



FLINDERS UNIVERSITY

**OFFICE OF COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT
ALUMNI AND DEVELOPMENT**

ESTABLISHING ALUMNI NETWORKS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is intended as a guide for alumni and others interested in establishing an alumni network—it is not prescriptive, rather it contains advice and suggestions based on the experiences of those who have been involved in establishing a network.

If you are interested in establishing an alumni network, please contact the Alumni and Development team at Flinders.

alumni@flinders.edu.au

WHAT ARE ALUMNI NETWORKS?

Alumni networks are groups of alumni based upon the common bond of affiliation with Flinders University as well as common interests.

The purposes of alumni networks can be:

- Establishing and promoting a mutually beneficial relationship between the University and the alumni (comprising graduates, past students, current students and staff);
- Engendering support for the University and its various undertakings from alumni and from the community at large;
- Informing alumni about the activities of the University;
- Providing a means whereby alumni may promote their common object of the welfare of the University.
- Supporting the raising of funds for research, scholarships and special programs in consultation with the Office of Communication and Engagement
- Fostering community access to University facilities through business, industry, local Government, unions and service clubs; and
- Directly assisting the University Council to preserve, develop and maintain the standards, position and facilities of the University.

Who are the alumni?

Graduates, diplomates, current and former students of Flinders University, and all present and former University staff (who have served for at least 5 years).

STAFF – Alumni and Development

Director, Alumni and Development:- Ms Sue Henry
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WHAT DOES THE ALUMNI AND DEVELOPMENT TEAM DO?

- Facilitates the cultivation of long-term relationships with Flinders' 90,000 global alumni, friends and supporters and secures additional resources through philanthropy to support the University's strategic development objectives.
- Builds alumni and supporter networks and promotes lifelong learning and networking.
- Develops programs encouraging graduates, donors and friends to engage with the University, both onshore and offshore.
- Acts as a first point of contact for all philanthropic giving to Flinders.
- Works with colleagues to provide support, and manage philanthropic relationships and bequests.

ALUMNI AND DEVELOPMENT TEAM SUPPORT FOR NETWORKS

Some of the services that the team can provide network assistance for are listed below.

Mailing lists/labels	Various groups such as degrees, schools, year of enrolment, countries etc;
Network establishment	Advice and support: printing, postage, distribution, function arrangements;
Communication:	Advice and support: newsletters, <i>Encounter</i> , <i>e.NCOUNTER</i> , Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, specific purpose mailings, media contact;
Inter-university liaison	Reciprocal access to alumni services elsewhere;
Organisation	Advice about activities and functions: how to, where to, what to;
Functions	coordination of network and alumni activities;
Search	Tracing 'lost alumni' is a continuing function.

ESTABLISHING SCHOOL, DISCIPLINE OR REGIONAL NETWORKS

Purpose of Networks

- To bring together Flinders alumni for the mutual benefit of the University and the alumni.
- Encouraging and initiating alumni activities that are conducted with the best interests of the University in mind.
- Providing the opportunity for all alumni to come together for social and intellectual enrichment.
- Act as University Ambassadors

Getting Started

The success or otherwise of a new network will depend upon the efforts of a small nucleus of dedicated and interested people. In the beginning it will require dedication and commitment from these individuals to ensure that the network organises itself in a way to assure continuity.

There are six key points for success:

- Leadership
People with the characteristics mentioned in the following five key ingredients must be chosen at the outset. A Head of a School, a key staff member, or a retired member of staff who is interested and energetic enough to take up this activity may initiate activities in the beginning and/or if an active distinguished graduate is known, the "reins" can be transferred. Ask your potential leaders whether all of the following are true.
- Time
They must have the time to invest.
- Dedication to the cause
They must believe in the importance of the existence of such an organisation.

- Effective Communication
They must be able to communicate that sense of importance and value to other alumni effectively and creatively.
- Strong leadership group with succession policy
They must realise early on that it cannot be done alone, and that they must identify and build up an active group with equal dedication for two reasons:
 - a) to ensure the success of the network while they lead it and,
 - b) to ensure that when they step down control is passed to a group who will maintain the momentum that has been put in motion.
- Effective program planning
Remember that your network ultimately will be only as successful as your programs. The quality, not the quantity, is important.

The First Steps

- Obtain from the Alumni and Development team assistance in contacting the alumni from your School, Discipline, or Region.
- Ask the Head of the School to canvass other members of the academic staff for the names of suitable people to approach. There will certainly be names other than those on the list above.
- Look for a cross-section of people, taking account of age, interests, employment, influences, skills, possible known commitment.
- Consider involving students, particularly final year students and retired members of staff.
- When you have identified a core group of alumni and staff, organise one or more informal meetings to assess and stimulate the potential of and interest in a network. Be patient and positive.
- The result of this meeting should be the nomination of a core group to oversee the establishment of a network.
- Alumni and Development staff are available for this purpose and will help you with communication and the organisation of a function.
- Each network should have a charter in which is set out its aims and purposes.
- Seek from Alumni and Development, approval for the establishment of the network.

