

The Final Countdown

A guide to welcoming your senior year students into your alumni community

Class of 2021

The countdown is on...

Your seniors are fast approaching their final semesters at school. Whether you're saying goodbye virtually or in person, here's how to **welcome them into your alumni community** and get them signed up to your online platform **during their final year!!**

The last year has demonstrated just how important connecting online can be for wellbeing, education and opportunities. An online alumni platform gives you a secure, private portal to engage your alumni, with a **built-in CRM and database**. Alumni can join clubs, sign up to events and connect with fellow alumni to reminisce or network. Using an all-in-one system to collect alumni details means that unlike social media, **you own the data** and can collect the most relevant information. With a private portal, you avoid social media algorithms that are impossible to predict, while giving your alumni a **space to connect with each other** and stay up-to-date with your school.

This guide contains lots of tips to **get your senior year students signed up** - from getting students to register on their phones during their graduation, to sharing words of wisdom from your older alumni - so **start today** to begin a lifelong connection with your class of 2021.

How to use this resource

Whether your senior year students' final semesters are spent virtually or in person, these last months are a brilliant opportunity to engage your class of 2021 before they leave. Each month there is a new tactic to focus on, to help sign up your class to your platform. By encouraging your alumni to sign up ahead of their departure, you will **engage a greater number of your graduating class**.

It's helpful to start the sign up process early for your alumni platform, as this avoids a rush later in the year to persuade seniors to sign up before their school email addresses expire.

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To create a sustainable alumnae network, you need to engage the current school community before they leave the school. When students depart to college, they often stay in contact with girls at the school and advise them on their college choices. Once they start their first jobs, they know they can tap into a huge network of alumnae who will offer them mentoring and careers advice.”

Jenny Blaiklock, Director of Advancement, Lady Eleanor Holles, London, UK



10 months to go

Give them a reason to connect

Invite existing alumni to share their own stories of connecting through your alumni community

Introduce your community with real life stories from your alumni. By showing them that their fellow former students are enjoying being a part of your school's alumni community, and are benefiting from the experience, you are proving the value of joining.



Hearing directly from alumni will get students thinking about the opportunities available to them.

You can recruit alumni to help in different ways, such as:

- Asking them to post a friendly comment on your forum to welcome the new class to the alumni community
- Asking alumni to come into school or stage a virtual event to talk through their career journey and experiences since leaving your school
- Creating online college groups (if these don't already exist) and asking recent alumni of those universities to post their experiences there.
- Staging an online networking event, such as a virtual coffee with 'break-out' groups
- Set up former students as pen-friends with senior year students, to share a postcard/letter
- Run a series of virtual coffee/teas with older alumni and senior year students, to reflect on their time since school and how far the alumni network has supported them



9 months to go

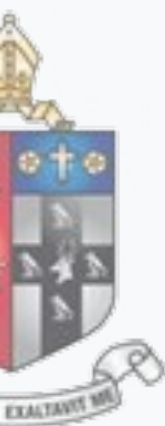
Help them in their next steps

Host a careers' fair with some of your alumni, and partner with local apprenticeship and higher education organisations

Helping current students secure jobs or support them make decisions about university can make alumni and development directors invaluable.



This is a great first step to networking for younger students, and demonstrates tangible value to joining their community.



We want to create a system that self-evolves. If we can help students get work placements now, then in five years' time, when they are working for a company, they can give back to the school by providing work experience opportunities for the next generation."

[Bishop Vesey's Grammar School](#), UK

Who should you invite to your careers' fair?

- Alumni of your school who are recent graduates of university, to share their experiences of attending and their future plans
- Alumni who are entrepreneurs, who can speak to students about starting their own businesses and potentially offer work experience
- Alumni who work for large corporations that often offer internship schemes
- Students who are currently studying in competitive courses, such as medicine or law, who may be able to offer up-to-date support on the application process

How should you organise your careers' fair?

- If possible, use a sports hall to give each person/organisation a stand to display information, and for final years to go and have an informal conversation and begin networking
- You can run a programme of careers' talks with alumni who have an interesting career journey
- You can invite your leavers to sign up for the careers' fair via your alumni site, and ask them to register at this time
- You can also promote one-to-one mentoring at your careers' event, and ask leavers to sign up to your site if they would like to get involved



8 months to go

Make the most of meeting in person

Use your events as a way to get school leavers to sign up in person

Attend every event with a laptop or tablet in hand, ready for alumni to register on their way into an event or while it's taking place! An easy way to encourage sign ups as students will see their peers signing up and want to get involved.



