

NSPRA 2018

Mark of Distinction

Award Application

for

Professional Development and Skill Building

by the

Michigan School Public Relations Association



Submitted on May 15, 2018

**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: Kristin Tank

President's contact information

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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: Kristin M. Tank

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, 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 _____
-

X **Section II: Special Focus Areas**

- X Category A – chapter has less than 50% NSPRA membership
- Category B – chapter has 50% or more NSPRA membership

X 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

2018 National School Public Relations Association Mark of Distinction Award Application

This year, the [Michigan School Public Relations Association](#) (MSPRA) is submitting two entries, one under Section II: Special Focus Areas: **Professional Development/PR Skill-Building** and one under Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication Efforts.

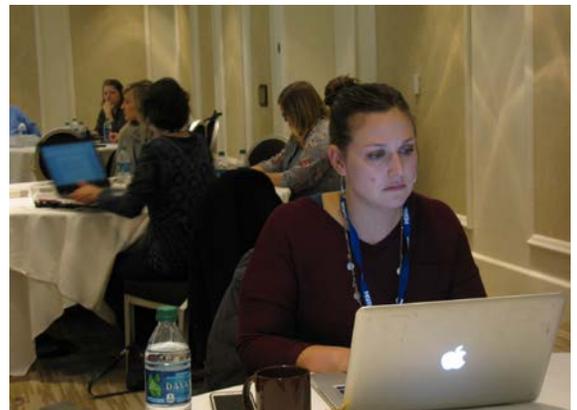
Section II: Special Focus Areas

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 five examples of professional growth support: A) MSPRA's Annual Conference, B) Two drive-in conferences, C) The Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award, D) The Gerri Allen School Communicator of the Year Award, and E) Other examples of public relations training provided by MSPRA members on behalf of MSPRA.

This entry documents and shows 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 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 awards (page 10)
- 5) Identification of target audience and participation/attendance (pages 4, 8 and 9)
- 6) Documentation/demonstration of measurable outcomes, effectiveness and success of the program/activity (See annual conference evaluation link and drive-in conference evaluation links 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 11)



Jessica Stilger participates in the 2018 Annual Conference.

Michigan School Public Relations Association

Overview of MSPRA Professional Development & Skill-Building Activities

The Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) devotes much of its human and financial capital to professional development and skill building. The results are some of the best available communication and public relations training. The consistent, high quality of our effort helps our members be better communicators, aids in member retention, and drives conference attendance and participation.

Our primary professional development activities are:

- Our spring Annual Conference, which offers two days of intensive skill-building sessions, networking and learning.
- Our drive-in conferences that feature timely, topical training with expert speakers to equip members with knowledge and skills.
- Our Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award to recognize the critical role of communication at the top of our organizations.
- Our Outstanding School Communicator Award to recognize front-line practitioners.
- Our Gold Medallion Award that recognizes member skills and encourages sharing of high-quality projects and programs. (No awards were given this year.)

The MSPRA Executive Board appoints a board member to manage these Professional Development initiatives: the Annual Conference, the Communication Awards, Membership networking activities and APR Certification. Typically, an additional 1-3 board members are either conference co-chairs, assist with the awards, or help coordinate drive-in conferences. Again this year, we recruited several MSPRA members to serve on our Professional Development Committee, giving them statewide experience/exposure while giving our Annual Conference statewide input. It was a positive growth opportunity for all involved.

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 who are veterans.
- 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 (NSPRA) Seminar. This year, both our Annual Conference final keynote speaker, CALSPRA member Trinette Marquis-Hobbs, APR, and our Fall Drive-in Conference presenter, Adrienne Leon, APR, of NYSPRA, were also NSPRA presenters.



Trinette Marquis-Hobbs, APR, makes a point at the 2018 Annual Conference.

And, MSPRA's Communication Awards aim to:

- Affirm school districts' communication efforts.
- Elevate exceptional communication programs, products and practitioners.
- Encourage best practices among those providing communication services in Michigan's public schools.

Together, MSPRA's Communication Awards, Annual Conference and 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 180 registrants (members and non-members), speakers and sponsors who attended our three conferences.

Evaluations from all these activities are mined for improvement ideas and suggestions. 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.

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 seminars, sessions and speakers are chosen to build the abilities of our members and members of the school family. Our last two conferences were specifically advertised as building on the RPIE process to improve our communication practices.

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



We thank our sponsors: Blackboard, West, Foxbright and Finalsite. Three are pictured here at the Annual Conference with Sponsor Chair Kelly Allen (second from left).

The 2018 Annual MSPRA Conference

This year, MSPRA held its annual two-day conference “*The RPIE Process—the Gold Standard for School Communication*” on March 15 and 16, 2018 at the H Hotel in Midland, Michigan. Nearly [70 people](#) including presenters, members, vendors and interested others attended the conference.

