

# Leveraging Technology for Your Shared Interest Group (SIG)

Prepared by the Strengthening SIGs Committee  
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One of the most challenging aspects of running a shared interest group (SIG) is the likelihood that its leadership and membership will be widely dispersed across the country or the globe. Without a geographic hub to anchor their programming, SIGs have used a variety of technological tools to connect their members and conduct their work. The Technology Working Group of the Strengthening SIGs Committee has assembled this list of resources that SIGs have used to form, operate, and connect with their members across considerable distances. The list is designed to be a living tool; SIG leaders and supporters who have used other resources and found them helpful are encouraged to suggest them to [ryan.thoreson@gmail.com](mailto:ryan.thoreson@gmail.com) to be added to future versions.

## Virtual Meetings

One of the most basic things any SIG must do is to meet occasionally, connecting its leaders or members with each other. A number of tools have been helpful to SIGs in this regard.

To schedule meetings, SIGs typically use [Doodle](#), a web tool that allows a meeting organizer to propose times, circulate the link to allow participants to express their preferences, and view the responses to decide when the meeting will optimally take place. Other SIGs use [SignUpGenius](#), which allows you to create an event and circulate a sign-up sheet for members or volunteers. The basic version is free, with added functionality for \$9.99 per month, \$24.99 per month, or \$44.99 per month. A new tool that currently offers free beta access is [x.ai](#), an artificial intelligence program that schedules meetings for you. After signing up, if you cc the program on an email, it will email with your guests to find a time and location that works with everyone's schedules.

Once a meeting is scheduled, there are tools available to conduct it. The HAA is currently exploring the possibility of obtaining a [WebEx](#) license that SIGs could use to conduct virtual meetings. WebEx offers a number of tools that may be helpful for SIGs, including different ways of viewing the meetings and switching between presenters, the ability to annotate documents together, and the option of recording meetings.

For SIGs that want a paid service in the short or medium term, WebEx hosts more people for a lower cost than other available alternatives [GoToMeeting](#). WebEx offers different pricing plans depending on the number of people who will be participating in calls. As of April 2016, an account for up to eight people per meeting is \$19 per month if billed annually and \$24 month to month, while an account for up to 25 people per meeting is \$39

per month if billed annually and \$49 month to month. [Glip](#) integrates a number of services, including video chat, shared calendars, and real-time messaging. It has unlimited posts and storage, and integrates external apps into a single service. A free version is available that permits a company to use up to 500 minutes of video chat total for the company, with paid versions permitting 1000 minutes of video chat per person per month and 3000 minutes of video chat per person per month costing \$5 and \$10 a month, respectively.

Most SIGs seem to find that free conference calling programs are easy to use and meet their needs. Many SIGs use [FreeConferenceCall.com](#); other options are [Fuze](#) or [UberConference](#). SIGs may also use chat and messaging options like [Google Hangouts](#), which can be used to conduct a group voice or video call with up to ten people, or [Skype](#), which can be used to conduct a group voice or video call with up to 25 people. Both Google Hangouts and Skype require that each participant on a call create an account for the service, which is a consideration to keep in mind. SIGs may also want to consider whether they have international members calling into the meeting, whether they operate outside the United States and a local or regional service would be better, and whether free options provide toll-free numbers or free access to those calling in from outside the country where the service is based.

## **Developing a Web Presence**

A website is the most basic tool for SIGs to advertise their community and activities to potential or actual members. SIGs interested in creating a website have a range of options.

The HAA offers a suite of integrated tools called [AlumniMagnet](#), which includes a website, a membership database that syncs with the HAA's own up-to-date records, event registration, email, and administrative support. The cost is free, although development charges may be incurred by SIGs who need to add additional functionality to their AlumniMagnet site. The HAA is working with SIGs who have expressed interest to set up their sites, and once the process begins for a given SIG, it takes approximately three to four weeks to create the site. To ask questions, obtain more information, or begin to create an AlumniMagnet site, contact Chandra Mohammed with the HAA at [chandra\\_mohammed@harvard.edu](mailto:chandra_mohammed@harvard.edu).

As SIGs mature and think of ways to connect their members, they may wish to use tools to create communities of their own. [Harvard Alumni in Healthcare](#) use three different tools to engage their community.

- For \$8 per month, Squarespace hosts the SIG's website and provides easy-to-lay-out pages along with contact forms which integrate with email, MailChimp, and Google Sheets.
- For free (but \$99 if a SIG charges members for dues), [Mightybell](#) drives member signups and cultivates member interactions through structured topics created by community hosts, one-to-one chat threads, and member profiles through social sign-ins and affinity data collection (like specialty, city, and topics a user is following).
- For \$9 per month, [Maptiv8](#) visualizes the Mightybell member directory on the Squarespace site to help users discover members and expand the community.

