

Design principles (Mule)

Design and technology are only as valuable as the human activities they enable. The design of the Cornell Alumni and Giving sites is about much more than colors and fonts, although this owner's manual includes information on those decisions. It's about creating these websites as tools to drive the strategic goals of the organization and meet the needs of its many audiences.

The design of this system was informed by a period of discovery, which included talking to representatives of Cornell's alumni and parent communities and AAD leadership and staff. From this research, themes emerged. Each theme represents a cluster of organizational goals, audience needs, practical constraints, and emerging opportunities.

Service is an exchange

The Cornell community has a strong ethos of service. Alumni are motivated to give when they perceive a need and know that their contribution will make a visible impact. AAD can reinforce this idea by using the digital ecosystem to better serve alumni, parents, and friends.

Alumni want to be of service to the world. The AAD digital properties can be a powerful tool to align Cornell's mission with global issues. Better user experience and audience-centered content can provide a high degree of service and stewardship without additional labor.

In the design system

- Volunteer and giving opportunities are framed as service to Cornell and to the world rather than something to be done out of obligation.
- Concrete examples of how Cornellians are improving the world are featured more prominently than appeals to nostalgia.

Broad generalizations are avoided in favor of specifics and speak to alumni directly with a personal tone, even in mass communication. * A range of opportunities to participate are offered.

One Cornell—infinite perspectives

Alumni keep up with aspects of Cornell that reflect their interests—and these interests evolve at each stage of life. These are deeply personal, diverse, unpredictable, and changeable. Students cope with Cornell's scale by joining smaller interest-based communities within the university. Just as students choose areas of focus to make their relationship with Cornell manageable, AAD can offer alumni an array of opportunities to stay connected to the parts of Cornell that matter most.

In the design system

- Individual stories showcase Cornell's diversity and global influence through news articles and the new "Profile" content type.
- The site encourages exploration and discovery around topics rather than site hierarchy. For example the "Volunteer" landing page can pull in relevant profiles, news stories, and events to create a fuller picture of volunteering through Cornell AAD than one page could do alone.
- Avoiding content silos in the design keeps the website navigable and relevant even as community members' interests to shift over time. Connections between sections of the site allow for visitors to discover information they may not have been looking for originally.

Connection requires clarity

Cornell orients new students, but alumni receive little guidance on their lives as alumni. Their relationship to Cornell becomes opaque upon graduation. Alumni are more likely to engage with what they understand. The new AAD ecosystem clarifies alumni offerings and information about how and why alumni should stay involved.

In the design system

- Orienting content for alumni, students, and parents/family offer a primer on building a lifelong relationship with Cornell.
- Calls-to-action make explicit Cornell's need for time, talent, and treasure—no matter the amount—to increase overall alumni participation.

Embrace scale

Given the appropriate set of tools and processes, AAD can harness the scale of Cornell. At Cornell there is potentially a story for anyone to relate to, as long as they can find it. AAD must tell these stories online in an audience-centric, coordinated way. A digital ecosystem that highlights connections across information will turn scale into an asset.

Workflows that incorporate online tools and processes can connect individual efforts inside the organization and allow the team to draw on the full range of associations and better reflect the many facets of the Cornell experience.

Creating contextual links among the various sources and types of information will help ensure that everything is findable in multiple ways and nothing is lost. Using connections to provide context rather than relying on a static site hierarchy is more effective for a large amount of information to meet a wide variety of interests and needs.

In the design system

- Imagery and content that reinforces Cornell as an institution of great diversity and influence is prioritized.
- The site infrastructure connects all the things and reduces the challenge of AAD size and variety of goals.
- The multitude of programs, projects, and opportunities are organized and connected not just by site hierarchy but through content and links.

Change is always coming

Administrations and funding priorities come and go, strategy changes, new tools and technologies appear, and new stories emerge. The AAD sites are built as a flexible system that will allow AAD's online presence to evolve and remain viable over time.

In the design system

- The sites are built using modular elements that can be repeated, removed, and rearranged as your understanding of your audiences grows.
- Global calls-to-action can be easily updated as priorities shift and allow for page-level overrides when another action makes more sense in the context of that specific content.