



7. oktober 2015

## Alumni Engagement Work Group Interim Report

Vedlagte rapport er 'a giant step' i forhold til, hvor vi stod i oktober sidste år.

På de efterfølgende sider finder du den rapport, som en arbejdsgruppe under AFS Board of Trustees har udarbejdet her i 2015. Den er inspireret af talrige opfordringer under AFS Centennial i Paris i november 2014 samt af indlæggene på den workshop, hvor vi sammen med alumni repræsentanter fra Frankrig, USA, og Japan holdt vore indlæg (Creating Vital AFS Organizations).

Vi har kontakt til BoT-udvalget AFS Alumni Engagement Work Group via Cercle des Amis. Vi har leveret en del input til de møder, der har været afholdt; her har vejledningen Helpful Guidelines været et bidrag til arbejdsgruppens arbejde. Arbejdsgruppen stiller sig indtil videre tilsyneladende meget positive overfor at promovere oprettelsen af alumnegrupper nationalt som internationalt.

Vi forventer at indsatserne udmønter sig i formalisering af et AFS Alumni Worldwide.

Af fodnoten på rapportens første side fremgår det, at man ønsker rapporten drøftet overalt i AFS netværket:

**Although this is an interim report to the BoT, it is intended for a broader audience since it will be distributed to Partner Board Chairs and Partner Directors. We hope it will stimulate broader discussion in the AFS Network so that we receive comments and suggestions from various sources at the Network Meeting and thereafter.**

Det er baggrunden for at vi giver dig mulighed for at læse og give din mening til kende. Det bedste vi har til en sådan dialog er vores Facebook gruppe, som du finder på <https://www.facebook.com/groups/82372943478/>

Har du brug for at få direkte kontakt, så skriv til [formand@afsalumni.dk](mailto:formand@afsalumni.dk).

AFS – og i AFS Alumni DK – har meget brug for din mening og tilbagemelding. Så læs rapporten og skriv på Facebook!

Efterårshilsner  
Bestyrelsen for AFS Alumni DK

## **For Information and Discussion**

Date: 23 September 2015

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Alumni Engagement Work Group

RE: **Alumni Engagement Work Group Interim Report<sup>1</sup>**

CC: Partner Director Representatives  
AFS International Managers  
Partner Board Chairs  
Partner Directors

Do you want to participate in an international network of some of the coolest, most intelligent and most interesting people on earth? To create and maintain friendships all over the globe? To discuss significant global issues and instigate beneficial change? To receive useful advice and guidance on educational and career opportunities? To find new ways to engage with and support AFS?

All this and more can be possible if we create a robust AFS alumni network. It's within our reach. Thus, the Alumni Engagement Work Group strongly and unanimously supports expanding our alumni engagement initiatives across the AFS Network.

### **Why does AFS need an alumni network?**

As AFS embarks on its second century, we need an active alumni association so that AFS can become an even stronger, more relevant intercultural education organization that is fulfilling its fundamental mission of peace and social justice. Expanding the network of individuals and organizations that are prepared and committed to join our efforts will enable us to do this.

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Historically, AFS has pursued its mission of building a more just and peaceful world by promoting greater intercultural understanding through student exchange programs that involve very personal connections achieved in many ways, but primarily by having our participants live with a host family in another country. Although the actual AFS program may last just a year or even only a few months or weeks, we have found that the experience will positively impact participants and their outlook on the world for the rest of their lives. Indeed, many AFSers have demonstrated, by both words and deeds, that the AFS experience can be personally transformative. We believe there is now an enormous opportunity to build upon this to achieve even greater success – and hence promote the mission of AFS more broadly – by engaging and connecting alumni long after their actual AFS exchange is over.

### **Why is an alumni network appropriate for AFS?**

The AFS global community is one of the largest, most dynamic, international networks of active, global citizens and changemakers that exists anywhere in the world. Acting together, we have the potential to effect dramatic, positive change throughout the world.

