URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement Shatters Fundraising Goals with Updated Data Architecture

The University of Rhode Island Foundation & Alumni Engagement (URIFAE) secures contributions from alumni, parents, corporations, foundations, and friends on behalf of the University of Rhode Island. New commitments typically amount to some $30 million year per year. URIFAE is currently in the fourth year of an eight-year fundraising campaign – Big Ideas. Bold Plans. The Campaign for the University of Rhode Island – which aims to raise $300 million by June 2024. More than 28,000 individuals and organizations have contributed to the campaign to-date.

Highlights:

- Data Rocket architecture delivers curated insights to 75 business users through PowerBI dashboards

- PowerBI dashboards helped guide real-time outreach response during Day of Giving campaigns, with nearly $1.5 million raised from 3,400 alumni and friends in October 2021

In September, Wendy Bucci, Chief Operations Officer for the University of Rhode Island Foundation & Alumni Engagement, was looking at a rosy picture of URIFAE's latest fundraising campaign. With 2 ½ years left to go in the campaign, her team had raised $218 million of the original $250 million goal. On October 26th, the University of Rhode Island raised the stakes – and the campaign goal – to $300 million.

Adding 20% to a quota might seem daunting, but Wendy and her team are unfazed.

"We were tracking well ahead of our goal," Wendy said. "We're confident we will get there."

Wendy's confidence is not unfounded. Nearly two years ago, she spearheaded a data transformation at URIFAE – replacing legacy systems with scalable data architecture that puts data in the hands of decision makers in real time. With intuitive dashboards tracking outreach status, development officers can quickly identify opportunities, and team leaders can more effectively help set goals and targets.

The dashboards replace a flat file system that made it hard to access data for decision-making.

"We have probably 400 customized reports, and they were all flat," Wendy explained. "You couldn't drill down in the data. You couldn't explore things or have any analytics per se. We were looking for a tool that would make it easier to deliver data to our staff."

Working with Passerelle, Wendy opted for the Data Rocket architecture – using Talend to land data from multiple source systems, including Ellucian and People Soft, into the Snowflake Data Cloud. From there, Passerelle helped Wendy and her team to build custom PowerBI dashboards that align with URIFAE's business questions.

Data Rocket has bridged the gap between data systems and business users – with 75 employees now licensed for PowerBI dashboards.

"Data Rocket eased a frustration point in helping get data into people's hands," Wendy said. "That's always my goal – to get current data in people's hands to help them do their jobs better."

With data updated nightly, team leaders can better target initiatives and monitor results.

"There are so many ways to slice the information to drive activity," Wendy said. "We are getting out of the mindset of having flat reports you look at once a month – instead we are using data for real-time decision-making."

In URIFAE's recent Day of Giving fundraiser, PowerBI dashboards were used to monitor results as the day progressed. With hourly refreshes of data, PowerBI dashboards helped guide direct, targeted outreach where it was most needed. The Day of Giving raised more than $1.47 million, and set records for new donor donations and number of donations. Additionally, URIFAE completed gift processing ten days ahead of schedule.

Looking ahead, Wendy plans to add goals to the dashboard that will provide snapshots of development activity and performance across the organization. Wendy also hopes to add more data sources to the Snowflake Data Cloud, to further refine the data definitions and reporting consistency within the organization. Passerelle has helped create a solid foundation, Wendy said.

"Passerelle helped us create the framework that we can use to move forward for all of our programs," Wendy said. "And I'm hoping to continue that relationship as support for our programs in the years ahead."

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