

## V – Regional Communications

What brings together enthusiastic leadership and engaged membership? Effective communication—the third hallmark of successful regional associations. This handbook section reviews the basics—from how to obtain, update and utilize alumni contact information (and what you can and cannot do with such data), to the typical methods of communicating with alumni, to the rules for what kind of content can and cannot be sent from a regional group—and also suggests ways to maximize the impact of your communications.

### A. *Obtaining Contact Information*

Regional officers have access to lists of all Princeton constituents living within their regional boundaries so their contact information can be used for official regional association business. The list may be obtained in one of two ways:

- Download the list from TigerNet Volunteer Services, part of the Office of the Alumni Association’s Web site (please see **Appendix D** for instructions on using this function)
- Request a copy of the list from the Regional Affairs staff at Office of the Alumni Association.

The same list is available from either source, as TigerNet and the University’s alumni database are synchronized on a daily basis. Regional officers are strongly encouraged to make use of the TigerNet download function whenever possible because it is instantly accessible to you, without any office processing delay, and it is always current, while a list received from the office two months ago may already be out of date.

### B. *Updating Contact Information*

The University’s Office of Alumni Records maintains the database of all alumni contact information. When Alumni Records is notified that an alumnus/na has moved to a new regional association, they will include this information in regular reports to the regional secretary so that s/he will be notified of this new local member and can get in touch with this person to welcome them to the community.

Regional officers will frequently receive requests from their local constituents to update their contact information. The association may also have mailings returned, indicating the University’s address on record for the person in question is inaccurate. It is possible to update alumni contact information in several ways:

- Alumni can update their own contact information online at the following Web site: <https://tigernet.princeton.edu/updates/updateinformation.asp> [Note: Alumni must register (or be registered already) for TigerNet in order to access this Web site.]. Regional officers can not make changes on behalf of others on this site.
- Alumni can directly contact Alumni Records by e-mail or telephone to provide updated information.
- A regional officer can pass along the requested changes to Alumni Records by e-mail or telephone (in this case, the officer should identify him/herself as such, so Alumni Records knows why s/he is speaking on behalf of a fellow alumnus/na).

Alumni Records can be reached by e-mail at [alumrecs@princeton.edu](mailto:alumrecs@princeton.edu) or by phone at (609) 258-3114.

### ***C. Removing People from Mailing Lists***

Occasionally, regional officers are asked to remove someone from their mailing list or e-mail listserv. If the association is maintaining a separate database, mailing or e-mailing list, you may do so at your discretion. But assuming the regional association is using lists generated through Alumni Records (including TigerNet), there are several steps that must be undertaken.

First, the association is asked to remind those with this request that currently, this is an “all-or-nothing” situation – if someone wishes to stop receiving e-mails from a regional association, the only way to do this is to remove this person from ALL University e-mail lists maintained through Alumni Records (including Tiger E-News, Annual Giving, and notices from classes, affiliated groups, individual departments, etc.). The same rule applies to mailings – if someone wishes to receive no mail or contact from the regional association, s/he will also be taken off the mailing list for the University (including the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*). However, a person can remain on the University’s hard-copy mailing list and be taken off the e-mail list.

If the requesting individual still wishes to proceed, there are different policies depending on the request and the type of constituent:

- If the requesting individual is anyone other than an alumnus/na (i.e., a parent, widow, kin, etc.) and wishes to be taken off either/both e-mail lists and/or mailing lists, Alumni Records can process this immediately, and no further steps are needed beyond notifying Alumni Records of the request.
- If the requesting individual is an alumnus/na and wishes to be taken off e-mail lists, Alumni Records can process this immediately, and no further steps are needed beyond notifying Alumni Records of the request.
- If the requesting individual is an alumnus/na and wishes to be taken off mailing and e-mailing lists (in other words, wishes to receive “No Contact” from the University or its supporting organizations), please bring the individual to the attention of the Office of the Alumni Association so they can be sent a letter confirming their intention and knowledge of the decision’s implications.

