



YaleWomen: A New Alumnae Network (edited for YaleGALE – for more information see [yalewomen.org](http://yalewomen.org))

## Chapters Toolkit – Summer 2012

### Summary

This toolkit has been developed to provide “best practices” and other practical tips and information to help alumnae who are starting to form YaleWomen chapters. For some alumnae, chapters will be defined geographically by city, region, or state. For other alumnae, chapters might be online or virtual – for members of a Yale class or school or women with a common interest or profession. The “best practices” reflect the experiences of the alumnae who formed the ten chapters that are in place or being formed as of this writing of the toolkit. As new chapters are formed and existing ones evolve and grow, new “best practices” will be developed and shared. It is important to note that given the diversity of Yale alumnae – from Yale affiliation to personal and professional interests – there is no one way to form a chapter. These “best practices” are options for you to consider in order to meet the needs of your Yale alumnae community. But these are not strict rules; they are guidelines and suggestions. In these early days of YaleWomen, we’re not trying to limit, define and proscribe: we want to enable and encourage you to find what works best for your chapter.

This toolkit includes the following information:

- Background of YaleWomen
- Why Form a Chapter?
- How to Get Started
- Relationships Among Chapters and Between Chapters and YaleWomen National Organization
- Defining Your Alumnae Base
- Coordination with Local Yale Clubs and other groups and associations (including shared interest groups)
- Communications
- More Thoughts about Event Planning

### Background of YaleWomen

Women have been part of the student body at Yale since 1869, when the first woman matriculated in the School of Art. In the hundred years following, the graduate and professional schools at Yale included women students. In 1969, Yale College became coeducational, catalyzing a change in the profile of the broader University alumni body. Today, women are more than one-third (50,000) of the Yale alumni body. YaleWomen has been launched to bring them together.

The mission of YaleWomen is to create a vibrant, engaged community of alumnae, drawn together by the common thread of our Yale experiences, that is committed to advancing women’s voices and perspectives and to enriching one another, Yale, and the world.

The initial focus of YaleWomen is on four key areas:

- Building community among Yale women
- Providing lifelong learning opportunities
- Promoting collaborations that will contribute to society
- Enabling alumnae to stay involved with Yale in meaningful ways

While working toward these goals, YaleWomen is committed to adhering to the organization's core values of inclusiveness, compassion, learning, equality, integrity and excellence.



## Why Form a Chapter?

Chapters are a distinctive venue through which to convene communities of Yale alumnae, across Yale College and the Graduate and Professional Schools, across generations, across personal and professional interests, and with existing organizations and new groups. At the local level, chapters can bring alumnae together through activities ranging from social get-togethers at alumnae homes to special events, including speakers, readings, exhibits and performances. Chapters can also co-sponsor and help organize activities with local Yale Clubs or other shared interest groups (e.g., Yale Day of Service). Chapters currently operate or are being formed in ten areas, including Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Connecticut, Colorado, Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco/Silicon Valley, Seattle, and Washington, DC. We envision that online and virtual chapters will also bring alumnae together through shared backgrounds, interests, and identities.

## How to Get Started

Start with a core group of women (even two or three is enough!) who can share the start-up work. To find alumnae in your area, contact the Recruitment and Outreach Committee at \*\*\*\*\*, Reach out to alumnae friends and acquaintances. Talk with the Yale Club (if there's one near you) or any other Yale alumni group or event, such as Yale Day of Service or a Shared Interest Group. The AYA's Shared Interest Group staff person supporting YaleWomen can also help you to identify other alumnae who might be interested in forming a chapter.

With your core group, hold an initial meeting, which can be in person, by teleconference or e-mail to discuss and decide on a plan and communications plan, including key messages, frequency, and channels (e.g., hard copy, e-mail, social media, etc.). The agenda could include:

- Why YaleWomen?
- What are our interests for programs
- Setting an initial calendar
- Deciding on the (minimum) communications infrastructure to get going: will you create a website, LinkedIn or FaceBook page, or a ListServ, or simply communicate by e-mail?