Ask your alumni to sign up to be the first to hear about the next reunion event

Considering ideas to bring your school leavers together? Try one of these:

- Meet & Greet dinners at popular universities: ask your alumni currently studying at universities to attend a dinner hosted by the development team to welcome new alumni to the campus
- Alumni assemblies: While it might be too early for a reunion, some schools have alumni assemblies a few months after final year students leave the school where you can encourage graduates to sign up
- School tradition events: some schools have traditional annual events for their leavers such as a final day breakfast
- Sports dinners: If your school has end-of-year or farewell dinners for your sports teams, use this time to ask final years to sign up and join the club for their sport; e.g. the Hutchins Alumni Golf Club



7 months to go

Create a personalised page

Joining a whole new community can be daunting; give your leavers a space of their own

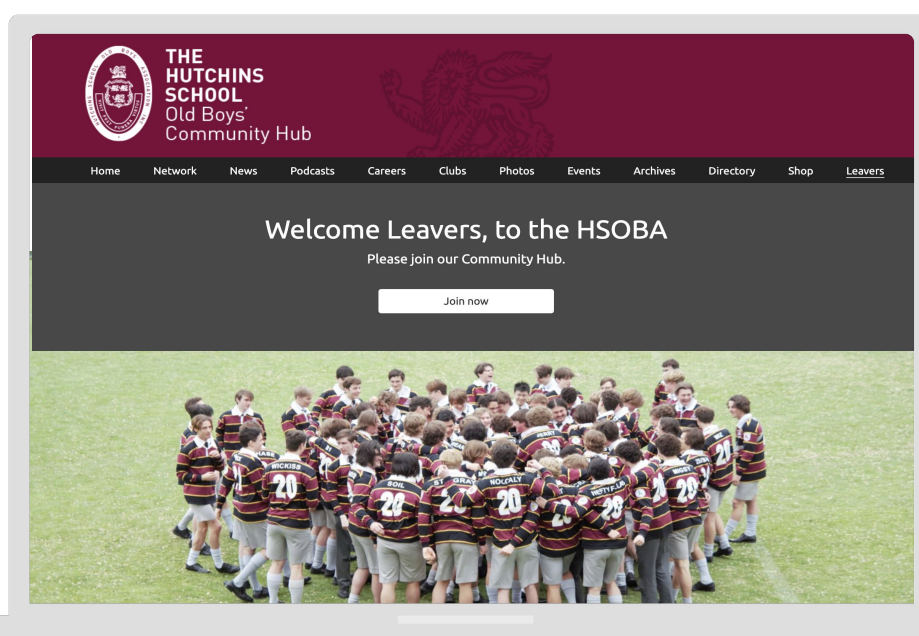
Creating a 'Class of 2021' page on your alumni platform is a great way to introduce your new alumni to their network, and you can make it personal with photos, upcoming events, and relevant news.



The [Hutchins School Old Boys' Union](#), TAS, created a landing page for their leavers with a prompt to sign up to the community

Here's what you can include on your page:

- A link to a photo gallery of their time at school
- A button and call to action to prompt people to register for the community
- A hub for school clubs, with relevant groups for leavers to join, such as '2021 alumni', and sports clubs, hobbies or university groups
- Share relevant stories i.e. about current or recently departed staff, or newer alumni that they might know
- Highlights of final year students who are going on to study with scholarships or overseas



6 months to go

Your current students are your future donors

Explaining the value of fundraising to your current students can help to increase the chance of them becoming donors in later life

Your students may first hear from your development office in their final year, and might not be aware of how fundraising helps their school. Introducing your development team and explaining the importance of fundraising to support bursaries and capital projects will facilitate future engagement.



Share the value of community fundraising with your students before they leave, and show them how they can create their own impact!

Offering your graduates an opportunity to get involved in fundraising, or take advantage of the benefits, is a great, practical way to start them on their own journey to becoming donors. By signing up to your alumni site, you can offer opportunities and show them how other alumni are making an impact.

Feel the benefit of fundraising: Current final year students at Sidcot School, in the UK, can apply for the Travel Award, a £1,000 grant given to graduates to enable them to volunteer for charitable projects overseas.

“You should make them aware of what the development office does and why it exists. It allows children to understand the meaning of giving, and they will know that, by contributing a little every month when they leave school, they can make this award possible for the next generation.”