One final note on this topic: If you are receiving many requests from people wishing to be taken off your mailing or e-mailing lists, you could be sending too much mail or e-mail! See below (Section V-F) to review the best practices for effective communications.

### ***D. With Whom Should a Regional Association be Communicating?***

Associations are encouraged to send all communications to the broadest relevant constituent base. In most cases, this includes all alumni, parents, widows, etc. living within a regional association’s boundaries. Occasionally, the officers may wish to communicate with a more limited segment of their population (for instance, in recruiting interviewers for local applicants, only alumni should be contacted since only they may serve in this capacity), but in general, the Office of the Alumni Association encourages erring on the side of inclusiveness.

## *E. Types of Communications*

There are many different ways regional officers can communicate with their constituency. The most common are mailings, broadcast e-mail, Web sites, online/e-mail discussion groups, and the telephone, each of which will now be discussed in further length:

**MAILINGS** – Traditionally, mailings such as letters, newsletters, invitations (and reply cards), flyers, and postcards have been the cornerstone of regional association communications. Here are a few tips and ideas to consider when sending out a mailing:

- The University offers Printing and Mailing Services to its alumni groups, including regional associations. For full details on this program, please see **Appendix F**. To view sample layouts for mailings produced for regional groups by Printing and Mailing, please see **Appendix G**.
- The U.S. Postal Service and many other internet companies offer opportunities to design, print and mail a variety of formats through easy-to-use online services. Traditional mail-houses also may exist in your local community. Regional associations are welcome to use these services, so long as they follow standard procedure in ensuring the companies will not use alumni contact information for any purpose beyond the immediate job. To view a sample Confidentiality of Data Agreement for outside printers and mail-houses, please see **Form F**.
- Regional associations can request a set of printed mailing labels for their local alumni from the Office of the Alumni Association. This can be sorted either by name or zip code.
- Hard copy mailings do involve the expense of postage, though it is possible to qualify for a reduced postage rate by using bulk mail and pre-sorting all pieces by zip code (for more information on these and other tips, visit the United States Postal Service Business Mail Web site at <http://www.usps.com/businessmail101>).
- Given the costs of producing and sending mailings, regional associations may want to promote a full schedule of events through a regular mailing (such as an annual, quarterly, or monthly newsletter), and then use postcards, e-mails and other cheaper communication methods on a more frequent basis.
- Extra copies of mailings—especially those mentioning upcoming events—can be made available as flyers at association gatherings as an additional way of promoting participation.
- It is important for one copy of every mailing to be sent to the Office of the Alumni Association for inclusion in the association’s permanent file.
- To view a sample regional association newsletter, please see **Appendix H**.

**E-MAIL** – In today’s online world, e-mail broadcasts and distribution lists have become the preferred method for communications for many regional associations, due to ease of production and low costs. However, there are many alumni who have not provided e-mail addresses to the University, so e-mail is not recommended as the sole method of communication. Here are a few tips and ideas to consider when sending out an e-mail broadcast:

- Through TigerNet Volunteer Services, regional officers can instantly send a simple broadcast e-mail to all their constituents (please see **Appendix C** for instructions on using this function). The Office of the Alumni Association automatically receives a copy of every broadcast e-mail sent through this system.
- If regional associations wish to send attachments or rich-text e-mails, an officer can download a list of e-mail addresses within a region from TigerNet Volunteer Services (or request this from the Office of the Alumni Association) and send it through a separate system. In this situation:
  - Please be sure to include one or more members of the Regional Affairs staff on the distribution list, so the message can be included in the association’s permanent file.
  - Please list all recipients in the blind-carbon-copy (BCC) field; this helps to ensure the security of the list and the privacy of all recipients.

