

Leadership and Motivation

Best Practices for Reunion Leaders

Volunteerism at Harvard

One of the most valuable ways in which alumni can be involved with Harvard is through volunteering. Our volunteers are what help shape and sustain our institution. They take great pride and satisfaction in giving back—and we welcome all alumni to join our volunteer community. Volunteering with your reunion program committee can be one of the most memorable and meaningful experiences. Attending your own reunion and encouraging others to do so is also a vital way to ensure that your class stays connected over the years.

As volunteer leaders, you can work with your HAA staff liaison to support the work and enthusiasm of volunteers to set goals, expectations, and norms for how you will all work together and ultimately ensure that everyone is having fun with the work they are doing!

Resources for Reunion Volunteers

Chairs and other reunion committee leaders should be knowledgeable about all informational resources available to reunion volunteers. Many of these can be found on the Reunion Volunteer Resources page of the College Alumni Programs Officers Lounge website (which can be found here: <https://officerslounge.classes.harvard.edu/article.html?aid=233>).

These have been assembled based on the experiences of past classes and volunteers, so it's important that volunteers continue to use them to identify what might be missing or what might need to be updated.

A thorough understanding of this information will help you best support your reunion committee, while also ensuring that they are fulfilling their responsibilities and taking advantage of the resources available to them. It's best to always direct volunteers to the copy of the document on the Officers Lounge website instead of sharing the document directly, as it may be updated on the website.

Meeting Norms and Best Practices

Meetings provide time for us to come together, share updates, and brainstorm ideas. Reunion Committee Chairs, subcommittee leaders, and other ad-hoc leaders should work in partnership to determine when meetings should be held, who should be invited, what should be on the agenda, and what attendees should plan to do before and/or after the meeting. While many of these meetings may include your HAA staff liaison (or another HAA staff member) volunteer leaders should discuss with their staff liaison to determine what works best. For example, it might make sense for members of a subcommittee to meet on their own if they don't have questions for or need input from the Chairs or staff liaison.

Managing Reunion Committee Members

As mentioned above, a primary leadership role for chairs and other leaders to play includes ensuring that reunion committee members are fulfilling the responsibilities of their role and taking advantage of the resources available to them. There may come a time when you need to approach a member about

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their ability to continue to effectively serve in the role (or they might come to you with similar concerns). This might then lead to a conversation about how you may be able to move forward with them still in the role (such as with help or with pivoting the goals/scope of the work), or if there might need to be a discussion about them stepping down and determining a replacement. Your HAA staff liaison can be a great resource for these conversations.

Psychological Safety and Productive Dialogue

Psychological safety is the belief that someone can freely and comfortably speak their mind. This allows for stronger volunteer communities as well as more productive volunteers who enjoy their work. This can also lead to a culture of more creativity, speaking up, and trying new things. While not every idea may be able to be pursued, there might be ways to get at the heart of what a volunteer is suggesting and empower them to see it through as part of another initiative. Classes are diverse communities, and someone's experience may have not been an experience you were aware of (a "blind spot") and it's important to make sure these experiences are honored not only within the committee, but also within the culture of the class and the reunion programming.

With this in mind, there might be comments or ideas that are not appropriate (or need to be pivoted in another direction while honoring the original intention). It's important to ensure your other volunteers know you hope this group serves as a positive and inclusive place for you to continue to build class community, and that it's important to maintain a fun and psychologically safe space for all members.

Motivating Committee Members

With reunion year programming running across a year, it's important to work with your HAA staff liaison to determine the best way to motivate your committee members depending on their interests in the work (since, again, we all want this to be fun!).

Foster a community where volunteers can be honest about their bandwidth and interests to ensure all volunteers are on the right projects, and you can reassess your goals and scope as needed. Volunteer leaders should also be mindful of the volunteers (whether new or veterans) that are going above and beyond, as they might be potential future leaders of the class (or have interests in other HAA volunteer roles).

As you identify the strengths and interests of committee members, feel free to encourage them to play a role in an event, program, or task where they will be able to make the biggest impact. Very importantly, be sure to show appreciation for your fellow volunteers on a regular basis - you are all volunteering your time after all! Regular check-ins, reminders, and honest conversations can help committee members stay motivated and ensure you all meet your goals of creating great programming for your class.