For SIGs that wish to create and maintain their own website and related tools, a good option is [Squarespace](#). As of April 2016, a personal Squarespace account is \$8 per month if billed annually and \$12 month to month; a business Squarespace account is \$18 per month if billed annually and \$26 month to month. With the annual purchase of either type, a custom domain is included free. A personal account is limited to twenty pages and two contributors, while a business account offers unlimited pages and unlimited contributors.

Developing a social media presence can be helpful for reaching new members, and perhaps especially recent graduates. At the same time, successfully establishing and sustaining a presence on social media can be a time and labor intensive process for volunteer-led SIGs. SIGs interested in using tools like Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn should consider the communities they serve, the value that a social media presence might generate, and the effort that such a presence might require. The HAA's Engagement and Marketing Committee has created a detailed [Social Media Playbook](#) that SIGs may find helpful in considering and answering these questions.

The [Harvard Gender and Sexuality Caucus](#) is an example of a SIG that uses social media tools to link its members and promote its programming.

- The group's [Facebook page](#) allows members to post and share their own content and interact with other members.
- The group's [Twitter account](#) posts news stories about LGBT issues at Harvard and beyond, and is especially helpful for publicizing upcoming events or creating a virtual “hub” for attendees at events to connect and share their reactions and photos online.
- The group's [LinkedIn](#) page allows members to connect and advertise their affiliation professionally.

## Marketing and Membership

For SIGs that do not use AlumniMagnet, tracking membership and reaching out to members for marketing purposes can be challenging. [MailChimp](#) offers a free plan that allows users to create a list of up to 2,000 subscribers and send up to 12,000 emails per month. [Constant Contact](#) is another service that many non-profits use, but it is not free, and pricing begins at \$20 per month. For larger SIGs with greater needs, [Salesforce](#) is a paid service that offers a full range of customer relation management tools, but it also is not free and pricing for more than five users begins at \$65 per month.

## Virtual Collaboration

SIGs produce and share files – membership lists, draft budgets, event programs, etc. for a variety of reasons. Using collaborative tools can help keep the edits to these documents in one place instead of having multiple versions circulating among the SIG's leadership via email. The simplest tools for this purpose are those that [Google](#) has created, including Google Docs, Google Sheets, and Google Forms. They allow multiple users to edit a single file in real time, and can track who has made changes as time progresses and the changes they have made. The files sync with Microsoft Office tools to be uploaded or downloaded to the web. A popular alternative to Google's suite of products is [Dropbox](#), which creates a shared folder that permitted users can access online to store and share synced documents. The basic version is free and provides two gigabytes of storage, the pro version is \$8.25 per month for individuals and provides one terabyte of storage, and a business version for teams is \$12.50 per user per month with unlimited storage.

## Planning Events

For large events or collaborative project planning, some SIGs use [Trello](#), a task management program. A basic version is available for free, while an upgraded version that integrates with programs like Google Hangouts, Google Drive, Dropbox, Mailchimp, and Salesforce; larger file attachments, and greater customer support is \$8.33 per user per month when purchased annually. [Asana](#), another task management program, offers a basic version that is free for up to 15 people and a premium version that is \$8.33 per user per month when purchased annually.

Although these are not technological tools per se, the HAA has resources on the web to facilitate event planning with other Clubs and SIGs under the HAA umbrella. The tools include directories of [Clubs](#), [SIG leaders](#), and [HAA Directors for Clubs and SIGs](#). The HAA also has [eEVENTS](#), which lists upcoming events to alums, and a [SoundCloud](#) page where various entities at the university – including the HAA – post audio from their events.

For ticket sales and advertising, one program to consider is [Eventbrite](#), which is free for free events and requires processing fees – which can be added into the ticket price – for paid events. [Eventbee](#) is another option with flat fee pricing.

To collect payments on site, two popular options are [Square](#) and [Google Wallet](#). Users can register with Square, download the Square app and link it to their bank account, and receive a free Square reader that plugs into a smartphone to receive credit card payments. Square charges 2.75% of each amount swiped or 3.5% plus \$0.15 for each manually keyed in transaction. Google Wallet allows you to send money to another person; after logging your debit card with the free app, you can transfer money to others using an email address or phone number.

## Surveying Members

SIGs may also wish to survey their members periodically, and a number of tools are available to do so. One free tool for SIGs is [SurveyMonkey](#), which allows users to create basic surveys of up to ten questions that can be answered by up to 100 respondents. For those seeking greater detail or functionality, SurveyMonkey offers paid plans that can reach a greater number of respondents, and paid alternatives like [Qualtrics](#) and [EvalX](#) may be useful for capturing more detailed information or producing more rigorous results.