- To view a sample regional association e-mail newsletter, please see [Appendix J](#).
- Some associations maintain a separate database of regional constituents who have opted in to receive broadcast e-mail messages from a special listserv. The Office of the Alumni Association can assist you in creating a listserv that ends in @princeton.edu; please contact the Regional Affairs staff for additional information.
- Only regional officers should be able to send an e-mail to all alumni, parents, etc. in a region. If a forum is desired where any Princetonian can reach out broadly to other Princetonians interested in a similar subject, the association can create a TigerNet Discussion Group (see below for more details).

**WEB SITE** – Many regional associations create and maintain a Web site to create a virtual presence for the local alumni group. Web sites can help to promote upcoming events, chronicle past gatherings in descriptions and pictures, post newsletters and links to other relevant Web sites, provide contact info for local leaders, and even collect dues and event registrations through an online payment system. Here are a few tips and ideas to consider when building or updating a regional association Web site:

- Regional associations can create and store their web pages on the Office of the Alumni Association’s server for free, however, certain technical limitations may apply. Please contact the office’s Technical Services staff at [tigernet@princeton.edu](mailto:tigernet@princeton.edu) for more details.
- To gather ideas on what kind of design and information a regional association might wish to include on its Web site, we encourage review of existing Web sites to identify best practices. All known regional association Web sites are linked to the main listing of regional associations at [alumni.princeton.edu/main/alumni\\_communities/regional\\_associations/regional\\_association\\_list/](http://alumni.princeton.edu/main/alumni_communities/regional_associations/regional_association_list/).
- A regional Web site is visible not only to local Princetonians, but anyone surfing the web. Effective regional Web sites maintain a balance between being informative about local officers and activities while safeguarding the privacy of its individual members.
- The Regional Affairs and Technical Services staff members of the Office of the Alumni Association are happy to provide advice and suggestions for alumni organization Web sites; however it is ultimately the responsibility of the local officers to keep the Web site content updated and relevant.

**DISCUSSION GROUP** – Since regional officers are only permitted to send official association messages through TigerNet Volunteer Services and other formal communication methods, many regional associations will set up an opt-in online discussion group where any Princetonian can post information s/he thinks will be interesting to other people in the area. Here are a few tips and ideas to consider with regard to a regional discussion group:

- The Office of the Alumni Association offers regional associations the opportunity to easily create a free discussion group through TigerNet. This system offers discussion group members the option to receive e-mails from the list in real-time or in a daily digest (new and archived postings can also be placed and read on the discussion group’s TigerNet portal).
- Please note that TigerNet discussion groups are public within the Princeton alumni community and can not be restricted; for instance, someone who lives in New Jersey can still join the New York discussion group. However, this can work to the advantage of a region that utilizes such a group to promote an upcoming event—perhaps someone who lives outside the boundaries of a region will be in town when an event is taking place!
- Topics on existing regional discussion groups typically range from local job opportunities and available sporting event tickets, to references for neighborhood doctors and suggestions for great restaurants. Regional officers can promote their club’s upcoming events as well as other activities not sponsored by the association, but still potentially of interest to area alumni.

**TELEPHONE** – It may be old-fashioned, but the telephone is still an important tool for communicating within a regional association. Here are a few tips and ideas to consider when deciding in what circumstances the use of a telephone may be the best method of regional communication:

- In any circumstance where individual attention would be warranted or appreciated, consider calling alumni instead of sending e-mails or a mailing (even if it is personalized). For instance, if an alumnus is new to the area, receiving a call from a regional association officer may encourage that alumnus to get involved in the group and consider fellow alumni to be a resource in settling into the community. If an alumna who usually has a good record of paying dues suddenly stops doing so, a concerned phone call could reinforce that the regional association has valued her past contributions and hopes she'll stay involved. Likewise, thanking dues-paying members with a personal phone call demonstrates that the regional association recognizes their assistance.
- If a regional association receives returned mailings or bounce-back e-mail addresses, quick phone calls can individually remind alumni to keep their contact information up-to-date, as well as notify them of the content of the missed message.
- A telephone chain may also be an effective way to quickly spread the word about events or other critical information among a regional association population.