The First Function: Planning

When you are ready to establish the network formally, plan your first function or meeting well ahead. A minimum of three months is recommended.

This will allow:-

1. The necessary arrangements to be made for a suitable venue.
2. A suitable 'warm-up' campaign to be undertaken e.g. communication to alumni with advance notice of the establishment of a network, and an invitation to keep a particular date free.
3. Your initial core group to work up an agenda: network charter and a plan for the first year of activities.

4. An appropriate senior officer of the University to be present (e.g. Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Deputy or Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Executive Dean).
5. Arrange for a noted alumnus/a to be invited into lending support and to say a few words.

The First Function: Execution

- Check with the Alumni and Development staff to see if your dates overlap with other University functions.
- Ensure that as many as possible of your School and or Discipline academic and professional staff attend.
- Whilst such a function is likely to be very much a social occasion, some part of the function must include the formalities of launching the network.
- Adoption of the Charter, even if *pro-tem*, and Terms of Reference for the steering committee
- Appointing a steering a committee: the names should be pre-selected but take nominations from the floor.
- Ensure that everybody has a name tag.
- Ensure that people leave prepared to spread the word.
- Within one month send out via Alumni and Development, a communication thanking people for attending and giving news of the next activity and other University events as well.
- Encourage people to let your committee know what sort of activities or programs they would like to see the network run.

NETWORK OPERATION

Network Steering Committee

The network steering committee should generally consist of a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer together with two or three (or as many as is workable) others and is responsible for the management and effective operation of the Network.

The Committee should concern itself with the oversight of the annual activities program, the work of its sub-committees and the relationship between itself and the Alumni and Development team (and if appropriate, with the School or discipline with which it has a special link).

Sample Terms of Reference for a steering committee:-

The purpose of the Flinders University XYZ Alumni Steering Committee is to:

- provide alumni with opportunities for professional development, networking and volunteering;
- facilitate communication and co-operation among staff, alumni, students and friends of the Flinders University XYZ undergraduate and postgraduate programs;
- plan and hold events to further the vision and mission of the Flinders University XYZ Alumni;
- act as a resource to the Faculty/School/Department of XYZ at Flinders University in relation to the teaching of ABC;
- act as a liaison between the university and the alumni of XYZ programs;

- undertake any other initiatives and activities it considers necessary to support and further the mission.

Network Officers

For any organisation to be dynamic and effective it must have effective leadership - you cannot do without leaders. Choose carefully and keep in mind the six key points referred to under Getting Started, above.

A suggested minimum is four office bearers:

- Chair
The Chair is head of the network and is responsible for the program conducted during the term of office.
- Vice-Chair
The Vice-Chair assists and acts for the Chair in any way requested, and takes part in decisions that affect network activities. The normal progression of events would be for the Vice-Chair to become Chair.
- Secretary
 - a) Plans meetings with the network committee
 - b) Ensures that notices of meetings and other activities are sent out in advance.
 - c) Keeps track of address changes and of alumni leaving and settling in the area, and keeps the Alumni and Development team informed of these
 - d) Is aware of interesting news of alumni in the area and advises the Alumni and Development team
 - e) Ensures that minutes of meetings are recorded and filed
- Treasurer
 - a) Negotiates with Alumni and Development team re financial aspects of functions, payment of accounts and receipt of monies.
 - b) Reports to the network committee on the financial outcome of network functions.

Networks should consider limiting terms of office to two years as this will help to prevent the Network becoming stale and will maintain vitality through the changing perspectives of its leaders.

Networks may wish to consider a small nominating committee to constantly seek out potential office bearers. Take account of age, enthusiasm, experience, commitment - ensure the inclusion of younger alumni.

Network sub-committees

As a network develops and grows and its role *vis à vis* the School, Discipline, Region and University becomes clearer, it is likely that it will want to expand its range of activities. Of course, the network committee would not be able to plan and implement the expanded range of activities and programs alone.

Sub-committees should be appointed and, therefore, charged with the attainment of particular goals as part of the overall mission of the network.

Such sub-committees might include:

- Nominating Committee (see above)
- Young Alumni Committee
Plan and execute activities specifically for undergraduate students (e.g. first year students' welcome, alumni-student sporting contests)
Career and study counselling; vacation employment
- Development Committee
Plan and execute fund-raising programs: specific purpose such as equipment, scholarships, etc.
- Programs Committee
Plan and advise the network Committee of the activities and programs for each year.

