

# NSPRA MARK OF DISTINCTION AWARD APPLICATION

*Submitted by the Michigan School Public Relations Association*

*(MSPRA)*

*May 15, 2016*

**The "Mark of Distinction" Recognition Program  
for NSPRA Chapters**

**Entry Form**

(Please include this information with each individual entry)

Chapter Name: Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA)

Chapter President: Micki O'Neil

*President's contact information*

District/Organization: Ingham Intermediate School District

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**Right to Use Materials Statement**

On behalf of the Chapter, I agree that NSPRA has the right to use any materials, project/program examples, etc., submitted in this entry in Association print/online publications, on the website, and as "best practice" resources for NSPRA chapters.

Signature of Chapter President: Micki O'Neil

**Application Process Checklist**

- Each entry includes this cover form and the Entry Specifics form.
- A single PDF that includes links to related supplemental materials and examples is attached.** (If entering in more than one category, a single PDF for each category entry is attached or sent individually).
- Chapter president has signed the "right to use materials" statement on the entry form.
- Entry is delivered no later than May 15** and sent to [awards@nspra.org](mailto:awards@nspra.org), subject line "Mark of Distinction."

## Mark of Distinction Entry Specifics

Chapter: Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA)

Please complete and include the information below for each individual entry

**Section I: Membership Building**

- Current number of chapter members \_\_\_\_\_
  - NSPRA-provided membership baseline number as of June 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  - Number of chapter members who belong to NSPRA as of April 30 \_\_\_\_\_
- 

**Section II: Special Focus Areas**

Category A – chapter has less than 50% NSPRA membership

Category B – chapter has 50% or more NSPRA membership

1. Professional Development/PR Skill Building

2. Special PR/Communication Program, Project or Campaign

One-time project/program (completed within a single year)

Continuing annual project/program (repeats each year; demonstrate new/improved/revised components)

Multi-year project/program (one-time only with defined start and end dates)

Multi-year phased project/program (components implemented in clearly defined phases each year)

3. Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication Effort

## 2016 National School Public Relations Association Mark of Distinction Award

The [Michigan School Public Relations Association](#) (MSPRA) currently has 140 members; of those 45 belong to NSPRA. That means MSPRA falls in Category A: Chapter has less than 50% NSPRA membership. This year, we are submitting an entry under Section II: Special Focus Areas: Professional Development/PR Skill-Building.

### Section II: Special Focus Areas

#### 1. Professional Development/PR Skill-Building –

Each year, the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) plans and provides a variety of programs and activities to support the professional growth and status of its members and improve the communication skills of Michigan educators including administrators, board members, teachers and support staff. This submission includes four examples of professional growth support: A) MSPRA's Annual Conference, B) Two Drive-In Conferences, C) MSPRA's Annual Communication Contest, and D) The Outstanding Superintendent Communicator and Gold Medallion Awards.

This entry shows documentation and evidence of chapter programs/activities, including:

- 1) Impact of overall year-long effort (page 3)
- 2) Statement of chapter goals and objectives for programs/activities (page 2)
- 3) Documentation and copies of conference/workshop/meeting programs and agendas, marketing materials, tip sheets and/or presentations distributed or made available to participants (See links throughout narrative.)
- 4) Examples of specific programs/activities for contests and awards (page 9)
- 5) Identification of target audience and participation/attendance (pages 4 and 8)
- 6) Documentation/demonstration of measurable outcomes, effectiveness and success of the program/activity (See annual conference evaluation link and drive-in conference evaluation link in narrative.)
- 7) Explanation of how program/activity relates to NSPRA's Goals and Objectives (page 3)
- 8) Other relevant examples of chapter's professional development/PR skill-building efforts (page 10)

# Michigan School Public Relations Association

## Overview of MSPRA Professional Development & Skill-Building Activities

Professional development and skill building is a major emphasis of the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA). As an association, we focus much of our human and financial resources in this area. The results are some of the best communication skill-building training in the state. The consistent quality of our effort helps our members be better communicators, aids in membership retention, and drives conference attendance and contest participation.

Our primary professional development activities are:

- Our Annual Conference which offers two days of intensive skill-building sessions, networking and learning.
- Our Regional Drive-in Conferences that feature topical workshops with expert speakers to equip members with knowledge and skills.
- Our Annual Communication Contest that recognizes member skills and encourages sharing of high-quality projects and programs. One part of the contest includes an Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award to recognize the critical role of communication at the top of our organizations.