This is not a comprehensive list of types of communication suitable for regional associations. Innovation is highly encouraged and even rewarded. To learn more about the Committee on Regional Associations Award for Innovation and the Alumni Council “Award for Communications Excellence,” please see [Appendix Q](#).

#### ***F. Best Practices in Effective Communications***

Beyond the mechanics of how to communicate with a regional constituency, regional officers are encouraged to maximize the impact of their communications through a few basic principles and practices:

- **REGULAR COMMUNICATION** – Ensure that communications with constituents occur; whether that means biweekly or quarterly depends on the activity level of the association. However, be aware that sending too much mail or e-mail will have diminishing returns. It is important to strike the right balance between communicating frequently and TOO frequently.
- **MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH** – Utilize multiple methods of communication to ensure that all local alumni have been reached. In this electronic age, it is tempting to rely solely on e-mail broadcasts to notify regional constituencies of news and upcoming events; but though e-mail messages are easy and low-cost, more than one-third of Princeton’s alumni do not have an e-mail address on file with the University. Even among those alumni who do have e-mail addresses on file, some messages will bounce, some will be diverted to spam filters, and some will just be ignored. Different people will be reached through different approaches, and only with a multi-pronged communications strategy can a regional association ensure that its message reaches as many people as possible.
- **CAPTURING AND HOLDING INTEREST WITH CONTENT** – Share interesting and relevant information with your regional constituents. Aside from announcing upcoming events, regional association communications may include news about local admitted students and Alumni Schools Committee efforts, campus updates from local Princeton undergraduate and graduate students, excerpts of thank-you letters from regional scholarship recipients, a short feature story about recent achievements of local alumni, and/or other topics that serve to link alumni with Princeton and each other (see [Appendix H](#) and [Appendix J](#) for sample newsletters in print and e-mail format).

- **CAPTURING AND HOLDING INTEREST WITH LANGUAGE** – The way in which content is communicated is just as important as the content itself:
  - Have a positive and enthusiastic tone. Regularly express gratitude for people’s contributions of time and resources.
  - Remember the acronym KISS, meaning “Keep It Short and Simple.” Messages (in e-mail and print) should be no longer than they have to be while still conveying basic details. However, providing a Web site link where more information on certain topics can be found is a good way to ensure people who want to know more can easily find additional info.
  - If multiple topics are contained within a single message, help alumni navigate to the sections most interesting to them by including a table of contents or topic list at the top of the communication piece.
  - Place the name of the regional association—or at least the word “Princeton”—prominently in the letterhead, header or e-mail subject line of all communications. This can help prevent messages from ending up in spam filters or garbage cans.
  - In addition to running spell-check, have more than one person proofread all messages—this will help catch mistakes that a computer won’t find and possibly flag issues about content that other readers and recipients would also have.
  
- **STARTING UP: OPENING COMMUNICATIONS** – If a regional association is newly-created or coming out of dormancy, the officers’ initial communication (letter and/or e-mail) to the group will serve as a formal introduction to the local alumni. Such a message may introduce the new officers and provide their contact information, clarify the association’s purpose, request payment of dues to create a treasury, solicit additional ideas and volunteers (informally or through a survey—see below), and promote one or more upcoming events (sharing news of several events will inspire confidence that the association intends to be active beyond one initial gathering).
  
- **SURVEYS** – Conducting periodic surveys of local Princetonians helps ensure that the regional association is being responsive to the interests of its constituents. Through well-phrased questions, surveys can also be wonderful mechanisms for recruiting new leadership, encouraging participation in existing and new club activities, and learning about resources available through the local alumni community. Equally useful to new or reorganizing associations and to established groups, surveys can be conducted through either a paper mailing or one of innumerable online service providers. To view a sample regional association survey, please see [Appendix K](#).
  
