

# YALE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION SHARED INTEREST GROUP GUIDELINES

## ABOUT THE YALE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (YAA)

Yale alumni come from just about every corner of the globe and are engaged in almost all possible human endeavors, but you have one thing in common: your connections to the university.

We at the **Yale Alumni Association (YAA)** exists to encourage those connections, both among alumni and affiliates and to the university. The **YAA** unites the people and ideas that comprise the lifelong Yale experience. We provide the ongoing support and structure for Yale alumni to pursue interests and activities that positively impact their lives, Yale communities, and the world at large.

Our character, strength, and values come from our diversity and our commitment to a culture of inclusion and equity. We encourage and empower our alumni to create, participate, and lead, in ways that are personally meaningful and valuable to the community.

Our mission is to enhance and renew the lifelong Yale experience for *all* alumni, wherever they are and wherever they may be. We strive to inspire new ideas, affiliations, friendships, professional fulfillment, and acts of service, around the world.

## ABOUT SHARED INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)

In 1971, when the YAA was founded as the Association of Yale Alumni, the university primarily provided staffing, financial support, and representation at the Assembly in large measure only for the Yale College classes, the regional clubs, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. In 2008, the YAA responded to an increasing number of alumni organizing themselves in formal and informal associations by providing support, partnership, and guidance to a number of shared interest groups (SIGs).

These shared interest groups fall into four distinct categories:

- **Shared identity:** Identity groups have been organizing at Yale since the founding of the Afro-American Cultural Center at Yale in 1969. Current SIGs centered on shared identity include the Yale Black Alumni Association, Association of Asian American Yale Alumni, Yale Gay and Lesbian Alumni, and YaleWomen.
- **Shared interest based on student affiliation:** Many alumni have organized based on their affiliations as students, including those of athletic teams, singing groups, senior societies, and a high percentage of the more than 300 student organizations recognized officially by the Yale College Dean's Office. These SIGs include the Yale Daily News Alumni, Yale Glee Club Association, and WYBC/Yale Broadcasting Company Alumni.
- **Shared vocational interests:** Where there exists no specific school or academic center focusing on certain professions, alumni have formed associations to promote professional development and affiliation. Examples of alumni organizations formed to support vocational interests include the Yale Alumni Real Estate Association, Yale Nonprofit Alliance, and Yale in Hollywood.

- **Shared avocational interests:** Alumni have also organized associations based on “mission driven” activities – either in service *to* Yale or on behalf *of* Yale.

As there is an almost infinite number of shared interest groups that could conceivably be created if the “interests” – identity, student affiliation, vocation, and avocation – of all Yale alumni were embraced, the following guidelines have been developed to govern the formation of appropriate and needed shared interest groups. As has been the case historically with classes and clubs, it is the role of the YAA to ensure that shared interest groups have:

- Missions that are well-defined and complement Yale’s larger mission.
- Policies for effective governance and management.
- Standards for good communication.
- Goals that further Yale’s mission and do not unnecessarily replicate or interfere with those of other groups.
- Plans for thoughtful and well-executed programs and activities to keep alumni engaged.

If alumni groups share these values and meet agreed upon standards and guidelines, the YAA’s SIG Department is prepared to support:

- Representation to the YAA Assembly, the official alumni organization representing the interests of alumni, after a two-year probationary period and meeting the requirements described below.
- Connection and access to other Yale groups through joint initiatives and other YAA supported collaborations.
- Tools to succeed in communicating including, but not limited to, access to Yale alumni lists, email facilitation, and website support.
- Professional support, advice, and counsel on matters such as governance, communications, marketing, fundraising, and event planning.
- Financial assistance in those instances where SIG activities serve the larger community.

## SHARED INTEREST GROUP (SIG) REQUIREMENTS

Shared Interest Group (SIG) recognition is intended for active and engaged groups that have demonstrated two years of sustained programmatic activity. Groups that serve a single event purpose, or have a limited time horizon for their program with no ongoing need for alumni engagement (such as a “task force” to study a particular issue), or a mission that only tangentially serves Yale, are not eligible for YAA’s ongoing resources or representation at the Assembly. For example, we cannot offer support to groups that choose to use the Yale name to support self-serving agendas such as starting a business.