The calendar can be as simple as hosting one or a few get-togethers over the coming months at the homes or workplaces of your core group members. For communications, select the communications channel(s) that are user-friendly for your core group and will scale to handle the target audience of alumnae in your chapter area. For example, tracking email RSVPs can be difficult when you have a large group of alumnae. Many chapters are using FaceBook groups. A few also have LinkedIn groups. And some only use e-mail distribution. Try to identify broadly the women you are trying to include. While some alumnae may be very active on FaceBook or LinkedIn, others might not participate in those sites for a variety of reasons, including privacy. There are always some alumnae with connectivity and bandwidth issues.

The Chapters Committee can connect you with an alumna (or alumnae) who can be a "mentor" you through the process. You may prefer to test the waters by organizing and some events to see what does and doesn't work; you can compare your experience with other chapters.

## Relationships Among Chapters and Between Chapters and YaleWomen National Organization

The structure between the national YaleWomen organization and individual chapters has not yet been finalized. While there is no formal network of chapters, there is a great deal of informal idea-sharing. As more chapters are organized, we may begin to organize periodic meetings of chapter leaders to share ideas. We may also find sub-groups getting set up – perhaps younger alumnae in one geographic region, or YaleWomen in academia. As these evolve and YaleWomen really begins to take shape, we will address the formal relationships, including the financial relationship.



## Defining Your Alumnae Base

The geographic base for a chapter can be large or small. It depends in part on identifying and building a critical mass of alumnae, and how easy it is for them to attend events and programs. In Boston, for example, women drive up to two hours from Cape Cod and western Massachusetts to attend events that are held in Boston. Cincinnati is planning an event that would invite women from as far away as Columbus, Indianapolis, Lexington and Louisville.

If you live in an area where there is not a large critical mass of Yale alumnae (or even if you have plenty of Yale alumnae), you may wish to include women who are Yale spouses, parents, or alumnae of other Ivy League, Seven Sisters or similar schools. Your planning group can make an initial decision, and then you may want to get input from participants.

## Coordination with local Yale Clubs and other Yale groups and associations

Before you launch publicly, meet with the representatives of the Yale Club or Shared Interest Groups in your area to outline your plan and the benefits to them of having a YaleWomen chapter in your area. YaleWomen has collaborated and partnered with many Yale Clubs. Our goal is to complement Yale Clubs and Shared Interest Groups: YaleWomen can help increase overall alumni involvement in Yale alumni activities by engaging alumnae who might not previously been involved. A rising tide does lift all boats. The goal of both YaleWomen and the Association of Yale Alumni is that local YaleWomen chapters will coordinate closely with Yale Clubs on a local basis. To date there have been mixed results in different locations. In some locations, the YaleWomen chapters are considered a subgroup of the Yale Club and share the website and other logistical benefits (e.g., paypal accounts, etc.) along with great synergy. In other locations, the relationship may be more one of tolerance. Financial and governance ties between YaleWomen chapters and local Yale clubs are another area which is still being addressed.

## Communications

Once you've planned one or more events and have drafted your communications, you're ready to reach out to other Yale alumnae. To reach out to your target audience, the local Yale Club may be able to supply an email list or you can reach out to \*\*\*\*\*. Define your target group (see list below for ideas.) Draft your initial message (see samples in Appendix.) Don't forget to post event information on your social networking sites, if you have them, or on Yale club websites. We're developing a national calendar on which to post on the YaleWomen website. There's also a website called EventBrite which you can use to collect RSVPs if there is no payment involved. One chapter felt they got a particularly good turnout for their first event by mailing out a nice printed invitation.

The target group for an invitation may include:

- Alumnae from Yale College and the Graduate and Professional Schools.
  - This may be from the same geographic area as the local Yale Club or it may be broader or narrower.
- Parents (mothers) of young alumni or current students
- Spouses (wives) of Yale alumni
- Alumnae of other colleges or universities.