Since the founding of the student exchange program, AFS has sent over 450,000 participants to live with families in foreign countries. We currently have 40,000 volunteers, 800+ staff members and thousands of host families living, working, volunteering and collaborating in over 100 countries across six continents, as well as hundreds of thousands former volunteers, staff members and host and natural families. Some have active leadership positions within AFS, but many others want to stay connected with AFS -- and with each other -- in some other way.

Arguably, this network is the organization's biggest asset. Grateful for the impact their AFS experiences had on their lives and united by disposition to engage with others from different cultures, many of these alumni are hungry to maintain their engagement with AFS and each other and stand ready to be of service to the organization. AFS has the opportunity to leverage this incredible asset and, indeed, one might even say that AFS owes it to its alumni to better deliver the full promise that such a network offers.

### **What are the reasons for AFS alumni to remain connected to this important organization and successful global community?**

**For starters, AFSers are:**

## **Everywhere**

From diplomats to astronauts to leading business professionals, teachers, humanitarian aid workers, community leaders and volunteers—you don't have to go far to find AFSers making a difference in communities, across industries, or at the forefront of important national, regional or international issues or social causes.

## **Transformative**

They are at different stages of their amazing intercultural journeys—expanding horizons after experiencing life in a different country, learning another language, and enjoying living, working and collaborating with people from different cultures at home and around the world.

## **Multigenerational**

They are part of an extraordinarily diverse global community of students, young adults, alumni and volunteers, returnees, staff members and host families who are now linked together by a common purpose: a desire to work together with others to make a positive difference in their communities, their countries or across the globe.

## **Inclusive**

They are part of a welcoming, encouraging and supportive network of confident, open-minded, culturally fluent, tolerant active global citizens and changemakers.

## **What are the advantages of engaging our alumni more robustly?**

AFS alumni have the potential to become enormous resources for promoting cross-cultural understanding and, ultimately, to participate in a global network that promotes world peace. Many returnees have reached positions in life and society from which they can effectively advance such ideas more widely. So what can an alumni network offer for them and for AFS?

- Furthering the mission.  
By enabling alumni to re-connect, they will be able to explore global issues of common interest and concern that might lead to many new and exciting initiatives that coincide with and promote the AFS mission. These initiatives could focus on the environment, present day conflicts, social justice issues or many other pertinent topics. These efforts would be mainly

self-directed by networks of alumni and be driven by their energy, enthusiasm and passion to make a difference on issues that concern them. In the end, however, such activities not only would further the AFS mission, but they would enhance the image and reputation of AFS worldwide

- Finding friends/making new friends.  
Social connections have always been at the heart of the AFS experience and that experience should be lifelong – we already talk the same “language” after all. We just need to connect and find each other all over the world. An alumni network provides a means by which all alumni can remain involved with the world wide community of AFS and also build friendships all over the world that will enrich their lives immeasurably.
- Providing Education/Career opportunities.  
We have shaped the global outlook of many young people. Now we can assist with the next stage of that journey by helping alumni find the right path in their education and careers as well as opportunities to contribute to society. Some alumni, for example, could become mentors to more recent returnees or provide internship opportunities that may, as a collateral benefit, cement lifelong connections. Others may want to collaborate and support each other professionally, or they may simply be looking for helpful introductions to other individuals who might support activities in which they’re engaged.
- Re-engaging with AFS – as host families, sending parents and volunteers.  
At different times in their lives alumni will be ready and eager to take on a variety of roles to support AFS. By establishing and maintaining contact, we maximize the possibility that they will re-engage when the time is right for them, whether as volunteers, host families, natural families or maybe even all three.
- Providing financial support.  
By fostering a lifelong connection with AFS we provide an opportunity for alumni to reflect on the value of that experience in their own lives. Many will be keen for others to have this same opportunity by providing financial support whether at the local, national or international level.