The MSPRA Board appoints a minimum of three members to Professional Development initiatives: one to manage the Annual Conference, one to manage MSPRA's Communication Contest, and one to serve as a resource for APR Certification. Typically, an additional 1-3 board members are either conference co-chairs, assist with the contest, or coordinate regional drive-in conferences. This year we also recruited several MSPRA members to serve on our Professional Development Committee, netting positive results, as evidenced by our successful Annual Conference.

The Board's goals for its annual and drive-in conferences include:

- Building skills for all levels of members, from those who are new to the profession to those with many years of experience.
- Preparing members to address current hot topics in Michigan education.
- Networking to strengthen professional relationships.
- Recognizing the skills and sharing the successful strategies of MSPRA/NSPRA contest winners.
- Sharing some of the topics, trends, and speakers heard at the National School Public Relations Association Seminar. This year, both our Annual Conference keynote speaker, Brian Woodland, APR, and our Fall Drive-In Conference presenter, Shane Haggerty, were also NSPRA presenters.

And, MSPRA's Communication Contest aims to:

- affirm school districts' communication efforts.
- inform districts about how they can improve their communication programs and products.
- provide a venue to exchange best practices among those providing communication services in Michigan's public schools.

Together, the Communication Contest, Annual Conference and Regional Drive-in Conferences provide unparalleled opportunities for members and interested others to learn about and improve upon their communication skills. All of these activities generate widespread participation from communicators, educators and staff members across the state.

The impact of this year's effort is reflected in the more than 150 registrations for our three conferences. And, we had 35 entries benefit from judges' reviews and comments as part of MSPRA's Communication Contest.

Evaluations from all these activities are mined for improvement ideas and suggestions. And, every few years, these activities are reinvented to ensure their relevance, value to our members and high quality of programming. We are using social media and technology to promote our organization and events, and finding new ways to use these tools for professional development as well.

Our reputation for professionalism and excellence means we are the group other state education-related associations turn to for communication advice, toolkits, presentations and workshops for their members. Our board members can be found at the conferences and meetings of many of these partner organizations, helping to equip other members of the school family with the communication skills they need.

MSPRA'S professional development activities mirror the goals and objectives of NSPRA.

- MSPRA is the go-to organization for strategic communication.
- MSPRA is a leader in the use of technology to advance education through responsible communication.
- MSPRA provides valuable services and resources to our members to help them acquire and sharpen the skills they need to:
  - ✓ plan and implement an effective public relations program.
  - ✓ be recognized and valued as critical members of school/district leadership teams.

Our workshops, sessions and speakers are chosen to build the abilities of our members and members of the school family. Every contest entry helps advance the use of the RACE (RPIE) formula as well as shine a bright light on our profession and excellent communication practices.

Through purposeful planning and expert implementation, our chapter works to elevate the role of school communication, the skill of our members (and their co-workers) and the value we each bring to our schools and communities.

## The 2016 Annual MSPRA Conference

This year, MSPRA held its annual two-day conference [\*“Fine Tune your Communication Skills”\*](#) on March 17 and 18, 2016 at Weber’s Inn Conference Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A total of [70 people](#) including presenters, members, vendors and interested others attended the conference.

We promoted the annual conference with series of electronic messages to members and interested others. There were conference teaser and registration reminder emails ([see sample](#)) that included an attached [conference registration form](#) and a link to MSPRA’s website.

## Unique Features

These unique features were part of MSPRA’s 2016 Annual Conference:

- 1) Brian Woodland, APR, Director of Communications and Community Relations, Peel District School Board, was our keynote speaker and a break-out session speaker, both on Thursday. During his keynote address, Brian shared an updated version of his 2015 NSPRA keynote message entitled: *“Fine Tune Your Skills.”* During the break-out session, Brian taught us about *“Building or Breaking the Image of Public Education and Career Tech!”*
- 2) On Friday, our keynote speaker Larry Johnson, Executive Director of Public Safety and Security for Grand Rapids Public Schools and President of the National Association of School Safety and Law Enforcement Officials, schooled us on how to *“Be Ready for Anything.”*
- 3) We had [four sponsors](#) for this year’s conference: SchoolMessenger, LunchTray, Blackboard and Foxbright. Again this year, our sponsors and their displays were in the same meeting room as our large group sessions, which gave them convenient access to our members. Plus, two of our sponsors shared presentations on critical issues.
- 4) Our presenters brought us international, national, as well state communication perspectives, helping us view our work in the context of the bigger picture.