Joanna Hodnett, Alumni and Development Manager, [Sidcot School](#), UK



5 months to go

Reward them for joining the programme

Give a token gift to welcome students into your alumni community

Whether it's a school sweatshirt or yearbook, incentivizing your graduating class with a small gift to sign up is a gracious way to welcome them into your alumni community.

Branding the gifts with your logo helps keep the school in mind when they set off to work/ uni/ travel - particularly if they can take the item with them. Surbiton High School in the UK gives all seniors a branded rubber duck and encourages alumni to send back selfie-photos with the duck! With this in mind, longevity is key when choosing products!



Think practical, think premium, and make it personal.

Other ideas for branded merchandise:

- Bound notebook with school logo
- A tie/cap in alumni association colours
- A commemorative coin
- Everyday items like a reusable tote bag, umbrella or laptop case
- Something quirky like a school teddy mascot, a beautiful year-group photo book or a funny alarm clock

Think digital; ways to celebrate alumni online:

- A LinkedIn badge of your alumni logo
- A branded 'frame' for profile pictures on social media
- A personal email signature banner promoting their alma mater



On their last day of School, the Class of 2020 were officially welcomed to the Arden Alumni Association. A lovely morning was enjoyed by all and the students were excited to receive their alumni pins, which they wore with pride. We had a one hundred percent sign up rate to the Arden Alumni Association website from this year group."

[Arden Anglican School](#), NSW

ARDEN



4 months to go

Engage graduates via the alumni community



Invite your seniors to their end of year events through your alumni platform

Whether it's a prom or graduation that your seniors are eagerly awaiting, inviting them to book their tickets through your alumni platform will incentivise sign up rates.

Using your online community to organize and promote your events is a great way for alumni to come together, whether that's virtually for now or at reunions in the future.

Here's how you can promote your events:

- Send out invitations via email from your all-in-one system
- Ask year-group reps/ambassadors to share the link with their peers
- Share the event link to your social media groups and from any other school websites
- Share updates on the event on as announcements on your community site

Encourage engagement with comms and consent preferences at this stage

While your 2021 graduates set up their online profiles in your alumni community, why not capture their opt-in for future communication?

If you want to fundraise from alumni in the future you might want to take this opportunity to gather consent from your graduates to send them occasional email updates about school fundraising projects.



[Sydney High School Old Boys' Union](#) invited their class of 2020 to a university preparation and early career webinar, with alumni from 2013-2017 on hand to share their advice for incoming graduates.



[Arden Anglican School](#) invited all final year students to a special breakfast held in their honour on campus to celebrate their final day of school, and being officially welcomed into the alumni community.



3 months to go

Co-create Class of 2021 content

Collaborate with your senior years to produce content for your alumni site

Posting exclusive content behind a login screen encourages students to sign up to check it out.

User submitted content

Ask your senior years to submit content to your platform, for example: a short introduction to themselves, where they'd like to be in 5 years time, and their favorite school memory.

Interesting content ideas:

- Experiences of different universities from an alumni perspective
- Graduation or prom photos
- Link to a senior year video
- Farewell messages from teachers
- Predictions of where they'll be in 1 or 5 or 10 years' time - which can be used as a 'hook' to re-contact the year-group in the future! These predictions can be 'fun' - e.g. most likely to be living on a remote island/saving the planet/running for elected office etc



Calling all creatives!

If you have students in your senior year group that are already passionate about writing, videography or photography, why not invite them to contribute to your school alumni community?

Delegating content generation

Conversely, well-connected graduates could be given responsibility for encouraging fellow students to upload pictures to a Class of 2021 gallery, or collecting quotes or anecdotes to share in community groups.



Top tip!

Ask your class president or any student ambassadors to submit their introduction, and they can share this with the rest of their year group!

[Arden Anglican school](#)

shared a farewell letter from their Headteacher to the class of 2020 on their alumni site, sharing her hopes for this year group and a prayer for them.



2 months to go

Establish a mentoring scheme

Set up a mentoring programme to connect experienced alumni with alumni taking their first steps in their careers

One of the best ways to welcome your new alumni and provide an opportunity for continued engagement could be through a mentoring scheme.

You can start this once your seniors officially leave, or during their final year so that alumni can give advice on work experience and personal statements.

When asked about planned alumni engagement activities for their 2020 graduates, 65% of advancement professionals in our survey planned to set up a mentoring programme as a way to support and engage with their alumni.

