

## VI – Regional Event Programming

Regional associations primarily exist to bring Princetonians together away from campus, so holding successful events, activities and other programming constitutes the third key feature of thriving regional associations. This handbook section provides strategies for effective programming, including basic planning principles, a sampler of regional event ideas, and a review of frequently undertaken special projects.

### A. *Important Event Planning Principles and Practices*

A little bit of advance thought will go a long way toward ensuring events are successful. The following questions and answers reveal practices and principles to consider when planning regional association activities:

- **WHO IS THE TARGET AUDIENCE?** – Is an event aimed for just alumni, or also for spouses, widows/widowers, children, parents, current students, admitted or prospective students and/or non-alumni friends? Within any of these categories, there are also a variety of interests to be served. Since regional associations typically aim to engage as many people as possible, regional events usually try to be as inclusive as possible. It’s ok to plan activities that may have more appeal to a certain demographic, so long as other events have been or will be planned that would be interesting and open to a different demographic subsection and/or a wider array of people. Over time, regional associations can offer programming designed to engage a broad spectrum of their constituencies.
- **WHEN SHOULD EVENTS BE HELD?** – Think about what seasons, days, and times will provide the greatest opportunity for association events, recognizing that different constituencies will be more or less likely to attend functions at certain times (for instance, a weekday luncheon could draw well from a largely retired crowd, but many alumni employed full-time will not be able to attend unless they work close by). Varying the time slots for events over time can ensure that many types of schedules are accommodated. Awareness of religious holidays, school break schedules, and popular local events will help officers to avoid scheduling functions when many Princetonians may not be able to attend; checking Princeton’s academic calendar will inform when to schedule events to which current students will be invited. When several upcoming events are being planned, officers can spread them out over time as much as possible to ensure activities feel regularly-spaced and not bunched together.
- **WHERE SHOULD EVENTS BE HELD?** – Whenever possible, hold events in appealing locations. This means taking into consideration the demographic distribution of the local alumni population (i.e., if most people work downtown and live in the suburbs, then events on the weekend might be best located in the suburbs), as well as the particular draw a certain venue may have (i.e., holding an event in a trendy new location or historic site may draw more people than a hotel meeting room). Varying venues both prevents alumni from becoming tired of one location and encourages people from different parts of the region to participate. If controlling costs is often an important consideration, look to free or low-cost locations whenever possible, such as alumni homes, public parks, civic facilities (libraries and community centers), schools and universities, and spaces that Princetonians can make available through their own connections (i.e., corporate conference rooms).

Finally, regional officers must always abide by the “Policy Regarding Use of Non-Discriminatory Facilities at Alumni Events” (see [Appendix A](#)) and never hold events in facilities that are at all discriminatory on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin. Given the diversity of the Princeton community, it is important that all Princetonians be made to feel welcome

and comfortable at all Princeton-related functions. For similar reasons, regional officers are encouraged to hold events in locations that are accessible to those in wheelchairs and/or with limited mobility.

