

HOW TO START & GROW AN ALUMNI CHAPTER



HOW TO START & GROW AN ALUMNI CHAPTER



We hope the material, resources, and personal experiences of alumni gathered for this toolkit help you through the steps of starting an MUW Alumni Chapter or Constituency Group.

Alumni Chapters and Constituency Groups are a wonderful way to keep our connection with our alma mater and former classmates as well as promote the W within our own communities.

HOW TO START & GROW AN ALUMNI CHAPTER

So, You Want to Start an Alumni Chapter?

The next few slides will provide you with the initial tools you need to start the process of forming an alumni chapter.

We have a great set of resources and individuals in our alumni office that can help with any questions you have, as well as provide you feedback and resources throughout the process.

HOW TO START & GROW AN ALUMNI CHAPTER

Step 1: Development

Decide the type of group desired:

- **Formal Chapter** – A group of alumni in a specific geographical area. Has officers and collects dues.
- **Informal Chapter** – A group of alumni in a specific geographical area. Has a leader/coordinator, but no formal set of officers and does not collect dues.
- **Formal Constituency Group** – A group of alumni that share a common major, social organization affiliation, graduation year, sport, etc. Has officers and may collect dues.
- **Informal Constituency Group** – A group of alumni that share a common major, social organization affiliation, graduation year, sport, etc. May have a coordinator, but does not have officers or collect dues.



HOW TO START & GROW AN ALUMNI CHAPTER

Step 2: Initial Inquiry

- Contact Alumni Office
- Submit to Alumni Office a list of counties/major cities or zip codes within a 75-mile radius of your community for a chapter or the specific type of alumni you are targeting for a constituency group
- Allow four to six weeks for Alumni Office to perform a query of alumni in that area or meeting that description
- Prepare initial interest email to be sent by the Alumni Office to all alumni identified in query (See last slide for a link to an example.)

HOW TO START & GROW AN ALUMNI CHAPTER

Step 3: Initial Meeting

For those starting a chapter:

- Set up initial meeting (Date, time, place)
- Send out invitations through the Alumni Office to alumni identified in your area (See last slide for an example invitation you may use.)
- Make personal contact with as many alumni as possible to generate interest

HOW TO START & GROW AN ALUMNI CHAPTER

Step 3: Initial Meeting

For those starting a constituency group:

- Determine how you would like your group to “gather”. For most constituency groups, this is currently done through a Facebook group.
- Send out invitations through the Alumni Office to alumni identified with a link to the Facebook group for them to join.
- Make personal contact with as many alumni as possible to generate interest.

HOW TO START & GROW AN ALUMNI CHAPTER

Initial Meeting Tips for Chapters

- Restaurants (Dutch treat) & homes are great locations
- Come with tentative timeline & goals to share
- Plan to gather interest in leadership positions
- Gather contact information from all attendees & send follow-up email thanking them for attending & encouraging them to come & bring their W friends to future events

HOW TO START & GROW AN ALUMNI CHAPTER

Further Tips for New Chapters

- Don't be concerned if turnout for initial meeting is low
- Invite speakers & guests from The W
- Offer a variety of events at various times
- Contact other chapters, the Alumni Office, and the MUWAA Chapters & Constituency Groups Committee for event ideas

HOW TO START & GROW AN ALUMNI CHAPTER

Supporting Materials

Governing documents and other alumni information can be found at <https://longblueline.muw.edu/alumni/alumni-association>.

Important documents to review and keep on hand:

- [Chapter & Constituency Group Guidelines](#)
- [MUWAA Bylaws](#)

HOW TO START & GROW AN ALUMNI CHAPTER

Additional Resources

- [Intro Letter Template](#) - Sample letter to send out to prospective members
- [Helpful Tips from Active Chapters](#) - Tips from alumni who have started chapters
- [So I Started an Alumni Chapter!](#) - Narrative from an alum who started the Middle Tennessee Chapter

Dear MUW Alumni,

Hope this letter finds you doing well. I am [YOUR NAME] and I graduated from Mississippi University for Women in [YOUR GRADUATION YEAR]. I am sending this letter because we are forming a [NAME OF CHAPTER/GROUP] Alumni [CHAPTER/CONSTITUENCY GROUP] and thought you would be a wonderful addition to our new group.

[BRIEF EXPLANATION OF WHY YOU ARE DOING THIS] With assistance from the MUW Alumni Office, we were able to identify alumni [IN THIS AREA (for chapters in a certain geographical location) or THAT WERE MEMBERS OF [ORGANIZATION] (for organizational groups) or THAT WERE GRADUATES OF [MAJOR/DEPARTMENT] (for major/departmental groups)]. And, thus, we found you.

I am looking to hold an interest meeting regarding our plan to form a [CHAPTER/CONSTITUENCY GROUP] and am hoping that you are interested in being a part of the process. I am hosting an initial meeting on [DATE, TIME, PLACE, & OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION].

Please RSVP to [CONTACT INFORMATION] by [RSVP DEADLINE]. If you are unable to attend, but are interested in supporting a new [CHAPTER/CONSTITUENCY GROUP], please indicate so in your response so we can keep you informed about our progress and the time and place of future meetings.

We are excited about starting this new [CHAPTER/CONSTITUENCY GROUP] and hope you are able to be a part of it!

With W spirit & love,

[YOUR NAME]

Helpful Tips from Active Chapters

Several active chapters were asked the following questions regarding the start-up of their respective groups. The responses received are summarized below in hopes that the information gleaned from their experiences may help you in organizing your new chapter.

What kind of initial meeting did you have with your group?