## The Annual Conference—Day One

The annual conference convened with our first keynote speaker, Brian Woodland, APR, Director of Communications and Community Relations, Peel District School Board. During his presentation, Brian shared an updated version of his 2015 NSPRA keynote message entitled: [\*“Fine Tune Your Skills.”\*](#) Humorous video clips and country songs helped carry his message that we are professionals who need to be trusted (but not always liked). We need to love unpopularity, get our APR, be the expert, and stand for something. He also noted that Twitter is a conversation (not a technology) that’s happening with or without us.

After Brian’s presentation, we held a “Jam Session,” breaking up into interactive, roundtable discussions, diving deeper into these main points from Brian’s presentation: Using Video, Community Conversations, Branding, [Leadership and Ethics](#), Awards, APR and customer service. Getting your APR was one of the most popular round tables.

At lunch, we held an MSPRA Business Meeting. President Micki O’Neil presented the association’s [Annual Report](#), highlighted the winners of the 2015 MSPRA Communication Contest and promoted the opening of the 2016 Communication Contest. We also reminded participants about [FRED](#) (Free Resources for Educators), a password-protected site stocked with free resources for Michigan educators. The file system allows for an exchange of

information among superintendents, school administrators and school communicators. Plus, we encouraged participants to submit stories to [InspirED Michigan](#), an online magazine designed to share stories of innovation, inspiration and hope happening every day in Michigan's public schools.

After lunch, we remained in a large group to learn about election and campaign finance laws from Mark McInerney, Clark Hill, PLC. Recent legislative changes and a subsequent court injunction made for an interesting presentation on [“Election Laws: What Can Schools Do?”](#) Mark also included a handout on [Acceptable and Unacceptable Conduct](#). Note: After the conference, Mark amended some his comments in a [follow-up email](#). Mark's comments were followed by “*Election Tips*” from three MSPRA members: Tom Gould, Diane Bauman, APR, and Judy Evola, APR. Each spoke briefly about their most recent elections and their recommended strategies for information campaigns.

We then convened two sets of three (6 total) break-out sessions for the remainder of the afternoon. The first set of three break-out sessions included:

[“Tips to Make your Program Sing”](#) presented by members Karen Heath, Tom Gould, and Anne Cron, APR, was targeted to newer public relations professionals and contained excellent tips for getting your program started, using social media, and working with the media.

Brian Woodland, APR, presented [“You've Got the Power—Building or Breaking the Image of Public Education and Career Tech!”](#) He focused on customer service and giving audiences customer-friendly information. Brian reminded us that parents want information they can digest while waiting for the microwave—not the crock pot.

MSPRA's 2015 Gold Medallion Winner and former School PR professional Nicole Malak, taught us about [“Digital Marketing Planning”](#) from her new perspective as a Digital Account Executive with the Graham Media Group. Nicole shared tips and strategies on advertising, having a recognizable brand, and succeeding in the ever-changing reality of technology.

The second set of three break-out sessions included:

[“Leveraging Small Town Resources for BIG City Impact”](#) featured a trio of talented MSPRA members who came together as a team to successfully pass a Headlee Restoration Millage. Holly McCaw, Tom Scheidel and Joni VanNieuwenhuyzen told us how they combined forces to help the students and schools in their county garner the community support they needed.

One of our vendors, Jen Osborn from Foxbright, presented critical information on [“Websites that Top the Charts and Meet ADA Compliance Laws.”](#) Now that some Michigan school district websites—and the Michigan Department of Education's website—have been flagged for non-compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Jen gave us great tips for how all of us can meet the ADA requirements.

And, finally, Veronica Gracia-Wing, from Piper & Gold Public Relations presented a session on [“Making and Posting Movie Clips That Rock.”](#) In this visual world, it's important to tell your school's story both in images, as well as words. Veronica offered tips on how to effectively do just that.



We then adjourned our formal agenda and transitioned to the evening's activities.

### **MSPRA Annual Conference Evening Networking Event**

At our annual MSPRA Conference, we start early and learn late, but take a break in the evening for building our relationships. Goals for the evening are for fun, but also connection. The more our members—who come from across the state—connect with each other, the broader their professional networks grow. And, professional networks are key to successful careers. In addition, we want to showcase our conference location, so activities have ranged from a museum after-hours tour to a live theatre performance to a special dinner venue.

This year, our conference hotel was close to three restaurants unique to Ann Arbor, Michigan. We offered participants an opportunity to [sign-up](#) for the establishment of their choice and an MSPRA Board member accompanied each group to that dining location.