As with classes and clubs, SIGs should have a well-articulated mission that relates in meaningful ways to Yale’s institutional goals. The following criteria will be used in determining whether to formally recognize a shared interest group:

1. **Mission statement or statement of purpose:** What is the group’s intended purpose? What university “need” is the group trying to meet? Especially to be considered are needs that are not currently being addressed by another group to avoid replication of efforts.

2. **Membership:** The potential membership of the group must be large enough to provide for sustained activity and interaction – important to consider in determining the appropriate allocation of university resources. The total prospective membership base of the SIG must number at least 500 alumni, with a commitment from at least 100 alumni to be active and participating members (which can be defined as participating in a program or contributing once a year).

To ensure that the proposed SIG will serve a range of alumni and has a sustainable and ongoing mission, there must be at least 25 years between the years of the most recent degree and longest-held degree within the membership base. A SIG's activity, stated purpose, and alumni engagement will be periodically reviewed to determine whether Assembly representation and/or ongoing YAA staff support is appropriate. Also, no SIG should potentially represent more than 50% of Yale alumni, potentially causing a competing interest with the currently established and alumni-elected Yale Alumni Association volunteer leadership.

3. **Nonprofit status:** While each group has the option of considering whether to pursue independent nonprofit 501c3 status, the group must refrain from certain activities that would jeopardize Yale's, or the group's, not-for-profit status. For example, nonprofit organizations cannot be involved in any significant commercial endeavors (i.e., in the business of manufacturing and marketing of a product), and nonprofits cannot engage in lobbying or political activities.
4. **Constitution or operating procedures:** To ensure effective governance each group should have a constitution or set of operating procedures. The purpose of the constitution is to state why the group exists, what constituency or stakeholder group is being represented, who should benefit from the work of the group, and how the group intends to function – its broad principles and the basic structures for decision making and getting the work done, as well managing its finances and assets. Such a document would define leadership roles and responsibilities, ensure effective leadership succession, and manage member expectations as to the management and activities of the organization
5. **Bylaws:** In accordance with the constitution and to ensure good operating procedures a SIG must have bylaws, or an “operating manual.” The bylaws must cover all matters of corporate governance appropriate to the mission and purpose of the SIG including the size of the board and how it will function; the roles and duties of directors and officers; rules and procedures for holding meetings, electing directors, and appointing officers; and how monies will be spent. Each SIG acknowledges the current executive director of the YAA as an ex-officio member of the governing board. The YAA will provide model bylaws to assist groups with this process.
6. **Volunteer leadership:** Recognizing that sustained activity requires committed and engaged volunteers, each group must have identified officers as set forth by the bylaws. At a minimum, there must be three officers to ensure that the activities of the SIG are not co-opted or dictated by a party of one. Typical officer positions are: president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer with other committee heads as appropriate. However, for those groups seeking to organize as a 501(c)3 in a state other than Connecticut, such groups should consult the relevant laws of its state when establishing a governance structure.

7. **Long range or strategic plans:** For the YAA to make an informed decision about the appropriate level of recognition and support to be afforded a SIG, it is required that a proposed SIG draft a multi-year plan (two years required, three years recommended) to be reviewed by the YAA. New SIGs will be considered to be in “launch phase” during this initial multi-year plan and will be reviewed for the allocation of delegates within the Yale Assembly after the “launch phase” conclusion. Such plans should be developed to demonstrate how the group’s activities will serve its membership and at the same time advance the mission of the university. Plans should include the development and execution of at least three events per year, finalizing of bylaws and other governance documents, and the delivery of an annual report as noted below.
8. **Annual reports:** To remain in good standing and be eligible for continued recognition, representation at the YAA Assembly, and allocation of appropriate levels of university resources, SIGs must submit an annual report including an overview of activities, goals achieved, financial statements, and current members.

## RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SHARED INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)

Upon formal recognition by the YAA the following benefits will be available:

1. **Use of the Yale name or a Yale mark<sup>1</sup>:** Most importantly, care and attention must be paid to the intellectual property use of the Yale name and other marks. Groups with no alumni or university connections have already used the name “Yale” to promote causes, sell products or services, or otherwise bring attention to their organizations. The university needs to protect its brand by ensuring that all groups that use the name Yale are appropriate stakeholders upholding the traditions and advancing its mission. Groups must propose the name they would like to use which must make clear the alumni role of the organization. To distinguish the alumni group from the university itself, the proposed name must contain the word “alumni” in the formal name and on any formal documentation. The name must clearly indicate the type or purpose of the group. In addition, the SIG must present for review and approval any proposed logos to the SIG Department.
2. **Official representation at the YAA Assembly:** The Assembly is the official Yale alumni representative body and is a key part of the governance of the YAA and Yale. Recognized groups can be represented in the Assembly through the appointment of one or more delegates, depending on the size of the group, as stipulated in the YAA Constitution. Such delegates, when called upon, vote on official alumni matters. Delegates are also an important leadership pipeline to service on the YAA Board of Governors and other leadership roles within the university.
3. **Group listing on the YAA website:** In an effort to help publicize the existence of the group, to attract new members, and to relate important news and information about its activities, the YAA will include the group name, listing of two key officers, contact information, a brief description of the group, and a link to the group’s website, on the YAA website.

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<sup>1</sup> Logos, designs, symbols, etc.

4. **Access to university alumni records:** Working with the YAA's SIG Department, SIGs will be eligible to receive updated member lists (including name, year of graduation, and contact information) on a semiannual basis.
5. **Online services:** SIGs will have access to select e-marketing and event registration platforms. These resources are found on [the YAA website](#).
6. **Strategic planning:** The SIG Department offers strategic planning and organizing. Strategic planning helps groups affirm their mission; clarify mutual, core beliefs and shared values; create a vision; ensure that organizations are performing at their best; and communicate the organizations to the wider community.
7. **Professional advice:** The SIG Department offers advice on nonprofit governance and overall best practices in nonprofit management.
8. **Event planning** – The SIG Department can help groups organize and plan events. Such assistance, and the extent of the assistance, will be determined by the relative scale, scope and strategic importance of the event at the discretion of the YAA.
9. **Program funds:** For approved SIGs, the YAA will consider providing limited program funds. A SIG would request such funds in consultation with their dedicated SIG director.

## RECOGNITION AND REVIEW PROCESS

Recognition consideration abides by the following process involving the YAA's SIG Department and the YAA Board of Governors:

1. **The completion of an online interest form by the proposed SIG.** In addition to basic information including name, mission statement, an outline of proposed activities, relationships with other Yale organizations, and governance structure, the form will require affirmation of key Yale policies. Review of the form will determine if the applicant is recommended to move forward in the process, as well as any necessary name changes, clarifications, or additional information.
2. **If the SIG Department determines that the organization can move forward in the process, YAA staff will schedule a meeting with the proposed officers of the SIG to review the form responses, governance model, bylaws, membership pipeline, and overall timeline.** Sample bylaws and other governance templates will be provided by the SIG Department as needed. If needed, at the discretion of the SIG Department, the proposed SIG may be asked to submit bylaws, articles of incorporation, a founding slate of temporary officers, and a timeline for initial elections if different than the regular elections outlined in the bylaws.
3. **The SIG Department, in consultation with the YAA executive director, will then determine if the group has met the criteria necessary to become a SIG.** This will include in-depth review of the proposed SIG's mission and vision to ensure that they meet the goals of inspiring Yale alumni to reconnect with each other and the university without overlapping with the mission or goals of existing SIGs or other alumni groups.

4. Upon provisional approval of a SIG, the SIG Department will provide a link to the organization for it to submit a list of 100 “founding members,” which must include a range of at least 25 years between the most recent and longest-held degrees. After confirmation of this list, **a vote to approve recognition of the proposed SIG will be taken at the next eligible meeting (fall or spring) of the Board of Governors. If the recognition is approved, the SIG will be considered to be in a two-year launch phase.** During this launch phase, the SIG will be provided with onboarding and mentorship by members of the YAA Board of Governors and will be required to hold at least three events per year, complete and implement bylaws and other governance documents, and deliver an annual report.
5. **At the end of the two-year launch period, the SIG will be eligible to be presented to the full YAA Board of Governors to determine eligibility for delegate representation at the Assembly.** Should the board determine that the group meets the criteria and the intent of a Yale shared interest group, the board will approve the group’s delegate representation and official SIG status.

