, and access to internship and job opportunities with corporate partners (Braven, n.d.b). This program design is captured in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Braven Logic Model

THE BRAVEN MODEL



Zooming in on the Accelerator Course, the curriculum has three sections designed to envision the professional goals each Fellow wants to achieve, build the tactical skills needed to successfully navigate the job search process, and develop competencies needed for success in the workplace, including communication, collaboration, and problem solving. This approach is captured in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Accelerator Course Content



The Braven program is designed to provide its Fellows with four building blocks of career readiness (Braven, 2020, p. 12):

1. Social capital – Braven builds its Fellows’ networks by building relationships with their Leadership Coach, professional mentors, and a range of other corporate volunteers
2. Career skills – The program focuses on five core competencies:
 - a. Self-driven leading
 - b. Working in teams
 - c. Problem solving
 - d. Networking and communicating
 - e. Operating and managing
3. Experiences – Braven provides hands-on experience working with teams during the Accelerator Course as well as connections to internship and job opportunities
4. Confidence – Braven Fellows develop the know-how and the belief in their ability to build their careers

Braven’s revenue comes from three sources: university partners, which pay a fee for course delivery; employer partners seeking diverse talent recruitment opportunities and ongoing professional development for their staff through volunteer opportunities; and philanthropic giving. Braven has prioritized refining their repeatable program model in the next few years, so they are prepared to thoughtfully scale the program in the years beyond (Bain and Company, 2020).

Programmatic Outcomes

In its first six years, Braven has demonstrated meaningful impact, accelerating its participants' career trajectories. A 2019 study conducted by researchers at Stanford University and the University of Illinois at Chicago found that Braven Fellows experienced statistically significant growth in three competencies correlated with college persistence – grit, sense of social and academic fit, and academic self-efficacy – as well as two correlated with career success – job search self-efficacy and career self-efficacy (Braven, 2020, p. 17). Another exploratory study from Harvard University found similar increases in those competencies, with the substitution of growth mindset for academic self-efficacy (Braven, n.d.b). These research findings are borne out by the outcomes achieved by Braven Fellows:

College graduation

- 80 percent of Braven graduates are persisting in college or have graduated (Braven, 2021, p. 19); just 60 percent of young people who enroll in college nationally finish within six years (Braven, 2020, p. 15)

Career advancement

- While only 36 percent of Black and Latinx students at public universities secure a strong first job within six months of graduation, 58 percent of Braven Fellows do so – an increase of 22 percentage points (Braven, 2021, p. 8). The pandemic has driven dramatic decreases in strong job attainment across the board; the rate has dropped 15 percent for all college graduates (Braven, 2021, p. 7). Prior to the pandemic, 71 percent of Braven Fellows were landing strong first jobs (Braven, 2020, p. 7)
- 74 percent of employed Braven graduates hold positions aligned with their long-term career goals (Braven, 2021, p. 10)
- 75 percent held at least one internship as an undergraduate, compared to 68 percent nationally (Braven, 2021, p. 15)

Financial security

- Braven Fellows out-earn the median salary of public four-year college graduates, earning a median salary of \$55,000 - \$60,000 compared to \$49,725 nationally (Braven, 2021, p. 10)
- 88 percent of recent Braven graduates have a job with employer-provided benefits (Braven, 2021, p. 10)
- While Americans have a 50/50 chance of out-earning their parents by age 30, 53 percent of Braven graduates report they already out-earn their parents in their first job out of college (Braven, 2021, p. 9)
- A March 2020 analysis by Bain and Company estimates Braven's potential economic impact in terms of increased income, if it were to achieve its ambition to serve 40,000 Fellows in its first decade, at between \$7 and \$10 billion. (Bain and Company, 2020, p. 30)

Marketing and Communications Infrastructure

Braven maintains a matrixed model with a regional team dedicated to the execution of each its four university partnerships and national teams, including an External Affairs team that provide strategic direction and technical support for the entire organization. Braven's Marketing and Communications team sits within the External Affairs team and is responsible for organization-wide digital marketing, earned media engagement, and brand resources. The organization's overarching participant communications strategy is designed by the Marketing and Communications team, but portions of it are driven by teams focused on specific stages of the participant lifespan - recruitment, program, and Post-Accelerator Fellow (PAF) support. Some of the execution of the plan is entirely managed by national functional teams, while others are delegated to regional staff members, who have the flexibility to tailor templates to their local needs. The thoughtfully crafted participant communications plan identifies key messages that should be used to tell the Braven story and describes how specific digital platforms will be used to meet programmatic and participant needs.

To monitor the effectiveness of its digital marketing platforms and promote coordination across national and regional teams, Braven has invested in online tools that enable the Director of Marketing and Communications to measure engagement with digital content. Braven uses Campaign Monitor to track the analytics of emails sent through the platform and Hootsuite to post and track analytics for its national Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn social media accounts. Regional teams manage their own Instagram accounts, which are used to build community among their local cohort, but at the time of data collection these were not run through Hootsuite. Slack is also used by regional teams for Fellow and PAF community building and reminders, but analytics are not regularly tracked. Regional teams also use text messaging to send reminders to Fellows and PAFs but they use various texting platforms, so analytics were not readily available.

Braven has established a strong foundation for effective participant communications in its strategic plan and collection of digital key performance indicators (KPIs) for email and social media channels. This evaluation offers an opportunity to broaden Braven's analysis of its participant communications and incorporate measures of participant perceptions to more holistically understand the strategy's outcomes.

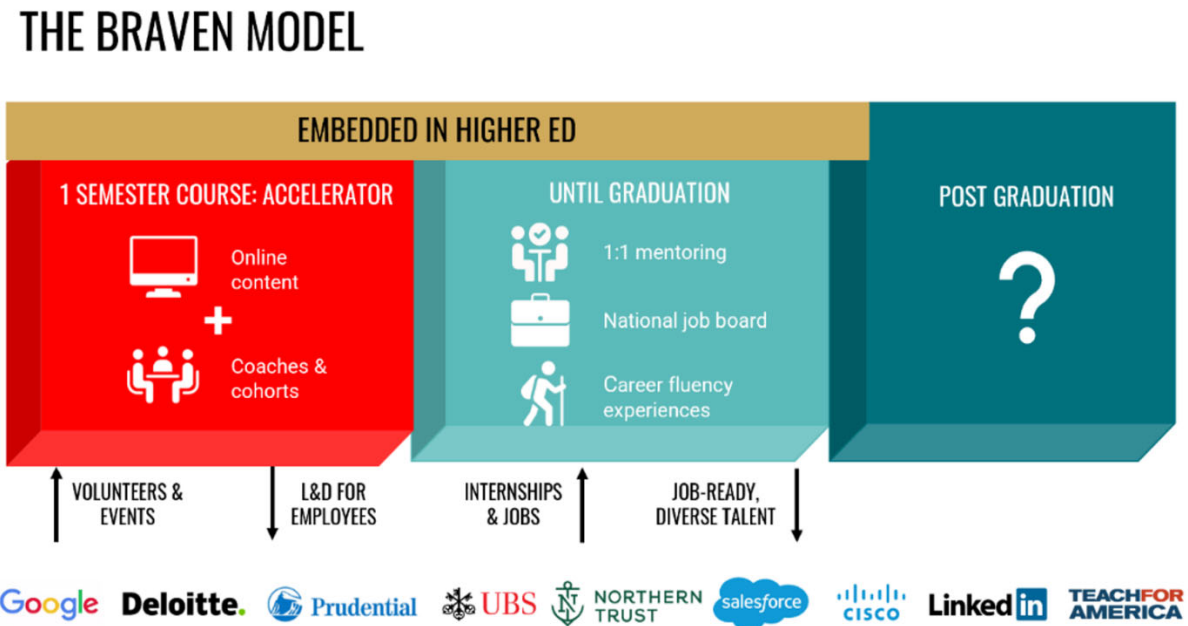
Problem of Practice

Braven's participants are out-performing similar students nationally on rates of college graduation, strong job attainment, and earnings (Braven, 2021). These strong programmatic outcomes – measured with robust data systems - indicate Braven is making progress towards its vision. They have fueled steady recruitment, high levels of program completion, and growing funding opportunities. With such notable results in its relatively short history, Braven has prioritized sustainable growth and developed a strategy to scale up operations in partnership with a Bain consulting team (Bain and Company, 2020). To meet its growth goals, it is critical for Braven to be able to successfully recruit a growing number of Fellows, ensure they complete the Accelerator Course, and foster continued engagement in Braven programming through college graduation and into alumni-hood. An effective participant communications strategy is essential to those outcomes. Braven's Head of External Affairs engaged this

evaluation to assess their current participant communications strategy and identify opportunities to strengthen their approach so that they maximize their talent and financial resources.

Furthermore, the Head of External Affairs recognized that as the alumni force continues to grow, it is increasingly important to revisit their role in the logic model. Current programming and communications often treat the PAF and alumni audience as one, but differentiation may be valuable as alumni needs and interests change after they launch their careers. Therefore, this evaluator was also tasked with identifying best practices for designing alumni engagement strategy. Figure 3 illustrates the addition of an alumni component to the logic model.

Figure 3. Expanding the Braven Logic Model



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Literature Review

To address the problem of practice, a review of the existing literature was conducted to understand the major life transition young people make into adulthood as they move from college to career and how well-structured communications efforts designed to meet their changing needs over time can steward this period of change.

Social Support for Underrepresented Students in the College to Career Transition

The transition from college to career in contemporary America is considered a period of significant exploration as young adults in this period of life, referred to as emerging adulthood, consider and test their life options (Arnett, 2000). Research finds that an emerging adult's perception of a smooth

transition is strongly tied to the degree of social support they receive. New research from Nancy Hill and Alexis Redding (2021) demonstrates that emerging adults benefit greatly from mentorship as they consider who they want to become, explore their career options, and learn how to pursue them. Much of the research on emerging adulthood, however, has been conducted among more affluent communities (Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig & Platt, 2010) than those served by Braven, which targets students who come from low-income backgrounds, are the first in their family to attend college, and/or identify as people of color. Students from less affluent backgrounds often lack the financial and social resources for extended exploration (Arnett, 2000) and have less access to mentors who can help them navigate their professional aspirations. Therefore, they more frequently secure first jobs that do not fully leverage their college degree or put them on a path to economic freedom (Braven, 2020).

Research on low-income students' transition to college offers useful parallels to understand the needs for social support and planning resources of under-represented college students as they move through major milestones as they grow from adolescents to adults. A body of research on summer melt – the attrition of young people who are admitted to but do not enroll in college the fall after high school graduation – indicates that students who are low-income are more likely to fail to enroll in college after they have gained admittance than their more affluent peers because they are hindered by financial, administrative, and communication barriers (Castleman & Page, 2014). Rall (2016) examined summer melt through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory, which identifies four factors that enable individuals to successfully navigate major life transitions: the transition's impetus, the characteristics and experience of the individual, social support, and the strategies the individual employs to navigate the transition. Rall found that students who "melted" – or failed to enroll in college – lacked the social support they needed to navigate confusing financial aid and registration requirements and had difficulty interpreting unclear communications meant to explain necessary procedures. Consistent with these findings, interventions that increase college enrollment increased social support and technical assistance, such as summer college counseling (Castleman, Arnold & Lynk Wartman, 2012; Castleman, Page & Schooley, 2014), near-peer mentoring (Castleman & Page, 2015), and text messaging reminders (Castleman & Page, 2015; Castleman & Page, 2017). These findings point to the role targeted communications play in providing needed social and technical support for underserved young people during important transitions on the journey into adulthood.

The Power of Narrative in Periods of Change

Having established the important role consistent communications and strategic content can play in moments of change like the transition from college to career, I now turn to the literature on effectively structuring communications to foster change.

One of the best-known narrative frameworks for effecting change through public advocacy was developed by organizer and Harvard professor Marshall Ganz. Ganz argues that narrative effectively moves people to action when it offers both logical and emotional elements through effective storytelling. He offers a three-part approach to public narrative building:

1. The story of self, which communicates the individual's values that move them to act,
2. The story of us, which captures the purpose that unites an organization or group, and

3. The story of now, which describes the urgency of the challenge at hand that needs to be met (Ganz, 2011).

Combining the three elements enhances the emotional valence of the storytelling and allows the story to resonate more potently with the audience (Ganz, 2011). Braven's four key messages named in its communications strategy – titled Our Why, Our How, Our What, and Our Now – mirror Ganz' focus on values, purpose, and urgency.

Management literature on the role of leaders in stewarding organizational change also offers insight into the role Braven's communications can play in supporting Braven participants through the college to career transition. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) argue that leaders play a critical role in managing organizational change by articulating a vision for the future and providing a consistent narrative describing the change process that helps their employees understand and support the change initiative. They propose a four-step sensegiving framework - envisioning, signaling, re-visualizing, and energizing – that spans the design of the strategic vision, its initial communication, adjusting course, and interpreting outcomes to motivate persistence in the change effort. This may be even more applicable to this audience than Ganz' model because it is designed to engage those tasked with implementing, rather than just supporting, a change effort.

Building on the sensegiving framework, Foldy, Goldman and Ospina (2008) argue that successful leaders are working to create a cognitive shift, or fundamental change in understanding, as they guide others through a change effort. In providing a narrative of under-represented college students' likely career pathway and possible alternative realities unlocked by participation in Braven's program, the organization's communications efforts can be considered a key tool in the sensegiving process, effecting a significant cognitive shift in this moment of life transition.

Customer Experience and Journey Mapping

Braven's mission – “to empower promising, underrepresented young people—first-generation college students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students of color—with the skills, confidence, experiences and networks necessary to transition from college to strong first jobs, which lead to meaningful careers and lives of impact” (Braven, n.d.b) – requires compelling college students to join the program and stick with it – through the Accelerator Course and beyond graduation. In addition to its post-Accelerator programming, Braven also identifies as an important benefit of participation membership in “an enduring network” (Braven, n.d.b) of alumni, making the Braven experience a lifelong relationship with the organization. While early results are strong, Braven seeks to maintain the engagement of its network members over the long-term and continue to thoughtfully expand the size of their fellowship cohorts to maximize its impact. Marketing literature provides a valuable lens through which to analyze how Braven's participant communications can serve to foster a positive experience over the course of a participants' relationship with the organization. This application extends marketing concepts conceived of in the for-profit context to the nonprofit sector; Braven takes the place of a for-profit company and the participant plays the role of the customer. Therefore, throughout this report I will use customer and participant interchangeably.

Since the 1950s, marketing researchers have noted the importance of understanding the customer's experience throughout the purchase process and ongoing interactions with a company in shaping their behavior as consumers (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In the ensuing decades, research has explored and further refined the marketer's focus on the customer's needs and the relationship they build with the seller. Abbott (1955) first observed that customers seek a satisfying experience when they make a purchase as well as a satisfactory product. More recent theorists posit that both acquiring a product and the experience that accompanies the purchase – whether of a physical good or a service – are two separate constructs that contribute to the happiness a consumer derives from the purchase transaction (Schmitt, Brakus & Zarantonello, 2015). In the 1980s, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) first introduced a framework for customer experience that identified three essential elements researchers should attend to when studying purchasing behavior - customer cognition, behavior, and affect – and advocated for greater focus on the emotional aspects that inform decision-making typically neglected by previous theory focused on the rational processes of decision-making.

In the last two decades, there has been a significant increase in research on customer experience with an increasing focus on finer market segments, even down to the needs and preferences of the individual customer (Sheth, Sisodia & Sharma, 2000). In a synthesis of existing cross-disciplinary research, De Keyser, Klaus and Kenningham (2015) define customer experience as “comprised of the cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, and social elements that mark the customer's direct or indirect interaction with a (set of) marketing actor(s)” (De Keyser, Klaus & Kenningham, 2015, p. 14). It is an iterative set of interactions between the customer and representatives of a company, including other customers, or its technology platforms, embedded in a social context, that build on each other as the customer gathers information about a product, makes the purchase, and reflects on the outcome. Customer experience suffers when there is a mismatch between the expectations built while considering a purchase and the actual experience in the “moments of truth” when customers engage with a product (Hultman, 2005). Given the interactional nature of customer experience, shaped by individual and social context, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003) highlight the importance of opportunities for co-creation between customer and brand, rather than the brand alone engineering the experience.

Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) present a four-dimension scale for measuring a related concept - brand experience – which conceptualizes the sensations, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors evoked by interactions with a brand. Aligned with customer experience frameworks, the scale measures sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral elements. The authors demonstrate their brand experience scale's validity, reliability and distinguishability from other brand measures using six studies. They found brand experience to be a strong predictor of buying behavior and brand loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009).

Reichheld (2003) also observed a strong correlation between company growth and positive customer experience. He advocates the use of net promoter score (NPS) – which asks customers how likely they are to recommend a product – as an alternative to traditional multi-question satisfaction measures because of its predictive value. A strong NPS score suggests that positive experience has cultivated customers as brand ambassadors who will, in turn, inform the purchases of other shoppers. NPS has been widely adopted in both the private and public sector and is used by Braven to measure brand perception among its participants.