The above list is a guide - some networks may need only their steering committees, others, a range of sub-committees including ones of a purpose not indicated above. Consider your particular needs and plan accordingly.

Constitution and/or Charter

A detailed, complicated constitution can mean diversion from your purpose and an inevitable bogging down in bureaucracy rather than efficiency of operation and maximum enjoyment from the achievements of your network.

A charter can serve to remind members of the network's purpose.

Network Record

It is essential for the sake of good management and continuity that each network maintain a network record: minutes/notes of meetings, copies of correspondence.

Financing

The University will assist you to get going with the cost of some initial printing, handling and postage costs. Whilst each network is expected to be self-financing, in the terms of functions etc, there are ways of reducing costs such as "piggy-back" mail-outs or having a sponsor underwrite a function or mail-out.

Communication

Apart from leadership, communication is the most critical element in a network's efforts to build and sustain membership.

As your network grows, word of mouth will naturally encourage more alumni into the fold but the tangible activity must be accompanied by the tangible presence: that is, continuing communication about your activities.

HOW?

- First, through the University's magazine, *Encounter*, and e newsletter, *e.NCOUNTER*.
- Secondly, possibly through a network newsletter. Such a publication does not need to be extravagant but it should:
 - be easily identified as yours;
 - contain news of activities both recently past and upcoming;
 - news of alumni: new members, employment changes, marriages etc;

- publicly acknowledge the efforts of alumni for the network
- The Alumni and Development team can help with advice about newsletter design and distribution.
- Think about the possibility of sponsorship for your newsletter; the cost will generally not be great.
- There is a third aspect to achieving the tangible presence for your network and this is visibility.

Why not:-

- Seek out media coverage of one of your activities. You may institute an award for university or community service; invite the press along to the presentation.
- Have a membership directory for your network (names, addresses, telephone numbers, network appointments, year of graduation).

ACTIVITIES

Diverse and vital activities will make your network interesting and play an important part in convincing alumni to become and remain members of the network.

If your network fosters activities which project Flinders University's image with distinction, alumni (and hence the community) will respect what the network is attempting to do in Adelaide and elsewhere.

Here are some suggestions on how network activities can be structured in order to assist the membership building efforts of your network.

Publishable Activities

A network's activities provide it with an excellent opportunity through promotion in newsletters, publicity in University publications and in the local media, for projecting and enhancing its own, and the University's image in the community.

This is especially true where activities feature topics of widespread interest and where the speakers or panelists are distinguished in their fields.

Perhaps put on at least one major activity each year, such as a forum (coordinate with other networks) which can focus on issues of current interest and concern.

The publicity potential of the network will be maximised by gathering together a group that includes:

- A member of our academic staff who teaches, and perhaps writes, in areas related to the forum topic
- network members with knowledge and expertise in the field
- A non alumnus/a who has prominence and/or expertise

An activity such as this should be held soon after a newsletter/ mailing. Announcing the activity in a newsletter can serve to attract alumni to membership. A reservation slip can be included in the mailing.

Activities of this sort can be of specific or general appeal; however, the approach should be such that the wider community can participate and feel comfortable about doing so.

Activities of this sort should be made part of the network's year to year programming to ensure maximum effect, and not simply arranged on a one-off basis.

Other Activities

- a) Plan your network activities well ahead. Activities should be decided upon for the whole year in January-February. Keep in mind organisation, timing, publicity and coordination with Alumni and Development staff.

- b) Some suggestions:
 1. Network specific lectures, seminars
 2. Luncheons: monthly, bi-or tri-monthly. Hold at the same place, day each month. Limited time period, low cost. Speakers do not have to be School or Discipline related - consider political, taxation, investment, local government, the arts, sports, etc.
 3. Post-enrolment reception for new students - meeting other students and members of staff
 4. Graduation linked dinner
 5. Family outings - barbecue with football, cricket, tennis, basketball matches. Activities for children.
 6. Tours: why not arrange to visit a television studio, winery, another school of the University
 7. Combined network functions
 8. Film or quiz evenings

There are also major activities, which occur on an annual basis, such as the annual general meeting and a reunion dinner for a specific year of graduation

- c) Organisation
 1. Choose dates carefully - avoid conflicts with other Network meetings and public holidays
 2. Select meeting places thoughtfully - convenience and cost
 3. For activities indoors
 - check size and condition of room(s)
 - check costs - what is, what is not included
 - check public address system, ventilation, lighting etc
 4. Ensure interested friends of members are invited, including spouses, staff from other tertiary institutions, parents, etc
 5. Name tags (provide for pockets, pins and stick on)
 6. Publicise activities in the University's publications.

REMEMBER: *There are excellent facilities on the campus for functions*

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