We promoted the annual conference with a series of electronic messages to members and others. There were conference-teaser and registration-reminder emails that included a registration link. We also mailed a [postcard](#) to members.

Unique Features

These unique features were part of MSPRA’s 2018 Annual Conference:

- 1) Deputy State Superintendent, Sheila Alles, was our opening keynote speaker on Thursday. She shared “Making Michigan a Top Ten in Ten State.”
- 2) On Friday, our final keynote presentation with CALSPRA member Trinette Marquis-Hobbs, APR, answered the question: “How Do School Communicators Impact Student Growth?”
- 3) We had four sponsors this year: Blackboard, West (formerly SchoolMessenger), Foxbright, and Finalsite. Our sponsors and their displays were in the same meeting room as our large-group sessions, which gave them convenient access to our members. We instituted a new [sponsorship menu](#) (adapted from Ohio’s model) that worked well.
- 4) Our presenters brought us national, as well as state and local communication perspectives, helping us view our work in the context of the bigger picture.
- 5) For the first time, we had an app for the conference. It was designed by Blackboard as part of its Platinum sponsorship. It received good reviews from conference attendees.

The Annual Conference—Day One

The annual conference convened with our first General Session speaker, Sheila Alles, Chief Deputy Superintendent for the Michigan Department of Education. During her presentation, Sheila explained how we can help: [“Make Michigan a Top Ten in Ten State.”](#)

After Sheila’s presentation, we learned how to [“Make Cents out of Treasury... What Every School Communicator Should Know about the Department of Treasury”](#) with Danelle Gittus, APR, Communication Division; Mike Wrobel and Sarah Spitzley, Community Engagement and Finance Division.

Our Outstanding Superintendent Communicator of the Year Erin MacGregor and Tom Gould (one of NSPRA’s 35 under 35) both from Howell Public Schools delivered the third General Session presentation: [“Innovative Tactics to Increase Communication.”](#)

At lunch, we recognized our sponsors “pinning” them with gold and silver medals as part of our new sponsorship system. And, we heard from NSPRA Vice President and MSPRA Board



Chief Deputy Superintendent for the Michigan Department of Education Sheila Alles shares the plan for making Michigan a Top Ten in Ten State.

Member Tom Scheidel about the national conference. The membership committee reminded attendees about the late afternoon Peer-to-Peer Networking event and taking a brief survey on attending conferences.

After lunch, we broke up into four sets of three (each was repeated once) break-out sessions.

They included:

Session I-A and II A

[Student-Lead CTE Marketing Campaign](#): Michael Crawford, Marketing and Visual Design Communication Teacher and Julie Root, Genesee Career Institute

Session I-B and II B

[Crisis Communication](#): Kristin Tank, Public Information Officer, and Rick Witham, Communications Project Specialist, Muskegon Area Intermediate School District

Session I-C and II C

[School Finance Research Collaborative](#): Diane Byrum of Byrum & Fisk; Ron Koehler, APR, Kent Intermediate School District and Past President of MSPRA and NSPRA

Session III-D and IV D

[Creating an Onboarding Process for your District](#): Dr. Amanda Holdsworth, APR, Director of Communication Services for Oakland Schools and Kim Medlock, Communications and Marketing Consultant for Jackson Intermediate School District

Session III-E and IV D

[Social Media Archiving: What is Really Required?](#): Attorneys Meg Hackett and Cristina Patzelt, Thrun Law Firm

Session III-F and IV F

[Surveys and Focus Groups: What They Can and Cannot Tell You](#)

Garth Kriewall, Supervisor for Communications and Graphics, St. Clair County Regional Education Service Agency



Garth Kriewall notes the power of surveys and focus groups.

We reconvened in a large group for a special session: [Talking About Walking Out](#) to debrief with other school communicators about student safety-related protests including the March for Our Lives: National School Walkout on March 14th. We also discussed staff demonstrations. Representatives from Thrun Law Firm were there to answer questions.

Before dinner we held a Peer Mentor Networking Reception with light appetizers.

At dinner, we pinned our Blackboard Platinum Sponsor and thanked them for dinner.

We also held the Annual MSPRA Business Meeting. President Kristin Tank presented the association’s [Annual Report](#), highlighted the chapter’s health and its professional development offerings, along with its overall successes and challenges. The Awards and Recognition Committee honored the first recipient of *The Gerri Allen Outstanding Communicator Award*—Michelle Ready from Ottawa Area Intermediate School District.

We then adjourned our formal agenda and transitioned to networking activities.

MSPRA Annual Conference Evening Networking Event

The after-dinner activity was dedicated to building relationships. Our goals for the event emphasized fun, but also the need to make connections. 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 like to showcase our conference location.