Mentoring programme starter kit

Here's a starter kit to getting your mentoring programme off the ground:

1. Ask for volunteer mentors from your existing alumni network. A good time to get in touch could be those that have recently graduated from college, or those that have lots of experience in competitive industries such as law and medicine.
2. Add new categories to your mentoring options that will appeal to your seniors, such as 'College essay advice' and 'Internships'.
3. Publish a 'Best practice guide' to explain how to make the most of the mentoring experience for mentees.
4. Introduce the mentoring programme to your seniors in an assembly or workshop, where you can talk them through the platform and answer any questions. If possible, ask a few of your mentors or mentees to talk to students about what they got out of the experience.
5. Ask for feedback from mentees and share positive anecdotes on your alumni site to encourage further engagement.



Get your older alumni involved

Why not invite one of the older school alumni to record a video message for seniors, explaining how much they have gained from maintaining alumni connections over the years?

[Sydney High School Old Boys' Union](#) launched their series speaking to alumni about their career in industry, kicking off with 'A career in medicine' with Dr Chris Ryan. Alongside this, they run a regular mentoring programme and connect older alumni with incoming or new alumni.



1 month to go

Get personal & capture contact details

Ensure that your graduates' details are up-to-date!

Many students will sign up with their school email address, meaning they are unavailable to be contacted after their addresses expire. Collecting their personal email address, and updated home address if they are moving, will save lots of admin time later down the line and ensure that you can keep in touch.

You can set up a quick notification to pop up whenever students log in to ask them to check and update their details. You can also use this as an opportunity to check their consent preferences, so you send them the most relevant communications.

You may also want to set a date for a **'Just left meet-up'** - for example a reunion in the winter break when a lot of alum are likely to return from their 1st semester at college.

Give graduates a reason to leave their personal data behind

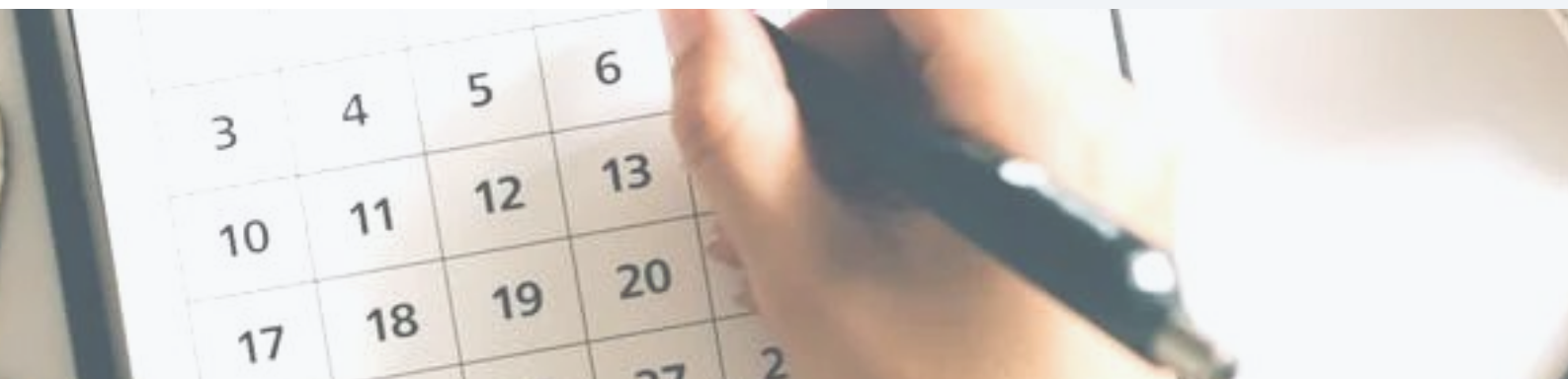
When asking students to share personal details, it's important to make it clear why the school wants to store this information, and what it will be used for.

Sharing a list of reasons that benefit them may increase the number of personal details that students are willing to share, such as -

- To keep you informed about updates to the school
- To invite you to networking or learning events in future
- To share mentoring/careers initiatives with you
- To ask you to get involved in relevant school activities
- To inform you about connection requests from fellow alumni

In a 2020 ToucanTech survey, 92% of advancement professionals wanted to contact new alumni by email, but 83% of their school email addresses expired within a year.

Don't lose touch with alumni who would love to hear from your school!



Success!

The next steps for your class of 2021

Hopefully, the hard work of signing up a new class to your alumni network is mostly over, and you can focus on creating meaningful, sustainable engagement.

