



Engaging alumni of different ages

Universities used to take a one size fits all approach to their alumni events. They held reunions, arranged professorial lectures, and scheduled formal dinners. However, many now realize that different kinds of events, tailored to different specific age groups, can be quite successful. Some such events gain a life of their own that extends beyond their niche. Targeted programming also helps make those events that bridge age differences all the more special and meaningful.

What has worked for Yale alumni organizations: Many of Yale's regional associations have been segmenting their activities by age for some time (see <http://aya.yale.edu/content/advice-examples>.) These regional clubs have found the following distinct needs for varying age groups and have developed programs to successfully address these needs:

- Younger alumni – want ongoing informal networking, are career focused, and have significant after-work free time – Examples: A regular standing once a month get together at rotating bar or restaurant (social focus) / networking events (career focus) / wine or cheese tastings / ongoing weeknight service activities
- Alumni with young families – experience time crunch between work and family, prefer activities limited to weekends (evening activities interfere with bedtime routines), want value-focused activities (both in terms of ideals and in terms of cost), and desire activities that repeat and create a sense of tradition for their children - Examples: Day of Service activities, holiday parties, summer picnics, telecasts of Yale-Harvard athletic contests
- Older alumni – experience a desire to learn or re-learn, expect quality programming, have evening weeknights often available – Examples: traditional lectures with dinner receptions, continuing-education-type classes, lecture the larger meaning of things.

Note: creating activities to appeal to particular age groups does not mean other age groups should be prohibited from attending. Often, as is the case with the Day of Service, an activity has a natural appeal to many age groups and/or can grow to include many age groups. Even within these guidelines, there will be regional and cultural variations.

How do you find out what might work for your organization: Just ask them. Seek ideas for age appropriate events via focus groups, surveys, or just talking to alumni from different particular age groups. Do not merely ask them what they would like you to do. Ask them what events they would like to run for their friends. Offer to help accomplish their goals. Then you have some volunteers to help organize and run the event – and promote it to their friends.

How do you recruit alumni volunteers of different ages and empower them to work on programming: Recruiting volunteers of different age groups happens naturally for Class Reunions (which are based on age cohort). However, some believe this is more difficult for general all-school homecomings, regional associations, or shared interest groups.

Keep up-to-date lists of alumni and send them out: to the chapters, regional organizations, shared interest groups, and other constituent organizations. Information technology can update lists automatically, but only if the university (or central office of the alumni organization) keeps good electronic records. Lists should be updated when students graduate (and become alumni) and when alumni move. Have a contact number and person at the central office, where chapters and regional organizations can report a move (or death).

Welcome new alumni – and those alumni new to a region. This does much to foster interest and volunteerism. It is just as important to listen to them, and support their efforts when they do volunteer.

Thank your volunteers. And thank them again, regardless of age. This simply cannot be stressed enough.

Alumni organizations can use their Board of Directors to promote volunteer leadership – by requiring each Board member to organize and run an activity or two every year. And by requiring that the Board of Directors includes members from all age groups. (This applies whether the organization is national, regional, or a Shared Interest Group.) Look for that spark of interest and impact in participants and seek to foster it. Making service to the organization meaningful and fun keeps volunteers active.

If an organization is committed to having activities for different ages, reaching out and gathering opinions as to what those activities might be should unearth ideas and the individuals willing to spearhead those ideas.