- Identifying new leaders.  
By actively engaging more alumni with AFS, we can identify and develop a deeper pool of talented individuals interested in serving on National or International Boards, work groups or task forces. This can be a tremendous source of “new blood” bringing energy, ideas and enthusiasm to AFS programs and activities. Furthermore, the cost and effort of recruiting staff, volunteers, mentors, leaders and donors from among returnees must be much lower than recruiting from among non-returnees who must first be convinced of the merits of AFS. Ultimately, the cost to the organization of not engaging its alumni is a huge lost opportunity cost.
- Creating international connections.  
The Centennial celebrations in Paris demonstrated that alumni are eager to have the opportunity to connect with other AFSers globally. Nearly 50% said that international connections were what they missed most and were most important to them. An AFS alumni network can help fill that void.

For all of these reasons, a robust alumni network could provide a continued link that would enable us all to walk together and talk together for our entire lifetimes for the betterment of the world.

### **Are there any potential concerns?**

Despite the distinct advantages of engaging our alumni much more broadly, some concern has been expressed about this initiative. Thus, we shall list those concerns and some of our preliminary thoughts about them in the expectation it will provoke further discussion. What are those concerns?

- It could create more work or expense for AFS Partners.  
Some Partners may be reluctant to take on new activities, viewing them as a potential distraction from their current responsibilities and a drain on scarce human and financial resources. This is, admittedly, a risk, but the potential gain may make it well worth taking. As you will see, there are several different models for increased alumni engagement, some of which may involve minimal work or resources at the Partner level or little change (other than enhanced technological support) in what they are currently doing. Since the development of an alumni program will be optional, we anticipate that not all Partners will embrace this activity immediately, but the numbers will grow as they see it successfully implemented elsewhere. Not everyone needs

to participate for this initiative to be successful, but the more individuals or organizations that do participate, the more exciting and successful it will be.

- It could interfere with current Partner initiatives or create brand confusion. Some Partners may fear that active alumni organizations could push initiatives that are different from the priorities of the staff and/ or the National Board and that their operations could create confusion for volunteers and returnees. Much may depend on the way the alumni organization is formed nationally and upon its specific activities, but clear ground rules can help to minimize confusion. Moreover, AFS International licenses the use of the brand, so, if it becomes necessary, restricting usage to appropriate activities can be a further means by which to minimize confusion. In the end, many alumni will want to be active locally but connected globally.
- Neither Partner organizations nor AFS International may be able to afford this initiative financially. That depends entirely on how the alumni network or groups are organized. In many cases, the measures that need to be taken to engage alumni are relatively simple, low cost and achievable by alumni themselves with relatively little staff support – e.g., organizing gatherings for alumni to reconnect or inviting alumni to speak to younger returnees about work or educational experiences, especially those that make the most of a returnee’s intercultural experience. Nonetheless, there certainly is a potential cost for a Partner organization or International, but many activities could be self funding through membership dues or voluntary contributions by their members. Already, there is significant “sunk cost” in the World Café, which we can now capitalize upon by utilizing its exceptional potential for connecting alumni.
- It may create new tensions around fundraising. To the extent that this initiative gives rise to fundraising opportunities, it will be necessary to balance the donors’ wishes of how they would best like to support AFS with Partners’ rights to fundraise in their own territories. It also could create a competitor (the alumni organization) for fundraising income. Ideally, however, this initiative will greatly increase overall fundraising potential (i.e. it will increase the pie), which in the end will be to everyone’s benefit.

- New initiatives by alumni may not be compatible with the AFS mission. Since AFS has historically been a non-political organization, there is a risk that some alumni initiatives could interfere with that principle. Again, there will need to be some ground rules about what can/cannot be done in AFS's name, but we can resolve this. What matters is providing the opportunity to link alumni who decide to take independent action on important global issues – it's the next step in making the drivers' dream becoming a reality!

### **If we do develop an AFS Alumni Network, how do we do it?**

There are a wide variety of models for enhanced alumni engagement. Many organizations, especially colleges and universities and some secondary schools, make great efforts to stay connected with their alumni or to facilitate the interaction of alumni among themselves. Some are closely linked to the “parent” organization, while others are independent or quasi-independent. With a plethora of possible models, neither AFS International nor any AFS Partner needs to re-invent the wheel. Furthermore, alumni connections do not have to be made through any type of formal organization; some can be easily created through individual initiatives.

