What is the best way to fire up disengaged alumni from the past 20 years for a big campaign? Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass., started by asking them. The result is a new campaign Web site that the school thinks is the most transparent, flexible fundraising site serving an independent school today.

The idea for the site grew out of the 20/20 Advisory Board, a panel of representatives from each Andover class of the last 20 years. The group organized dinners around the country and invited alumni who were not engaged with Andover in an effort to find out why.

“We had a lot of candid discussions,” says Reiji Hayes, the Class of 1993 representative. “What I heard was, ‘Why should I give $25 to Andover when those dollars go further at the local soup kitchen?’ I would explain that not only is Andover worthy, but it is needy, too.”

Hayes liked to cite the stats that 40 percent of Andover students receive some form of financial aid and that even full tuition covers only 60 percent of each student’s education. “That kind of peer-to-peer appeal is so powerful,” says Jenn Schraut, Andover’s associate director of annual giving.

The Andover annual giving team, in partnership with the 20/20 Advisory Board, took that observation a step further by creating a Web site that registers each gift as it comes in. A bar graph shows how close the school is to making its goals in need-blind admissions, technology, and nine other categories. Clicking on any of these categories shows what typical gift amounts “buy” for Andover, from $25 for a USB flash drive to $1,000 for a laptop computer.

The approach takes a page from “retail philanthropy,” à la Heifer International, but in a way that is unique to Andover and its goal to increase participation among young alumni, even if their gifts are small.

“Sixty-five percent of our gifts are under $250. These small gifts do add up,” says Schraut. “Look at the Obama campaign.” —DWT