Engaging your recent graduates usually takes a different form to the rest of your alumni community; they are much less likely to be in a position to give back to their school, and will mostly want to use the alumni community to hear updates about school events and exam results.



Here are 3 things you can share with your new alumni in their first summer:

- Send them a postcard from the school, wishing them well
- Share any internships or work experience opportunities
- Use university groups on your alumni site to buddy up new college students with other alumni

For further resources on engaging your alumni, check out one of our guides:

[Deepening Alumni Connections: Without Physical Events](#)

[Adapting fundraising & alumni communications during COVID-19: A practical case study](#)

[Five Engagement Examples](#)

[Encouraging Business Networking](#)

[6 reasons your alumni should join your online community](#)

[Engaging recent leavers](#)



Connect your Class of 2021 long-term using an online community website

A private portal provides a place for alumni of all ages to come together & engage with the school.

Creating an online alumni community gives your alumni the choice to join in and stay in touch with your school. Whether they want to hear the latest school news, or take advantage of job opportunities in their network, having access to a platform where alumni feel encouraged to connect is a lifelong benefit.



News

Publish articles about the school, or alumni initiatives



Events

Promote opportunities to connect, online or offline



Discussion Forum

Encourage conversation and comment



Picture Galleries

Post images old and new, and create galleries



Individual Groups

Coordinate subsets of alumni into groups or clubs



Merchandise

Use the online shop to make sales, or promote donations



Notifications

Inform community members when activity takes place



Job Board

List available opportunities at top organisations



Resources

Share helpful guidance, such as CV templates

Did you know?

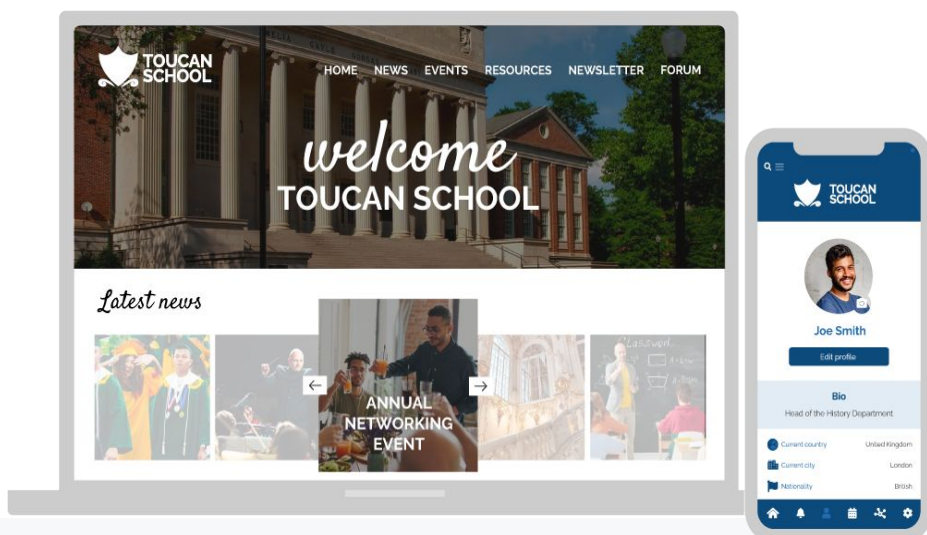
A ToucanTech alumni community is connected to a robust database and easy-to-use CRM system, meaning that all interactions are automatically logged on alumni records. A built in email engine makes contacting alumni simple.



About ToucanTech



ToucanTech is a **community software** used by schools, companies and charities for marketing, membership, alumni, careers, and fundraising activities. Combining a flexible **website** and powerful **database/ CRM**, it's an easy, all-in-one system.



Database

Import, filter, update and merge record, create custom fields, forms and admin permissions



Community

Connect your members on a branded network with privacy controls and mobile app



CRM

Track activity, measure engagement, capture consents, create postal labels, sync emails



Groups

Set-up club pages where admins can manage their own members, discussions, events



Email

Design and schedule newsletters, view stats, remove bounced emails, manage unsubscribes



Fundraising

Process donations and tax relief, set up funds, reconcile payments, run reports, steward donors



Resources

Upload photos, documents, magazines - tag, categorise, share and track downloads



Careers

Run a mentoring system, post jobs, publish careers guides, promote business networking



News

Publish articles, videos, and other content - track views, tag people, share on social media