To understand the many interactions a customer might have with a brand and how they shape a positive or negative perception, researchers have embraced an approach known as customer journey mapping that reflects the ongoing nature of a relationship between the customer and a brand. Its origins can be found in models of the customer decision-making process developed throughout the 1960s and '70s (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In the 1980s, service blueprint mapping gained popularity to define the process through which customers make a purchase and to enable service improvement. This process examines the physical elements a customer encounters, the steps they take as they complete a transaction, as well as the customer service systems they encounter directly, and the behind-the-scenes elements that shape their experience (Bitner, Ostrom & Morgan, 2008).

Today's customer journey maps typically plot on a horizontal axis the possible interactions – or touchpoints – a customer might have with a brand chronologically through pre-service, service, and post-service phases. The vertical axis has been used to map a variety of elements, but Rosenbaum, Otolara and Ramirez (2016) recommend using it to define opportunities for innovation across specific strands of service delivery at each customer touchpoint. They also highlight the importance of recognizing that not all touchpoints are equally influential (Rosenbaum, Otolara & Ramirez, 2016) – some are more frequently experienced by customers, others have a stronger positive or negative valence, and some occur at pivotal moments of transition from one phase of the journey to the next. Therefore, the authors utilize customer surveys to gain insight into actual customer actions and perspectives.

While much of the research on customer experience and participant journey has been conducted in a for-profit setting, the theory can be appropriately applied to the nonprofit context as well. Nonprofits, like corporations, operate as brands promoting their services or products. Program participants experience multiple touch points with a nonprofit's brand that shape their perception of the organization and likelihood of continuing to engage with the program. When their expectations for interaction with the nonprofit are not met or negative experiences become overwhelming, participant experience suffers, and they are less likely to stick with the program and recommend it to others.

Braven's primary goal is to impart the skills and mindsets their participants need to navigate the college to career transition. Their participant communications support program uptake and persistence when they offer a narrative that helps participants conceptualize the opportunity that lies before them in the college to career transition, is realistic about the challenges they are likely to face entering the job market, and conveys how Braven will help them fulfill their aspirations.

Conceptual Framework: Customer Journey Mapping

This evaluation utilizes the customer journey framework to guide research design and data analysis. Customer journey maps are grounded in the idea that every interaction an individual has with a brand (or organization) over time shapes their experience in a positive or negative way. Positive experience is cultivated when a product or service meets the customer's expectations, effectively satisfies a need, and the interaction provokes a positive emotional response (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009). Conversely, when the reality of a product does not match the expectations set, fails to perform, or interactions spur negative emotions, customer experience is negative. Factors shaping experience are captured in Figure 4. Positive experience fuels buying behavior and brand loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt, and

Zarantonello, 2009). Net Promoter Score (NPS) is an effective indicator of customer experience and is predictive of brand loyalty and ambassadorship (Reichheld, 2003).

Figure 4. Factors Shaping Customer Experience

Experience Drivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do the expectations set for the product/service in the sales pitch match its reality?• Does the product/service effectively fulfill a meaningful need for the customer?• Do interactions with the product or staff – “moments of truth” – provoke joy or frustration?• Do the brand’s business processes or digital platforms work seamlessly for the customer or is there a breakdown in the process?

Customer journey maps sequentially list the interactions – both in-person and digital – a customer has with a brand. Because customer needs and interests change over time and the ways in which they will interact with a brand may vary in different stages of their relationship with the brand, journey maps are typically arranged by different phases of engagement. This is illustrated in Figure 5. In the for-profit sector, customer journey maps are typically organized into pre-service, service, and post-service phases as the customer considers a product, purchases that product, and then reflects on the experience.

Figure 5. Common Journey Map Format



In the context of the current evaluation, the Braven participant journey can be deconstructed into four phases that align with Braven’s programmatic model: 1) prospect, 2) Fellow, 3) Post-Accelerator Fellow (PAF), and 4) alumni. The four phases are illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Braven Participant Journey Segments



This framework allows the evaluator to assess the effectiveness of participant-facing content and how it is delivered in the context of each phase of the participant journey. It also orients organizational leaders to design alumni engagement strategy in a way that is consistent with the previous stages of the journey and in service of the organization’s mission and theory of change.

Research Questions

To understand the experience shaped by Braven’s current participant communications strategy, this project seeks to map the Braven participant journey. By charting the touch points participants are having with Braven and identifying the positive interactions that encourage future engagement as well as the pain points that undermine ongoing engagement, the findings illuminate opportunities to build on existing areas of strength and address gaps. That data was then supplemented with best practices for alumni engagement gleaned from peer organizations to prepare Braven to pursue its growth goals with a refined participant communications strategy designed to shape positive experience for participants from the prospect to alumni phase of their Braven journey.

To achieve these outcomes, this evaluation asked three primary research questions with five subquestions:

1. *How are Braven participants interacting with the organization?*
 - a. *What touch points are participants having with the organization via marketing channels and staff interactions?*
 - b. *Are the messages sent reaching and activating the intended audience?*
2. *How does Braven’s messaging shape participant experience?*
 - a. *What messages are contained in sent communications and do they align with the messages prioritized in Braven’s communications strategy?*
 - b. *Do those messages – both prioritized and delivered – set accurate expectations for program design and desired outcomes?*
 - c. *Are there certain moments in the participant journey that are frequently pain points or affirming experiences?*
3. *What are other high-performing organizations doing to engage their alumni community?*

Project Design

To gain a holistic view of how Braven’s participant communications strategy is being implemented and experienced by its intended audience, this study employs a mixed-method approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The formative evaluation seeks to answer its research questions using

data gathered from document review, content analysis of email and social media communications, digital marketing analytics, participant surveys and focus groups, and interviews with participants, staff, and peer organizations. A table of the research questions and data sources used to answer each is included in Appendix A. Answering the research questions provides the building blocks to construct a participant journey map that illustrates the typical pathway of engagement for current Braven participants. Visualizing the participant experience illuminates strengths in the current process and opportunities to build on it as the organization continually refines its model and grows over time. Best practices gleaned from interviews with peer organizations offer direction for a discrete alumni engagement strategy that extends current engagement efforts beyond college graduation.

Data Collection

Data collection began with a review of strategy documents, marketing collateral, and website content to establish a baseline understanding of Braven’s purpose, structure, and goals. From there, I undertook a systematic review of five data sources.

Content Analysis

To understand what messages are being delivered by Braven’s digital communications, I reviewed all email captured in Braven’s email platform, Campaign Monitor, and the social media communications sent from Braven’s national accounts via the Hootsuite platform between January 1, 2020 and June 30, 2020. The content was coded for the four key messages named in Braven’s 2020-2021 communications strategy, audience, region, topic, major, and other themes that emerged during analysis. These messages, categories, and themes are listed in Figure 7. Email segmentation could be determined by the distribution list used to send them. While LinkedIn content is not segmented – any user can see every post – I coded posts by audience type (prospect, Fellow, PAF or alumni) if its content was most appropriate for that audience. For example, a post about a PAF training opportunity would be given the audience code of PAF. While Braven has segmented audience-specific messages, the four core key messages that anchor the strategy were used for analysis to allow for comparison across audience categories.

Figure 7. Content Analysis Codes

Braven's Key Messages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Why: Every young person dreams about what they'll be when they grow up. Yet too many promising young Americans face daunting hurdles to career success. With an inclusive talent strategy, the next generation of leaders can emerge from everywhere. We're here to help make that happen. • Our How: Braven partners with universities and employers to build career preparation into the undergraduate experience. Through the Braven course and post-course experience, Fellows gain the professional skills, confidence, networks, and experience necessary to land a strong first job. • Our What: We are putting education to work and fueling a generation of leaders as diverse and courageous as our future demands. • Our Now: While our Fellows and Post-Accelerator Fellows who are still in college are our first priority at this moment, we wake up every day thinking about the 75% of the 1.2 million low-income and first-generation college enrollees each year who in a strong economy won't emerge with a quality first job. We know the world just got even more complicated for our most vulnerable students and while we are doing a lot of good, we have far bigger ambitions to equalize access to economic mobility. The Braven Booster will allow us to reach up to 100,000 students and will be a main focus in Q1.
Message Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audience – Prospect, Fellow, PAF, alumni, Leadership Coaches, supporters • Region – Lehman College, National Louis University (NLU), Rutgers University – Newark (RU-N), San Jose State University (SJSU), national • Topic – About Braven, career tips, COVID update/resources, enrichment opportunity, event, holiday, inspiration, job/internship opportunity, PAF profile, recruitment, volunteer opportunity • Major – all majors, tech, business, education
Content Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building relationships • COVID • Ongoing support • PAF stories • Core values • Leadership Coaches • Professional connections • PAF messenger • 50-50 chance of out-earning one's parents

Emails

Two hundred forty seven (247) emails sent through Campaign Monitor between January and June 2020 were coded for the full list of codes listed in Figure 7. Only four emails were sent by the Chicago team via Campaign Monitor during the focal period because they were not actively running a course that semester, so this analysis does not capture the full scope of their communications in an average semester.

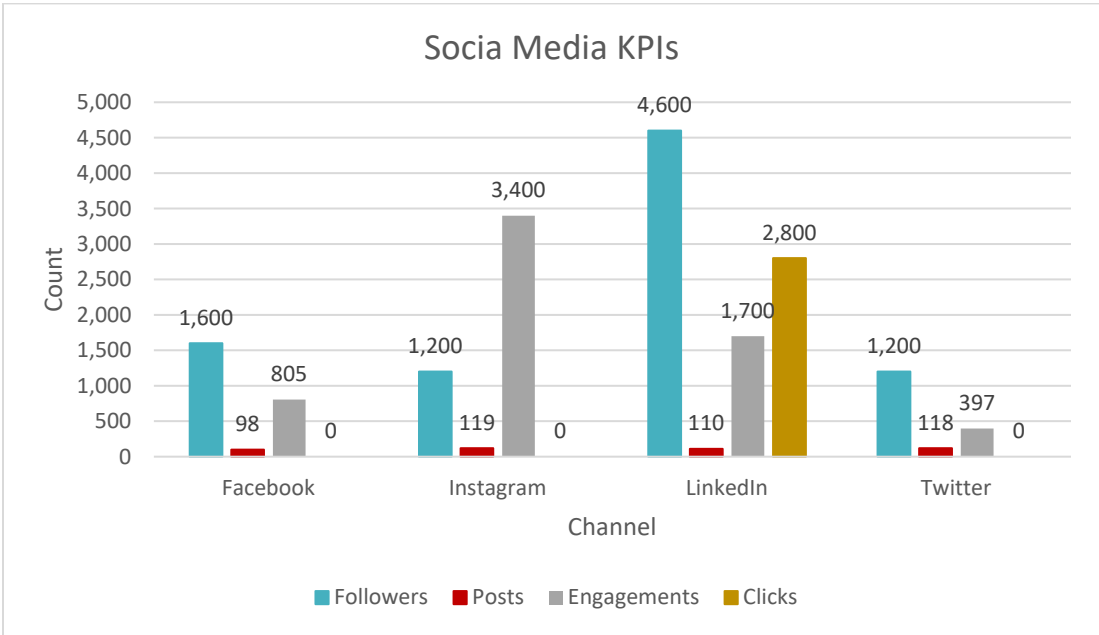
Social Media

LinkedIn, as the most followed of Braven’s social media accounts and the only one with click data available in Hootsuite, was selected as the proxy for social media content performance because similar content is shared across Braven’s other social media channels - Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The key performance indicators for each of Braven’s social media channels are captured in Figure 8 and Figure 9. Fellows and PAFs also noted in interviews and focus groups that the value of LinkedIn as a networking and career advancement tool is highlighted in the program, especially during the current pandemic, so it follows that LinkedIn should be heavily utilized by the Fellow, PAF and alumni audiences. It was identified by 84 percent of respondents to the post-course survey as a top choice platform for future support. One hundred ten (110) LinkedIn posts were coded for the full list of codes included in Figure 7.

Figure 8. Braven Social Media Platform Comparison

Braven Social Media KPIs				
January 1, 2020 - June 30, 2020				
Channel	Followers	Posts	Engagements	Clicks
Facebook	1,600	98	805	0
Instagram	1,200	119	3,400	0
LinkedIn	4,600	110	1,700	2,800
Twitter	1,200	118	397	0

Figure 9. Graph of Braven’s Social Media Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)



Other Digital Channels

Braven also frequently uses Slack to communicate with participants, but a comprehensive log of messages was not readily available. Similarly, access to text message content sent by regional teams to participants is not centrally tracked across the board, nor are regional Instagram pages. Therefore, all three were excluded from analysis.

Digital Analytics

To measure audience interaction with Braven’s content, digital analytics captured in Campaign Monitor for email and in Hootsuite for social media were analyzed.

Email

Audience reaction to email content was gauged using three statistics:

- **Open rate** was used to measure how many recipients viewed the content.
- **Click through rate** was used to gauge how often readers were taking an action called for in the message.
- **Click-to-open rate** further refines that measurement by presenting the frequency with which those who opened the message clicked content within it.

Social media

Engagement with social media content was measured using four metrics that indicate the audience has been moved to take an action in response to the content:

- **Reactions** – the number of post likes
- **Comments** – the number of comments added to a post
- **Shares** – the number of times users share a post
- **Clicks** – the number of times users click a link or photo

Other channels

Access to regional Instagram pages, Slack, and text message analytics were not readily available so analysis of those channels is not included in this report.

Surveys

To gather Fellow and PAF communications preferences and reflections on their experience with Braven, I leveraged two surveys developed and regularly conducted by Braven.

- **The post-course survey** is administered to all current Fellows at the conclusion of the Accelerator Course each semester to gather recent completers' feedback on the course experience. The relevant questions reviewed in this evaluation are included in Appendix B. I examined the results of the Spring 2020 administration, which was completed by 421 Fellows.
- **The PAF survey** is administered each year in August and gathers information on PAFs' career development since the course. For the purposes of this evaluation, Braven added two communications-related questions to the survey to address research question one by illuminating how Braven's communications strategy aligns with their preferred communications platforms:

1. How do you prefer to receive information from Braven? Please select your top three.
 - a. Blog
 - b. Email
 - c. Facebook
 - d. Instagram
 - e. LinkedIn
 - f. Phone
 - g. Text
 - h. Twitter
 - i. Website
 - j. YouTube
2. Is there anything else about the communication you receive from Braven that you'd like to share feedback on?

The relevant questions reviewed in this evaluation are included in Appendix C. I analyzed the results of the August 2020 administration, which was completed by 1,367 Post-Accelerator Fellows.

Focus groups

To gather additional detail on participant experience and preferences, Fellows, PAFs, and alumni were invited to participate in focus groups to share their experience. Because Braven staff was hesitant to burden their participants – many of whom were enrolled in college, working full- or part-time jobs, and facing a range of hardships during the pandemic – with additional requests, they identified a limited number of individuals representing each audience group and each region. Across all four regions, 13 Fellows and 26 PAFs were identified as engaged and 49 PAFs were identified as unengaged. I sent three rounds of emails, copying regional program staff to enhance the credibility of the request, to invite the identified participants to participate in focus groups. Two Fellows, five engaged PAFs and eight unengaged PAFs accepted the invitation by completing a Google form. Therefore, three focus groups – one for each audience group – were scheduled for the week of October 26, 2020. Although each participant was told at the time of recruitment that they would receive a \$15 Amazon gift card provided by Braven for completing a focus group, there were a number of confirmed participants who were no-shows for their session. Just one Fellow and one unengaged PAF attended their respective focus groups, so those became one-on-one interviews. The participant who joined the unengaged PAF session revealed in the conversation that he was actually an alumnus who was meaningfully engaged as a completer of the Professional Mentor enrichment program and a volunteer with his school's Braven campus club for undergraduate students. Four of the five engaged PAFs that had signed up attended their focus group. Follow up correspondence with some of the Fellows and PAFs who did not attend their focus group indicated that they were also participating in focus groups for other Braven research partners, creating confusion about which session they were supposed to attend or concerns they did not have time to commit to multiple sessions. Focus group protocols are included in Appendix D.

