



Regional Associations Abroad: Key factors for Success

These key factors include not just suggestions for local volunteer leaders on-the-ground, but also the university support for them.

Local leadership. Strong local leadership is essential for the success of an international club. Strong leaders might form a regional association on their own. If the region or area or country is important to the institution, the University can think about recruiting one or more local alumni with leadership capacity, and asking them to establish a club. In either case, the University must be prepared to offer support in the way of alumni lists, basic resources, faculty or alumni office visit, and guidances. It's lonely "out there." The University can help to make it less so.

Alumni "density." A successful association needs a critical mass. There is no special, exact formula for this. A truly dynamic leader can bring people together, while the lack of a leader can keep a crowd from becoming a club. Still, alumni density might determine your priorities in developing clubs, and where you aim your resources. A city or region with a lot of alumni is more likely to have a (potential) leader, and more likely to build ongoing momentum, than one where alumni are few and far between.

Key items for support

- A good, up-to-date alumni list, and support for list maintenance. Don't forget advice on how to deal with names on the list (opt-in, opt-out on emailings, what not to do with the names)
- Internet or website support: *Habemus website, ergo sumus*. This might include advice on Facebook or LinkedIn for groups. Setting up a webpage or website takes too much time and energy when each group has to explore the matter on its own.
- Some basic training in resources and requirements. Spend an hour or two walking the local leader through available resources, and introduce new leaders to more experienced leaders and to other local leaders.

Note: Even Yale, though excellent in many respects, does not always do this. For example, in the Netherlands, it never linked the regional association leaders and the volunteer leader organizing Yale requested interviews of students applying for admission. They met by chance. A good candidate for leading a regional alumni association may have leadership experience, but not necessarily with alumni. Running a volunteer organization can be quite different from running a formal organization with hierarchies and reporting lines.

- Ties to the "mothership." An organization built around a far-off university is buoyed by frequent contact. Pay particular attention to travel schedules, and arrange events around travelling faculty or university representatives, and local alumni. It takes a little bit of work, but is greatly appreciated by the club, and strengthens the ties tremendously.

Alumni umbrella groups. If density is too low, consider looking into "like-minded" groups and forming an umbrella group that might include a few different universities. Consider peers based on rankings, country of origin, size, or school focus (e.g. business school alumni, computer science majors, etc.) A regional association might have one or two "exclusive" events and a few "shared" events to provide a fuller calendar. The good experience of the Ivy Circle in the Netherlands is an example, as are the "Oxbridge" clubs. Many overseas U.S. university alumni associations get together with associations from other universities on a regular, if informal basis, to create a critical mass for events.

Remember: a vital local alumni organization can help you recruit students, raise the university's profile, and build bonds in numerous ways.