Events

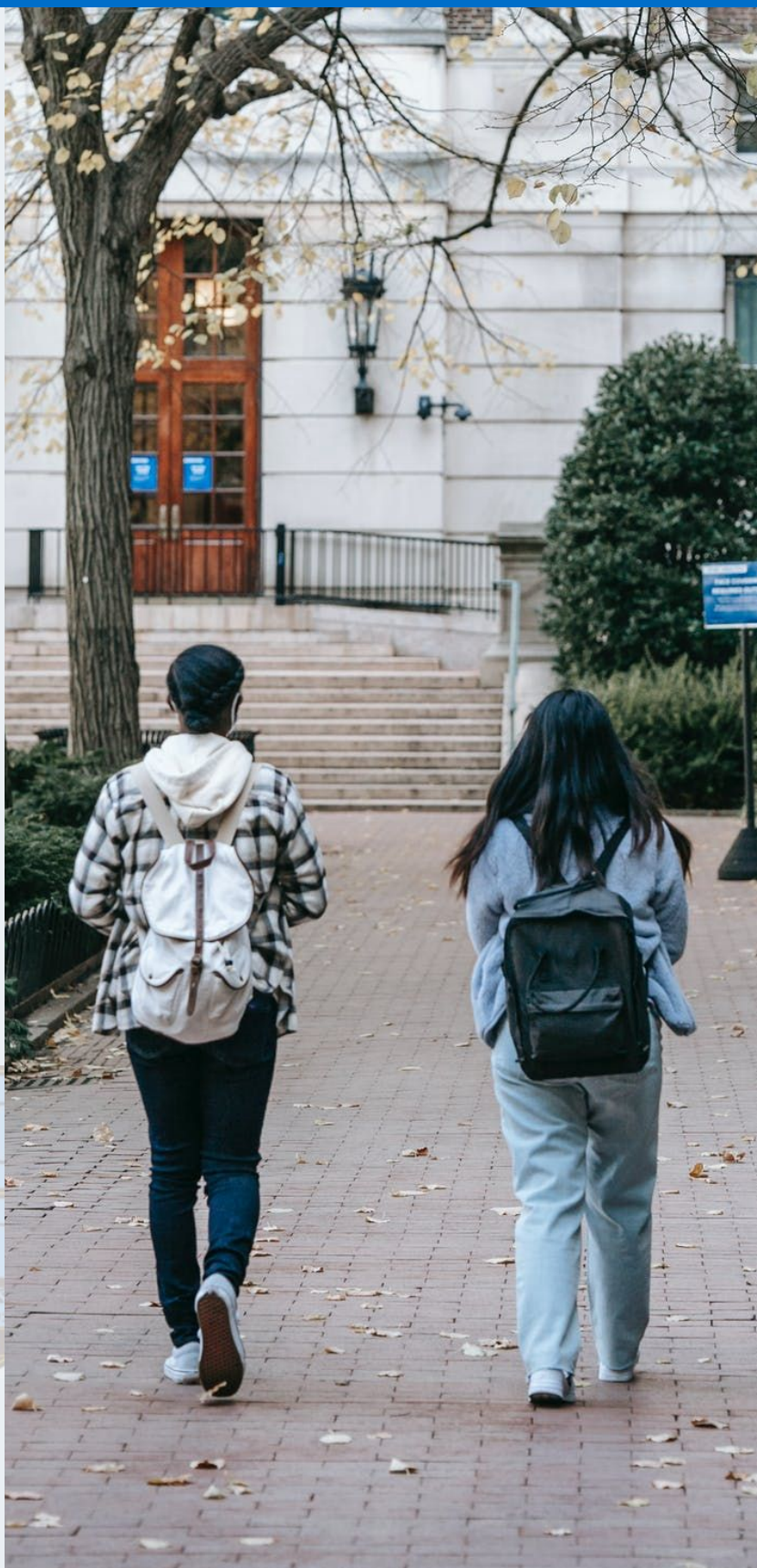
Manage your events (online or in-person), invites, reminders, seating plans and ticketing



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It took 9 months reviewing over 60 products before I settled on ToucanTech. As a comprehensively integrated SaaS platform, I am able to manage our contact database, communications, membership fees and donations, community groups and online store plus more I am getting to in time. Most importantly the after sale support has been exemplary in both ideas, design and technical support. Do yourself a favour and speak to ToucanTech.”

Paul Harapin,
Sydney High School Old
Boys' Union, Australia



Visit toucantech.com or email hello@toucantech.com to book a product demo

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