Within AFS, it has become apparent to the Work Group that to the extent connections are made through some type of formal organization, there is no single model that will work for all AFS organizations, i.e. there is no size that fits all. We also have limited resources to invest in this initiative, so we must spend any money we have very wisely.

Today, very few AFS Partners have active alumni initiatives, but where they exist, they fall into four basic categories:

1. Those operated nationally, but independent of the AFS Partner organization;
2. Those operated nationally, but in association with the AFS Partner organization;
3. Those operated nationally, but directly by an AFS Partner organization; and
4. Those that can potentially be operated internationally, primarily by utilizing the World Café.

We shall discuss each individually.

#### 1. Those operated nationally, but independently.

The best example here is Cercle des Amis AFS, the AFS returnee organization created in France in 2009. This organization has done a good job of tracking down returnees, organizing 2-3 social events/year and producing newsletters. It also provides some annual scholarship support for hosting and sending programs. At the outset, Cercle did not have a positive relationship with the National Office, but the relationship has improved, and they now cooperate together on some



projects/events. Because AFS-VSF is a federation of local organizations, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to have a national AFS alumni organization within the AFS-VSF structure, so Cercle operates independently. Cercle has 900 members who have registered online in their Directory and 200 members who have paid annual membership dues. They maintain their own database utilizing their own software, but may consider migrating to the World Café. They use the AFS name under a license agreement with AFS International, and that agreement limits the way in which the name can be used and the activities it may pursue using the AFS name.

Cercle would like to engage more internationally and has collaborated with the AFS alumni organization in Denmark . Together they have reached out to others and have sponsored one conference on the formation and operation of alumni organizations and have plans to sponsor another. Together they have produced some guidelines on how to create a national alumni organization. A copy of the relevant portion of that document is attached as Appendix A.

Le Cercle is self-funded through its membership dues, voluntary contributions and fees for events.

## 2. Those operated in association with a Partner organization.

The best example here is the alumni organization in Denmark. It is formed independently with its own Board and officers, but the Board Chair of AFS Denmark serves on its Board. The group uses the offices of AFS Denmark for its meetings and some of its functions. To date, their activities have been primarily social for AFS returnees, but they also have included meetings to discuss relevant political issues and projects that lend direct support to AFS Denmark. On occasion, its members support local chapters with practical help, and it annually awards a stipend to a dedicated volunteer. In addition, it provides two scholarships annually for the sending program. There is some concern the separate organization may create confusion among volunteers (some of whom are returnees), but thus far this does not seem to have materialized.

The Danish alumni organization is self-funded through membership dues, voluntary contributions and fees for some events.

## 3. Those operated by Partner organizations.

AFS Japan operates its own alumni activities, organized by program year, and the group has generally provided great support (and volunteers) for the National Office

and Boards. It has existed at AFS Japan for virtually the entire existence of the Japanese program.<sup>2</sup>

AFS USA is just launching its own alumni organization. Since it is very common in the U.S. for U.S. colleges, universities and secondary schools to have very active alumni associations, AFS USA hopes to utilize those models and experience. Activities will be primarily social and intellectual and will frequently be organized by region or in large cities. They hope it will enhance recruitment of volunteers and host and natural families and pay significant fundraising dividends in the long run. Again, however, many of its alumni have expressed interest in enhanced connections internationally.

Both AFS Japan and AFS USA fund their alumni activities through their annual operating budgets, though fees may be charged for some events.

#### 4. Those organized internationally.

At the present time, there is no international association of AFS alumni, but the World Café offers enormous potential. It can link various individuals and/or alumni associations and enable the formation of groups (by individuals or by organizations) by year, by country, by type of interest or nearly any other criterion. Its flexibility is one of its most remarkable characteristics. To the extent Partners will share contact information (they must, of course, be sensitive to national and regional regulations on privacy and sharing personal data and information), it will enable returnees to cross national borders electronically to locate and reconnect with long lost friends. It offers the greatest potential of linking alumni internationally -- one of our primary objectives --, and it will provide a platform to facilitate the formation of alumni organizations however and wherever they are developed.

