



## **Alumni Volunteer Toolkit**

*A step-by-step guide for SAU Alumni Association affinity organizations, leaders, and volunteers.*

---

### **1. You: The Alumni Volunteer**

**It starts with you.**

Building alumni affinity programs is a joint effort shared among:

- highly motivated, and well-informed alumni
- the SAU Office of Alumni Relations
- the SAU Alumni Association Board of Directors
- the SAU Office of Development and SAU Foundation

Dedicated alumni are instrumental to our success and help SAU build relationships and connections with fellow alumni in purposeful, exciting ways. The SAU Alumni Association affinity organization program offers alumni volunteers - both local and nationwide - the opportunity to stay involved with and connected to SAU's current students and fellow alumni. By volunteering your time, energy, and talent in this program, you have joined a group of dynamic alumni leaders who are committed to supporting SAU and connecting alumni with each other.

By staying informed and involved, we hope that Mulerider alumni will be inspired to support Southern Arkansas University and ensure its continued excellence. The work you and your affinity organization do to keep alumni in your community connected to SAU is essential.

No matter the structure you choose for your affinity organization (chapter, network, or group), developing meaningful engagement is the key focus for the SAU Alumni Association. As you give your time and energy, please know that you are shaping the strategic direction of the SAU Alumni Association and future generations of proud Mulerider alumni.

Thank you for taking this first step in the journey. **Now, let's get started!**

#### **The ideal volunteer:**

1. Is an SAU alumnus or alumna
2. Commits to participating on the steering committee and works with fellow alumni to develop meaningful engagement programming

3. Along with other committee members, serves as public contact for the affinity organization and provides contact information that is published on the SAU Alumni webpage
4. Follows guidelines of the Alumni Association detailed in this Toolkit.

## 2. How We Can Help You

The SAU Alumni team is committed to partnering with you to create a vibrant alumni affinity organization. We look forward to developing your organization and celebrating its many accomplishments.

Growing a flourishing, active alumni affinity organization requires commitment and innovation from numerous alumni volunteers. To assist you in this process, our staff provides a number of services to help pave the way for success.

- **Staff Liaison + Professional Advice:** Each alumni affinity organization is assigned a staff liaison to provide advice and assistance with organizing, implementing, and achieving your organization's annual goals.
- **Communications Resources** including:
  - E-communications promoting programs, events, and volunteer opportunities
  - Webpage for your affinity organization
  - Social media support + creation of social media group for your organization
  - Event promotion on Alumni Association website, Mulerider Alumni app, and campus calendar
  - On-line registration response forms
  - E-commerce gateway for event registration fees
  - Coordination and Planning of Mailings (including design)
    - We aim to provide financial resources, when available
  - Survey creation, publishing, collection, and analysis
  - Zoom Meeting access for hosting virtual committee meetings and conference calls.
  - Add Event (event tool for websites) to automatically create and hosts a landing page link to add events to attendees calendar
  - Access to Doodle poll tool to determine best times to schedule your meeting
  - Private Group Forum in Mulerider Alumni App
- Fee waiver for usage of the **SAU Alumni Center** for alumni affinity program events and meetings.
- Access to Southern Arkansas University's **event services** (if available) to help with your on-campus events: Aramark catering service, photographer, etc.

- **SAU Spirit Package**, including SAU alumni name badges and decorations to make your alumni feel SAU pride.
- Assistance and guidance with **identifying alumni and faculty speakers** for programs.
- **Volunteer Toolkit** complete with checklists, timelines, and logistical details.
- Access to the **SAU Alumni Leaders Drive** where you'll have the opportunity to routinely learn and share best practices, successes, and challenges with fellow alumni affinity organization leaders and have access to resources to help you develop your alumni affinity organization.

### 3. How an Alumni Affinity Organization Works

SAU alumni affinity organizations—

- Bring together alumni who have a shared interest or common goal
- Work to advance the Southern Arkansas University
- Build and strengthen individual relationships and connections.

An alumni affinity organization may be created around any shared interest or geographic location, such as the examples listed below:

#### 1. Academic:

- ✓ Agriculture
- ✓ Sciences
- ✓ Business
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Engineering
- ✓ Fine Arts & Communications
- ✓ Nursing
- ✓ Honors College
- ✓ And more!

