



EVENT BEST PRACTICES

These best practices serve as a guide for Clubs and SIGs as they build out their event planning and strategy. Please refer to the [Event Marketing Toolkit](#) for resources specific to marketing your event.

Planning your Events

- Build a planning calendar in advance of the new academic year
- Define the balance of event types (e.g., networking/social, learning [career programs, panel discussions, interactive workshops, faculty/alumni/non-Harvard speakers, book discussions], annual event, [HAA-enabled programs](#))
- For in-person events, choose a venue that is accessible to all attendees
- Timing for in-person events:
 - Most learning type events will need a minimum of three (3) months to find a venue, secure a speaker and market the event. For these, dedicate an Events Chair or Co-chairs to organize.
 - Large scale functions can take as much as a full year to plan. For these, consider a dedicated planning committee.
- Take into account the various life stages of your community. One size doesn't fit all, so tailor events to address the needs of distinct groups.
 - Schedule the timing based on who you are looking to target. For example, after work social hours for recent grads (0-10 years out), weekend picnics for those with young children (10-20 years out), book clubs for seniors (40+ years out).
 - Offer specialized events for different graduation years. For example, career programs for recent grads (0-10 years out) and mentorship opportunities for seniors (40+ years out).
- Set measurable goals to gauge the success of events (e.g., new members, repeat attendees, balance of Harvard affiliates vs. other attendees)

Budget

- Create a general budget plan to assist with efficient resource allocation to manage expenses
- Determine how events will be paid for (e.g., sponsors, donations, cash reserves, tickets). Don't forget tax and tip as well as 10% for inevitable overrun
- Event pricing:
 - Make sure that there is variability in price points for different events, so there's something within reach of your entire community

- Provide members with discounted and free tickets as part of the incentive to join. If there needs to be a fee to cover costs, set that as the member ticket and charge a 50% premium for non-members.

Marketing and Communication

- Use a variety of channels to promote your events (e.g., monthly newsletters, stand-alone emails for big name events, social media channels, fellow Clubs and SIGs to promote on their websites and in their newsletters)
- Send confirmations and reminders leading up to the event
- Leverage Harvard This Week Newsletters to promote your events. Harvard This Week (HTW) is the HAA's weekly event newsletter to the alumni community highlighting Harvard events that are happening all around the world.
 - Submit event information for inclusion in the newsletter via the [HTW online form](#)
 - Important note: Club and SIGs with events on AlumniMagnet are automatically considered for inclusion in HTW.
 - Review the [Event Marketing Toolkit](#) for additional HTW guidelines.
- Refer to the [Event Marketing Toolkit](#) for additional resources, such as:
 - Event planning guide and timeline for in-person events
 - Post-event survey tool that can be tailored
 - Sample materials sorted by event type (e.g., event invites, save the dates)

Event Safety and Security

- For in-person events, it's often advisable to publicly share only the general area where the event will take place (e.g., on your website and in newsletters). To enhance security and manage attendance more effectively, provide the exact location only to registered participants as the event date approaches.
- For virtual events, ensure that you share the access link exclusively with registrants. Adhere to your platform's security guidelines (such as those provided by Zoom) to minimize the risk of non-registrants joining the event.
- The sharing of registrant and attendee contact information outside the intended operations of the individual Club or SIG is a violation of the [HAA Volunteer Confidentiality Agreement](#).
- To protect individual officers and board members from liability in the event of an accident at an event, consider D&O and liability insurance. Review the [Insurance Information for U.S. Clubs and Shared Interest Groups](#) for more detailed guidelines.