The World Café was designed and created with funds from a grant by the Caravan Foundation. It now is funded from the annual operating budget of AFS International. No fee is charged for those who use the World Café.

Dede Huang, one of the work group members, has developed a useful check list by which a Partner can rate itself on how “alumni friendly” its organization is. A copy is attached as Appendix B. Although the Work Group intends to refine this check list further, it provides a useful starting point by which each Partner can measure how well it is currently engaging its alumni.

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<sup>2</sup> AFS Japan may also have a “Friendship Society”, independent of the Partner organization, that organizes social events and does some fundraising.

## **Some Specific Preliminary Recommendations from the Work Group**

The Work Group strongly and unanimously supports a greater, Network-wide, expansion of our alumni engagement activities. We intend to continue to develop some final models, particularly after receiving feedback from Partners and others at the Network Meeting, but we already have some preliminary recommendations.

1. We should continue to move forward with this project. The potential benefits of developing an active alumni engagement project throughout the AFS Network, as described above, vastly outweigh the risks or disadvantages. Let's capture the momentum created at the Centennial in Paris.
2. Every Network Organization should adopt an alumni oriented/alumni friendly mindset as outlined in the first section of Attachment B.
3. Every Network Organization should investigate, utilize and promote usage of the technology provided through the World Café, which soon will have links to Facebook and LinkedIn. Only if enough people utilize it will it be successful. We cannot, of course, require people to use the World Café and it's too expensive and time consuming for us to locate them; they must find us and want to connect. If they can find friends and engage in meaningful dialogue and activities through the World Café, they will. We believe that as more subscribe and talk about it, the numbers will grow geometrically. For all Network Organizations, the message should be clear: "Use it or lose it."
4. Building upon point 3, AFS International should continue to devote human and financial resources to further enhance the capabilities of the World Café and the ease of using it.
5. We should take immediate steps to start developing "a lifelong community" of AFSers by automatically enrolling all AFS participants in our alumni network as an explicit benefit of an AFS program. "You go on this life-changing experience AND you become a life member of this incredible global network." Although this initiative can certainly start immediately, the Work Group intends to develop more detailed recommendations on how we do it and who does it in our final report.
6. We should make a greater effort to identify alumni, particularly those in influential positions, with a standard nomenclature used internationally. We should then try to make sure that their AFS connections are publicly identified whenever possible.

7. We should establish alumni engagement benchmarks for all Network Organizations and include them in the AFS health monitor. We could, for example, ask for the number of alumni; the percentage with current information, including active e-mail addresses, in the database; the number (and percentage) of alumni serving as AFS volunteers and participating as donors; and the number of events run for or by alumni each year and the total number of individuals who attend them. Again we request feedback before developing this in more specific detail.

8. We would encourage broad circulation of his Interim Report to all AFS Network Organizations and invite comments, suggestions and feedback to help guide the Work Group in its future discussions. We hope that feedback will start, but not end, at the Network Meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

#### Alumni Engagement Work Group

Bill Meserve      Co-Chair

Richard Spencer      Co-Chair

Jorge Castro

Elisabeth Hardt

Dede Huang

Maximilien Marxer

Fernanda Ogasawara

Kenan Sahin

Sheryl Tucker

## Appendix A

### **How to establish a national AFS Alumni organisation?**

#### Step one: How to find interested AFS Returnees in my country?

- Form a small group that collects names and establishes contacts to potential members via :
  - AFS rosters, national and international lists of participants.
  - National AFS office
  - Public data bases
  - Newspapers
  - Social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. as well as websites
  - By word of mouth
- Organise data for example in a spread sheet or something similar to which a few people have access.