- **HOW MUCH SHOULD EVENTS COST TO ATTEND?** – Some factors that go into setting attendance fees include how much the event costs to run (see below), whether there will be discounts (and how much) for dues-paying members, what the refund policy will be (if any), and perhaps most importantly, what alumni will be willing to pay. People are more likely to attend if they feel the price reflects the opportunity provided and constitutes a good deal—not as though they are being gouged. Officers are also encouraged to have various events set at multiple price points through the year, so that people who are on a tighter budget would still feel they have an opportunity to attend at least an occasional regional function without creating financial hardship.
- **HOW MUCH SHOULD EVENTS COST TO RUN?** – The answer to this question will of course vary widely depending on the nature of a given event. However, a good rule of thumb to follow is that individual events should generally break even or achieve a small surplus between the cost of running the function and the income gathered from attendance fees. Some associations adopt and apply this principle over time, trying to break even or achieve a small surplus over the course of a year’s events instead of on an event-by-event basis. A few other notes related to event costs:
  - **Non-Paying Guests** – Include the expenses of non-paying guests—such as featured speakers—in the event budget.
  - **Audio-Visual** – AV equipment may be needed for certain presentations, especially those given by University faculty. Many venues will charge exorbitant fees to set up and utilize this equipment, but sometimes these can be negotiated. Also, some associations get around renting this equipment by asking an officer or member to borrow available equipment from their company.
  - **Incidentals** – The cost of flowers, decorations, fancy nametags and other incidentals can quickly add up. If any/all of these are determined to be truly necessary for the event, make sure these items are included in the event budget. Please note that the Alumni Association Office can provide limited numbers of logo nametags and napkins to regional associations on request.
  - **Cash Bar** – Many associations do not host cocktails for their events, only providing non-alcoholic beverages as part of the attendance fee. If so, the association should not receive a commission on the sale of alcohol, as this would be subject to income taxation.
  - **No Honoraria** – It is the policy of the Alumni Association Office to pay only the travel expenses, but no honoraria, for Speakers Bureau visits to regional associations. Regional associations are encouraged to abide by this policy of not paying honoraria or speaker expenses.
  - **Require RSVPs** – Asking alumni to pay in advance (and specifying there will be no refunds after a certain date) will make certain the association can provide an accurate count to venues and caterers, as well as ensure all expenses are covered, even if someone cannot attend at the last minute. Charging attendees a higher rate to pay at the door helps encourage people to register ahead of time.
  - **Protecting Against Losses** – For very expensive events, some associations will ask a few loyal, generous alumni to guarantee a contribution, up to a specified amount, that would cover any losses if the event does not break even. These individuals can then be thanked for their “sponsorship” of the event.
- **HOW MANY PEOPLE SHOULD ATTEND?** – The previous two questions will also be impacted by this third consideration of projected and actual attendance. The goal is usually to have as large an attendance as possible and as is fitting at events; but be realistic in setting attendance goals that take into account past trends and the unique circumstances surrounding each function.

- **HOW SHOULD EVENTS BE PROMOTED?** – Make every effort to advertise all events as much as possible through a variety of communication mediums (including a mailed invitation/flyer/etc., initial and follow-up e-mail announcements, etc.–see Section V-E for additional methods). Other mechanisms to promote activities include:
  - Mention upcoming gatherings at each event and, if possible, have flyers or copies of the announcement/newsletter/invitation to distribute.
  - If a featured speaker is a Princetonian, send a copy of the invitation to the speaker’s class president and ask him/her to notify other classmates in the area. This concept can also be applied to graduate alumni (notify the Association of Princeton Graduate Alumni) and members of Princeton’s affiliated groups (notify the groups in which s/he is active, such as the ABPA, ALPA, A4P, and FFR/BTGALA).
  - Spread the word among the officers of other local alumni clubs from peer institutions–especially if there is a connection between a particular school and the event.
  - Always send information about all gatherings to the Office of the Alumni Association; this ensures they will be included in the central online regional calendar, as well as in “Take Note,” the quarterly Alumni Association newsletter in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*.
  
- **WHAT IS A REASONABLE EVENT PROMOTION TIMELINE?** – In general, it is advisable to spread the word about their scheduled events as far in advance as possible, so as to allow people to make plans to attend if they wish. For major functions, at least 4 to 6 weeks is a fairly standard practice. Some associations plan even further in advance, announcing a calendar of activities for several months or up to a year in advance – this strategy can be particularly helpful when treasury funds are limited and it makes sense to mail only once for a slate of events.
  
- **HOW SHOULD EVENTS BE MANAGED?** – Clearly designate responsibility (whether to an officer, event chair, or committee) for every function. Encourage this person or group to set and stick to a planning timeline for making all related arrangements (see **Form G** for a sample event planning worksheet), as well as plan to be the on-site manager during the actual gathering. A few other notes related to logistics:
  - **Registration Table** – Plan to have a registration table where arriving attendees will check in and/or pay and receive a nametag (the Alumni Association Office can annually supply regional officers with some University nametags; some of the more active associations with many events order their own large supply).
  - **A/V Check** – If planning a function with an audio-visual component, carefully review the available equipment (and the fees involved in using the equipment) and be sure everyone is clear about who will provide auxiliary cables, tech support, etc.
  
