



CHAPTER COMMUNICATION: KEEPING YOUR CHAPTER CONNECTED

AmeriCorps Alums @ the National Conference on Volunteering and Service

This annual event usually takes place in June, and is the only face-to-face opportunity for chapter leaders from across the nation to share ideas. Because the National Conference on Volunteering and Service has a complex agenda, AmeriCorps Alums provides a one-and-a-half-day Pre-Conference on the weekend prior to the full conference. Alumni may choose to stay for the full conference, and receive a discounted registration fee. The actual workshops and events of the Pre-Conference are selected by a Planning Committee made up of chapter leaders, who meet via conference call approximately once every two weeks in the three or four months prior to the event. A Networking Reception for alumni is usually hosted on the Saturday evening of the Pre-Conference.

Chapter Leader Conference Calls

Meeting the diverse needs of chapter leaders is a complicated process. Some are brand-new, and just starting to plan events. Others have been involved for years, have highly-functioning committee structures, effective fundraising techniques, and hundreds of members. When surveyed, chapter leaders made two things clear:

- 1) They want to have opportunities to connect with each other.
- 2) They are incredibly busy people, who value quality over quantity in communications.

Issue-themed Chapter Leader Conference Calls address both of those realities. They're facilitated by experienced chapter leaders, and designed around discussion topics that directly relate to building a successful chapter. They are not structured as an opportunity for everyone to simply "share what they've been up to." By focusing on topics like "Fundraising," newer chapter leaders can ask questions, and everyone is able to share both their challenges and strategies for success.

Hosting conference calls too often becomes a chore in the perception of chapter leaders. They're willing to call in once per quarter or once every other month, but not more frequently than that. For that reason, it's important for the calls to be well-planned and facilitated in an efficient manner. Off-topic discussions should be encouraged to be followed up at the end of the call or in a separate venue, if they involve a minority of the participants. AmeriCorps Alums staff may participate in the calls to answer technical questions, but encourage chapter leaders to do most of the talking.

The calls generally take place at 7:30 PM eastern/6:30 PM central/5:30 PM mountain/4:30 PM pacific, as that allows most chapter leaders the opportunity to finish their workday prior to the call.

As a local AmeriCorps Alums chapter leader you can advance your chapter's cause and make a difference in your community by inspiring national service alumni and mobilizing them for change. Use AmeriCorps Alums as your training ground for future success by connecting with our chapter specialists.

Chapter Leader Resource E-mails

These are the primary means of communication between the national office of AmeriCorps Alums and the chapters. They are brief highlights of no more than four topics, and usually include:

- **A Resource** - mini-grant opportunities, promotional material templates, and new member benefits/discounts could be highlighted in this section.
- **An Upcoming Event** - any national event in which chapters can take part are appropriate for inclusion in the resource e-mail. MLK Day, National AmeriCorps Week, and Day of Action all fall into this category.
- **An Effective Process** - when a chapter hosts a wildly successful event, and the results are replicable in other places, the details of how they did it are shared.
- **A Call to Action** - Occasionally, chapters are invited to further the cause of National Service by educating legislators, signing online petitions, or sharing information with their wider social networks.

What should not be included in the e-mail is anything that's just "nice to know." It's not the place for long narrative about a service project or profiles of individual alumni. The information must be immediately useful to busy chapter leaders. If the headline doesn't start with a verb, it's probably not compelling enough to include.

The key to an effective Chapter Leader Resource E-mail is brevity. The text of the e-mail should include compelling headlines, a few sentences below each one, and a link to a webpage or attachment with more detailed information. Very few people have the time to scroll through multiple-page messages, so being concise is extremely important. A photo or graphic should also be included whenever possible.

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