On this evening, a member of our professional development committee worked with the local Chamber of Commerce to arrange a walking scavenger hunt in downtown. Three teams of MSPRA attendees competed to find locations based on clues and then find answers to questions posed about those locations. The scavenger hunters had to bring back artifacts from the locations or take selfies at the location to prove they had been there. As they worked through the clues on a blustery, mid-March night, participants were warmed by teamwork, camaraderie and the adrenaline rush of a fun challenge.

The Annual Conference—Day Two

We began our Friday morning with General Session IV: “[Leveraging Local Resources to Prevent Suicide and Promote Mental Wellness](#)” featuring Kim Thalison, Prevention Services Supervisor for Eaton Regional Education Service Agency and Nancy Buyle, School Safety/Student Assistance Consultant for Macomb Intermediate School District.

Our final keynote presentation was “[How Do School Communicators Impact Student Growth? Using Data to Promote your District and YOU!](#)” with Trinette Marquis-Hobbs, APR, Partner and Chief Communicator for SchoolPRPro, Sacramento, California.

After closing remarks, the conference adjourned. Attendees returned home feeling more connected and better equipped to manage their work.



Nancy Buyle, School Safety/Student Assistance Consultant, advises us on how to help promote mental wellness.

The Annual Conference—Attendee Reactions

More than half of the nearly 70 attendees (37) evaluated their conference experience. Based on their comments, it was a success. From discovering how to help Michigan become a *Top 10 in 10 State* to learning about how school communicators impact student growth, we covered it all and still managed to enjoy some job-alike therapy.

[Conference evaluations](#), overall, were very positive with either very useful or somewhat useful rankings. Some of the written comments included:

- *Structurally, this year's conference was about as good as it gets. Midland H Hotel was wonderful. The one-site package was convenient.*
- *Personally, it's always a bad week for me but I'll always find a way to make it. Don't want to miss it.*
- *Thank you for offering this wonderful opportunity to learn more. All sessions were helpful and beneficial to me in my role, and I feel that I gained some very useful insights.*
- *I gleaned great information from the sessions I was able to attend, however, I was sad I could only come for part of Thursday. In addition to district communications and many other hats, preparing documents and packets for Board of Education meetings are part of my position. We had a Board meeting last night, which I was in the middle of preparing for last Thursday and Friday.*
- *Fantastic job!*
- *The hotel and staff were wonderful. The presenters were very knowledgeable and friendly. It was a wonderful conference.*
- *Can't wait for next year! It's a great group!*

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

- *It seems like being away from the district for two days is difficult for most, as shown by the number of attendees walking in and out of sessions to take calls. I wonder if it would be possible to hold the conference on a Friday/Saturday or Sunday/Monday to limit some of this.*
- *We need to have a few breaks incorporated into the day, morning especially since there were two keynotes in a row.*
- *Offer a variety of sessions at different times - seems the three I wanted to attend were all at 2 times...*
- *More mainstream food options and more snacks (maybe protein based, like yogurt, nuts, jerkey, etc). More breakouts, too.*
- *Can we add more time to the day so there's time for more sessions, lol?*

MSPRA's 2017 Drive-in Conferences

June Drive-in Conference:

We received many requests to offer additional training about ADA compliance after our December 2016 Drive-In on Building ADA Compliant Websites. So, MSPRA held an [ADA Compliance Action Lab](#) on Thursday, June 29 at Ingham Intermediate School District in Mason, Michigan. It was sponsored and presented by Foxbright, a website developer and host service that works with MSPRA and school districts across the state. Participants didn't need to be Foxbright clients to participate. It was promoted in several ways including a [website posting](#) and mentions in the MSPRA Minute (our weekly electronic communication to members).



Andrew Munson and Waseem Hammoud attend the ADA Compliance Drive-In.

During the day-long session, [65 participants](#) learned how to produce [documents that comply](#) with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) plus they had time to work on their own documents with the help of the Foxbright experts.

To make the most of their experience, registrants were encouraged to bring their laptop and electronic versions of the documents they wished to make compliant.

[Evaluations](#) were positive. More than 80% of those who completed the evaluation rated the day-long session overall as either very or somewhat useful. About 20% of those in attendance who completed the evaluation rated themselves as not very knowledgeable on the topic.

Some of the written comments included:

The best thing about the ADA Compliance Action Lab was....

- *Solid instructions for using the [compliance tools within the Office suite](#).*
- *Lots of opportunities to ask questions.*
- *The overview of the requirements to make documents and websites accessible was very useful. The information presented during the first session was excellent.*

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

- *More helpers available to assist with questions during the lab portion of the day.*
- *More guidance for InDesign compliance.*
- *Our district is moving toward an all Google district. Using Google sites, Google Docs, Google Drive, Gmail, Google Classroom etc. It would be great to have a class that covers all of those.*

October Drive-in Conference:

Our second drive-in conference was on October 26, 2017 at the Michigan Educational Leadership Group in Lansing, Michigan. Adrienne Leon, APR, from New York (who spoke at NSPRA in 2017) was our presenter.