- **HOW SHOULD AN EVENT BE EVALUATED?** – Soon after an event is over, evaluate the function’s success, as well as the effectiveness of the whole event process. Was the gathering well-attended and well-received by the membership? What was the net cost for the club? Were lessons learned that will help the club plan successful future events?

## ***B. Types of and Ideas for Regional Events***

Aside from the logistics and mechanics just mentioned, the most important remaining question is “what.” What kinds of events might regional associations organize? Here is a sample of program ideas:

- **ANNUAL MEETING** – Most active associations hold at least one event every year that is billed as an annual meeting of the association. This is when elections may be held, awards announced, and other association business conducted.

- **LUNCHEON, DINNER AND/OR RECEPTION** – A group meal can be either a formal or informal function, depending on the venue, cost, and program. For instance, some associations hold pay-your-own-way monthly breakfasts or luncheons without a planned agenda—just providing Princetonians with a chance to gather and talk with each other. On the other end of the spectrum, a meal can serve as the occasion for an annual meeting and/or a distinguished speaker.
- **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS** – Princeton University is an educational institution that promotes lifelong learning, and regional associations can help fulfill this mission by providing interesting educational opportunities to their members. Options include:
  - Presentation by a visiting Princeton faculty speaker through the Alumni Association Faculty Speakers Bureau (see **Form D** for more information on the Speakers Bureau Program)
  - Presentation by a local Princetonian—this could be on the field in which she teaches at a nearby college, a book he just published, an art exhibit she just launched at a downtown gallery, his distinguished career, etc.
  - Presentation by a notable community member, even if not affiliated with Princeton
  - Panel or debate involving multiple speakers
  - Precepts, seminars or small group discussions themed around certain issues
- **CAREER-NETWORKING AND MENTORING FUNCTIONS** – In addition to the informal social networking that happens at all regional events, some associations hold “NetNights” or other functions specifically designed for local Princetonians to have the chance to make business and career connections. This kind of event may or may not have a speaker addressing related issues (i.e., how headhunters work, how to achieve work-life balance, how to write a stand-out resume, etc.), but usually does provide a structured networking session for participants. (Note—The Alumni Council Committee on Careers can provide assistance and suggestions to regional associations on career-related programming; please contact the Alumni Association staff for further details.)
- **ASC INTERVIEWERS GATHERING** – Some Alumni Schools Committees hold a gathering for new and returning interviewers at the beginning of the interview season. This gives the Chair the chance to review procedures and answer questions, as well as provide local interviewers with the chance to meet each other.
 

Alternatively or in addition, some ASCs schedule a mass interviewing day, where students and ASC members meet at a central location. Though the interviews are still conducted one-on-one, this set-up allows many interviews to get done systematically and gives the ASC members the feeling that they’ve participated in an association event with other Princetonians.
- **ADMITTED STUDENTS GATHERING** – Once the Admission Office has made its offers of admission, regional associations are strongly encouraged to invite admitted students and their families to an event so they can be persuaded to matriculate and welcomed to the Princeton family! With the end of Early Decision, the Admission Office views such events as a crucial part of the recruitment process and deeply appreciates all local efforts made to encourage admitted students to pick Princeton.
 

An admitted student gathering can be a stand-alone event, or it can be incorporated into another association function (such as an annual dinner). Every year, the Admission Office provides ASC chairs with the dates of April Hosting and encourages the regional associations to hold admitted student gatherings within a specified time frame (so as not to conflict with the on-campus recruitment program).

Associations may also include admitted graduate students in this kind of event. Though alumni do not interview these students as part of their application process, the association can still play a role in introducing them to the Princeton community and encouraging them to matriculate. Involving admitted graduate students can also be a good way to get graduate alumni living in a

region interested in association activities. To obtain a list of admitted graduate students within a region, please contact the Alumni Association staff.