Attendance at many YaleWomen events reflects a broad spectrum of alumnae, ranging from alumnae who are officers or members of/involved with Yale Clubs and Shared Interest Groups to alumnae who have not been involved in Yale alumni activities at all.

Once you've defined your target audience and obtained contact information, send out your initial email or mailing to them. For subsequent events, you may establish a presence on social networking sites, including FaceBook and LinkedIn. If you use social networking sites, recruit someone to moderate the posts. The role includes (1) checking on the AYA Alumni Directory to verify that those who ask to join attended Yale; (2) posting relevant news from eLine



and from YW communications; (3) encouraging discussions via “Like” or other methods; (4) for social media super-users, there are links and feeds that you can set up.

## More Thoughts About Event Planning

Events can be informal potluck gathering at someone’s home or workplace, or a gathering at a restaurant with wine and hors d’oeuvres or a meal. The major objective is networking and general conversation, and you may want to get a semi-private room, or a location at someone’s home where there will not be a lot of interruptions or background noise. Events can also be formal programs with speakers or panel discussions (perhaps medical, financial planning or career planning advice or showcasing alumnae representing a variety of fields).

Events can be held in an alumna’s home or workplace, restaurants, museums or other private or public spaces. Consider the day of week, the time of day, the duration of the event, the time of year, and the frequency with which you hold events. If you’re thinking beyond the “first” event, consider different times (weekend vs. weekday evening) to be sure to attract the broadest cross-section. You may even want to send out a SurveyMonkey poll to your potential attendees to find out what time works best for them.

It may be easiest to start with get-togethers hosted in someone’s home, but be sensitive to the impact of an invitation from a “high-end” address and whether that will deter some alumnae. The logistics are easy if you have a volunteer who is willing to open her home. They are typically BYO with attendees bringing an appetizer and beverage and while the hostess supplies sandwich fixings or chili to “anchor” the food. For chapters covering a large geographic area, the home-based events may be ideal for getting closer to your target audience by hosting them in different geographic parts of your region.

Based on comparing notes among chapters early on, women tend to like potluck events (whether they cook or pick up something at the local grocery store or wine shop) and budget-priced events (e.g., restaurants that will be affordable to the broadest group of women). In some locations, accessibility to public transportation or major highways is an important consideration. Whatever the event, alumnae like lots of time for socializing, usually with an opportunity to go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves to the group.

Other event considerations include:

- Registration: always have a sign-in sheet to get email addresses and ask for volunteers and areas of interest. Name tags help alumnae meet one another. Do you need to collect payments? What about walk-ins vs. pre-registered? How will you handle refunds?
- Do you want to partner with your Yale Club or SIGS (e.g, Yale Club of Chicago has a new Outreach Committee)
- Marketing (including FaceBook, LinkedIn, ListServs (google groups, NING), e-mails (g-mail accouts), snail mail, and websites – including those of Yale Clubs
- Pricing: If you need to charge a fee, whether for food, space or speaker, what’s the effect of the price point on the potential attendance? Can you recoup some of your costs by getting one or more sponsors (which might be one single generous alumna)? One group had a book signing, and got each participant to purchase the book at a slightly discounted retail price, while the group was able to buy the books at a wholesale price – the difference subsidized the cost of refreshments.
- Activities: whatever the main event, most groups provide lots of time for socializing and networking. Unless the turnout is too large, having everyone introduce themselves to the group can be a great icebreaker. And don’t underestimate the conversation value of small door prizes or posed group questions.
- Post-Event: Plan before the event how you will follow up post-event. At some get-togethers, attendees have asked for a list of names/emails. If you’re happy to provide, be sure to announce an opt-out for those who don’t want their info distributed (e.g., tell me before end of evening if you want your email/name left off the list) or circulate a sign-up sheet for those interested in participating.