#### 2. Cultural, Diversity, and Inclusion:

- ✓ Black Alumni
- ✓ International Alumni
- ✓ LGBTQ Alumni

#### 3. Geographical:

- ✓ South Arkansas
- ✓ Little Rock
- ✓ Northwest Arkansas
- ✓ Dallas
- ✓ Houston
- ✓ And more!

#### 4. Professional Groups:

- ✓ Attorneys
- ✓ Accountants
- ✓ Physical Therapy
- ✓ And more!

#### **5. Student Organizations/Interests:**

- ✓ SGA
- ✓ Greek Life
- ✓ Residence Hall Association
- ✓ President's Ambassadors
- ✓ Student-Athletes

### **4. One Size Does Not Fit All: Determining Your Structure**

There's more than one way to build your affinity organization. We recognize that one size doesn't fit all, so we want to make things easier for alumni to choose the structure that best suits your needs.

The SAU Alumni Association recommends three structures for affinity organizations—  
1 – Chapters    2 – Networks    3 – Groups

#### **Chapters:**

*Chapters are generally for more mature alumni affinity organizations that have a solid volunteer network and leadership succession plan. Newly established alumni affinity organizations may start as a network or group and grow into another structure as the organization matures.*

- Sponsor 2-3 engagement activities per year
- Led by a committee or board
- Annually elect officers or chair
- Follow guidelines or bylaws
- Develop annual goals
- May request annual Association allocation to support activities
- Receive assistance from the SAU Office of Alumni Relations

#### **Networks:**

- Sponsor 1 engagement activity per year
- Led by a committee
- Committee selects chair
- Follow guidelines
- Develop annual goals
- May request annual Association allocation to support activities
- Receive assistance from the SAU Office of Alumni Relations

#### **Groups:**

- Sponsor 1 engagement activity per year (or less frequently)
- Works with SAU Office of Alumni Relations to coordinate engagement activity
- Follow guidelines
- Develop goal and objectives for engagement activities
- Consult with SAU Office of Alumni Relations to determine funding assistance options for activity.

## **5. Launching Your Affinity Organization**

### **Step 1: Contact the SAU Office of Alumni Relations**

We're here to help you explore the best approach in organizing your affinity organization by examining:

- The best structural fit—chapter, network or group?
- Alumni data to determine the number of alumni in the desired affinity (regional, academic, special interest, etc.). We'll also look at academic degrees, generational groupings, geographic location, contactable alumni, and other factors that will best inform us about the affinity.

### **Step 2: Survey**

Once the pool of alumni is determined for the affinity, the Office of Alumni Relations will distribute a survey to measure interest and gather ideas about engagement programming. The survey will also help in identifying and recruiting volunteer leaders who will serve as the initial steering committee for the affinity organization.

### **Step 3: Plan**

The steering committee and your SAU Alumni Engagement liaison will work together to develop a strategic plan for initial programs and activities including:

- Initial goals for the organization
- Communications plan
- Engagement programming
- Funding

### **Step 4: Launch**

Once the plan is in place, we will work together in launching the initial program that will bring together alumni for your organization.

## **6. Strategies for Success**

Rewarding, meaningful, and worthy of your time...this is how we hope you will define your experience as a volunteer leader of your affinity organization. Our staff is here to help you establish your chapter, network, or group with ease and organization. The SAU Alumni Association's goal is to engage alumni who want to be involved with the University and each other, to share ideas and best practices, and pave the way for our alumni to help SAU in its educational mission. Following are some simple approaches that will help us all be successful.

- **Develop A Strategy:** Begin by answering these questions –

- 1) What do our alumni within this affinity want and need because of their unique connection to SAU?
  - a) Connections and friendships with other alumni
  - b) Professional network opportunities and help with their own career paths
  - c) Connection with SAU faculty
  - d) A desire to help SAU
- 2) What does SAU need from our affinity organization?
  - a) How are we uniquely suited to help SAU students?
  - b) How can we be ambassadors for SAU?
  - c) Can we play a role in attracting and recruiting students to attend SAU?
  - d) Who should be our partners in our organization's efforts?
- 3) How do our alumni want to spend their time?
  - a) Helping a student or faculty member
  - b) Attending an event
  - c) Connecting virtually using technology
  - d) Behind-the-scenes work that builds and strengthens the organization
- 4) How do we engage alumni from different generations and at different stages in the Alumni Life Cycle?
  - a) How do we engage Gen Z, Millennials, GenXers, and Baby Boomers?

