

Harvard Alumni Association Shared Interest Group (SIG) FAQ

WHAT IS A SIG? By the Harvard Alumni Association's (HAA) definition, a SIG is a recognized community of University-wide alumni who actively engage around a central unifying purpose, mission, background, or activity beyond class affiliation, School, or regional proximity. All SIGs are independently governed and financed organizations that are affiliated with (rather than directly controlled by) the HAA.

WHAT SIGS EXIST? HAA recognizes nearly 60 different SIGs, which have, in turn, been organized into five thematic clusters: Identity & Shared Experience, General Interest, Professional Interest, Religious Identity, and Undergraduate-Based Groups. Current SIGs include such varied groups as the Harvard Asian American Alumni Alliance, the Harvard Alumni for Agriculture, the Harvard Alumni for Mental Health, the Harvard Glee Club Foundation, and the Harvard-Radcliffe Science Fiction Alumni Networking Society. To join a SIG, visit the page of the individual SIG you wish to join. Each SIG has different membership requirements. [Explore the full list of SIGs](#) to find links to their particular websites or email addresses.

WHAT CAN SIGS HELP YOU WITH? SIGs can help you grow your personal and professional connections with alumni who share your interests, industry, or identity; access professional resources and a network of alumni outside your geographic region; find opportunities for intellectual enrichment, advocacy, and community service; and stay connected to Harvard with friends old and new.

WHAT TYPES OF PROGRAMMING/ACTIVITIES DO SIGS OFFER? The scope of SIG programming varies from group to group but, in all instances, such activities are organized around the interests of the SIG's membership. SIGs are virtual in scope, so they typically hold virtual programming throughout the year. Some SIGs have regional chapters where they host in-person events in areas with a high concentration of members.

HOW DO SIGS DIFFER FROM HARVARD CLUBS? Both Harvard Clubs and SIGs seek to encourage and facilitate greater connections among Harvard graduates, current students, and, in some instances, faculty and staff from across the University. Yet there are several key differences between the two types of alumni groups:

- While Harvard Clubs are organized around shared geography, SIGs are organized around common interest/affiliation largely as "virtual communities" (although several Harvard Clubs have subgroups that focus on particular interests or affiliations just as some SIGs have regional chapters).
- While Harvard Clubs engage alumni broadly, SIGs engage alumni around a specific focus. In this way, SIGs have created new entry points for alumni affiliation and engagement both with the University and among its graduates.

HOW DO I FIND OUT ABOUT SIGS IN MY AREA? SIGs are primarily virtual global organizations that engage with their members online. As such, while a SIG can be said to "exist" anywhere it has members, in-person activities tend to be limited geographically to areas where it has a significant concentration of

members or a particular tie to a given location (e.g., Harvardwood being centered in and around Los Angeles). A number of SIGs have local chapters and representatives that serve as a vehicle for connecting members in a specific geographic area. Yet what SIGs lack in geographical presence is more than made up for with the vibrant online communities they create for members.

HOW DO I JOIN A SIG? Each SIG has its own policies and procedures for registration of new members (including payment of modest dues in a few cases) all as set forth on its web page. [View the full list of SIGs along with links to their websites.](#)

HOW CAN HARVAD CLUBS AND SIGS COLLABORATE? The HAA encourages Harvard Club and SIG leaders to reach out to each other to promote and even collaborate on programming, recognizing that SIG leaders will be mindful of tailoring planning and publicizing events and activities to those that speak to the specific interests of their members. A particularly successful model of collaboration has been programming in which SIGs provide content specific to their focus while Clubs draw on their membership and other area alumni to bolster participation. In addition, SIGs and Clubs regularly partner on such annual events as the HAA's Global Networking Night, Welcome to Your City, and various intellectual programs. Club/SIG collaborations oftentimes provide membership recruitment opportunities for both organizations, as well.

HOW ARE SIGS STRUCTURED, GOVERNED, AND FUNDED? While the organizational structure of SIGs varies from group to group, they are all independently governed with their own boards and bylaws. Membership ranges from several dozen to several thousand alumni. The HAA does not provide funding to SIGs (nor Harvard Clubs) and, as such, a number of the SIGs have opted to charge dues or request donations from program participants to cover costs of operations and programming.

WHAT HELP DOES THE HAA PROVIDE TO SIGS? The HAA provides SIGs with a full range of services (including listings in the monthly HAA eEVENTS newsletter, space on the HAA website and use of other online tools, and the opportunity to participate in the HAA Speakers Bureau, Early College Awareness, Prize Book (except in NYC), and Summer Community Service Fellowship Programs) in return for adherence to HAA SIG guidelines, operating procedures, and annual reporting requirements. In addition, SIG leaders are invited to the HAA's annual Alumni Leadership Conference at which Harvard Club and SIG leaders meet to share best practices, learn more about what is happening at the University, and discuss their ongoing challenges and needs with HAA staff and committee members. SIGs do not receive alumni data but there are many different marketing opportunities to participate in each year to help grow your membership.

IS CREATING A SIG THE RIGHT STEP FOR ME? When considering establishing a SIG, there are a few things you will want to consider:

1. Is there an existing HAA SIG that has an overall mission that meets the needs of the community I would like to engage with or build?
2. Is the overall mission of my group to connect alumni to one another and back to Harvard surrounding a specific interest/affiliation?

3. Would it benefit my group to have an official board, bylaws, and governance structure?
4. Would it benefit my group to keep up with an annual report each year and introduce term limits?

There is a rigorous recognition process in place to set HAA SIGs up for success. Many groups decide becoming a SIG is too formal for their group or they are unable to devote the time to running a volunteer organization. If you are interested in learning more about the HAA SIG recognition process, please email clubs@harvard.edu.

Please note: The HAA avoids creating new SIGs that overlap considerably with the core mission and programming of an existing SIG; however, groups of alumni can exist without this formal structure and be very successful in connecting with one another and planning activities.

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