Interviews

Interviews provided an additional opportunity to gather information directly from key stakeholders. The one-on-one format was chosen for stakeholder groups that might feel less comfortable in a group setting or with whom more time was desired for one-on-one discussion. Two of the intended focus groups became one-on-one interviews because of low attendance. Interviews were conducted via video conference in August, September, and October with:

- Fellows (1)
- Students who enrolled in the course but did not complete it (1)
- Braven staff members (5)
 - Program Manager, Bay Area
 - Site Director, NYC
 - Program Manager, Newark

- Director of Program, National
- Manager of Design (PAF programming), National
- University and nonprofit alumni affairs staff (8)
 - Brown University (1)
 - Dartmouth College (1)
 - Georgetown University (2)
 - Princeton University (1)
 - Vanderbilt University (1)
 - Education Pioneers (1)
 - Teach For America (1)

Fellow participation is described in the previous section. Seven non-completers were identified by Braven staff for invitation to interview. Like Fellows and PAFs, non-completers were offered \$15 Amazon gift certificates for completing an interview. Five non-completers scheduled interviews, but – as was the case with focus group recruitment – attrition was a significant issue. Course load, changing work schedules, and family emergencies were cited as reasons for missed interviews.

Braven staff members were identified by the Director of Communications and Marketing as representatives of the teams frequently executing participant communications. Program staff from three of the four regions as well as the head of Braven’s national Program team and the national staff member responsible for PAF programming accepted invitations from the Director of Communications and Marketing and completed interviews with me in July and August of 2020.

Alumni affairs staff at universities and nonprofits were invited to participate in interviews about their alumni affairs strategy because of their institutions’ reputations for strong alumni networks and, in the case of the nonprofits, a similar focus on increasing diverse talent pipelines. The two nonprofit staff members I interviewed were members of my professional network, so I invited them to participate via email. I also reached out via email to the heads of alumni affairs at 12 highly selective universities and state schools recognized by US News and World Report for the strength of their alumni networks. Leaders at three Ivy League Institutions accepted the invitation. Leveraging my Vanderbilt network, I received three introductions from my classmates to alumni affairs leaders at the universities where they work. These introductions yielded three additional completed interviews. All interviews lasted about one hour and were conducted via video conference in July, August, and September. Interview protocols are included as Appendix E.

To avoid multiple interviews by Braven research partners with the same audience members, I was also granted access to notes from interviews conducted by Deloitte staff with students who were recruited by Braven but chose not to enroll in the Accelerator course – those who entered the prospect phase but did not move forward to become Fellows. The interviews were

conducted in the summer of 2020 as part of a separate project on recruitment strategy. Their notes informed my understanding of prospect touch points and preferences.

Data Analysis

Content Analysis

I coded 247 emails and 110 LinkedIn posts sent between January 1, 2020 and June 30, 2020 for Braven's four key messages, four descriptive categories – audience, region, topic, and major – and nine additional themes that emerged during analysis that are listed in Figure 7. I used descriptive analytics – namely frequency – to identify the most common themes in the content as well as outliers.

Digital Analytics

To understand how participants were responding to digital marketing content, I captured digital analytics for the 247 emails and 110 LinkedIn posts sent between January 1, 2020 and June 30, 2020. Using the digital analytics calculated by Campaign Monitor and Hootsuite, I compared the results across regions and audiences to understand how performance varied by audience, region, and message content.

Surveys

Spring 2020 post-course and August 2020 PAF survey responses were shared with me by Braven's Data team. I then used descriptive analysis to identify response trends.

Focus Groups

One 30-minute focus group was conducted with PAFs via video conference. The session was recorded and transcribed using Zoom software. The transcription was coded for common themes in the touchpoints mentioned; positive and negative experiences identified; expectations set, met, and missed; and where they sought career advice.

Interviews

Fifteen (15) 30-minute to one-hour interviews with a non-completer, a Fellow, five Braven staff, and eight alumni affairs leaders at peer organizations were conducted via video conference. The sessions were recorded and transcribed using Zoom software. The transcriptions were coded for the themes for each audience captured in Figure 10. Frequency data was used to observe trends in alumni strategy.

Figure 10. Focus Group and Interview Transcript Content Coding Categories

Non-Completer, Fellow, PAF/Alumni
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touchpoints identified • Affirming experiences/pain points • Expectations set/met/missed • Communications preferences • Where they seek career advice
Peer Organization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of engagement strategy • Objectives • Tactics • Communications platforms used • Data collected • Measures of success

Findings

The evaluation findings are presented in response to the three primary research questions and five sub-questions. The data sources described in the previous section were used to provide a robust answer to each question that triangulates experience using indicators of behavior and perception.

Research Question #1. How are Braven Participants Interacting with the Organization?

A). What touch points are participants having with the organization via marketing channels and staff interactions?

To answer the first research question, I applied the participant journey framework to map the touchpoints identified through staff and participant interviews and focus groups as well as review of email and LinkedIn content.

Depicted in Figure 11, the Braven participant journey is organized into four phases aligned with the organization’s program model: prospect, Fellow, PAF, and alumni. As participants move through that model, their relationship – and their interactions – with the organization evolves over time.

Figure 11. Braven’s Participant Journey Phases



Prospect

The Prospect phase is focused on student recruitment to the Accelerator Course. It is typically a time of purposeful cultivation, in which on-campus awareness-building tactics are paired with digital outreach. In interviews and focus groups, participants reported first learning about Braven through on-campus fliers, tabling, in-class presentations, info sessions, and word-of-mouth from friends. Many described experiencing all of those in-person touch points. In the Deloitte interviews, word-of-mouth was the most frequently cited initial source of information, followed by tabling on campus. Once a prospect has shared their contact information with Braven, usually after attending a recruitment event, they will typically receive emails from Braven’s local staff encouraging them to sign up. Of the 247 emails tracked in Campaign Monitor during our focus period from January to June, 34 percent (84 emails) were recruitment focused. Four were sent centrally and the rest were sent by the Newark (21), New York (20), and Bay Area (36) teams. Most were applicable to students of any major, but the Bay Area team segmented 10 of their recruitment emails for students in one of the following majors: Business, Engineering, Healthcare, and Marketing. Across the board, Braven email produced a high average open rate of 56 percent, and recruitment-focused email opens were also strong at an average rate of 43 percent compared to the nonprofit industry average of 20 percent in 2019 (Campaign Monitor, 2019). Only six of the 110 LinkedIn posts during the target timeframe were explicitly recruitment focused.

Fellow

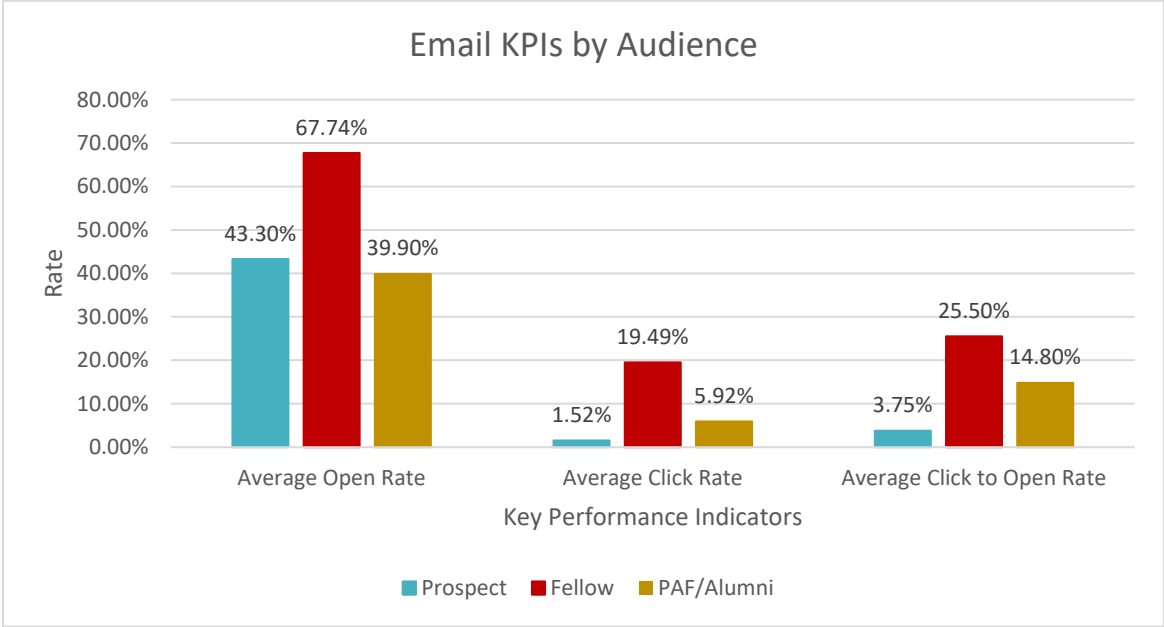
Once enrolled in the course, participants are referred to as Fellows. Fellows receive a welcome email introducing the course content, welcoming them to the Braven community, and providing logistics to ensure they are ready to access all of Braven’s learning and communications platforms before their course begins. This first contact includes a large amount of technical information and was described as overwhelming by some focus group members. The first class meeting serves as a kick-off event. From there, Fellows have regular touch points via their coursework – weekly live class sessions with their Leadership Coach, online asynchronous modules, and assignments completed individually or with their peers.

As described by staff, Fellows, PAFs and alumni in interviews and focus groups, Fellows receive frequent communications across multiple digital channels during this time period. They typically receive one lengthy weekly email that summarizes their assignments, upcoming deadlines, and logistics for the next class meeting. Those emails are followed by due date and event reminders via text and Slack. Regional staff post content focused on community building on their regional

Instagram pages and foster conversation and collaboration on Slack. Phone calls are also used when deadlines are missed or digital messages are going unanswered.

Staff report that Fellows often fail to read and take action on the lengthy weekly emails because they generally feel overwhelmed by the volume of email they receive. Participants in the PAF focus group noted that they generally feel overwhelmed by the volume of email they received and the volume was even higher during the pandemic. Therefore, staff observed, Fellows require multiple reminders via Slack, text, and phone to ensure they complete all necessary tasks. While two Fellows responding to the post-course survey reported that they received too many emails and five reported that they would like more frequent or clearer communications, only two percent of all post-course survey respondents identified communications as an area of possible improvement for the organization. The 108 emails to Fellows included in this analysis posted a notable average open rate of 68 percent, second only to the average open rate of emails sent to Leadership Coaches (LCs), which hit 81 percent. Aside from LCs, emails to Fellows also saw the highest average click rate (19.5 percent) and the highest average CTOR (25.5 percent), indicating that Fellows are reading and taking action in response to emails at a relatively high level. Our focal email KPIs for each phase of the participant journey are captured in Figure 12.

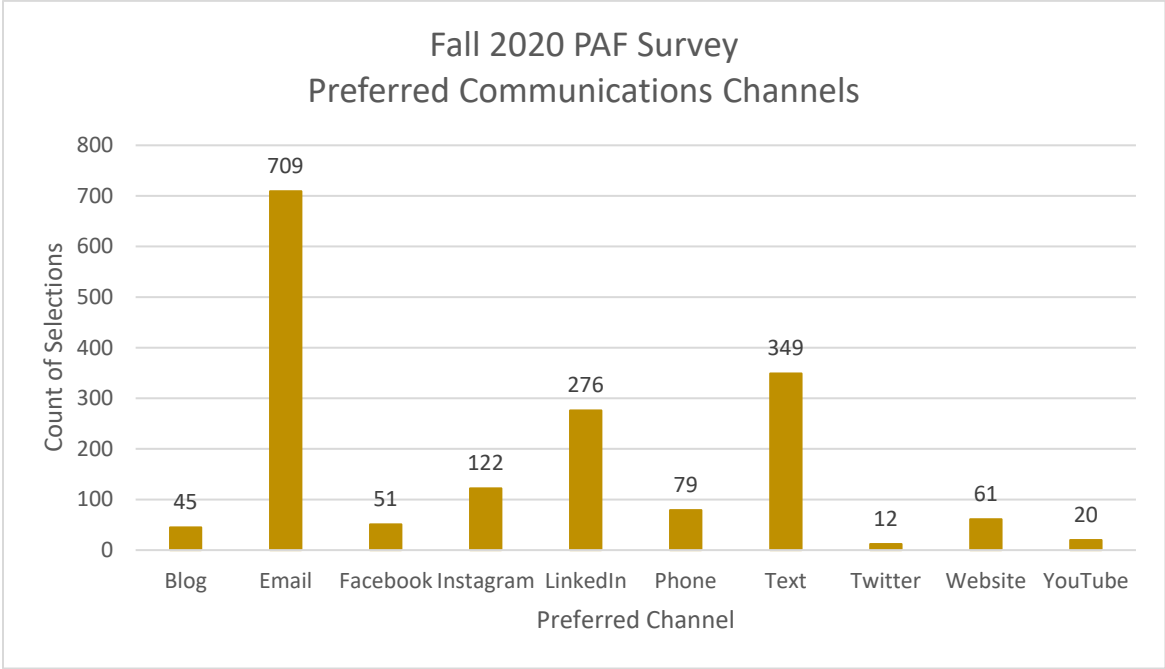
Figure 12. Email KPIs



Analytics from the four emails sent to participants in Braven’s Career Booster program – an online, condensed course option for recent graduates developed in response to the increasingly challenging job market brought on by the pandemic – mirror Accelerator Course email metrics (average open rate: 65 percent; average click rate: 20 percent; average CTOR: 36 percent).

Ninety percent of PAF survey respondents identified email as a preferred method of communication. Text (44%) and LinkedIn (35%) were the next two most popular answers. Further confirming this preference in interviews and focus groups, the non-completer, Fellow, alumni, and all PAFs interviewed noted that the weekly emails helped them stay organized during the Accelerator course and that they prefer to receive information from Braven via email even though they receive a large volume of email overall.

Figure 13. Preferred Communications Channels



PAFs

The transition to PAF-hood begins during the final session of the Accelerator course, celebrating the completion of the course and introducing the tools and resources that will be available to them as PAFs and alumni. At this point, primary responsibility for PAF communications is transitioned to national teams. Twenty three of the 48 emails (48%) directed towards the PAF audience were sent centrally. The majority were the Opportunity Newsletter (11), which is sent every two weeks and features internship and job opportunities. Others advertised enrichment opportunities, provided organizational updates, and promoted event registration. Enrichment opportunities (7) and events (10) were also promoted on LinkedIn. Just one job opportunity was posted on LinkedIn, but a number of organizational updates were shared (16), constituting 15 percent of the LinkedIn content. The uptick in organizational updates during this timeframe reflects the dynamic environment of the COVID-19 pandemic and increased social unrest following instances of police violence in America.

PAF focus group participants all noted that they stay in touch intermittently with Braven staff and LCs and will reach out to them when they have job search questions. Interviewed staff members confirmed that they receive questions from PAFs and alumni when they need support with a job application or want additional information about a Braven resource. Regional staff noted that there are a handful of PAFs they have built strong relationships with that they will be in touch with more frequently, but many questions are one-offs. The PAF survey provided supporting evidence from 551 respondents. When asked who had helped them with job applications, the most popular response was someone from Braven (44%). The next most popular answer was no one (29%). Other responses included their university's career services office, professors, family and friends, and older students in their program.

Alumni

The analysis indicated that communications to alumni are not heavily differentiated from PAF communications. Staff report that alumni are welcome to attend PAF enrichment opportunities, but programming is typically not targeted directly to this audience. They are invited to volunteer with the organization, however, as leaders in the on-campus Braven Club, mock interviewers, LCs, and Professional Mentors. One email was segmented specifically for alumni, while the eight emails to volunteers and 10 to LCs also included this audience. Of the LinkedIn content, enrichment opportunities (7), volunteer opportunities (4), career tips (16), and organizational updates (16) would likely be of interest to this audience. The digital marketing data supports the perception among External Affairs team members that this audience, as it grows, presents an opportunity for greater engagement through segmented programming and communications.

A detailed visual representation of the participant journey map encompassing all four phases of the Braven experience is included in Appendix F. A second iteration of the journey map designed to promote analysis and improvement of existing practice is included in Appendix G.

B). Are the messages sent reaching and activating the intended audience?

Digital analytics served as the primary source informing the investigation of this research sub-question. Braven is seeing strong engagement with its email compared to industry averages. Campaign Monitor reports the average open rate among nonprofits was about 20 percent in 2019, while the click rate was 2.66 percent and the average CTO was just under 13 percent (Campaign Monitor, 2019). Braven's sends typically out-perform these rates. I was unable to locate LinkedIn benchmarks for non-sponsored content, but comparison across Braven's LinkedIn posts indicate what topics and types of content elicit the most engagement from users.

Email

Among all emails, Braven saw an average open rate of 56 percent. They received an average click rate of 13 percent and CTOR of 18 percent. Emails to LCs had the highest open rates (81%), followed by emails to Fellows (68%), PAFs (50%), and prospects (43%). For comparison, the

average open rates of emails to volunteers, partners, and supporters fell between 40 and 60 percent. Among emails to participants, Fellow emails received the highest average click rates (19.5%), followed by PAFs (13%) and prospects (2.7%). Similarly, average CTOR was highest for Fellows (25.5%), followed by PAFs (18%), and prospects (6%).

Comparing the results of individual regions, Newark saw the strongest email engagement among prospects, New York had the highest engagement among Fellows, and Newark also saw the highest engagement among PAFs.