- **STUDENT “SEND-OFF”** – Many associations hold a summer “send-off” party for students heading off (or back) to campus in the fall. This can be a stand-alone event, or it can be combined with another regional function within the right time-frame. This kind of event can be held in addition to an April admitted students recruitment event (described above).
- **PARENTS PROGRAM** – Often held in conjunction with undergraduate- and/or admitted student-focused events, some regional associations create a special program for non-alumni parents to feel included. A format that provides opportunities for parents to ask other parents about their children’s experiences on campus encourages them to consider the regional group to be a resource for them and their children, and to stay involved in other association activities.
- **FAMILY-FRIENDLY EVENTS** – Don’t forget the little tiggers! Many associations plan some family-friendly events, to which constituents can bring their children and grandchildren. These can be as informal as a park play-date, potluck picnic, backyard barbeque and swim party, or a more organized excursion for a behind-the-scenes tour of the local zoo’s tiger exhibit. With all of the demands upon people’s time in today’s busy world, a family-friendly event sends a message that the regional association is not asking its members to choose between spending time with Princetonians and their loved ones.
- **SPECTATOR SPORTING EVENTS** – Watching a game can be a fun group activity. There are many different ways to plan an association event around spectator sports:
  - **Princeton’s Away Games** – Many Tigers will rally to attend a match-up of Princeton versus a local college team. The University sponsors more than 30 varsity sports that travel widely (even internationally, on occasion). To view a full list of upcoming sporting events, please go to Princeton’s Athletic Department Web site at [www.goprincetontigers.com](http://www.goprincetontigers.com).
  - **Princeton’s Televised Games** – Even if a University sporting event is not being held nearby, Princeton’s televised games (usually basketball or football) can still make for a great gathering, whether held in a local sports bar or in someone’s home. To determine which games will be televised, please go to the Athletic Department Web site at [www.goprincetontigers.com](http://www.goprincetontigers.com).
  - **Local Professional Games** – Many major- and minor-league teams will offer a special package for groups and, often, they’ll even welcome the group with their name in lights on the big screen! Regional associations may also want to ask their membership if anyone has corporate connections to utilize box seats; this can turn an ordinary game into a special occasion. Likewise, the team’s public relations staff may be able to find someone within the organization who would be willing to speak to the group and/or offer a behind-the-scenes view.
- **PARTICIPATORY RECREATION** – Not just for watching, sports and recreational activities make for great regional events. In recent years, associations have sponsored group hikes, ice skating, cycling trips, golf or tennis tournaments, ski days, and softball games (with just Princetonians, or against another local alumni association from a peer institution). Rafting, birding and whale-watching expeditions have also proved popular.

- **CULTURAL PROGRAMS** – Local museums, galleries, symphonies, theatrical houses and observatories may have exhibits or presentations that would lend themselves well to group participation. At such events, attendance can get a big boost if the regional association offers a special benefit along with the basic program—for instance, a curatorial tour or access to a normally-private area of the venue. Take advantage of any existing Princeton links—are there alumni cast or orchestra members? Is there a parent who is on the board of an institution who can provide special insight and access? Try to be aware of any such connections within your local population.
- **PERFORMANCE BY TOURING STUDENT GROUP** – Student performing arts groups such as the Triangle Club, some dance companies and *a cappella* groups often like to go on tour over breaks. Sometimes these groups know where they want to go and work directly with the association to set up and promote events. Other times, they contact the Alumni Association Office and ask for suggestions for regions that might be particularly welcoming. If a regional association would like to have a student group come to its area, please let the Regional Affairs staff know of this interest. NOTE – When students travel, they frequently look to the regional association for advice and assistance on housing. Please be prepared for this component of working with student groups.
- **CULINARY ADVENTURES** – More than just an occasion to bring people together, food and drink can themselves serve as the purpose for an event, from happy hours to wine-tastings to cooking classes. If a local alumnus/na owns or has special connections to an eatery, this may help secure an interesting venue.
- **BOOK CLUB** – There are several different methods for organizing a regional book club:
  - The Office of the Alumni Association offers an online book club called Tiger Tomes featuring about six selections a year, each written by a Princeton faculty member or alumnus/na. Regional associations could participate in this program by promoting one or more books to their members and sponsoring local book discussion groups.
  - The association can organize an independent book group, where local participants choose the books to be read and discussed.
- **IVY-PLUS COLLABORATIVE EVENTS** – Many of Princeton’s peer institutions (including other Ivy League schools but also Stanford, MIT, etc.) also have regional associations, and it can be fun and productive to collaborate with these organizations on some projects and events. Sometimes this can perpetuate a good-natured rivalry, but it can also provide a larger audience for some projects that may have limited appeal within the Princeton community alone.
 

