

April 2018

The DAAD Alumni Concept - Goals and Focuses



DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

Content

1. Goals of DAAD alumni work	3
2. Focuses of DAAD alumni work.....	4
2.1 Build lifetime relationships with scholarship recipients at an early stage	4
2.2 Intensify subject- and theme-based networking	5
2.3 Support cross-border networking	5
2.4 Make efficient use of the expertise and projects of the alumni network	6
3. Data management, alumni definition and communication	7

1. Goals of DAAD alumni work

All around the world, former DAAD scholarship holders rise to key positions in academia, culture and politics. They hold leadership positions at universities and national academies, assume leading political offices in ministries and parliaments, and manage research institutes. They receive highly distinguished research and cultural prizes, hold influential positions in research communication, and shape public opinion in the media. Their careers impressively demonstrate that the scholarship programmes of the DAAD are achieving their long-term goal. The best students and most talented scholars abroad are being selected and given adequate financial and ideational support so that after completing an impactful visit at a German university, they will remain lifelong friends of Germany in both spirit and deed. Conversely, supporting academic mobility at home is indispensable for international and intercultural cooperation. Therefore, the DAAD is enabling young German academics and prospective leaders to develop international competence through foreign study and research visits. Pursued in combination, the DAAD programmes can effectively advance further internationalisation in the German higher education sector and provide an academic perspective on the future development of globalisation.

DAAD alumni are generally defined as persons who have verifiably received at least three months of individual scholarship funding. The majority of former DAAD scholarship recipients – presently just over 375,000 according to the DAAD database (April 2018) – comprise an enormous potential for a committed, active alumni network. The network is to be regionally anchored in the academic systems and societies of the respective partner countries. Within their sphere of influence, the alumni are encouraged to pursue impactful cross-border projects, extend offers of cooperation by German universities and German foreign policy programmes to their respective regional counterparts and generate impulses themselves for international academic collaboration with Germany.

With the aim of promoting an active network, the DAAD places expectations on its former scholarship holders. DAAD alumni can contribute to alumni activities in various ways, for example:

- staying in contact with each other, the DAAD and German institutions and businesses; serving as multipliers for higher education cooperation, research collaboration and academic exchange with Germany;
- working together with the DAAD in selecting candidates for its scholarship programmes and subsequently providing assistance and advice to the scholarship recipients;
- sharing their international expertise with German universities and the DAAD;
- participating in the development of DAAD programmes;
- advocating dialogue, understanding and conflict resolution;
- participating in joint projects which aim to solving global challenges – especially with regard to the “Sustainable Development Goals”.

InfographiThese objectives serve as the basis for the guidelines of the future DAAD alumni activities. They provide thematic focus so as to combine the interests of alumni with the goals of the German academic and research sector. Experience has shown that alumni are generally interested in:

- continuing education and career support
- appreciation and increased prestige
- new cooperation and mobility opportunities
- transnational and cross-disciplinary networking
- exclusive information and inspiration
- support for their own ideas and projects
- the chance to support others and give something back.

The goals and interests are subject to change throughout the alumni “life cycle”¹.

In the future, the DAAD aims to motivate alumni to get involved in the DAAD programme activities even more intensively. For example, not only will former scholarship holders continue to play an integral role in the selection process, but they will also be encouraged to advise new recipients as part of a mentoring and supervising programme and suggest new ideas for developing programme content and formats. To this end, the DAAD’s alumni work must provide clear focuses and bundle its resources to ensure maximum effectiveness. As the technical basis for every subject-related thematic focus, the DAAD must manage alumni data and engage in alumni communication at the highest digital level possible in order to communicate with alumni in a manner corresponding to the thematic goals and to offer active members suitable platforms for networking and self-presentation.

2. Focuses of DAAD alumni work

2.1 Build lifetime relationships with scholarship recipients at an early stage

The basic premise of academic alumni work is that the initial experience with the funding institution lays the foundation for all later interaction between the two. For the DAAD, this means that the quality of its support services for scholarship holders will have a significant influence on the strength of its future relationship with its alumni. Consequently, the DAAD aims to improve its support of recipients of DAAD individual scholarships by adhering to quality standards that apply to all scholarship programmes. The scholarship holders will be given the option of starting and managing their own interactive profile on an electronic scholarship portal. Based on this information, the scholarship department will be able to address the individual needs and interests of the registered scholarship holders in a timelier and more personalised manner. The scholarship recipients should also be given the chance to develop their own project proposals and network as an international DAAD community in self-organised conferences.