- **Engagement is more than events.**

Alumni want to be engaged in many different ways. While many enjoy attending events, others want to give their time in ways that directly help students, faculty, or other alumni.

Alumni affinity organizations can explore a variety of ways to engage fellow alumni. Begin with considering primary goals for your affinity organization. More goals can be added as the organization matures.

These **initial goals** may include:

- 1) Developing stronger connections among one another within the alumni affinity.
- 2) Engagement that helps our students with shared interests more effectively navigate their academic experience and professional journey.
- 3) Educational opportunities that are uniquely valuable and beneficial for your organization

- 4) A desire to benefit SAU by supporting student recruitment or facilitating student internships and co-curricular learning opportunities.

- **Make an Annual Plan**

Most affinity organizations will start out as a network and will plan a minimum of 2 engagement programs per year—one in the fall and one in the spring is a great way to start. Keep in mind that virtual engagement opportunities are acceptable.

Effective engagement programs come in various categories including:

- ✓ Educational Webinar/Seminar featuring SAU faculty or notable alumni
- ✓ Cultural and or entertainment theatre, music, arts, and special cuisine
- ✓ Special On-Campus Alumni Events
- ✓ Student Engagement
- ✓ Volunteer Service

## **7. Building Your Steering Committee**

The steering committee acts as a strong core leadership with clear responsibilities that will pave the way for effective programming and connections.

We recommend building a steering committee that best suits your organization's needs. At a minimum, each steering committee should have a Chair and two additional members with defined responsibilities.

The following are recommended guidelines:

### **Chair**

- Serves as primary liaison with Alumni Engagement staff
- Ensures an annual calendar of programs and initiatives—is prepared for each fiscal year
- Appoints and recruit alumni volunteers as needed
- Convenes and chairs steering committee meetings
- Represents your affinity organization on the SAU Alumni Association Board of Directors

### **Communications Chair**

- Develops communications/marketing plans for each program in coordination with the Alumni Relations staff
- Maintains and monitors social media posts
- Provides content for program information and webpage
- Coordinates personal outreach efforts

### **Student Engagement Chair**

- Partners with Alumni Relations staff and relevant campus partners such as Muleriders for Life, Student Life, Admissions, or Career Services to create effective Student-Alumni programming.

#### **Event/Program Chair**

- Coordinates logistics for education, cultural, and community service programs using guidelines provided.
- Ensures all activities comply with Alumni Association guidelines.

*Other positions may be created as the organization develops its own strategy.*

### **8. Succession Planning**

Volunteer leadership service takes time and energy. We recognize that our volunteers are giving these resources while simultaneously managing careers, family, and other volunteer and social commitments.

We also know it's important to create a volunteer environment and experience that embraces fresh ideas and diverse perspectives. So, to safeguard against volunteer burnout and to create an energized experience, optimal terms of volunteer service are as follows:

- Chair & Steering Committee: One 2-year term
  - Members serving a second year may choose to serve in another position on the committee.
- If alumni volunteers want to continue serving in a leadership capacity following the maximum 2 terms, consider taking at least a one-year hiatus before serving again.

#### **Building Your Volunteer Pipeline**

Securing volunteers for sub-committee service (short-term and long-term projects) will build your pipeline for volunteer leaders.

**Tips:** Always be on the lookout for alumni who attend your events and programs and seek ways to involve new faces. Keep track of volunteers, contact information, and special interests. Promote teamwork so that all volunteers feel supported. Say thank you, such as a public thank you at your event. Send a handwritten note. Share the efforts of your volunteers for a shout-out on the affinity organization webpage.

Recognize when it's time to take a break—lack of enthusiasm and commitment by a steering committee leader or member can spread. Life gets busy and can be demanding. It's perfectly ok to change course.

Let go and delegate. Your fellow volunteers want to help, so delegate tasks and responsibilities.

Follow a succession plan.

Don't take on more responsibility than you can handle. The perfect volunteer is just waiting for the opportunity to help and get involved.

