

Securing promising futures with planned giving: Elon University's success with FreeWill's Planned Giving Suite



THE OPPORTUNITY

Elon University is known for their innovative and nimble approach to alumni engagement and annual giving. Based in North Carolina, the University cultivated a counter trend increase in alumni participation rates over the past decade, most notably among younger alumni. However, they identified a significant opportunity: planned giving.

With an alumni base made up of around 40% of graduates from the previous decade and 60% in their thirties and forties, Elon was keen on harnessing this younger demographic's potential for legacy giving. The challenge was reaching this audience with the right platform and message to emphasize the importance of estate planning and legacy giving.



Many people think planned giving is not for them, or that it's something they need to consider 'later.' We needed a solution to break this mindset.

Leanna Giles
Associate Director of Planned Giving

THE SOLUTION

Elon University launched their FreeWill partnership in June 2023. From the beginning, the simplicity and accessibility of FreeWill's tool caught the development team's attention. FreeWill's platform stood out for its potential to lower the barriers to estate planning, and ultimately, planned giving to the University. The team saw FreeWill as a tool to make the estate planning process more accessible to young alumni, and bring a new group of constituents into the legacy giving fold. With an initial launch and two targeted campaigns, this partnership started delivering results immediately.

From the same day we launched, we received a mid six-figure bequest from a young alumna who we had not engaged in planned giving at all.

Leanna Giles

Associate Director of Planned Giving

According to Elon University, FreeWill has not only boosted planned giving but also facilitated discussions on financial well-being among alumni; making estate planning seem less daunting — a crucial step towards engaging a younger demographic. FreeWill's intuitive platform helps remove barriers to folks who may feel overwhelmed by traditional estate planning approaches. The University is now able to challenge the notion among young people that they don't need an estate plan until they reach an older age, and FreeWill provides the tools to say "don't wait — you can do this now because everyone needs an estate plan."

The Elon University development team works closely with a FreeWill Partner Success strategist to map an annual outreach plan for planned giving appeals. Their dedicated strategist has enabled the team to be more proactive in planning an annual planned giving campaign and incorporate FreeWill into their communications calendar throughout the year.

Less than a year into their FreeWill partnership, the Elon University development team now works to integrate FreeWill into all fundraising conversations, aiming to cultivate legacy gifts from both new and existing donors.



Working with FreeWill has been really easy, understanding us and enhancing our efforts. It has helped shift the mentality internally and externally that it's not too early to start this conversation about planned giving. FreeWill has also been very easy to incorporate into our existing fundraising strategy.

Brian Feeley

Assistant Vice President for University Advancement

RESULTS

\$1.3M+

in total legacy gift commitments from 18 legacy gifts

17

primary bequest commitments