- The chapter already existed, but was not really functioning. I reached out to a fellow alum in the area and she brought in a few other alums who had been members of the chapter for a while. We all had lunch and discussed reviving the chapter and how to properly run it.
- Our initial meeting was coordinated with some local alums by the W Alumni Office.
- Our initial meeting was a high tea with time for mingling followed by a short meeting to discuss the details of becoming a chapter.
- Our initial meeting did not happen right at the beginning. Since we are a group of alums from a specific major and live all over, we spread the news by word of mouth until we got a group of people who wanted to be officers and help start it. We then voted for officers through email. After that was established, we had an actual in person meeting.

How did you invite people to your initial meeting?

- Word of mouth only.
- Sent out invites via email through the Alumni Office.
- Sent invitations through the mail along with a Facebook event and e-vite.

How many attended that first meeting?

- 6 people.
- Only 6 folks attended our initial meeting, but our next two meetings averaged 25-35.
- 15 alums
- Around 20

How many members does your group have now?

- Active – around 75, but that pay dues – 45
- Around 40
- We don't have chapter dues, so it is hard to track, but we have 218 Facebook members.

How many events do you host throughout the year?

- Typically, we host a lunch bunch each month and send off party each year. We host anywhere from 4 - 10 additional events each year - from happy hour gatherings to outings at a minor league baseball game to more recently feed the team events.
- 1-2 (Unfortunately most in our area only want to meet 1-2 times per year.)
- Only one that we hold the same weekend as another local event. We have tried to have more, but it is difficult because of the size of our area and traffic issues.
- We want to have one each semester, but so far we only actually have one in the spring.

Is there anything that you wish you would have done differently in hosting your initial meeting? (i.e. how you did the invites, the plan for your first meeting, etc.)

- Set up our structure differently and have true leadership and a set schedule of meetings.
- I would have had an interest meeting first and sent out invitations to it. This could have gotten more people on-board to help and more long-term buy-in. Everyone is just so busy, and we are having trouble finding people to help lead our group.

Any recommendations you would give to someone starting a new alumni group?

- Don't get discouraged if your first meeting doesn't go great! Sometimes it takes a little while to build interest and participation. Keep asking and encouraging attendance and involvement. Also, some chapters are VERY active, don't feel like you have ever be at that level. If your group just gathers once every year, then that's GREAT! And most importantly, don't be afraid to ask for something. The Alumni Office is always available to help you.
- The Alumni Office is a huge asset. Don't get your hopes up for a big turn-out at the initial meeting. Don't be scared to ask for help!
- Have someone who knows the area and has some free time plan events.
- Have the Alumni Office send out invitations for an interest meeting. Find someone with experience starting a chapter and ask them to be your mentor through the process. The Alumni Office and the MUWAA Chapters & Constituency Groups Committee can help with this.

Anything you thought was really helpful from the alumni office or anything that you wished you had gotten from the alumni office in terms of assistance/advice?

- The query the Alumni Office runs for a specific area is fantastic!
- A step-by-step process would've helped me.

So I Started an Alumni Chapter!

I attended my first Middle Tennessee Alumni gathering in May 2014 (Bar Louie in Nashville). At this meeting, there were representatives from the W. I was looking to become involved in my local chapter, and I thought this would be a good way. It was great to meet some local alumni. This event was more of a social hour, so no business was discussed. If I had to guess, we had somewhere between 12-15 people who attended.

In September 2015, I attended my second Middle Tennessee Alumni gathering (The Sutler in Nashville). At this event, Lyndsay Cumberland and Andrea Stevens attended from the W. We had a speaker from the Culinary Arts Program, and we got an update on the university. There was a great turn out for this event (25-30+). This is where I got curious. I wondered if “we” were an “official” chapter through the university. Surprisingly, we were not. I wanted to know why and how we could make this happen. There were plenty of alums in the greater Nashville area, so we needed to make it official. In about 5 minutes, I went from just attending the meeting to being the president of the chapter.

Over the next few weeks, the new officers had a conference call with Lyndsay, and we set up our chapter account through the foundation.

We then had our first “official” chapter meeting in November 2015 (The Blvd. Nashville). I just knew we were going to have a large turn-out for this meeting, but we only had six attendees. We sent out an email invite for this event (our one free mailer for the year was used for the September meeting). Having only six attendees was a tough pill to swallow.

In February 2016, Lyndsay reached out to me. She knew our chapter really wanted Dr. Borsig to attend our “big” September meeting. By the end of February, we had the date set (September 8 at Amerigo), and Dr. Borsig confirmed to attend. In June 2016, Lyndsay and I collaborated on a post card to send to the Middle TN Alumni (this was used as our one free mailer for the year). In June 2016 a “save the date” email was sent, and in August 2016, the postcard invitation was sent via mail. We also had a Welty Symposium Speaker attend our meeting. It was GREAT! We had two door prizes (a fall door hanger and the book by Dana – Welty Symposium Speaker). Dr. Borsig gave a wonderful talk on the university and all of the new and exciting things happening on campus, and Dana read a small snippet from her book. We had about 25-30+ people attend.

After this event is when I realized people like it when there is someone from the W speaking, and they only really like one or two events each year (or at least that is how it seems in our area).

In March 2017, Lyndsay and I got together about our next meeting. I really wanted to have Jason Trufant (Athletic Director at the W) be our guest speaker. Lyndsay confirmed a date with Jason (September 16), and I hosted the event at my home in Nashville. The save the date email was sent in mid-July, and our postcard invites were sent mid-August (again, we used this as our one free mailer for the year). We had a wine and cheese event. At this meeting we elected new officers, and Jason gave a fantastic update on sports at the W. We had about 25 people attend. Lyndsay and Andrea attended this even as well. A door prize was given away. This was by far the best of the five events we had over the past 3.5 years.

We have pretty much stuck with one big meeting each year since. We did donate a basket to the MUWAA Silent Auction last Homecoming, and we will be doing the same this year.