LinkedIn

Across all LinkedIn content, Braven posts received an average of 19 reactions, .35 comments, .97 shares, and 24.2 clicks. The two PAF profiles posted received the greatest engagement with an average 69 reactions, 2 comments, 1.5 shares, and 71.5 clicks. After that, general information about Braven (31 posts) received an average 25 reactions, .58 comments, .77 shares, and 31 clicks. With such dramatically higher engagement rates, PAF profiles seem to have tremendous potential to move the Braven audience to action.

Research Question #2. How Does Braven’s Messaging Shape Participant Experience?

A). What messages are contained in sent communications and do they align with the messages prioritized in Braven’s communications strategy?

The message content in emails and social media posts reflect Braven’s recruitment and programmatic goals. The content from both channels was coded for Braven’s four key messages – Braven’s Why, How, What, and Now (see Figure 7). Six other message themes emerged from the content analysis: ongoing support, relationships, logistics, COVID, Fellow/PAF stories, and the likelihood of out-earning one’s parents. They were also coded for region, audience, and topic.

Across email and social media content, Braven’s How message – describing how the Braven program empowers Fellows to land a strong first job – is the most frequently observed of its key messages. Nearly all emails included logistical information and 23 percent of LinkedIn posts did. The ongoing support offered to Braven participants and the relationships formed through Braven both emerged in about 31 percent of emails. Ongoing support was featured in 26 percent of LinkedIn posts and relationships were featured in 11 percent of LinkedIn posts. As the pandemic unfolded, the prevalence of COVID-focused communications increased, appearing in 31 percent of all emails and 26 percent of LinkedIn posts overall.

Key messages:

Why

The Why message – describing the inequity of economic opportunity that exists for underserved college students – appeared in just 12 total emails (5%) and 1 LinkedIn post (.9%). It tends to appear more frequently in emails to partners and supporters (21%) than in those directed to participants (3%).

How

The How message appeared in 102 emails (41%) and 25 LinkedIn posts (23%). It appears in 87 percent of recruitment emails, 20 percent of Fellow emails, but just two (4%) of PAF emails.

What

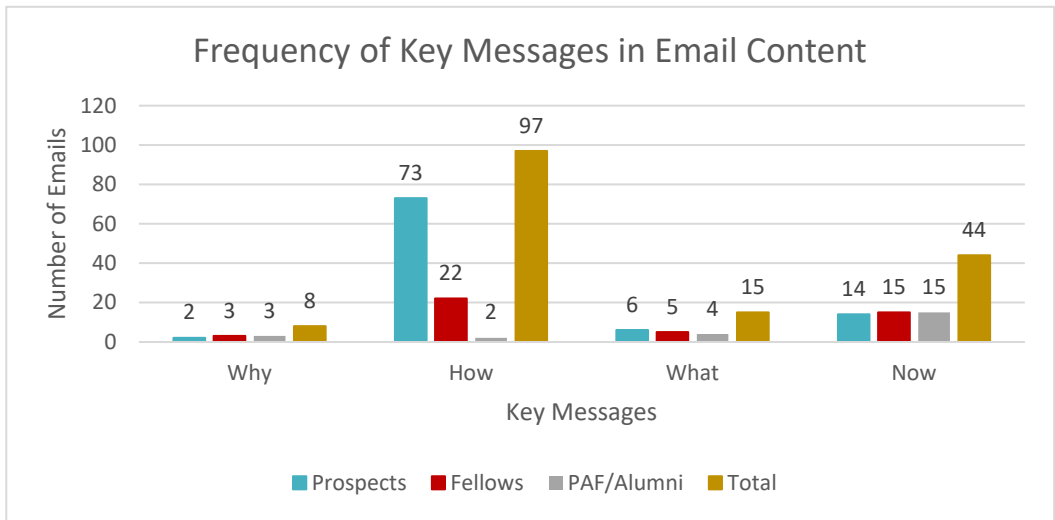
Braven’s What message – which encapsulates the organization’s theory of change – is explicitly referenced in just 21 emails (8%) and 16 LinkedIn posts (15%). It appears more frequently in PAF content (8%), than recruitment (6%) and Fellow (5%) emails. It appears in 50 percent of emails to volunteers and 21 percent of emails to partners and supporters, however.

Now

Braven’s Now message – communicating the urgency of the moment to take action – became increasingly relevant as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded. It appears in just 2 percent of LinkedIn posts, but 17 percent of all emails. It appears in 17 percent of recruitment emails, 14 percent of Fellow emails, and 85 percent of PAF emails.

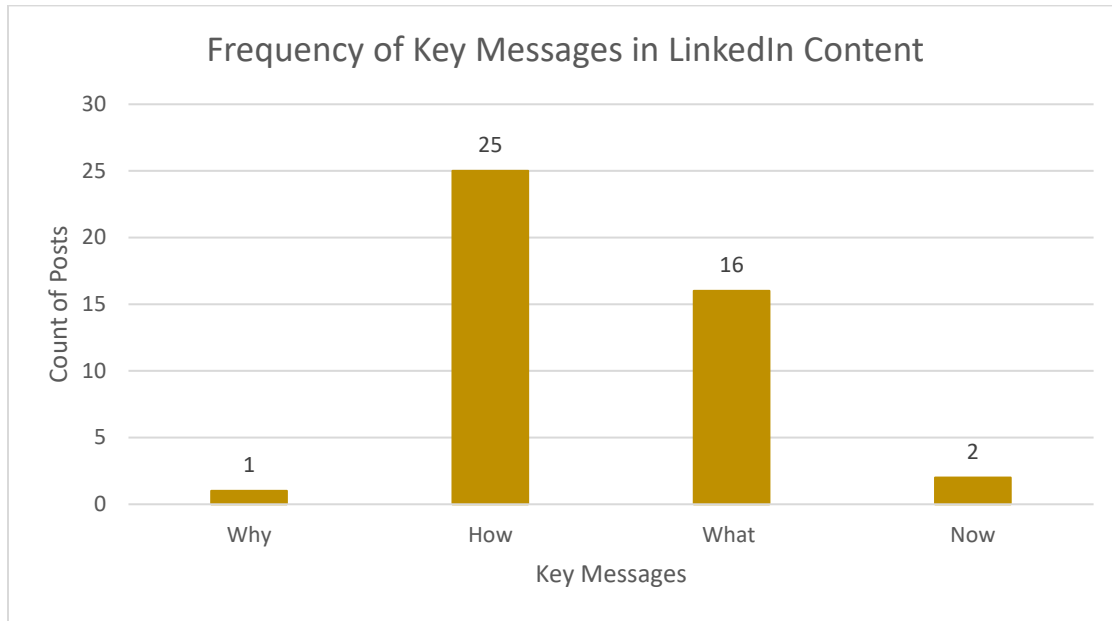
The frequency with which Braven’s key messages appear by audience type in email is captured in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Frequency of Key Messages in Email Content



The frequency with which Braven’s key messages appear by audience type in LinkedIn content is captured in Figure 15.

Figure 15. Frequency of Key Messages in LinkedIn Content



The coded message themes also produced different trends across audience type.

Recruitment content

Nearly all recruitment emails (99%) provided next steps to enroll. Just two LinkedIn posts were explicitly recruitment focused, but 21 percent were designed to build general awareness of the program and could be considered prospect-facing. Another 15 percent of LinkedIn posts featured the relationships with other organizations Braven leverages to expand opportunities for its participants. The vast majority of recruitment emails also provided an overview of the skills Fellows could expect to develop during the course – measured by the How message – (87%) and the relationship-building central to the course design (44%) and appears frequently. The Bay Area favored citing the statistic that there is typically a 50-50 chance of out-earning one’s parents in one’s lifetime, but Braven grads hit that goal much more frequently right out of college. Fellow and PAF stories feature prominently in recruitment content, appearing in 31 percent of all emails.

Fellow content

Fellow content primarily consists of logistics pertaining to the course such as next steps, assignment due dates, and reminders to plan ahead. Ninety six percent of Fellow emails include logistical content. These emails also begin to introduce the ongoing support Fellows can expect to receive from Braven after the course (45%) and feature the strong relationships built through Braven – which Fellows and PAFs report valuing in the post-course survey – continues to appear, although less frequently than in recruitment emails at 27 percent.

LinkedIn offers Fellows supportive, connection-building content in the form of holiday celebrations (5%), inspirational quotes (10%), and career tips (15%). While the inspirational quotes and holiday messages inspired more reactions on average, the career tips generated more average shares and clicks, suggesting they motivated Braven participants to learn more. COVID-19 resources likely felt highly timely and relevant for Fellows as well as PAFs; they outperformed those other three kinds of content across the board.

PAF Content

PAFs received the fewest emails among Braven's participant audiences (48). In interviews, regional staff noted that they had less insight into the messages sent to PAFs because much of it came from national teams. However, of the emails tracked in Campaign Monitor, 48 percent were sent by a national team. Newark produced the largest volume of emails to PAFs among regions with 12. By comparison, the Bay Area and New York sent five while Chicago sent two. Ongoing support was the most frequently appearing message (92 percent) since 52 percent of emails offered enrichment opportunities and 23 percent were Opportunity Newsletter sends. Thirteen percent were COVID resources and three messages were statements on social justice issues.

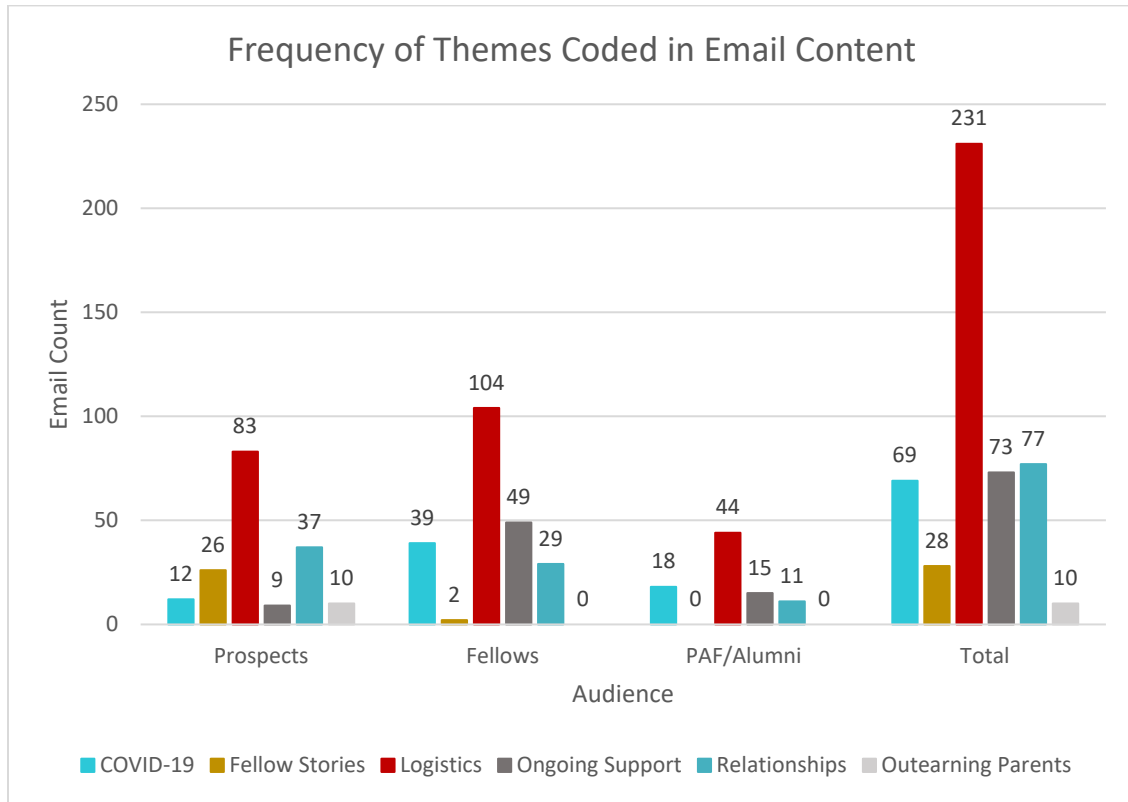
On LinkedIn, a range of posts were aligned with the interests of PAFs and Braven's programmatic goals for them. Fifteen percent of posts offered COVID resources, another 15 offered career tips, nine percent promoted an event, and six percent promoted enrichment opportunities. Like Fellows, PAF's perspective of the Braven community may also be shaped by the inspirational quotes and holiday celebrations. Their understanding of Braven's work and impact likely grows as they interact with organizational updates and program information content.

Alumni content

Much of the PAF content also applied to alumni. One email – an update on Braven's response to the pandemic – was sent to alumni alongside staff and partners/supporters, suggesting that their relationship to the organization and the role they can play within the Braven community is evolving as they build their careers. Emails and LinkedIn posts related to COVID resources, organizational updates and volunteer opportunities also met their informational needs. An opportunity exists to more explicitly set expectations for the alumni experience and role of alumni within the Braven community.

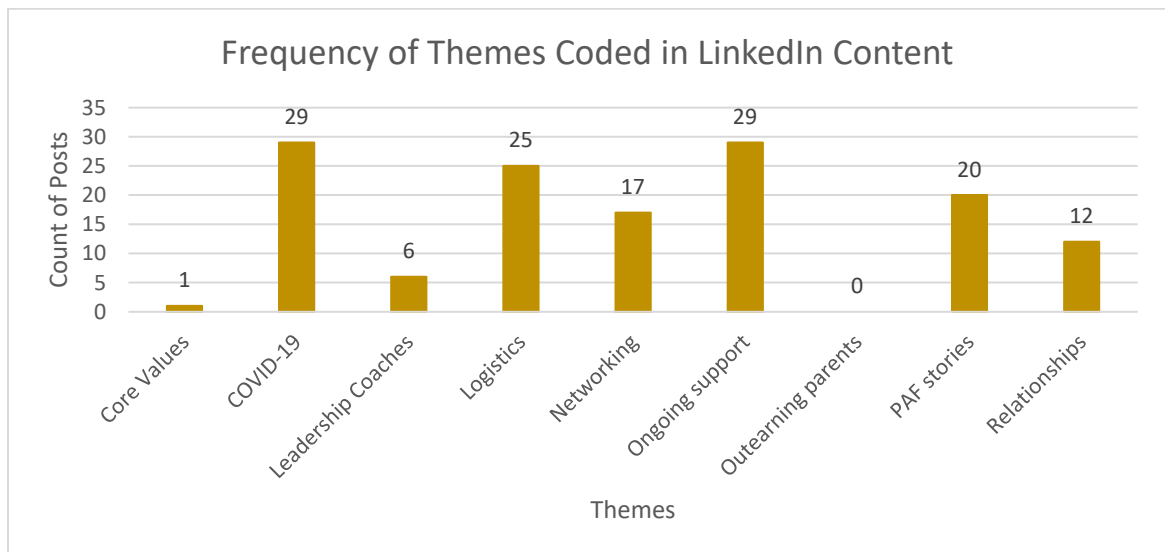
The frequency of coded message themes in emails sent to each audience segment are captured in Figure 16.

Figure 16. Frequency of Themes Coded in Email Content



The frequency of themes coded in LinkedIn content is captured in Figure 17.

Figure 17. Frequency of Themes Coded in LinkedIn Content



B). Do those messages – both prioritized and delivered – set accurate expectations for program design and desired outcomes?

Responses to questions in the post-course survey indicate that participants understand Braven’s mission, vision, and purpose and believe it has achieved clear objectives for them. Among respondents to the Spring 2020 survey,

- 84 percent of respondents moderately to strongly agree that Braven was one of the most valuable personal or professional development experiences I’ve had.
- 87 percent moderately to strongly agree that they feel like part of a larger Braven community
- 82 percent moderately to strongly agree that they feel like part of a broader movement
- 87 percent moderately to strongly agree that they have a mentor
- 93 percent moderately to strongly agree that the next generation of leaders will come from everywhere

These results indicate that participants that have completed the Accelerator Course are aligned with Braven’s organizational objectives. Next, I dug deeper to understand how the expectations prospects have as they enter Braven’s recruitment pipeline align with the reality they experience as they move through the Fellow, PAF, and alumni stages.

With the heavy prevalence of How messaging, Fellows and PAFs reported in interviews, the focus group, and survey responses that they had a fair amount of information about the tactical support they would receive from Braven, such as resume review, cover letter feedback, mock interviews, and networking opportunities. Analysis revealed, however, that there were several aspects of the program that were not aligned with participants’ expectations. Most were pleasant surprises, but others were pain points.

Soft skills

As several PAFs noted in their focus group, they were compelled to enroll in the Accelerator Course because of the job search skills Braven offers, but they were less familiar with the soft skills built during the program that contribute to career success. Many noted that these were the most impactful elements of the program. One noted, however, that he “might not have applied if I’d known about the focus on soft skills. I might have thought it was too touchy-feely. I should have wanted those skills, but I was focused on what’s going to get me a job tomorrow.”