¹ See, e.g. [Australia Global Alumni Engagement Strategy 2016-2020](#) and the [Infographics: Alumni](#) on the Alumniportal Deutschland.

Seminars for soon-to-be alumni in Germany serve to prepare current scholarship holders for their future role as DAAD alumni. On the other hand, seminars for returnees which provide on-site alumni support to former scholarship holders after returning to their home countries demonstrate the crucial role of the DAAD regional offices in the DAAD alumni work. To make more efficient use of available resources, the DAAD is well advised to concentrate its intensive, event-related alumni services in priority countries which benefit from a regional office. By focusing support in this way and encouraging further involvement of German alumni and beneficiaries who are and have been active in the respective country, the impact of the DAAD's alumni activities would increase considerably.

2.2 Intensify subject- and theme-based networking

Every year the DAAD organises five to ten major, often country-based alumni meetings and finances two to three hundred smaller alumni events which are predominantly coordinated by former scholarship holders themselves. With these formats, the DAAD is already cultivating contact with a large number of alumni; a total of 16,000 people participated in such events in 2017. In line with the goals mentioned above, the DAAD should continue to enhance the subject-based, thematic profile and quality of these events in the future. To achieve this, the DAAD should endeavour to select and invite alumni who are best suited and most inclined to attend the event in question. In this way the DAAD will be able to bundle the expertise of alumni to advance bilateral and multilateral higher education cooperation and potentially develop new subject-based or theme-oriented DAAD programmes.

For events which address highly topical academic and cultural policy issues, the format should ideally focus on achieving results and visibility. Productive subject- and theme-based meetings can lay the groundwork for longer-term academic networking between DAAD alumni. Academic bilateral or multilateral networks could offer an alternative to the mainly nationally oriented alumni organisations and supplement the services provided by traditional professional associations. They are defined by jointly shared thematic interests, are digitally present (i.e. not restricted to physical location) and are therefore accessible and attractive to younger, professionally active alumni. The DAAD is currently supporting two academic alumni networks in East Asia with a disciplinary focus on law and life sciences. As part of a BMBF-funded accompanying programme, the DAAD has recently begun coordinating and supporting efforts to create and publicise German-Chinese thematic alumni networks in the fields of economics, social sciences, life sciences, engineering and the humanities. These networks aim to serve as a catalyst for future bilateral collaborations in research and innovation and network German institutions and businesses. For the DAAD, these thematic networks double as workshops for learning how to improve and modernise alumni activities. Upon completion, the current programme will be assessed as reference project for cross-border alumni networking so that success factors may be transferred to the alumni efforts in other regions.

2.3 Support cross-border networking

In the future, the DAAD aims to more frequently offer opportunities for cross-border networking, bringing together the alumni of one transnational region and possibly German alumni as well. With a diverse range of subject or theme-based perspectives, the goal is to promote reciprocal internationalisation and encourage creativity in developing it. Multilateral meetings with German participation also create a platform for initiating university collaborations and other forms of longer-term cooperation or mentorship between former scholarship holders and junior researchers. When political tensions flare between countries, the cooperation between alumni in those countries can create a pre-political space for dialogue and understanding that may lay the foundation for conflict prevention and resolution.

Cross-border network-building measures require greater budgetary resources. However, this investment is thoroughly justified if the transnational context significantly improves the results and effects of the measures.

2.4 Make efficient use of the expertise and projects of the alumni network

A thematically broad-based network of international alumni in connection with DAAD regional structures in key countries is especially conducive to merging the alumni experience and commitment with DAAD activities and programmes. This is where the DAAD will clearly prioritise its alumni work in the future.