#### Step two: How to approach the work?

- Call for a first general meeting with interested returnees and other potential members and clarify the purpose of setting up an AFS alumni organisation
- Clarify the purpose and roles with the national AFS organisation
- Form a small group whose job it is to draft by-laws including
- Aims and objectives of the organisation
- Agenda for the annual assembly
- The formal connection with the national AFS organisation (e.g. the chair person of the latter could be an ex-officio member of the AFS alumni board – and vice versa)
- Suggestions for possible dual membership of both the national AFS and the AFS Alumni organisations
- Create a website with (as a minimum) the basic information about your organisation. We suggest the name of AFS alumni [plus Internet country abbreviations, e.g. AFSalumni.dk] as it would be easier to identify globally!
- Create an easily identifiable logo (to be agreed upon with AFS) preferably using the AFS standard for alumni organisations
- Consider to be visible on Facebook or similar social media ( may vary from country to country)
- Decide on different categories of memberships (single, family, company or dual membership), as well as suggestions for membership fee/no membership fee
- Prepare a tentative budget for recurring costs.

#### When established – make sure to:

- Keep continuous track of members and potential members.
- Keep members informed of activities using email, Internet, Facebook or other social media
- Make social media a two-way communication with the members
- Appoint webmaster/moderator

## Appendix B

### **ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT CHECKLIST FOR PARTNERS**

**Rate yourself on how alumni-friendly your organization is!**

[Provide some tick boxes - 0 points for No/Not Sure; 1pt for “Did so previously”; 2pts for “Sometimes”; 3 pts for “Always”]

#### **Adopts an Alumni-Oriented Mindset**

***Does your organization...***

- ...include reminders for alumni to keep in touch both in text and verbal communications?
- ...ensure that every staff members knows where to direct alumni-related inquiries?
- ...recruit volunteers from among alumni?
- ...highlight an alumni affiliation, when AFS staff, leaders, parents or host families are themselves alumni?
- ...ask staff to take special note when unexpectedly encountering AFS alumni?
- ...extend support if alumni ask for help with an alumni activity they are organizing?
- ...know of independently organized alumni groups in the country/region?

#### **Initiates Activities to Keep Alumni Engaged**

**Does your organization organize any of these types of activities for alumni?**

- **Volunteer recruitment activities?**  
Are alumni your main source of volunteers?
- **Social activities?**  
Any activities catering to different age groups, or other sub-groups?
- **Reunions.?**  
Do you regularly target specific year groups or countries/regions?
- **University- and careers-mentoring activities?**  
Any structured mechanisms to match older alumni/parents with younger alumni?
- **Speaker programs or other special interest activities?**  
Any focus on alumni presenters or on AFS-relevant topics such as intercultural understanding, youth issues or international affairs?

**Bonus point** if you have alumni who have competed as a sports team or perform non-AFS community service under the AFS name!

- **Fundraising activities or appeals**

Are alumni involved in both organizing such activities and giving?

- Does your organization take into consideration the alumni lifecycle (different levels of interest in AFS at different stages of life) when planning these activities?

**Actively Supports an Alumni Committee or Association**

***Does your organization...?***

- ...have either ad hoc announcements of its alumni activities or an alumni-specific newsletter or social media group?
- ...have either a clearly designated member of staff whose responsibility includes updating alumni contact information or actively reaching out to update contact information, or an online facility where alumni can update their own information?
- ...have either a member of staff, volunteer or volunteer group with alumni relations as all or part of their brief?
- ...have an annual alumni relations plan?
- ...budget funds for alumni-related expenses, or collect any kinds of alumni dues?
- ...develop any AFS branded items specifically to sell to alumni?
- ...maintain an archive of photos of AFS alumni or other memorabilia?
- ...present an annual or other type of award to an AFS alumnus/alumna?
- ...cultivate individual alumni to be donors?
- ...make all staff aware of their responsibility to build relations with alumni regardless of their role?
- ...embrace the concept of “stewardship” by proactively moving alumni to progressively higher levels of engagement?