Cohort relationships

Furthermore, PAFs reported being pleased to discover what strong relationships they built with their cohort. In focus groups and in response to the post-course survey question “What was the best part of the Braven experience for you?”, PAFs noted how valuable that support system and deep friendships were to them. Thirty-four percent of post-course survey respondents provided a response like “I enjoyed the camaraderie of my cohort” or “being able to make a family with my cohort” that indicate the relationships with peers was a highly valued aspect of the course.

Ongoing support

In the focus group discussion, several PAFs observed that they were pleased to discover during the final session of the Accelerator Course that there were additional resources available to them after they completed the course. One noted that it would be helpful to have a roadmap of the resources available to PAFs because he feels motivated to take advantage of every new one he sees, but worries his selections are not strategic. This observation aligns with the head of the PAF program's plans to develop a PAF roadmap planning tool that would enable PAFs to plan their career development.

Volume of work

Several PAFs also noted in the focus group that they also did not expect the volume of work required for the course. While many noted the rigor was beneficial and effective in building the skills and mindsets they needed for success in the job search, they were surprised and challenged by the workload. In response to the post-course survey question "How challenging was the work you completed for Braven compared to the work you complete in your other courses?", 51% of respondents indicated it was "about the same" as other courses, but more than one-third – 36 percent – indicated the Accelerator Course was "somewhat more challenging" or "far more challenging." In response to the post-course survey question, "What is one change Braven could make that would have made your experience even better?", five percent of respondents suggested decreasing the workload. Deloitte's interviews with prospects revealed that several had heard from past Fellows that it was an "easy A" which indicates there was a mismatch of expectation and experience around workload and rigor that becomes a pain point for participants.

C). Are there certain moments in the participant journey that are frequently pain points or affirming experiences?

Overwhelmingly, PAFs indicated a very positive experience with Braven in focus groups and via the post-course survey. Braven's overall Net Promotor (NPS) score – the measure of positive experience – as reported in their fundraising documents is outstanding at 57 (50 is considered excellent). The Spring 2020 administration of the post-course survey revealed similarly high scores with 78 percent of respondents rating their likelihood to recommend Braven an eight or higher out of 10. In response to the post-course survey question "What is one change Braven could make that would have made your experience even better?", the most common response was "nothing" (36%).

As noted in the previous section, focus group and interview participants report being pleasantly surprised to discover program offerings that served as affirming experiences:

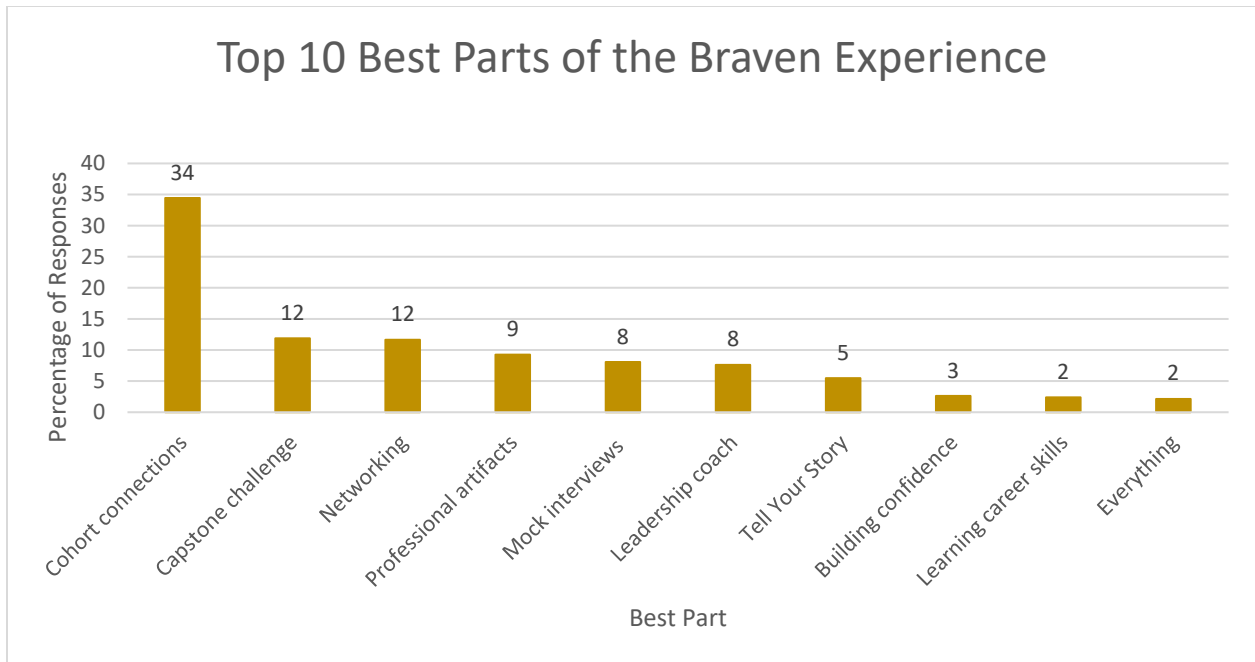
- Soft skill development opportunities
- Close cohort relationships
- Ongoing enrichment opportunities for PAFs

Additionally, in response to the open-ended post-course survey question, “What was the best part of the Braven experience for you?”

- 33 percent of Fellows confirmed what we heard in the focus group by naming collaborating with their cohort as the best thing about Braven
- 12 percent of Fellows identified the Capstone Challenge as the best part of their experience
- The next three most popular responses relate to job search skills built – networking (12%), professional artifacts (resume, cover letter, LinkedIn profile, etc.) (9%), mock interview sessions (8%)
- 8 percent of Fellows highlighted their relationship with their Leadership Coach

The top 10 responses are captured in Figure 18.

Figure 18. Top 10 Responses to the Post-Course Survey Question: “What was the Best Part of the Braven Experience for You?”



The complete list of responses to this question are included in Appendix H.

The post-course survey also includes an open-ended question that asks, “What is one change Braven could make that would have made your experience even better?” Fellow’s answers illuminate some of the pain points they experienced most frequently. It’s important to note that the most popular answer, given by more than one-third of respondents (36%), was no suggestions for improvement.

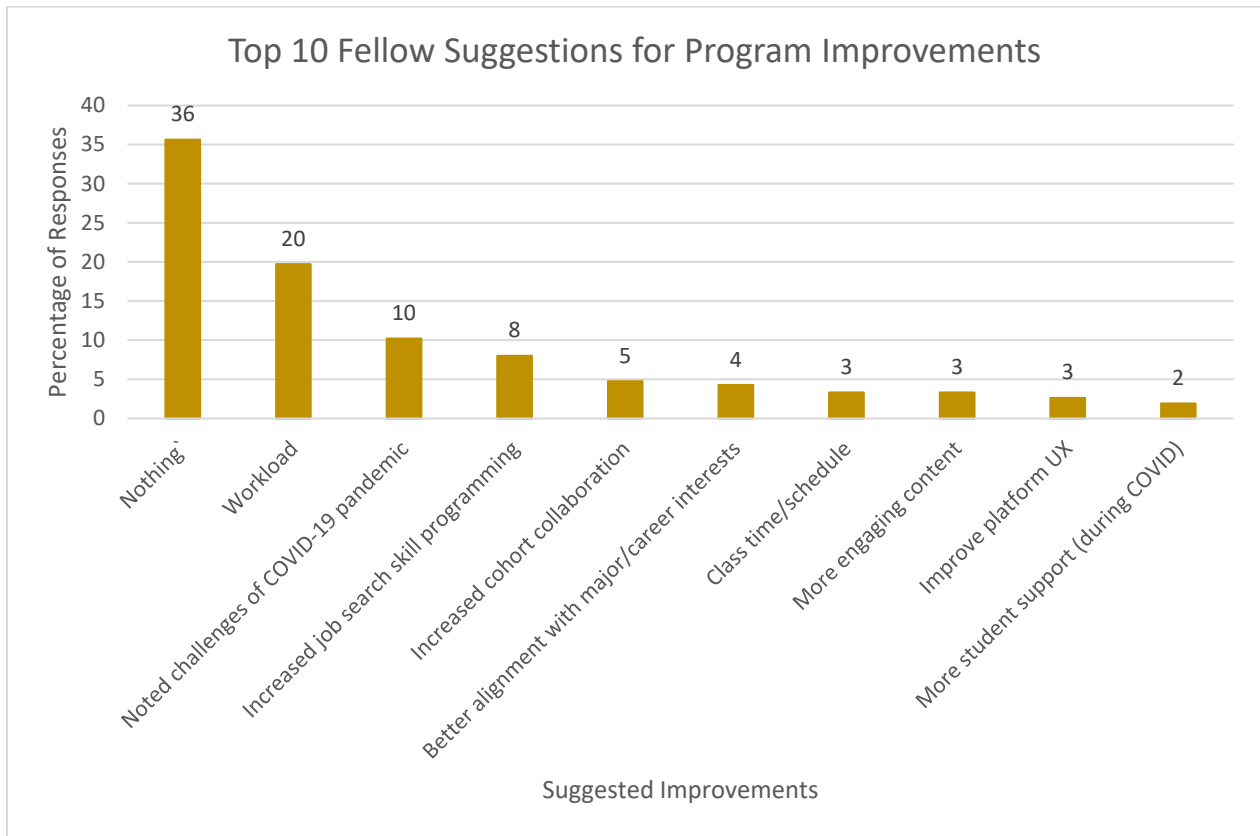
After that, the most common pain points identified were:

- 20 percent of Fellows called for a reduction in workload, noting that either the workload was too daunting to keep up with or that coursework could have been streamlined without a loss to student learning
- 10 percent noted a challenge they faced that was due to COVID-19 restrictions. A number noted these things were outside of Braven's control and that the program adapted as well as could be expected
- 8% would have liked to have more practice around the job search skills they developed such as resume writing, interviewing, or applying to internships

The next six most popular changes suggested were adjustments to the program design and delivery, including even more time for cohort collaboration, greater alignment of course content with students' career interests, the time class is held, making content more engaging, improving the user experience of the online platform used for course materials, and providing additional emotional support for students during the pandemic. Changes to communications practices were mentioned only a few times in responses to this question. Seven respondents total noted communications as an area for improvement. Two felt like there was too much email communication and five felt like they would have preferred more frequent communication with reminders timed for shortly before due dates. These responses constituted just 2% of responses.

The 10 suggestions for improvement made most frequently are included in Figure 19.

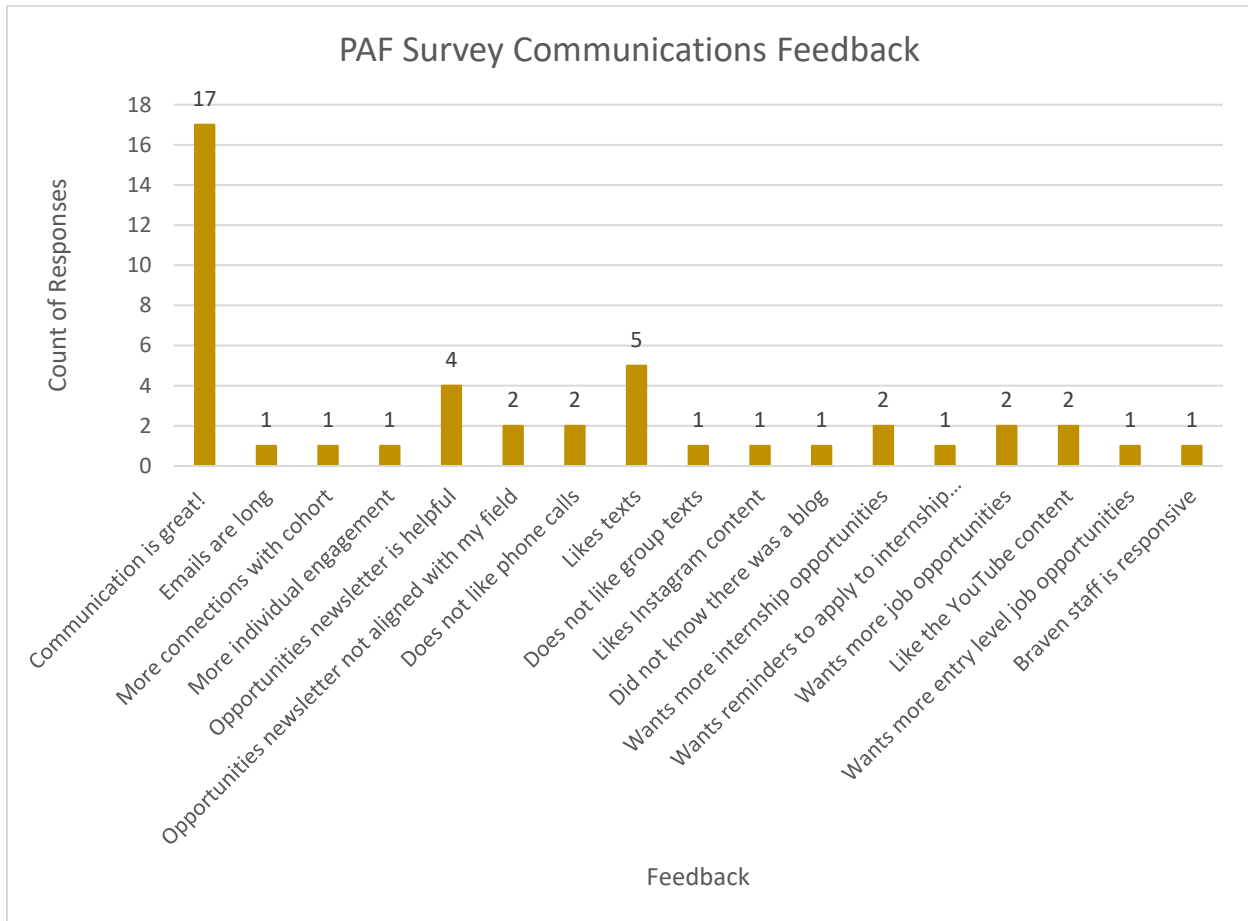
Figure 19. Top 10 Fellow Suggestions for Program Improvements



The full list of response themes is included in Appendix I.

Of the 45 respondents who provided feedback on Braven’s communications via the open-ended question added to the PAF survey, just one said emails were too long. Thirty-eight percent said they had no suggestions for improvement. Eleven percent noted they like receiving texts, and 9 percent praised the Opportunities Newsletter as helpful. The other responses, which were preferences for platforms or requests for more relevant internship and job postings, were given only once. All responses to this question are captured in Figure 20.

Figure 20. PAF Survey Responses to the Question “Is There Anything Else about the Communications you Receive from Braven You’d Like to Share Feedback On?”



Research Question #3. What Are Other High-Performing Organizations Doing to Engage their Alumni Community?

Interviews with alumni affairs leaders at elite universities and national nonprofits were conducted to gather best-in-class alumni engagement practices that could inform Braven’s approach. The universities represented – Brown, Dartmouth, Georgetown, Princeton, and Vanderbilt – are known for the strength of their alumni networks and the connections those networks offer members as they build their careers. The two participating nonprofits operate in a space adjacent to Braven’s: both cultivate diverse leaders committed to expanding educational opportunity for all children. Both have also recently undergone significant reorganizations of their alumni and communications strategies and had lessons learned to share from the ups and downs of their strategy shifts. Themes emerged from the interviews that illuminated common elements of philosophy and strategy.

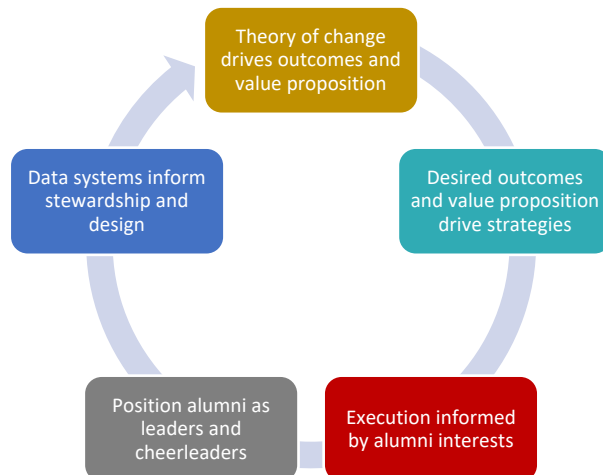
An iterative alumni engagement strategy

In one-on-one interviews, alumni affairs leaders pointed to the importance of grounding alumni engagement strategy in a clearly articulated theory of change and value proposition – what alumni can expect to gain from the relationship and how the organization will benefit from the relationship. That articulation makes desired outcomes and mechanisms by which they are achieved explicit. With that foundation in place, strategies to achieve those outcomes can be thoughtfully selected. Gathering information about alumni interests, communication preferences, and habits – often through surveys, focus groups, and even one-on-one cultivation – allows staff to determine the specific topics and activities most likely to meet the needs of their alumni population.