It is vital to the health of the university that those groups officially included in the YAA representative alumni body – whether they be classes, clubs, schools, or SIGs – remain effective in engaging and representing their stakeholders and carrying out their mission. To that end, all organizations upon recognition will be periodically reviewed for sustainability. SIG representation will be granted for a three-year period, with the opportunity for renewal, and will be contingent upon adherence to YAA recognition criteria. Reapproval as a SIG will take into account the group’s adherence to its bylaws, submission of an annual report, responsiveness to YAA staff and directors, and ability to engage alumni.

## INCORPORATION AND 501(C)(3) STATUS

Whether or not a SIG should incorporate as a separate nonprofit entity depends on a number of factors, not the least of which is the intended scope and scale of its activities, and whether or not it can be supported administratively by Yale. The YAA is not in a position to provide the necessary administrative support, legal advice, or technical assistance for financial accounting, tax filing, or donor acknowledgement to shared interest groups. If an organization will be soliciting dues, raising funds, or charging for events, and if university staff and resources are not available to provide this support,<sup>2</sup> then it is recommended that the organization file for 501c3 status.

“Nonprofit” organizations are not automatically “tax exempt” 501c3 organizations. If a SIG is to become tax exempt, it must apply for such status to the Internal Revenue Service by filing IRS Form 1023. Before a SIG applies for tax exempt status, however, it must first be legally incorporated.

There are key advantages to incorporation and securing tax exempt status. Some advantages to nonprofit 501c3 status include:

- Shields board members, officers, and employees of the organization from liability for corporate debts or lawsuits against the organization
- Allows donors to deduct their contributions (recognizing, however, that contributions to a separate 501(c)(3) **would not be eligible** for Yale reunion or Yale Alumni Fund recognition)

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the athletic alumni associations are supported by Departments of Athletics and the Office of Development.

- Grants exempt status for the organization from federal, state, and local income and sales taxes
- Requires a constitution and bylaws for good governance
- Provides a formal structure for effective operating procedures

## FUNDRAISING AND DONOR RECOGNITION

The Yale Office of Development offers a broad array of giving opportunities – by school or department, gift purpose, capital campaign priority, or dollar amount – touching every area of the university. In many cases, the needs of shared interest groups can be met through these many opportunities.

Many shared interest groups, however, want to raise funds to support their programs. Over the years our classes, clubs, schools, and shared interest groups have supported their programs through dues, annual funds, capital campaigns, and special events.

Shared interest groups should be aware that contributions made to a 501c3 organization other than Yale (should the SIG be an independent 501c3 or is seeking to be) are not contributions formally acknowledged by the university. In these instances, the SIG, as a 501c3, must issue its own tax acknowledgement letters to its donors and file appropriate IRS forms, incurring the necessary administrative work on the part of the organization.

The Yale Alumni Fund, a separate entity reporting to the Office of Development, recognizes only those contributions made to the Fund itself, within which there are many ways to designate gifts, such as financial aid, facilities renovation, faculty support, library collections, and undergraduate life. A donor of \$1,000 to a SIG, for example, would not be recognized as a Nathan Hale Associate in the Alumni Fund.

All gifts made directly to the university are given class reunion credit.

Gifts made to independent 501c3 shared interest groups and clubs are not given reunion credit.

Shared interest groups should consider the following in deciding an appropriate fundraising course of action:

1. SIGs should recognize and give precedence to the fundraising priorities established by the Yale Board of Trustees (also known as the Yale Corporation), recognizing that it has many competing interests to balance and that the board, all of whose members are alumni themselves, have the best interests of the university at heart.
2. As Yale is a diverse and multifaceted institution, it is helpful for all SIGs to first consider established channels for supporting the institution, principally the Yale Alumni Fund.
3. Alumni are being solicited by an ever-increasing number of organizations within Yale. This can be frustrating to many donors and contributes to donor fatigue. If a SIG decides to raise funds, whether through dues, contributions, or special events fees, its message – its case for support – should be clear, concise, and well-focused, taking into account the needs, interests, and priorities of the donors. Fundraising for fundraising sake creates confusion and mismanaged expectations.
4. Gifts to a shared interest group will not count for reunion credit.

The YAA is required to review the fundraising goals of shared interest groups and offer suggestions on appropriate strategies and best practices before any such fundraising is approved.