Then, we returned to the hotel for *March Madness* hosted by Blackboard. We enjoyed desserts and beverages, networked and watched a March Madness basketball game on a flat screen TV.

### **The Annual Conference—Day Two**

We began our second morning with [guided conversations](#) on seven *Crisis Communication* topics: Death of a Student or Staff member, Staff Misconduct, (Threat of) School Violence, Transportation Incident or Accident, Tweetgate (Social Media Gone Bad), Drugs in Schools (including OTC Misuse), and Crisis Du Jour: (Don't Drink the Water). Each of these table talks was facilitated by an MSPRA Board member.

These small group discussions, primed our thinking for Friday's keynote speaker: Larry Johnson, Executive Director of Public Safety and Security for Grand Rapids Public Schools and President of the National Association of School Safety and Law Enforcement Officials.

During his presentation, "*Be Ready for Anything*," Larry challenged us to make sure our district has a comprehensive school safety plan with someone placed in charge of it. He said to update it annually with the right people included in its development. He instructed us to learn incident command and how it connects with law enforcement. He told us to get to know the PIO of the police/sheriff department. And, he recommended using table-top exercises to help with emergency preparedness. He also told us to carry paper copies of our crisis manual—because the power can go out. He has four copies of his district's crisis manual: one in his car, one in his office, one at home, and one in a bag that he carries, so that he can always access it.

Out last presentation of the conference, "*TCPA: Hold the Phone! Telephone Consumer Protection Act*" was offered by another vendor, Jeremy Dobberstein from SchoolMessenger. Jeremy helped us understand how the most recent TCPA ruling impacts our parent communication. He covered how we need to get consent in writing. He also noted that consent refers to the called party NOT the intended recipient.

After Jeremy's presentation, the conference adjourned. Attendees went back to their districts feeling energized, connected, and better equipped to manage their work for the remainder of the school year.

## The Annual Conference—In Conclusion

In summary, at our 2016 Annual Conference, we offered participants four large-group sessions on: 1) Fine Tuning Their Skills, 2) Election Laws: What Schools Can and Can't Do, 3) Being Ready for Anything, and the 4) Telephone Consumer Protection Act. We gave participants their choice of six break-out sessions on tips for making their program sing, building the image of public education and career and tech education, digital marketing planning, leveraging resources, websites that are ADA compliant, and making and posting movie clips that rock. We also introduced them to four vendors. And, we provided opportunities for formal and informal exchange of ideas through 14 different facilitated round table discussions; three hosted sign-up dinners; and one March Madness gathering for relaxing and networking.

Overall, [conference evaluations](#) were very positive with most sessions rated either very useful or somewhat useful.

Some of the comments included:

- “THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU for all your work and planning to make this event happen. I go home feeling energized and ready to try so many new ideas.”
- “This was so helpful. As a new school PR person, it was so nice to know I'm not alone and meet the other people out there doing the same thing I am.”
- “Well done! The conference was extremely well organized and careful thought was placed on the discussion topics.”

We also gleaned some suggestions to improve our next professional development offering.

- “Have a later start on the first day.”
- “Continue to rotate the conference around the state. I think we have a larger draw when participants find it's close to their work/home location.”

## MSPRA's 2015-2016 Drive-In Conferences

This past year, MSPRA also held two Drive-In Conferences. The [first one](#) was on June 25, 2015, at The Perry Hotel in Petoskey, Michigan. It was designed with [two distinct offerings](#). Attendees could register for one or both sessions:

Morning Session: “*Comply with the New FOIA Requirements*”

Presenters Brad Banasik, Legal Counsel and Director of Labor Relations, Michigan Association of School Boards and Attorney Jennifer K. Johnston of Thrun Law Firm, P.C. helped participants sort out the latest Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) law changes and the related posting requirements.

Afternoon Session: “*Communication Across Generations*”

Presenter Nancy Anne Colflesh, Ph.D., Educational Consultant and Leadership Coach, shared the characteristics of each generation in the workplace and ways to help maximize this diversity for retaining teachers, staff, and administrators in our schools.

During the sessions, more than [30 participants](#) discovered how to: navigate the latest FOIA requirements as well as decipher the best way to work with different generations, all while in the picturesque, northern location of Petoskey, Michigan.