The interview subjects described positioning the alumni themselves as central actors in the strategy as the experts tapped to speak at events, as hosts, and as the messengers calling their peers to attend events, donate, and volunteer. Both university and nonprofit staff noted that the organization must provide alumni with a certain level of strategic guidance, tools, and resources to implement their plans, and technical support when they encounter challenges if they are elevating alumni as organizers and leaders of specific initiatives, such as local alumni clubs or a fundraising campaign. Attempts by peer nonprofits at complete delegation of alumni engagement to alumni themselves had resulted in inaction.

Most of the alumni affairs teams have also invested in robust, multi-person data teams that track engagement metrics so they can carefully monitor trends in participation and relationship cultivation over time. Universities made a significantly larger investment in this area than the nonprofits described. They use that data to inform and iterate on their theory of change, outcomes, value proposition, strategy, tactics, and stewardship efforts. This iterative cycle is described in Figure 21.

Figure 21. Diagram of Emergent Alumni Engagement Strategy Cycle



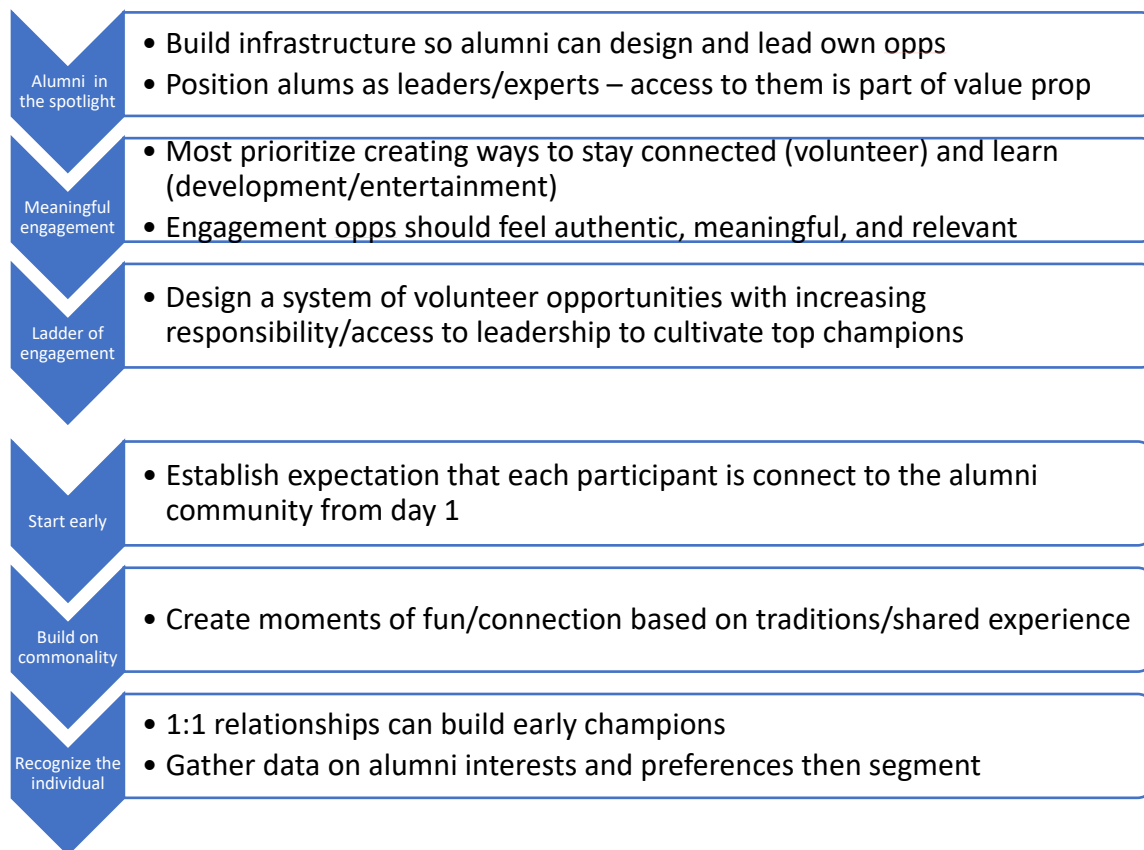
Stewardship principles

University staff identified six rules of thumb, depicted in Figure 22 that guide their cultivation of a feeling of connection and community among alumni.

1. **Start early** – Universities position students as members of the university’s network as soon as they enroll. The connections built at school and the access they will have to the alumni network is used as selling points to prospective students. At several of these schools, student’s first welcome to campus for orientation is infused with talk of the broader school community on campus and around the globe that students are joining.
2. **Build on commonality** – University alumni affairs staff will build nostalgia for the traditions, daily routines, and places that featured prominently in their student experience. They build on feelings of connection and belonging around the shared experiences that unite the alumni community. They are cognizant of which groups of students may not have had a positive experience as undergraduates and work to build on positive connections or evolve the negative associations of the past.
3. **Celebrate the individual** – Every touch point and activity offered by an organization requires an alum to make a decision about how they want to spend their limited time and resources. Individuals are more likely to choose the ones that are aligned to their interests and needs. Our university informants recommended investing in one-on-one cultivation when the organization needs to build early champions. The level of attention telegraphs to the alumni that they matter to the school and the university is willing to invest in their relationship. It also enables alumni affairs staff to deeply understand the individual’s questions, concerns, and interests. When there is a strong base of alumni supporters, tailoring event topics and design to the preferences shared by alumni gathered by instruments that cast a wider net, such as surveys, communicate that the network has something meaningful to offer the individual.
4. **Alumni in the spotlight** – University leaders seek opportunities to demonstrate the caliber of alumni network members by positioning them as the experts or talent at events. Similarly, they will build the infrastructure for alumni to grow their own leadership as the leaders of local alumni groups, affinity groups, and organizers of events or giving campaigns.
5. **Meaningful engagement** – Engagement opportunities typically fall into two buckets – 1) opportunities to stay connected to current campus life through volunteer opportunities or 2) opportunities to learn. In either bucket, events should offer value for the alumni – not just benefit for the organization.
6. **Ladder of engagement** – University staff have created a framework for increasing engagement used to cultivate top champions over time. They may start with low-touch engagement opportunities and build an individual’s skill, knowledge, and time commitment over time. Not everyone will move linearly through the ladder or end their engagement on the highest rung, but there are clear opportunities for advancement as an alumni leader. By the time they reach elite levels of leadership, such as board

members, they are well-versed in university issues and have relationships with senior leaders.

Figure 22. Alumni Stewardship Principles



Recommendations

The findings of this evaluation indicate that Braven has created a strong participant experience by delivering programming that builds skills and mindsets participants find valuable, supporting positive interactions with staff, volunteers, and cohort members, and by executing a thoughtful participant communications strategy. The External Affairs team has built systems and invested in technology solutions to support coordinated implementation across the organization. As a result, Braven has an excellent NPS score (57) and the vast majority of participants (84%) report Braven is one of the most valuable personal or professional development experiences they’ve had. Digital analytics reveal engagement with digital content across measured channels. Survey, focus group, and interview data reveals a number of affirming experiences that create positive participant experience, but also reveal opportunities to set more accurate expectations and enhance several touchpoints participants currently have with Braven.

As the organization turns to the development of alumni engagement strategy, this analysis provides insight into how Braven can effectively build out a third phase of their logic model dedicated to alumni and where the Braven team can build on its current efforts to foster an even more positive and consistent participant journey that fuels its mission.

Analysis of the evaluation findings through the lens of customer journey theory supports four recommendations that address both communications infrastructure needs and tactics that will promote more moments of joy in the participant journey.

Recommendation #1:

Develop a logic model for alumni programming and use it as the foundation to build out the alumni engagement strategy cycle.

A positive customer journey that fuels ongoing brand engagement begins with understanding the needs and preferences of the target audience (Sheth, Sisodia & Sharma, 2000), responds to changing interests and priorities in different phases of interaction with the brand (Keyser, Klaus & Kenningham, 2015), and sets expectations that are reliably met over time (Hultman, 2005). Therefore, starting with an articulation of desired outcomes for alumni and the programmatic mechanisms for achieving them in a new third phase of the Braven logic model is a powerful first step. The current logic model explicitly includes the Fellow and PAF portions of the journey only, so alumni are typically grouped in with PAFs or incorporated into the supporter and volunteer audiences. With an explicit alumni-facing portion of the logic model in place, staff could design communication touch points that facilitate program engagement by setting appropriate expectations, providing the information and resources most important to alumni, and leverage the channels participants prefer to use.

Furthermore, the alumni engagement framework that emerged from interviews with peer organizations began with establishing a clear logic model that captures desired outcomes that meet the interests of the organization and its alumni. Braven will be able to plan its alumni engagement activities at a more and more granular level once it has these foundational elements in place.

Interview and focus group results point to four potential elements of an alumni model that would both align with expressed participant interests and achieve Braven's vision.

- Enrichment opportunities focused on the skills and mindsets needed for success and advancement in the workplace applicable across sectors rather than tactical job search skills
- Increasingly robust volunteer opportunities that give alumni the opportunity to practice their leadership and coaching skills
- Opportunities for members of the Braven network to tap one another's professional networks

- Highlighting alumni stories (struggles, wins, transformation) in marketing and communications content to illustrate possible futures for participants in earlier phases of the journey

These four elements of alumni engagement also align with the stewardship principles that emerged from interviews. They offer activities that are valuable to alumni, recognize alumni as individuals, position alumni expertise and assets as part of the engagement value proposition, and create a ladder of engagement to deepen commitment over time. Adopting these priorities would provide opportunities to boost individual alumni's career trajectory, fuel volunteer pipelines, support student recruitment, contribute to development efforts, and cultivate a force of leaders for economic opportunity.

Recommendation #2:

Create an ideal participant journey map that maintains high points and addresses current pain points.

With the alumni model built out and the current journey map to inform design, the Braven team will be well positioned to proactively design an ideal participant journey that takes a participant from prospect to alumni. Of course, not every participant will have exactly the set of touch points on the map because, in practice, brand experience is an iterative process with each individual customer (Keyser, Klaus & Kenningham, 2015). However, proactively designing communications touch points to support program design and foster positive experience will improve efficiency. If every touch point has been planned to fit into a broader narrative arc or consistent and accurate storytelling and placed in the journey to meet a specific need at a specific time, staff resources should be more purposefully applied to high-impact touch points. That sense of purposefulness can, in turn, reduce concerns voiced in interviews that participants and, at times, staff are overwhelmed with the volume of communications.

This analysis revealed several important strengths in Braven's communications arc that should be maintained in an ideal journey map:

- Positive word of mouth among prospects
- Frequent on-campus recruitment touchpoints in the spaces (classrooms, student centers, career fairs) undergrads frequent
- Streamlined course instructions and reminders in weekly emails to Fellows with nudges sent via Slack and text message
- Collaboration in Fellow cohorts that produces lasting relationships and a support system
- A formal welcome to PAF-hood and introduction to PAF resources at the Live Your Legacy course session

The ideal journey map should also address the current pain points illuminated by the evaluation:

- Fellows are surprised by the volume and rigor of work expected of them once the course begins
- Some felt caught off guard when their LC described Braven as an ongoing community rather than a job search course, which was their impression when they registered for the course
- The first touch points enrolled students have at the beginning of the course are a series of emails guiding them through use of the technology platforms they will use during the Accelerator Course. Some interview and focus group participants noted this felt very transactional after the more personal cultivation they experienced as prospects
- Weekly emails are lengthy, so they aren't always read all the way through and important items can be missed, although this does not seem to be a top concern for participants based on survey data
- PAFs experience less personal contact with Braven staff as national program staff take responsibility for ongoing communications from regional team members. The fact that less than half report they would consult someone from Braven for career advice suggests that the relationships formed during the course weaken or are lost once it ends
- Some PAFs report feeling unsure how to prioritize the follow-on opportunities and either sign up for too much or miss ones that might have been valuable for them

Post-course survey data also identifies programmatic elements that can be strengthened. These elements should also be addressed and interwoven with the communications elements in the ideal participant journey map.

Recommendation #3:

Apply sensegiving theory to the arc of communication to increase alignment of expectations and experience and deepen participant investment in long-term membership in the Braven community.

Braven's key messages, which seem to be well aligned with Ganz' research-backed narrative framework, appear unevenly in the content delivered. Instead, logistics - instructions, deadlines, and next steps – appeared in nearly every email sent to participants (99% of emails among prospects and 96% among Fellows). Such messages likely contribute to Fellow's high course completion rate but miss an opportunity to paint the picture of where participants are in their journey, where they can expect to go next, and what benefits they can reap from ongoing engagement with Braven. The How message, describing key elements of the course, appeared in 41 percent of email, but the Why message, explaining Braven's purpose, appeared in just four percent. Specific benefits of course completion – like relationship-building and follow-on supports came up regularly in social media content, but the logic model diagram or three-part course structure diagram did not appear in any analyzed content.

The sensegiving framework calls on leaders of change efforts to establish a clear vision for team members to work towards, periodically highlight progress made in the change effort, and celebrate success to keep morale – and investment – high during prolonged periods of change. If we think of the transition from college to career as a period of change that requires a high level of social support, structuring the narrative to introduce the future state participants will achieve – landing a strong first job, attaining economic security, and building a career of purpose – and narrating their progress through the Accelerator Course and PAF programming with celebrations of major milestones along the way should serve to set expectations aligned with Braven’s purpose and increase satisfaction with the results participants achieve.

Tactically, Braven could:

- Introduce the Why message in the prospect phase more explicitly, albeit in an asset-based way that highlights prospects’ readiness to build the skills that will lead them to a strong first job and economic opportunity over their lifetime
- Leverage the logic model – with the alumni portion added – to introduce the support participants will receive over their lifetime
- Leverage the course curriculum diagram during the Accelerator Course to narrate progress through each phase of the class and highlight what knowledge, skills and mindsets are being built in each phase to help them reach their career goals
- Use PAF and alumni storytelling to model the Braven journey. PAF profiles were among the most popular content and could be used more broadly, featuring different regions and different career fields to enable participants at each stage of the journey to imagine their place in the Braven network as they build their careers
- Introduce a PAF and alumni roadmap to help participants plot their continued development by identifying the tools best aligned to their needs and goals

Recommendation #4:

Expand the use of centralized digital marketing tracking and measurement tools .

In a matrixed model with multiple stakeholders managing different phases of participant engagement, crafting message content, and executing on communications plans, it is difficult to maintain strategic fidelity and message continuity. The External Affairs team has implemented Campaign Monitor for central tracking of email analytics and Hootsuite for social media, which enables the Director of Marketing and Communications to easily monitor engagement with tracked content. Both customer experience literature and the alumni engagement theory that emerged from interviews highlight the importance of monitoring how your audience is engaging with content and adjusting course as necessary. The team’s data tools – and their read on the holistic participant communications picture – will be that much more powerful if they are expanded to include additional channels. Braven should consider incorporating:

- **All regional mass emails.** While some staff members reported that emails sent through Campaign Monitor felt impersonal because they incorporate brand elements more than a typical email would, it seems likely that participants would not be put off by on-brand

emails sent to their entire cohort or sections of it. Regional teams should be tasked with sending all of their cohort-wide emails through Campaign Monitor.

- **Regional Instagram.** Regional staff could still be charged with developing and posting content to regional Instagram handles, but they could be added to Braven's Hootsuite account so it's easy to pull analytics and get a read on the frequency and content of posts. Effective content ideas could be more readily identified and shared across regions.
- **Slack.** Slack is used frequently by regional teams for nudges and community building during the Accelerator Course, and the platform makes a range of analytics available to its administrators. Tracking the following metrics would enable ongoing measurement of how frequently regional Slack channels were being used, provide a proxy for how many participants are reading and engaging with Slack content, and enable comparisons across regions that can be cross-referenced with NPS scores and programmatic outcomes:
 - Weekly active users
 - Number of posts per channel
 - Reactions added
- **Text.** While regional staff expressed hesitance to use Braven's central text platform because they prefer other platforms, migrating all texting to one shared platform will enable measurement and help hone in on the most effective platform for providing nudges to participants. Informative metrics include:
 - Open rate - the number of users who open the message
 - Click-through-rate (CTR) – the number of users who click a link in the message
 - Opt-out – the number of users who unsubscribed from texts
- **A proactive email planning and tracking tool.** Because so much of Braven's email content is drafted or customized from a template by regional staff, designing a proactive tracker of planned emails sent from national and regional accounts will provide staff across the organization with visibility into how their sends align with organization-wide communications and pace how frequently a participant segment is receiving an email from different senders at Braven. It would also enable the Director of Communications and Marketing to monitor the flow of communications, implement a cohesive narrative arc, and observe trends across regions.
- **Periodic measurement of messages delivered.** Coding the key messages in each participant communication sent across all channels is not likely to be a realistic investment of staff time given Braven's lean structure, but leveraging the expertise of the data team to take periodic samples and assess context would confirm communications are on-message.