The key to including Ivy-Plus events in an association’s schedule of activities is to provide balance between Princeton-sponsored and Ivy-Plus events. Some alumni will only want to participate in Princeton-specific functions, while others want to meet new and interesting people from a variety of alumni organizations. A good rule of thumb is to be sure that more than half of the events offered are Princeton-specific.

If regional officers wish to learn contact information for local Ivy-Plus leaders, please contact the Princeton Alumni Association office, which can facilitate contact with the alumni relations offices of other schools.
- **GALA EVENT** – Several associations organize an annual “gala” event, usually a big formal dinner at a nice venue, though a few groups hold a more elaborate dinner-dance. Attendance fees for this event tend to be high, but the association could use proceeds to benefit a special program (such as a scholarship or internship fund – see Section VI-D for more information on such projects).

- **CLUSTER PARTIES** – Often, a regional association covers a wide geographic territory over which its population is scattered in clusters. While it makes sense to hold most events in the area of greatest population density, if there are significant membership numbers in outlying areas, regional associations may wish to set up some programs in these communities. These “cluster parties” can be formal or less so, but they do ensure that alumni across the entirety of the region feel engaged and connected, no matter where they live.
- **REMOTE REUNIONS** – Several associations hold events they promote as remote reunions. These are usually designed to evoke the on-campus Reunions in some way, whether by holding a small P-Rade or presenting awards to the oldest returning alumni, the most spirited costume, and/or the class with the best attendance.
 

Also, many classes organize mini-reunions, which frequently involve out-of-town classmates visiting for a special event. Regional associations can partner with classes to organize supplemental events for the visiting alumni in conjunction with the rest of the local population.
- **COMMUNITY SERVICE OR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECTS** – With the University’s motto of “in the nation’s service and the service of all nations” in mind, many associations engage in a project of community service or civic engagement, such as literacy training, student mentoring, blood or book drives, nature conservation, neighborhood rehabilitation, etc. These can be one-time or ongoing efforts, and may or may not partner with existing community programs. The key is to find a way to involve alumni in providing direct or in-kind support, not simply raising funds for another worthy non-profit organization. For additional information, please view Appendix P and contact the Alumni Council Committee on Community Service and/or the Regional Affairs staff.
- **BOARD MEETING** – Board meetings can be kept open and publicized to the entire local population, so as to encourage more people to get involved in the association’s leadership and activity planning. However, some associations may designate one board meeting as a “retreat” just for the current leadership to think strategically about upcoming plans.
- **WHAT ELSE?** – This list is by no means comprehensive, and regional associations are encouraged to be innovative and creative in your programming. You can come up with many other good ideas through such mechanisms as:
  - **Membership Survey** – Asking your alumni about the kinds of events in which they’d like to participate through a membership survey may yield new suggestions for interesting events. See Section V-F for more information about surveying and **Appendix K** for a sample survey.
  - **Utilizing Alumni Resources** – Local Princeton alumni may be well connected to limited-access venues and/or local civic or professional organizations; when possible, take advantage of the resources your constituents can provide.
  - **Publications** – The *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, *With One Accord*, *Princeton Weekly Bulletin*, and many other University publications may provide inspiration for an event or speaker. Local newspapers may also feature interesting projects or opportunities to gather.
  - **Visit the Campus** – Though many alumni return to campus at Reunions, returning at other times during the year when classes are in session and regular activities occur can provide you with a better sense of what Princeton is like today. Whether for Alumni Day or a random weekday, being on campus can provide alumni not just with nostalgia, but also inspiration for Princeton events in their hometowns. While on campus, be sure to stop by the Alumni Association Office in Maclean House to say hello!
  - **The Alumni Association Office** – The Regional Affairs staff members are happy to assist you with event idea brainstorming, as well as providing a sense of what kinds of programs seem to work well in other areas of the world.