Event Types

- Networking/Social Events
 - Consider hosting a recurring networking event, either virtually or in person, using the same Zoom link or venue at a consistent time and date (e.g., the second Thursday of every month). This creates a predictable schedule, allowing members to drop in even on short notice.
 - Include ice breakers or a fun format to your social/networking event (e.g., speed dating format, nametags with questions on them (*Ask me about...*))

- Explore cultural experiences like performances, sporting events, museum tours, film screenings, or extended group activities such as skiing, camping, kayaking, or horseback riding trips
- Learning Events (e.g., career programs, panel discussions, interactive workshops, faculty/alumni/non-Harvard speakers, book discussions)
 - Utilize your Board's connections and member community to identify and secure speakers that are experts in their field
 - Position speaking engagements as valuable opportunities for speakers to enhance their professional profiles and expand their influence
 - Seek out experts who have recently published books and are looking for opportunities to promote it
 - Invite Harvard affiliates to speak whose identity or industry expertise align with the SIG
 - Offer a variety of different formats from presentations, panels, workshops, and interactive sessions
 - Include career management sessions to support your community through various stages of their professional development
 - If in person, provide ample time to network before and after the main program
- Annual Event
 - Consider small-scale functions. This can include a holiday party, picnic, or summer BBQ.
 - Consider large-scale functions. This can include a formal dinner or gala to celebrate achievements, recognize distinguished alumni, and raise funds for scholarships for programs the organization participates in or for University initiatives.
 - Establish an annual conference or symposium to cover key industry topics featuring keynote presentations and panel discussions led by leading experts
- HAA-enabled programs
 - The HAA facilitates a number of centralized events and programs to support Clubs and SIGs in their efforts to connect alumni to each other and to Harvard.
 - Leverage HAA support and resources to participate in a variety of HAA-enabled programs
 - Refer to the [HAA Enabled Events and Programs page on Officers Lounge](#) for the list of all events, timeline, and participation guidelines

Value Proposition

- Each event is an opportunity to express the benefits and purpose of the SIG. Take a few minutes at the opening of events to briefly highlight the benefits of joining the SIG and thanking existing members

Partnerships and Collaborations

- Dedicate a Partnerships Chair to focus on cultivating relationships and fostering collaborations
- Partner virtually or in person with [HAA geographic Clubs](#)

- Clubs are encouraged to partner with each other (ex. cross-Canada Clubs virtual event, in-person Asia-Pacific conference in Sri Lanka, multi-Club ski trip)
- SIGs are encouraged to focus initial partnerships with Clubs in major cities or Club regions where a SIG board member resides
- Partner virtually or in person with [HAA Shared Interest Groups \(SIGs\)](#)
 - SIGs are encouraged to partner with each other on topics that could bring together different identities and/or interests (e.g., the climate crisis (HACE) and marginalized communities (shared identity groups), veterans (HVAO) and mental health (HAMH))
 - Clubs are encouraged to partner with SIGs on topics of mutual interest. Additionally, consider establishing relationships with a local SIG Chapter or SIGs where a board member resides locally.
- Partner with Clubs and SIGs of some of the Harvard Schools (not all Schools have their own alumni organizations):
 - [Harvard Business School](#)
 - Harvard Kennedy School: [Clubs](#) and [SIGs](#)
 - [Harvard Law School](#)
- SIGs are encouraged to connect with student organizations and partner on events and offer mentoring sessions. Building a relationship with student groups also helps build a volunteer pipeline for SIG leadership as students graduate.
 - [Harvard College](#) (may require online searching)
 - [Harvard Business School](#)
 - [Harvard Kennedy School](#)
 - [Harvard Law School](#)

Post-event Communications

- Collect feedback via post-event surveys. Refer to the post-event survey tool in the [Event Marketing Toolkit](#).
- Send thank you message to attendees, in addition to speakers; use this to highlight upcoming events
- Post event images across social media platforms to highlight the event and show the fun! Many attendees look at the images to see if they were included or if someone they know attended. Leverage LinkedIn Events in addition to other channels.
- Consider offering a library of recordings made only available to paid members. This can be an effective strategy for virtual events and adding value to paid membership.
- Debrief the event with planning team and Board to evaluate success and identify areas for improvement