Discussion

This mixed-method formative evaluation of Braven's participant communications strategy provides a model for ongoing assessment and refinement of Braven's participant engagement efforts. Qualitative measures of participant and staff perception alongside content analysis provide deeper context to the analysis of quantitative digital analytics where available. The application of customer experience and journey theory to participant communication illuminates the importance of tailoring strategy to an audience at each stage of their relationship with an organization while recognizing that there must be continuity between each stage to build positive experience and fuel long-term engagement. This evaluation approach could be implemented annually to inform strategic planning for the following year and elements of it could be leveraged throughout the year to test and iterate on specific tactics.

My findings in this initial evaluation supported four recommendations to expand on the successes of the current plan and address challenges as needed:

1. Develop a logic model for alumni programming and use it as the foundation to build out the alumni engagement strategy cycle
2. Create an ideal participant journey map that maintains high points and addresses current pain points
3. Apply sensegiving theory to the arc of communication to increase alignment of expectations and experience and deepen participant investment in long-term membership in the Braven community
4. Expand use of centralized digital marketing tracking and measurement tools.

While I see great potential for Braven to incorporate the methods of this evaluation into their ongoing practice of data-driven decision-making as applied to marketing and communications, there are also notable limitations to the current study:

- Analytics were not available for several widely used communications platforms: regional Instagram, text, and Slack.
- Recruitment for focus group participation was challenging as PAFs juggled work, school, and family commitments along with multiple invitations to participate in Braven's research partnerships during the pandemic (4 PAFs and 1 alumni participated).
- Similarly, interview sample size was low for current Fellows (1), those who enrolled but did not complete the semester (1), and alumni (1).
- While robust, this analysis is descriptive, not causal

Future evaluation efforts should strive to encompass as many of the channels in use as possible to provide a fuller picture of how each touch point fits into the sum of a participant's interactions. A/B message testing could be used to measure the effectiveness of varying message content in moving recipients to action. A next step in exploration of the impact of participant communications would be to create an experimental design using Braven cohorts to find causal relationships between communications tactics and programmatic outcomes such as NPS score.

For Braven, this evaluation offers the opportunity to strengthen participant communications strategy and implementation in service of their mission to empower under-represented college students with resources too often unavailable to them as they build their careers. For a broader audience of practitioners, this research offers an informative case study because it extends the application of existing marketing research on customer experience and how to map it from its traditional domain of for-profit business to the nonprofit sector. Understanding how to leverage communications strategy in efforts to expand economic opportunity for underrepresented young people is of special consequence to advocates in this moment in time when there is increasing interest in addressing the structural elements that reinforce economic inequality along lines of race and class in our nation.

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Appendix A. Research Questions and Their Data Sources

Question	Data Source	Method of Analysis
1a. What touch points are participants having with the organization via marketing channels and staff interactions?	<p>All participant communications from January 1, 2020 to June 30, 2020 on the following platforms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • LinkedIn <p>Interviews, focus groups, and survey data will illuminate participant and staff perceptions of the touchpoints that exist, their relative importance, and their valence</p>	Create a participant journey map that builds a chronology of touchpoints, noting those that seem to be high-impact
1b. Are the messages sent reaching and activating intended audience?	<p>Digital media analytics incl.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media – like, comment, share • Email – open rate, click-through-rate, click-to-open rate 	Identify most frequently read material and assess correlation with message type and content theme
2a. What messages are contained in sent communications and do they align with the messages prioritized in Braven’s communications strategy?	<p>Coded message content</p> <p>Braven’s participant communications strategy</p> <p>Interviews, focus groups, and survey data will illuminate participant and staff perceptions of the messages delivered</p>	Code each message for key messages and emergent themes
2b. Do those messages – both prioritized and delivered – set accurate expectations for program design and desired outcomes?	<p>Coded message content</p> <p>Braven’s program data, accessed via their data repository reporting tool</p> <p>Interviews with Braven’s national and regional staff members</p> <p>Interviews, focus groups, and survey data will provide insight into staff intentions, participant expectations, and perception of program delivery</p>	Qualitative comparison of desired program outcomes, anticipated experience, and the observed message themes

<p>2c. Are there certain moments in the participant journey that are frequently pain points or affirming experiences?</p>	<p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Braven program staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bay Area ○ Chicago ○ NJ ○ National • Alumni • Current Fellows • Program non-completers • Deloitte interviews 	<p>Code interview transcripts for notable findings and common themes</p>
	<p>Focus groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PAFs 	<p>Code interview transcript for notable findings and common themes</p>
	<p>Survey data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Braven spring 2020 end-of-course survey • Braven 2020 post-Accelerator survey 	<p>Assess participants' reports of program experience, outcomes, and satisfaction, including NPS scores</p>
<p>3. What are other high-performing organizations doing to engage their alumni community?</p>	<p>Interviews with eight alumni staff members at peer organizations such as nonprofits, charter school networks, prep schools, and elite universities</p>	<p>Code interview transcripts for notable findings and common themes</p>

Appendix B. Braven Post-Course Survey Questions

Braven was one of the most valuable personal or professional development experiences I've ever had.

- Strongly agree
- Moderately agree
- Neutral
- Moderately disagree
- Strongly disagree

I feel part of a larger Braven community of Fellows, alumni, and supporters.

- Strongly agree
- Moderately agree
- Neutral
- Moderately disagree
- Strongly disagree

I see Braven as more than just a course; I feel like I am part of a broader movement.

- Strongly agree
- Moderately agree
- Neutral
- Moderately disagree
- Strongly disagree

I have a mentor who encourages my goals and dreams.

- Strongly agree
- Moderately agree
- Neutral
- Moderately disagree
- Strongly disagree

I believe the next generation of leaders will emerge from everywhere.

- Strongly agree
- Moderately agree
- Neutral
- Moderately disagree
- Strongly disagree

What was the best part of the Braven experience for you? (Open ended)

What's one change Braven could make that would have made your experience even better? Feel free to include thoughts about the virtual Learning Lab experience. (Open ended)

How challenging was the work you completed for Braven compared to the work you complete in your other courses?

- Far more than other courses
- Somewhat more than other courses
- About the same as other courses
- Somewhat less than other courses
- Far less than other courses

Appendix C. Braven PAF Survey Questions

Satisfaction with Braven

On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend Braven to a friend?

Not at all likely

Extremely likely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Post Graduate Status

Who helped you prepare for the application process (e.g. reviewing cover letter and resume, interview practice, etc.)? Check all that apply:

- Braven staff member
- Braven Leadership Coach
- Braven Professional Mentor
- Professor or university staff member
- On-campus Career Center advisor
- Friends
- Family
- Someone else in my professional network
- No one
- Other:

Staying in Touch

How do you prefer to receive information from Braven? Please choose your top three:

- Blog
- Email
- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Phone
- Text
- Twitter
- Website
- YouTube

Is there anything else about the communications you receive from Braven you'd like to share feedback on?

Appendix D. Focus Group Protocols

Engaged Post-Accelerator Fellows

Thank you for joining me today. As I mentioned in my email inviting you to participate, my name is Kaitlin Gastrock and I'm a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University working with Braven to consider how they currently communicate with their current and post-accelerator Fellows and where there are opportunities to enhance the fellow experience. During our session, I'm going to pose a few questions about your Braven experience for us to discuss. Your first-hand experience is going to be incredibly helpful in strengthening Braven's offerings for the members of the Braven network. If you're all comfortable with it, I'll record our session to ensure that I don't miss capturing any of our conversation in my notes. I plan to keep everything we discuss anonymous – I won't attribute any of your comments to you by name in my recommendations to Braven unless you ask me to. Any questions? Great – let's get started.

Introductions

Let's start with some quick introductions. Who wants to jump in with their name, the university they attend or attended, and the semester they completed the Accelerator Course?

Expectations for and reality of program experience

Why did you decide to enroll in the Accelerator Course?

What did you know about Braven before you started the course?

Where there any aspects of the course that you didn't expect or that surprised you?

What were the most valuable parts of the course?

What were the most challenging?

Do you feel like you had a chance to build connections with other Fellows during the course?

Are there any aspects of the course you would change?

Perceptions of Braven communications

During the course, how often did you hear from Braven staff?

- Was that too much? Not enough? Just right?

During the course, who did you typically hear from?

What kind of communications did you typically receive from Braven during the course?

- Did you receive other types of communications from Braven?

Of the communications received from Braven during the course, which were most useful?

Of the communications you received from Braven during the course, were there any that were not useful?

- Were there any you just ignored?

How did you prefer to receive information from Braven while you were in the course?

Now, let's switch gears to after you completed the course.

How do you prefer to receive information from Braven now?

How often do you hear from Braven staff now?

- Is that too much? Not enough? Just right?

Of the communications you receive from Braven now, which are the most useful?

Of the communications you receive from Braven now, are any not useful?

- Are there any you just ignore?

Is there anything else about communications with Braven that you would like to share?

Post-Accelerator Experience

What post-accelerator development opportunities have you taken advantage of?

- Why did you choose those?
- How useful were those?
- Are there others you are considering using?
- How likely do you think you are to use those?

What other Braven resources have you utilized?

- Why did you choose those?
- How useful were those?
- Are there others you are considering using?
- How likely do you think you are to use those?

Have you stayed in touch with Braven staff or the members of your cohort?

Where do you typically turn for job-search support and career advice?

What do you hope to get out of being a part of the Braven network long-term?

Would you recommend Braven to current college students? Why or why not?

Is there anything else about your Braven experience that you'd like to share?

Appendix E. Interview protocols

Regional program staff

Thank you for hopping on the phone with me today to discuss Braven’s approach to communicating with its participants. As you know, I’m a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University working with Kasia and Lorraine to evaluate the current strategy and its implementation so we can identify opportunities to strengthen the fellow and alumni experience. I’m going to ask you a few questions about your experience communicating with program participants; your on-the-ground insights will really help us understand how the strategy is playing out in practice and identify important ways Braven can leverage communications to achieve its mission. If you’re comfortable with it, I’ll record our meeting to make sure I don’t miss anything we discuss in my notes. If there’s anything we talk about that you would like to keep confidential, just let me know and I won’t attribute the information to you directly or to your region. Any questions? Okay, great – let’s get started.

Introductions

Tell me a little bit about your role.

How long have you been with Braven?

Have you been in this role the whole time?

Communications with participants

When do you first communicate with Fellows?

- Do you do something to welcome Fellows to the course or the Braven community?

From there, when are you typically communicating with Fellows?

- Are there certain events or milestones that you always communicate about?

What platforms do you use to communicate with Fellows (email, text, etc.)?

What topics do you most frequently communicate with Fellows about?

Are there less common topics that sometimes pop up?

Do you find that new Fellows are typically prepared to engage in the course and know what to expect?

Are there any topics or requirements you find Fellows do not expect or are confused about?

Is there anything you would change about the current approach to communicating with Fellows?

Once Fellows have completed the Accelerator Course, how often do you communicate directly with them?

Do many follow up for job search or career advice? What kind of advice?

Can you share an example of someone who has? What kind of support were they looking for?

Have you had Fellows who did not complete the accelerator course?

Why do you think they didn't make it through?

- Did they cite specific reasons? Or have trouble with certain elements?

Is there something formal that marks the transition from fellow to PAF?

From there, when are you typically communicating with PAFs?

- Are there certain events or milestones that you always communicate about?

What topics do you most frequently communicate with PAFs about?

Are there less common topics that sometimes pop up?

What platforms do you use to communicate with PAFs/alumni (email, text, etc.)?

Do you find that post-accelerator Fellows are typically prepared to engage in PAF opportunities and know what to expect?

Are there any offerings you find PAFs do not expect or are confused about?

Once PAFs graduate from college, does their engagement with Braven change?

- Are the program offerings different?
- Do you communicate with them differently?
- Is there a formal transition from PAF to alumni that participants would experience?

Is there anything you would change about the current approach to communicating with Fellows to prepare them to engage as PAFs or alums?

Do many PAFs/alumni follow up for job search or career advice? What kind of advice?

- Are PAFs or alumni more likely to stay in touch?

Can you share an example of someone who has? What kind of support were they looking for?

Communications systems

How easy for you as a staff member is it to keep track of the communications going back and forth with Fellows?

I know the national team has some tools for communicating with Fellows or PAFs that they ask you to use. How often do you use them?

How easy are those communications tools to use?

How do you contribute to the national strategy for communicating with participants – from prospects to Post-Accelerator Fellows – and its implementation?

Wrap up

What else would be helpful for me to know about Braven’s approach to communicating with its participants?

National staff - Program

Thank you for hopping on the phone with me today to discuss Braven’s approach to communicating with its participants. As you know, I’m a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University working with Kasia and Lorraine to evaluate the current participant communication strategy and its implementation so we can identify opportunities to strengthen the fellow and alumni experience. I’m going to ask you a few questions about your experience communicating with program participants; your birds-eye-view insights will really help us understand how the strategy is playing out in practice and identify important ways Braven can leverage communications to achieve its mission. If you’re comfortable with it, I’ll record our meeting to make sure I don’t miss anything we discuss in my notes. If there’s anything we talk about that you would like to keep confidential, just let me know and I won’t attribute the information to you directly or to your team. Any questions? Okay, great – let’s get started.

Introductions

Tell me a little bit about your role.

How long have you been with Braven?

Have you been in this role the whole time?

Fellow communications

Do you communicate directly with Fellows?

- How frequently?
- When do you communicate with them?
 - What are the specific events, topics, or milestones that you weigh in on?
- How do you communicate with them?
- What topics are you typically covering when you communicate with them?

How does that fit in with regional staff members communications with Fellows?

How do you work with Kasia to develop fellow communications strategy and content?

- What kind of things do you collaborate on?

What do you see as the most important things for incoming Fellows to know in advance to be successful in the course?

Are there common misconceptions or issues that require trouble shooting that you often hear about from regional staff?

- Do you ever get directly involved in those moments?

Is there anything you would change about the way Braven currently communicates with its Fellows?

How would you say the Accelerator Course sets Fellows up to participate in the Braven network as PAFs and alumni?

- Do you see the current approach to communications as supporting that transition?

What do you see as the big wins in communications?

What opportunities for improvement do you observe?

Wrap up

Is there anything else you think is important for me to know about participant communications at Braven?

National PAF staff

Thank you for hopping on the phone with me today to discuss Braven's approach to communicating with its participants. As you know, I'm a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University working with Kasia and Lorraine to evaluate the current participant communication strategy and its implementation so we can identify opportunities to strengthen the fellow and alumni experience. I'm going to ask you a few questions about your experience communicating with program participants; your birds-eye-view insights will really help us understand how the strategy is playing out in practice and identify important ways Braven can leverage communications to achieve its mission. If you're comfortable with it, I'll record our meeting to make sure I don't miss anything we discuss in my notes. If there's anything we talk about that you would like to keep confidential, just let me know and I won't attribute the information to you directly or to your team. Any questions? Okay, great – let's get started.

Introductions

Tell me a little bit about your role.

How long have you been with Braven?

Have you been in this role the whole time?

PAF/alumni communications

Do you communicate directly with PAFs and alumni?

- How frequently?
- When do you communicate with them?
 - What are the specific events, topics, or milestones that you weigh in on?
- How do you communicate with them?

- What topics are you typically covering when you communicate with them?

How does that fit in with regional staff members' communications with Fellows?

How do you work with Kasia to develop fellow communications strategy and content?

- What kind of things do you collaborate on?

What do you see as the most important things for PAFs/alumni to know going into PAF programming to be successful and get the most out of it?

Are there common misconceptions or issue that require trouble shooting that you often hear about from regional staff?

- Do you ever get directly involved in those moments?

Is there anything you would change about the way Braven currently communicates with its PAFs/alumni?

How would you say the Accelerator Course sets Fellows up to participate in the Braven network as PAFs and alumni?

- Do you see the current approach to communications as supporting that transition?

What do you see as the big wins in communications?

What opportunities for improvement in PAF/alumni communications do you observe?

Wrap up

Is there anything else you think is important for me to know about participant communications at Braven?

Current Fellows

Thank you for joining me today. As I mentioned in my email inviting you to participate, my name is Kaitlin Gastrock and I'm a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University working with Braven to consider how they currently communicate with their current and post-accelerator Fellows and where there are opportunities to enhance the fellow experience. During our session, I'm going to pose a few questions about your Braven experience for us to discuss. Your first-hand experience is going to be incredibly helpful in strengthening the offerings for members of the Braven network. If you're all comfortable with it, I'll record our session to ensure that I don't miss capturing any of our conversation in my notes. I plan to keep everything we discuss anonymous – I won't attribute any of your comments to you by name in my recommendations to Braven unless you ask me to. Any questions? Great – let's get started.

