

# Harvard Alumni Association

## Policy on Shared Interest Groups

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### I. DEFINITION OF 'SHARED INTEREST GROUP'

The Harvard Alumni Association (HAA) definition of a *Shared Interest Group* (SIG) is any collection of Harvard University alumni who actively engage in communicating and/or gathering around a central unifying purpose, mission, background or activity beyond class affiliation or regional proximity.

The HAA considers SIGs to be a critical part of what connects so many alumni with each other and with Harvard. Therefore, as an implicit component of its mission to promote the welfare of Harvard University and to establish a mutually beneficial relationship between the University and its alumni, the HAA encourages such peer-to-peer interaction and, with the provisions delineated below, formally supports the existence of SIGs in addition to its ongoing support of the regional Harvard Clubs.

It is important to note that the HAA does not provide funding to Clubs, Classes, or SIGs.

### II. OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The HAA will provide certain benefits (delineated in Section III below) to support those SIGs that can demonstrate a commitment and an ongoing adherence to each of the following Operating Principles:

- A. Adhere to the University's policy on the use of the Harvard name and insignias.
- B. It is the HAA's responsibility to remain neutral on all political issues both inside and outside the Harvard community, as dictated by HAA policy. If the focus of the SIG is advocacy, the group must qualify for and secure the appropriate 501(c) IRS status, or any international equivalent. Any position of the SIG must always be qualified with clear language that states: "The [Group] does not represent the President and Fellows of Harvard College (Harvard University) or the Harvard Alumni Association".
- C. Refrain from discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation.
- D. Refrain from fundraising practices of any kind for purposes that are not related to the SIG's stated core mission. SIGs may fundraise from the membership only for the organization's stated mission and may not fundraise for other unrelated charitable organizations. For example, SIGs may fundraise to generate membership dues, to establish summer fellowships, and to pay for operating expenses. However, a SIG centered around chess cannot fundraise for Habitat for Humanity.
- E. Obtain written approval from the Harvard University Development Office to conduct fundraising of any kind for purposes that overlap with the University's priorities. This would apply to fundraising in such areas as accepting corporate support, funding academic chairs, and creating student scholarships. Such communication would, as appropriate, enable SIGs to partner with and leverage the resources and information of the Harvard University Development Office.
- F. SIGs may solicit corporate sponsorship for events only in an amount that does not exceed the greater of (1) the expenses of a particular event, or (2) the SIG's annual operating expenses. Requests for and acknowledgements of corporate sponsorships must clearly state that the contribution is to the SIG and not to Harvard University.
- G. Remain an independent organization, and not become a chapter of a non-Harvard organization.
- H. Represent less than half of all Harvard alumni in its membership.
- I. Refrain from starting or investing in any commercial enterprise
- J. Not set up a regional Harvard Club as a "front" for promoting the goals of the SIG. Refrain from starting or investing in any commercial enterprise.
- K. Not be established specifically to support a Harvard research center or initiative without written permission from the Provost's office.

- L. Refrain from admitting to its membership any individuals who are not members of the current Harvard community. Members of the Harvard community include alumni and their spouses/partners, students, faculty, staff, parents, and visiting fellows. At the discretion of the SIG, non-Harvard community members may participate in SIG events.
- M. Be governed primarily by alumni, i.e., with a governing body comprising at least three-fourths alumni.

The HAA reserves the right to determine the degree of adherence to these operating principles. On a case-by-case basis, the HAA may endorse and facilitate partnerships between SIGs and Harvard Clubs and between SIGs and any parallel student-based organization or club.

### III. BENEFITS

Support from the HAA will include the following benefits:

- A. Guidance from the HAA in the form of an operating manual that covers requirements, benefits, and services available and includes advice on establishing 501(c) status or equivalent;
- B. Access to an annually-updated list of contact information for all self-selected alumni participants;
- C. Listing of the SIG on the HAA's website, thus providing: 1) access to website hosting services and 2) recruitment and organization management tools;
- D. Inclusion, on a space available basis, of brief items in the HAA e-newsletter *eVENTS*;
- E. Participation in the Summer Community Service Fellowship Program and Early College Awareness Program, if interested, as well as other program offerings as applicable; and
- F. The opportunity for the HAA to sponsor (travel costs only) one member of the faculty or administration per academic year, at a U.S. SIG event, through the Speakers Bureau Program.

### IV. PROCEDURES FOR ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING A SIG

#### A. Concept Proposal and Alumni Petition

It is the policy of the HAA not to share lists of alumni with individuals not employed by the University's Department of Alumni Affairs and Development (except with the alumni volunteer officers of college classes and clubs). Thus, alumni, as well as other members of the Harvard community, must clearly identify themselves as having an interest in the mission of a SIG. Therefore, the germination of any such group will rely initially on an explicit volunteer-driven, grass-roots effort.

An individual graduate or collection of alumni seeking to establish a SIG must produce and submit a concept proposal that includes a petition of a minimum of 50 alumni names and signatures, including school and year of graduation, who support the proposal certified by the founding members and pledge to join the group. These signatures may be collected electronically; it is at the discretion of the HAA to request additional information regarding any of the petition signatures. The SIG should also specify their members who will work as contacts with the HAA and receive member information updates. The concept proposal, as well as the additional materials listed below, should be sent to the Assistant Director of Clubs & SIGs, Harvard Alumni Association, 124 Mount Auburn Street, 6th Floor, Cambridge, MA 02138.

#### B. Bylaws/Constitution and Articles of Incorporation

The SIG must draft and submit bylaws/constitution and articles of incorporation containing a broad overview of the group's purpose and including information on the following:

1. Operating Principles: Each SIG must acknowledge these [Section II] as part of the body of their constitution.
2. Policy on the use of Harvard name and insignias: SIGs must include standard language on the use of Harvard name and insignias, as provided by the HAA.
3. Nomenclature: The name of the SIG must include the word *Alumni* and must not include the word *Association, Fund, or Club*.
4. Governance: Each SIG is an independent volunteer-driven entity and as such the HAA is in no way involved in its management. The HAA may suggest a basic governing structure that has worked for other groups.
5. HAA Limitation of Liability Disclaimer: Neither Harvard University nor the HAA is responsible for the group's practices and reserves the right to deny the SIG any and all benefits of affiliation at any time if the SIG is in breach of the agreement.

The proposal, bylaws/constitution, and articles of incorporation, will be reviewed by both the HAA staff and the Executive Committee of the HAA Board of Directors, and a letter of notification will be issued as soon as possible. If the group has an advocacy focus, the appropriate 501(c) IRS certificate must also be submitted. If the proposal is accepted, the letter will be accompanied by a list of updated contact information on the signers of the proposal that includes postal address only. We will also code each petitioner's name in the University's central alumni database as being a member of the new SIG and will maintain such coding as new members of the Harvard community join. If the proposal is not accepted, a letter will be sent with an explanation and recommendations for future action.

Support expires three years from the date of approval by the HAA, at which time reapplication must take place. An application for renewal must be submitted 90 days prior to expiration. For an SIG to remain in good standing, its officers will be required to submit an annual report on membership and programming that includes the number of active members as of the end of the SIG's fiscal year and a summary of group activities and samples of any materials produced by the organization. A form will be provided by the HAA.

Appeal of any of the provisions either of the Operating Principles or the Procedures for Establishing and Maintaining a SIG may be made to the Executive Committee, in writing, stating the reasons for the request for non-adherence.