## 9. Effective Communications

A communication plan is essential in facilitating effective and successful engagement. Ideally, our goal is to employ an integrated plan that includes multiple platforms of communication including:

- Email
- Website
- Social Media
- Mulerider Alumni App
- Print/Mail Communications - *If resources were available, print/mail communications would round out the communication plan, but realistically, we are not able to produce and mail invitations for every program. However, there are times when it is appropriate to invest in printing and mailing invitations. If your organization wants to explore this idea, discuss this with your staff liaison.*

## 10. Program and Event Ideas

Volunteer leaders provide the ideas and insights that allow the SAU Alumni Association to deliver engaging and successful programming. Alumni programs come in all different shapes and sizes. From wine tastings and networking mixers to community service projects and speaker receptions—alumni events are hosted across the United States for the purpose of engaging SAU alumni. Every event begins with a well-developed idea and succeeds with a coordinated marketing effort.

Before planning an event for your affinity organization, answer the following:

- What is the purpose of the event?
- What will be accomplished by bringing a group of alumni together?

Initial planning with a view toward the long-term and the ability to always offer follow-up is fundamental to retaining engaged alumni.

Ideas:

- ✓ Gatherings featuring faculty or alumni speakers
- ✓ Theater or museum outings
- ✓ Networking Dinner with Students
- ✓ Community Service Project
- ✓ Summer Sendoffs for local students entering SAU

- ✓ Hosting visiting student groups (e.g. athletic teams, choirs)
- ✓ Welcome to the City for new SAU graduates in your area
- ✓ Alumni Book clubs
- ✓ College nights and high school visits (alumni admissions representative activities)
- ✓ Recruitment reception for potential students and families
- ✓ Professional sporting events
- ✓ Boat cruises
- ✓ Family-focused events or picnics
- ✓ Wine-tasting parties
- ✓ Cooking classes
- ✓ Young alumni events (networking and pub nights, etc.)
- ✓ Monthly luncheons (featuring alumni or faculty speakers )
- ✓ Networking events (include both professional and social components)

## **11. Steps to Planning Your Program**

### Setting the Date

The ideal time to set dates for programs and events is at the beginning of the planning year (July). Even if your organization is not able to determine the exact date, at least establish a month for planning purposes.

### **10-12 Weeks Prior**

- ✓ Select a date based on speaker, host, or venue availability
- ✓ Your chair or program chair will advise your alumni staff liaison of the date and event
- ✓ Ensure the date does not conflict with major university events
- ✓ Note venue manager's contact information
- ✓ Note caterer's contact information
- ✓ Determine venue payment policy and payment due dates
- ✓ Determine catering payment policy and payment due dates
- ✓ Confirm verbally and/or through contract that venue has liability insurance (this is standard process and every reputable venue should have it)
- ✓ Develop communications plan

### **8 Weeks Prior**

- ✓ Submit completed Event Planning Form and forward to your alumni staff liaison
- ✓ Submit all contracts to your alumni staff liaison (please note: only authorized alumni staff members may sign contracts)
- ✓ Your alumni staff liaison will coordinate contract approvals, payment approvals, and payments
- ✓ Prepare content for communications and forward to alumni staff liaison

### **6 Weeks Prior**

- ✓ Your alumni staff liaison will coordinate e-communications; registration forms; website postings and links

- ✓ Once e-communications begin (5-6 weeks prior to event), promote program via social media and personal networks.

### **Month of Event**

- ✓ Continue to promote program via social media and personal networks
- ✓ Analyze attendee list to determine marketing needs
- ✓ To increase responses, emphasize a different “value-added” or selling point in these follow-up email communications.
- ✓ Consult with your alumni staff liaison on ideas for market segmentation and communications

### **During Event**

- ✓ Track all attendees as they arrive and record no-shows or those who “walk in” without prior registration
- ✓ Collect checks, made payable to SAU Alumni Association, from all walk-ins and record their names; note alumni names and guests’ names.
- ✓ Make final payments to venue.

### **Post-Event**

- ✓ Send photos taken with smartphones or tablets to your alumni staff liaison for posting on your organization’s webpage and Facebook.
- ✓ Provide verbal or written summary of event so that we can share the recap with alumni who were not able to attend.
- ✓ Send final list of attendees and no-shows to alumni staff liaison
- ✓ Send all receipts (scanned receipts/photos are acceptable) and checks to your alumni staff liaison immediately after the event, if applicable.
- ✓ For any personal reimbursements, please make sure to include the reimbursement form with your name, alumni affinity organization name and date of event. Once received, reimbursements take up to 2 weeks to process. You will be advised if the reimbursement will take longer than 2 weeks by your alumni staff liaison.