### *C. A Few Notes about Young Alumni Events*

In most cases, young alumni are encouraged to attend all association functions, but often recent graduates have different interests and goals than alumni ten or more years out. Thus, many associations plan young alumni events to specifically draw out this constituency. A few special considerations to remember:

- **LEADERSHIP** – It's a good idea to appoint a Young Alumni Chair or Committee to oversee programming for this group. This will ensure the events will be appropriate for this group, and it is a great way to get young alumni involved in and groomed for the leadership of the overall association.
- **COST** – Many young alumni may not have the disposable income available to older generations, so it is advisable to plan low-cost or no-host gatherings for this age group.
- **TIMING** – Evening and weekend events may be more appealing to young alumni, as they may not be able to leave work or school early or in the middle of the day.
- **PROMOTION** – Young alumni have been essentially raised online and are accustomed to communicating electronically. E-mail announcements about activities are likely to be sufficient advertising and generate the best response.
- **ENGAGING ACTIVITIES AND TOPICS** – Young alumni will most likely be attracted to events that are fun and appeal to their needs and interests, such as casual social gatherings, participatory sports and career networking functions.

One final note – the undergraduate and graduate students of today are the alumni of tomorrow! Regional associations are encouraged to include current students in appropriate events, so they are aware of the local group's presence and activities. Though not all students return to their hometown after graduating Princeton, associations can make a long-range investment in the health of all regional groups and help each other by making a habit of inclusion.

### *D. Other Kinds of Special Projects and Regional Programming*

There are a few other types of programs that many regional associations operate. Though some of these may involve events, their primary focus is instead providing a service to the University and its students and alumni, or recognition for community high school students.

- **INTERNSHIP AND JOB PLACEMENT PROGRAMS** – Several regional associations coordinate programs to place undergraduates and young alumni in jobs in their communities. Sometimes this is a formal process, including applications from Princetonians and employers as well as a schedule of events for all program participants. For others, this is a more simple service of asking alumni and parents to help students who ask find rewarding summer work. To learn more about different operating models for internship and job placement programs, please contact the Regional Affairs staff.
- **BOOK AWARD PROGRAM** – Many Princeton regional associations and clubs sponsor an award program for outstanding area high school students, usually juniors, to raise the visibility of Princeton University in the community and spread awareness of the University among exceptionally-able potential applicants and high school counselors, administrators and faculty. Awards frequently take the form of certificates of recognition and/or books by University faculty members or by notable alumni. To learn more about different models for book award programs and how the Alumni Association Office can support regions that organize them, please see [Appendix E](#).

- **PRINCETON PRIZE IN RACE RELATIONS** – The purpose of the Princeton Prize in Race Relations is “to promote harmony, understanding, and respect among people of different races by identifying and recognizing high school age students whose efforts have had a significant, positive effect on race relations in their schools or communities.” This program began in 2003-04 in two cities and has since expanded to more than twenty cities across the United States. To learn more about the Princeton Prize and the cities that host it, please visit <http://www.princeton.edu/PrincetonPrize/> and contact [PPrize@princeton.edu](mailto:PPrize@princeton.edu).
- **SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS** – More than fifty regional associations have endowed or annually contribute scholarship funds for University undergraduates. These typically comprise part or all of the financial aid package for one or more students living within or near to the regional association. To learn if a regional association has previously established a scholarship or for information about establishing a new regional association scholarship, please contact Jotham Johnson '64, Director of Stewardship, at (609) 258-5956 or [jjohnson@princeton.edu](mailto:jjohnson@princeton.edu).
- **ANNUAL GIVING PHONATHON** – Some associations conduct a local Annual Giving phonathon in conjunction with the Development Office to encourage greater participation from local alumni in the current campaign. Such efforts are usually coordinated and managed by the regional Annual Giving chair. The Annual Giving Office can provide assistance in finding a location, invitations, supplying materials including calling lists, and helping with refreshments. To learn more about conducting an AG phonathon, please contact Bruce Freeman '69 in the Office of Annual Giving at [bfreeman@princeton.edu](mailto:bfreeman@princeton.edu) or (609) 258-2713.