- **INVITATIONS** – When promoting an event, include the following kinds of information in the promotional communication/invitation:
  - The event’s name and purpose (a lecture? museum tour? casual social gathering?), as well as a short description (i.e., short speaker bio, a few-sentence long teaser about lecture content, etc.)
  - Who is invited (i.e., just alumni or also spouses, parents, children, friends, admitted or prospective students, etc.?)
  - The date and time frame of the event (providing both start AND end times)
  - The event location and directions on how to get there
  - Inclement weather date and/or location, if necessary
  - Cost of attendance, as well as any available discounts (i.e., for members, children, etc.)
  - Registration mechanisms, deadlines and rules (i.e., how to register—online or with a specific person? are walk-ins permitted? if tickets/spots are limited, who receives registration priority?)

- **BE THOUGHTFUL** – Overall, the best communications-related practice for regional officers is to be thoughtful about the overall message of the regional association and how individual messages contribute to alumni’s impression of the organization. Consider how the content, language, design, and format will be interpreted by the audience. Ensure that news is shared in a timely way. Make decisions about which messages warrant formal and more expensive methods of communication, and when cost-cutting measures are justified.

### ***G. Restrictions on Use and Distribution of Contact Information and Communications Content***

Princeton University considers the contact information of its alumni (and students, parents, widows, etc.) to be confidential. Regional officers who obtain alumni contact information—whether it be for one person or of their entire regional membership—are responsible for protecting the data against unauthorized use. There shall be no transfer of the data to any third party without express permission of the Office of the Alumni Association.

The full list of Princeton constituents in a region may not even be shared with Princetonian non-officers. Any Princeton alumnus/na can look up other individual alumni on the online alumni directory at <http://alumni.princeton.edu> (or in the printed version), but only officers have accepted the legal responsibility for maintaining the information’s security. In some cases, regional associations have printed directories of local Princetonians; those wishing to do so should be in contact with the Regional Affairs staff to review security concerns and evolving procedures.

A list of Princeton alumni in any given area would be highly coveted by any company or individual, be they telemarketers, spammers, or businesses building a distribution list. Please help protect the privacy of your fellow alumni and the confidentiality of the Princeton network by respecting this rule.

In addition to restrictions on use of alumni contact information by non-alumni and non-officers, regional officers should also be vigilant about the types of messages they send themselves. To remain true to the non-profit status of your regional association and Princeton policy, regional officers may never use official mechanisms to promote personal or political agendas, send commercial or sales-oriented solicitations, or encourage recipients to donate money to any organization other than the regional association—not even fundraising on behalf of Princeton University (all plans for fundraising should be coordinated with the Development Office). Though it is incredibly tempting to help promote benefit dances for other worthy non-profit organizations or help spread the word that an alumna is running for state legislature, such messages are expressly prohibited.

### ***H. Communication within the Officer Corps and Board***

To be truly effective, the regional association’s officer corps and board members will communicate frequently amongst themselves, which helps to ensure that all alumni leaders know what their fellow officers are doing and intend to do across areas of responsibility. For more specific ideas about strong intra-board communication, please see Section III–H.

## *I. Communication with Other Regional Association Leaders*

Interregional communications can help strengthen even the most successful regional groups through the sharing of new ideas and best practices from around the world. To assist in this effort, the Committee on Regional Associations (CORA) organizes teleconferences for regional officers to regularly engage with each other on a variety of topics. Association representatives will be contacted by e-mail in advance of each teleconference with instructions for participation; for further information about upcoming sessions, please contact CORA members or the Office of the Alumni Association.

Regional Affairs staff members can also assist regional officers by recommending contact with other individual regions and/or leaders who may have faced comparable issues or recently tried implanting similar ideas. In particular, members of CORA stand ready to assist regional officers with questions and issues.