Introductions

Let's start with some quick introductions. Who wants to jump in with their name and the university they attend?

Expectations for and reality of program experience

Why did you decide to enroll in the Accelerator Course?

What did you know about Braven before you started the course?

Where there any aspects of the course that you didn't expect or that surprised you?

What have been the most valuable parts of the course so far?

What have been the most challenging parts of the course so far?

Do you feel like you're building connections with other Fellows?

Are there any aspects of the course you would change?

Perceptions of Braven communications

How often do you hear from Braven staff?

- Is that too much? Not enough? Just right?

Who do you typically hear from?

What kind of communications do you typically receive from Braven?

- Do you receive other types of communications from Braven?

Of the communications you receive from Braven, which are most useful?

Of the communications you receive from Braven, are there any that are not useful?

- Are there any you just ignore?

How do you usually like to receive information from Braven?

- Why is that?

Is there anything else about communications with Braven that you would like to share?

Expectations for the PAF/alumni experience

Now, I'd like you to think about after the course is finished. What do you hope to get out of being a part of the Braven network long-term?

- What resources specifically do you think you will want to utilize?

Where do you typically turn for job-search support and career advice?

Would you recommend Braven to current college students? Why or why not?

Is there anything else about your Braven experience that you'd like to share?

Engaged Alumni

Thank you for joining me today. As I mentioned in my email inviting you to participate, my name is Kaitlin Gastrock and I'm a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University working with Braven to consider how they currently communicate with their current and Post-Accelerator Fellows and where there are opportunities to enhance the fellow experience. During our session, I'm going to pose a few questions about your Braven experience for us to discuss. Your first-hand experience is going to be incredibly helpful in strengthening Braven's offerings for the members of the Braven network. If you're all comfortable with it, I'll record our session to ensure that I don't miss capturing any of our conversation in my notes. I plan to keep everything we discuss anonymous – I won't attribute any of your comments to you by name in my recommendations to Braven unless you ask me to. Any questions? Great – let's get started.

Introductions

Let's start with some quick introductions. Who wants to jump in with their name, the university they attend or attended, and the semester they completed the Accelerator Course?

Expectations for and reality of program experience

Why did you decide to enroll in the Accelerator Course?

What did you know about Braven before you started the course?

Where there any aspects of the course that you didn't expect or that surprised you?

What were the most valuable parts of the course?

What were the most challenging?

Do you feel like you had a chance to build connections with other Fellows during the course?

Are there any aspects of the course you would change?

Perceptions of Braven communications

During the course, how often did you hear from Braven staff?

- Was that too much? Not enough? Just right?

During the course, who did you typically hear from?

What kind of communications did you typically receive from Braven during the course?

- Did you receive other types of communications from Braven?

Of the communications received from Braven during the course, which were most useful?

Of the communications you received from Braven during the course, were there any that were not useful?

- Were there any you just ignored?

How did you prefer to receive information from Braven while you were in the course?

Now, let's switch gears to after you completed the course.

How do you prefer to receive information from Braven now?

How often do you hear from Braven staff now?

- Is that too much? Not enough? Just right?

Of the communications you receive from Braven now, which are the most useful?

Of the communications you receive from Braven now, are any not useful?

- Are there any you just ignore?

Is there anything else about communications with Braven that you would like to share?

Post-Accelerator Experience

What post-accelerator development opportunities have you taken advantage of?

- Why did you choose those?
- How useful were those?
- Are there others you are considering using?
- How likely do you think you are to use those?

What other Braven resources have you utilized?

- Why did you choose those?
- How useful were those?
- Are there others you are considering using?
- How likely do you think you are to use those?

Have you stayed in touch with Braven staff or the members of your cohort?

Where do you typically turn for job-search support and career advice?

What do you hope to get out of being a part of the Braven network long-term?

Would you recommend Braven to current college students? Why or why not?

Is there anything else about your Braven experience that you'd like to share?

Non-completers

Thank you for hopping on the phone with me today to discuss your experience with Braven. As I mentioned in my email, I'm a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University working with Braven to better understand the touchpoints participants have with the organization and how those interactions shape a Fellow's experience. I'm going to ask you few questions about your experience in the Accelerator Course and communicating with Braven staff; your first-hand insights will really help us understand how Braven can strengthen their communications to improve the Fellow experience and help more under-represented college students land strong first jobs. If you're comfortable with it, I'll record our meeting to make sure I don't miss anything we discuss in my notes. I plan to keep everything we discuss anonymous – I won't attribute anything you share with me to you by name in my recommendations to Braven. Any questions? Okay, great – let's get started.

Why did you decide to enroll in the Braven Accelerator course?

What did you know about Braven before you started the course?

What did you hope to get out of it?

What did you expect it would be like?

Did the Braven team send you information before the program began? What did they highlight as important to know?

How often did you hear from Braven staff?

Were the communications from Braven staff useful?

When you had questions about the course, who did you reach out to?

When did you decide to leave the course?

What led to your decision to leave the course?

Did you find that you had the information and resources you needed to complete the work?

What might have helped you stick with the course?

Are there other job-search or career planning resources you've found to be more helpful?

Where do you typically turn for job-search support and career advice?

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your Braven experience?

Peer Organizations

Thank you for hopping on the phone with me today to talk about alumni engagement. As I mentioned in my email, I'm a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University working with Braven – a workforce development nonprofit that supports under-represented college students in launching their careers – to think about how they can enhance their alumni engagement strategy. Your expertise in the field will give us such valuable insight as we consider opportunities to build a thriving network among their program completers as they continue to grow and develop their careers. If you're comfortable with it, I'll record our meeting to make sure I don't miss anything we discuss in my notes. If there's anything we talk about that you would like to keep confidential, just let me know and I won't attribute the information to you directly or to your organization. Any questions? Okay, great – let's get started.

What outcomes do you hope to achieve through your alumni engagement efforts?

How do you work towards those goals? What are your key strategies?

How do you communicate with alumni?

- What platforms do you use?
- How often are you communicating with them?
- What topics are you communicating about?
- What kinds of inquiries do you get from alumni?

Where are you seeing the most participation from alums?

- What are your most popular events?
- On which communications platforms do you see the most engagement?
- How do you measure your progress to your goals?

What would you say are alumni hoping to get out of their relationship with the organization?

- How do you determine what alumni want or need from ORGANIZATION?

Do you tap alumni themselves to communicate your message or encourage their peers to participate in alumni events/utilize resources? How so?

What factors do you see as contributing most to your success?

What do you find alumni expect to get out of their relationship with ORGANIZATION? Do they reach out to you with specific requests?

What are your biggest challenges in building alumni engagement?

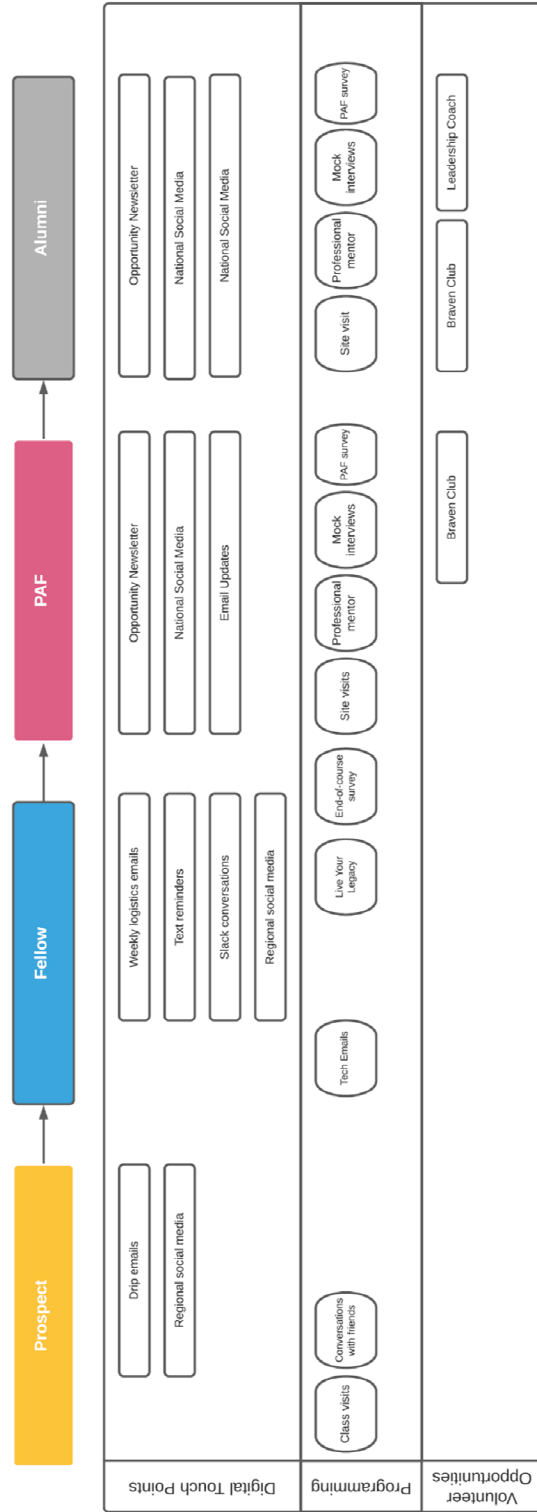
What opportunities do you see for your organization in alumni engagement?

What lessons have you learned from your experience developing alumni strategy? Any flops or big wins?

What advice would you give an organization just starting to develop its alumni engagement strategy?

Is there anything else you'd like to share about ORGANIZATION's alumni engagement strategy?

Appendix F. Braven's Participant Journey Map



Appendix G. Evaluation-Focused Participant Journey Map

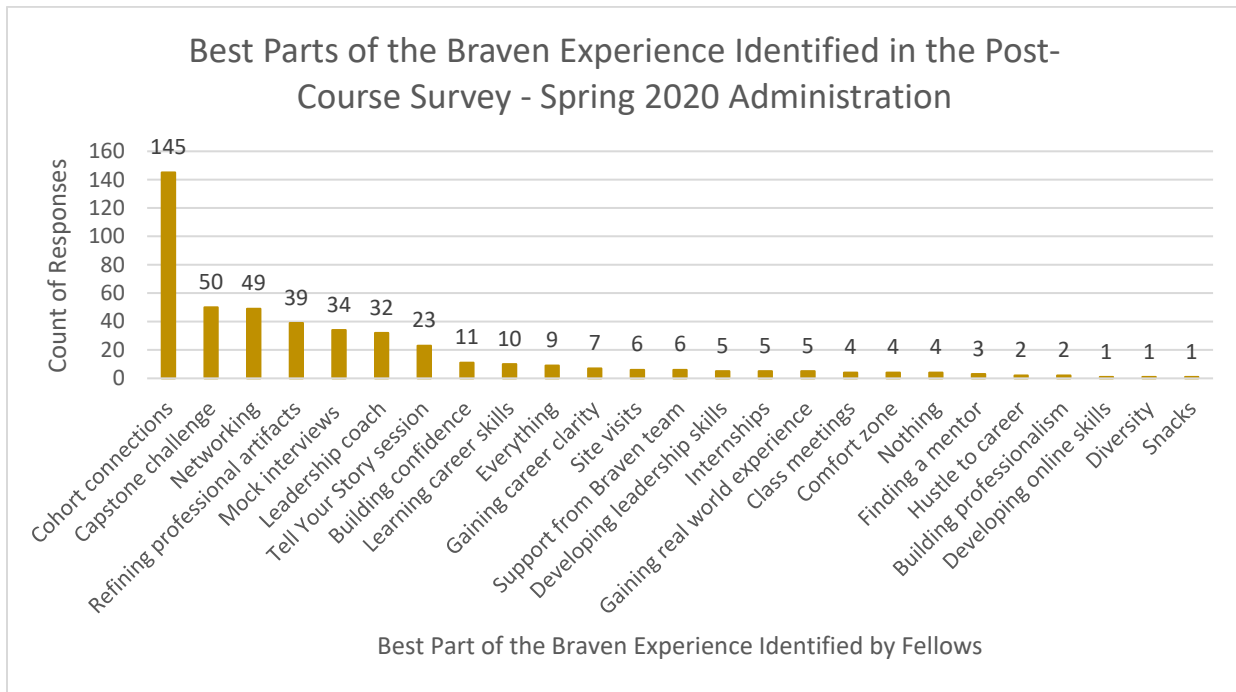
Prospect					
Touchpoint	Word-of-mouth	Tabling	Class presentation	Recruitment email	Social media messages
Platform	Individual interactions	In-person event	In-person event	Email	Instagram
Description	Friends share experience	Tables at student activity fair	PAF/Braven intern presents during class sessions	Outreach and follow up emails to Fellow candidates	Community building content builds awareness of program
Strength	Authentic	Highly visible	Prof lends credibility	Direct to the candidate	Platform prospects frequently use
Challenge	Not curated	May be cursory	May not reach all majors	Lost in a sea of emails	Has to be sought out
Owner	Fellows/PAFs	Regional staff	Regional staff	Recruitment team	Regional staff
Contributors		National staff	National staff, interns, PAFs	Regional staff	Communications and Marketing
KPI	Referrals	Registrations	Registrations		Likes, clicks

Fellow							
Touchpoint	Welcome emails	Weekly Course Meeting	Weekly email	Deadline reminders	Community building convo	Inspirational content	Survey
Platform	Email	In-person/online	Email	Text	Slack	Regional IG	Email
Description	Initial emails welcome and outline registration steps	Live class meeting	Course logistics	Reminder message	Discussion prompts to build community	Encouraging social media content	Post-course survey
Strength	Provides clear next steps	Opportunity for personal connection	Provides clear expectations	Short, to the point	Dynamic, allows participants to shape the content	Feel good	Provides an opportunity for fellow feedback
Challenge	Lost in a sea of emails	Rich in content	Can be lengthy	Can be annoying if done too frequently	Slack may be a new platform for participants to learn	Could be considered fluff	An ask for Fellow time
Owner	Program team	LC	Regional staff	Regional staff	Regional staff	Regional staff	Data team
Contributors	Regional staff	Regional staff	Communications and Marketing	Program staff	Communications and Marketing	Communications and Marketing	Marketing and Comm
KPI	Opens, Clicks, CTOR	Attendance, NPS	Opens, Clicks, CTOR	Reads	Reactions	Likes, clicks	Opens, Click, CTOR

PAF							
Touchpoint	Live your Legacy	Org update email	Career Tips	Survey	Opportunity Newsletter	PM program invite	Online webinar
Platform	Live class session	Email	LinkedIn	Email	Email	Email	Zoom
Description	Final course session	Email on evolving programmatic efforts	Job search how-tos	Annual PAF survey	Monthly internships and jobs email	Email promoting opportunity to sign up	Skill building session conducted online
Strengths	Primes future engagement	Conveys the recipient is a valued partner	Actionable	Provides an opportunity for feedback	Actionable; what participants want most	Direct outreach	Usable knowledge; provides opportunity for connection
Challenges	A moment in time	Lost in a sea of emails	Often calls on participants to take additional steps to access info	Requires an investment of time	Lost in a sea of emails	Lost in a sea of emails	May feel disconnected from other content
Owner	Regional team	Comms and Marketing	Marketing and Comms	Data team	PAF team	PAF team	Regional team
Contributors	Program team	Program team	Program team	Comms and Marketing	Comms and Marketing	Regional team	PAF team
KPI	Attendance	Opens, clicks, CTOR	Reactions, link clicks	Opens, clicks, CTOR	Opens, clicks, CTOR	Opens, clicks, CTOR	Attendance

Alumni					
Touchpoint	PAF Survey	Org update	LC invitation	Braven Summit invitation	Call with LC
Description	Annual survey sent to PAFs and alumni	Email from Aimee offering programmatic update	Volunteer opportunity to become a Leadership Coach	Invitation to annual conference	Follow on check-in call with LC
Platform	Email	Email	Email	LinkedIn	Live meeting
Strengths	Provides an opportunity to provide feedback	Conveys the recipients are a valued partner	Direct outreach	Timely; direct outreach	Personal; personalized
Challenges	Requires an investment of time	Lost in a sea of emails	Lost in a sea of emails	Lost in a sea of email	Not curated
Owner	Data team	Comms and Marketing	Volunteer management team	Communications and Marketing	Alum
Contributors	Comms and Marketing	Regional staff	Comms and Marketing	Program, Development teams	LC
KPI	Opens, clicks, CTOR	Opens, clicks, CTOR	Opens, clicks, CTOR	Reactions, comments, shares	PAF survey question: How often do you stay in touch with your LC

Appendix H. Best Parts of the Braven Experience Identified by Fellows in the Post-Course Survey



Appendix I. Changes to Make Braven Even Better Suggested by Fellows in the Post-Course Survey

