



Organizing Alumni by Interests and Passions

Which comes first– a group with a shared passion that becomes organized into a formal entity or a passion that is so compelling that many people choose to organize around it?

You can organize a Shared Interest Group (SIG) or Affinity Group by first identifying a group to be organized. That group can be organized from the top down, the bottom up, or some combination (see other handout).

Alternatively you can identify an interest or passion (for an activity) to organize around. Often this distinction will not matter. But, starting with a shared interest in doing an activity may lend a different dynamic to the collectivity.

In some alumni-based SIGs, this different dynamic is caused by focusing on organizing an annual (or periodic) participatory event or activity rather than (a) organizing a group to support current students who are engaged in that activity or (b) organizing a group for intergroup networking opportunities. Sometimes, the organizational motivation is for alumni to do now what they had loved to do as a student – with a group of like-minded individuals.

Some examples of organizing around a passion once held as students:

Yale Alumni Chorus. The Yale Alumni Chorus (YAC) is a self-funded member-based organization. It produces choral concert tours and festivals. Hundreds of alumni, family and friends participate every year. Many view this as a proto-typical SIG, but it did not arise as an alumni continuation of a specific student group. Certainly Yale has a long tradition of multiple undergraduate (and graduate student) singing groups that go on tour. Many of these choral groups have their own alumni SIGs which provide support and guidance. In contrast, YAC was founded by alumni who just wanted to sing together as Yalies (<http://alumninet.yale.edu/sigs/yac/aboutus.html>).

AYA Service Initiatives. Since 2008, the Association of Yale Alumni (AYA) has developed several alumni-run service initiatives: Yale Alumni Service Corps (yaleservicecorps.org), Yale Global Alumni Leadership Exchange (yalegale.org), and Yale Day of Service (yaledayofservice.org). Each has different programs and organizational characteristics.

Yale Alumni Service Corps: Every year, hundreds of Yale alumni, family and friends travel to a developing country, or an under-developed community to perform community service. Projects range from education to public health to light construction. Each trip is self-funded by the alumni who participate in it.

Yale Global Alumni Leadership Exchange: Every year, dozens of Yale alumni, family and friends travel abroad at their own expense to exchange best practices in alumni relations with foreign universities.

Yale Day of Service: On the Yale Day of Service (DoS), alumni and their families and friends work side by side to make communities better because Yale alumni live there. The effort involves over 4000 Yale alumni, family and friends at over 250 sites around the world. Many DoS projects are part of ongoing efforts by local Yale Clubs or other Yale alumni organizations – and part of their programming toolkit.

Yale has a long history of student-run community service and social justice initiatives. While the AYA service initiatives are not affiliated with any of the specific Yale student service programs, they tap into a passion of many alumni for performing service to their community (or communities around the world) under the banner of Yale.

Dernell Every Fencing Tournament. This tournament is a yearly fundraising event organized by the Yale Fencing Association – an alumni SIG which supports the Yale Fencing Team. The unique feature of this tournament is that Yale alums who had been on the Fencing Team as students compete against current Yale student fencers. It gives current fencers and alums a chance to get together for a friendly day of fencing and camaraderie – to bond the way a sports team does, via competition. (<http://www.yalebulldogs.com/sports/m-fenc/2009-10/releases/20091119xaocy1>).

Feb Club Emeritus. Feb Club was originally an undergraduate student social event. However, since 2008, it has become a social event for alumni around the world (febclub.webs.com). The student tradition was an attempt to enliven the coldest, dampest month of the year – February – by holding a party at Yale every night of the month. As an alumni tradition the intent is to hold an alumni get-together (no matter how small) somewhere in the world every night of February. Many Yale regional associations participate, sometimes sponsoring several events to serve a dispersed constituency. There are currently over 100 Feb Club events around the globe attended by over 5000 alumni.