Reactions to the June 25<sup>th</sup> drive-in conference were very positive, like the following post in the 6/26/2015 SCN Encourager: “There’s nothing like a little ‘FYI’ time in charming Petoskey... especially with a state mandated July 1 deadline looming. But thanks to...the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA)...the pent-up anxiety felt by many school communicators due to Michigan’s new Freedom of Information Act “website posting” requirements was reduced considerably. MSPRA’s summer drive-in conference on June 25 reviewed the ins and outs of the FOIA mandate from A to Z with attorneys Brad Banasik from MASB and Jennifer Johnston from Thrun Law guiding the way.”

MSPRA’s [second drive-in conference](#) was on October 29, 2015 with Shane Haggerty, Director of Marketing and Technology at Tolles Career and Technical Education Center in Plain City, OH. More than [50 participants](#) attended this full day [Social Media Action Lab](#) that included two parts. The morning session, “*Next Level Social Media*,” was patterned after the pre-workshop Shane presented at NSPRA in 2015. He demonstrated how social media is a way to support our overall strategy and district goals. In the afternoon session, “*Taking Action: Implementing and Integrating Your Next Level Social Media Strategy*,” he gave participants [tips to integrate social media strategy](#) into their communication plans by aligning content with district goals and targeting key constituent groups through mini-campaigns. He also gave us advanced tips on managing the school’s on-line reputation and measuring results.

[Evaluations](#) were also very positive for this drive-in conference.

## **MSPRA's Annual Communication Contest**

MSPRA provides opportunities for people who direct communication and public relations programs to:

- attend conferences and workshops designed to enhance skills in personal and organizational communication.
- exchange ideas and strategies with specialists from other school districts.

One of the best ways to exchange ideas and strategies is through [MSPRA's Communication Contest](#) for Publications, Campaigns and Electronic Media. Each year, MSPRA invites schools throughout Michigan to submit their best programs, campaigns, and communication products for a juried review. Product categories range from writing to print and interactive-media publications. In 2015, we had a total of 35 contest entries. Last year, MSPRA transitioned to an online contest entry format using a commercial product called Reviewr. As a Board, we were impressed by the product and customer service responsiveness. Overall, members were pleased with the product and process. The only real issue was the ability to make online payments, which wasn't possible last year. There were a total of 21 [Communication Contest winners](#): Nine Distinguished and 12 Commendable Awards.

## **MSPRA's Gold Medallion Award**

MSPRA's Gold Medallion Award recognizes outstanding programs or projects that advance responsible school communication. Entries may come from public and private schools, education agencies, regional MSPRA groups, and any public relations agency or private business serving education entities. In 2015, we had one recipient. Kent ISD won for its "*Roots of Reading Success Video Series*," submitted by Katie McClintic.

## **MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award**

MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award recognizes a superintendent for leadership in school district communication. Our winner for 2015 was Dr. Richard Machesky of the Troy School District in Troy, Michigan. We were pleased to learn that Dr. Machesky was recently chosen as one of NSPRA's Superintendents to Watch.

## Other examples of increasing PR visibility and providing PR training

MSPRA members presented at other conferences and worked with school districts on the importance of good public relations and planned communication. Examples include:

1. Members Holly McCaw, Tom Scheidel and Joni VanNieuwenhuyzen shared their knowledge and experience in October at the Michigan Association of School Boards' Annual Leadership Conference by presenting "*Leveraging Small Town Resources for BIG City Impact*" to an audience of school board members. They explained how they came to together as a team to successfully pass a Headlee Restoration Millage to help the students and schools in their county garner the community support they needed.
2. MSPRA Executive Director, Gerri Allen, facilitated a half-day communication planning session for the Career and Technical Education staff at Lenawee Intermediate School District on August 24<sup>th</sup>.
3. On behalf of the MSPRA Board, Executive Director, Gerri Allen, wrote an article on [Crisis Communication](#) for the spring 2016 issue of *Leader Board magazine*, the official publication of the Michigan Association of School Boards.

### Other Professional Development Activities

- This year, we encouraged and celebrated two new APR recipients: Anne Cron, APR, of Birmingham Public Schools and Jacqueline Robinson, APR, of Southfield Public Schools.
- We used conference calls as well as in-person sessions for our board meetings, thus promoting electronic media use.
- We also conducted a Member [Professional Development Survey](#) in December 2105 to assist in planning future professional development opportunities.

These are excellent examples of MSPRA's professional development efforts that occur throughout the year, in addition to its conference offerings.

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[Note: If any of the links in this document are broken, you can find all of the materials posted at <http://www.mspra.org/resources/nspra-2016-mark-of-distinction-award/>

These links will remain live until at least 07/29/17. Thank you.]

**Thank you for this opportunity to document and submit our professional development programs and activities. -- The Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA)**