The expertise of former scholarship recipients is already playing an important role in the local selection process of new scholarship candidates through the DAAD regional support infrastructure. The new DAAD contact management system launched in March 2018 (see section 3) will make it possible to identify and reach out to German and foreign alumni in a more targeted fashion, encouraging them to serve as selection committee members and assessors. The same applies to getting alumni more involved in German higher education and research marketing. To this end, the “Research Ambassadors” programme is playing a significant role. At now nine locations worldwide, DAAD representatives select “Research Ambassadors” from the pool of alumni in that host country. Their role is to inform others about the German research landscape and the programmes offered by the DAAD based on their authentic experience. The success of the programme lies in the high-quality information provided through the DAAD to a subject-specific selection of multipliers – young academics who have received funding to study or research in Germany. With good alumni data management, the role-model function of alumni who represent the programme aims of the DAAD can be used in other ways as well. With respect to the UN Agenda 2030, for example, we are currently assessing whether and to what extent we can find and enlist foreign DAAD alumni who are suited and willing to help implement the “Sustainable Development Goals” at their home universities in cooperation with German partner universities.

For the five German Centres for Research and Innovation (DWIH), former DAAD scholarship holders whose careers have transitioned from academia to research-based industry are especially well-suited for intensifying innovation partnerships with their home countries. By targeting the support of DAAD alumni, the DWIH centres are enhancing their public outreach in domestic research, industry and society and can more effectively assume an advisory function for promoting innovation in Germany. The eight foreign “Binational Universities”

established with DAAD funding for transnational education projects also serve as points of crystallisation for academic collaboration with the respective partner countries. DAAD alumni played an active role in building these projects and now serve as initial contacts for the scientific communities in their home countries with regard to evaluating and communicating the results of the project collaborations.

The DAAD can do more to tap the potential of DAAD alumni mentoring for academics returning from their respective host country. Alumni funding is currently being used to finance local model projects initiated by the DAAD network. Following an evaluation of the participants' experiences, the DAAD will assess whether such intensive one-on-one consultation should be offered on a broader scale both in Germany and abroad, and whether a digitally-aided matchmaking service can be offered prior to the stay abroad.

3. Data management, alumni definition and communication

The use of an alumni data management system which provides qualitative, significant information is a basic prerequisite for productive alumni work. The contact management system (Extended Relationship Management xRM), introduced in 2018, offers the DAAD a considerably improved instrument for collecting and using such data. With the prior consent of the alumni and in compliance with all data protection regulations, the system creates a more comprehensive and qualitative profile of the former scholarship holders with information about the key stages of their careers since their scholarship funding, current areas of expertise, thematic interests and their network contacts to other DAAD alumni. With the aid of the xRM system, the DAAD will be able to systematically create alumni focus groups – for example, all alumni worldwide who received DAAD funding to study at German universities and who have research expertise in climate issues, or those only in a specific region of the world like East Asia or Japan – in order to contact and enlist their support for joint collaborations and projects. The quality of the data increases with the degree of alumni contact with the DAAD and among each other. Alumni activation and alumni data management go hand in hand and are thus mutually reinforcing.

In view of the technical advances in future networking capabilities with and between alumni, the DAAD is assessing whether to expand its current alumni definition which has been previously limited to those who received at least a three-month individual scholarship. The plan is to also allow those supported through DAAD-funded university projects access to the DAAD alumni networking services. The first step in this process will be to clarify which DAAD-funded programmes would best correspond to this new alumni definition and how to implement it administratively.

Increasing the size and especially the quality of DAAD alumni networking is ultimately a matter of improving alumni communication. The challenge here is to not only to expand the scope of communication, but also provide more participant-relevant content to the recipients without exploding necessary resources. Therefore, developing new target group-specific information formats for the future should generally pursue digital methods and consider the focus areas for alumni activities described above. Virtual networking options can play a vital role in this regard by offering the DAAD alumni community a suitable forum for exchange. These represent the communication-based technical counterpart of a sustainable and active alumni network which the DAAD is committed to building and cultivating in the coming years.

Imprint

Published by

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service
Kennedyallee 50, D – 53175 Bonn

www.daad.de

Department ST16 – Alumni: Concept and Coordination

Contact

Dr Heidi Wedel
wedel@daad.de

Published as an online digital publication
© DAAD – All rights reserved