To promote this conference we sent a [postcard](#) to members, shared it with our sister

associations, posted it on the [MSPRA website](#), shared it on the group Facebook page and sent it out as an MSPRA Minute (our weekly electronic member communication).

During the day-long session entitled “[Communication Plan Action Lab](#)” some [50 participants](#) learned about what a [communication plan](#) should include, how to write it using the RPIE process, how to align it with the district’s strategic plan, and how to measure success.

Adrienne also gave us a handy [communication planning chart](#) and helpful [research resources](#).

[Evaluations](#) were very positive. More than 80% of those who completed the evaluation rated the day-long session overall as very useful. More than 40% of those in attendance who completed the evaluation rated themselves as not very knowledgeable on the topic.

Some of the written comments included:

The best thing about the Communication Plan Action Lab was....

- *Adrienne's hands-on, real-life experience greatly enhanced [her presentation](#)! RPIE is not an easy subject to wrap your head around and she did an excellent job of breaking it down. Her examples made the concepts much easier to understand and apply.*
- *Being able to work one on one with the presenter on my own plan.*
- *I appreciate the opportunity to be among other school pr professionals hearing their struggles are similar to ours and learning from them.*
- *I really like the location and I also like the Action Lab component. My team was able to create a real life example in the afternoon.*

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

- *I think a little more structured time and space for networking. The room was tight and hard to move around in.*
- *Make it longer! I would love to have spent more time working in small groups and on my own.*

MSPRA’s Peer Review is under Review

MSPRA provides opportunities for practitioners 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.



Attendees learned much from MSPRA presenters in 2017-18.

The MSPRA Awards and Recognition Committee had scheduled its second Peer Review Breakout Session for the March 2018 conference. Reviewers and reviewees were to have a separate time that would not compete with any other breakout sessions to discuss publications, videos and digital communication. However, due to lack of registrants for the special session, combined with our conference occurring the day after the March 14th Walkouts, it was decided to use that time to debrief about the Walkouts. The committee plans to re-evaluate the Peer Review concept to see if there are other options that will better meet member needs.

MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award



Superintendent Erin MacGregor received his surprise award in October.

MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award recognizes a superintendent for leadership in school district communication.

Our winner for 2017 was Erin MacGregor of Howell Public Schools in Howell, Michigan. Superintendent MacGregor's award was presented by Gerri Allen, MSPRA's Executive Director, at a Howell School Board meeting in October 2017.

He was a featured speaker, along with Howell's Director of Communication Services, Tom Gould (one of NSPRA's 35 under 35), at MSPRA's 2018 Annual Conference.

MSPRA's Gerri Allen Outstanding School Communicator Award

This MSPRA award honors a practicing school public relations professional for his or her daily work and contributions to the field.

Named for long-time school public relations professional and current MSPRA Executive Director, the Gerri Allen Outstanding School Communicator Award is designed to allow MSPRA members and non-members to nominate deserving MSPRA members.

Michelle Ready was recognized as its first recipient in a surprise presentation at an Ottawa Area Intermediate School District Board meeting in September 2017.



Michelle received the award from NSPRA and MSPRA Board Member Tom Scheidel.

Other Examples of Increasing PR Visibility and Providing PR Training

Between May 1, 2017 and April 30, 2018, MSPRA members presented at other conferences and worked with school districts on the importance of good public relations and planned communication. Examples include:

1. On May 16, 2017, MSPRA member Kalli Zielbauer, Grand Rapids Public Schools, participated in a panel discussion on “Rebuilding your Brand” at the Michigan Association of School Boards’ Communication Conference: [Changing the Perception of Your District](#).
2. On October 24, 2017, MSPRA member Holly McCaw, Otsego Public Schools, presented at the [Executive Assistants EDGE Program](#). She delivered a session on “*Communications and Social Media*” in the morning (repeated in the afternoon) to help administrative professionals use social networks to communicate more effectively.
3. On January 18, 2018, two MSPRA members, Rebecca Fannon, Grosse Pointe Public Schools and Kristen Ledford, Fraser Public Schools, presented on [Connecting Teacher Leaders to Advocate for Sound Educational Policy](#) by building an effective communication plan; building relationships with policy makers; and keeping district leaders in the loop.
4. On April 17, 2018 two MSPRA members, Keely Baribeau, Port Huron Area Schools and Tom Gould, Howell Public Schools, presented at the [2018 Annual Michigan School Business Officials Conference](#), sharing techniques and strategies to send clear messages, create credibility, and develop strategic communication programs. Also, MSPRA member Holly McCaw, Otsego Public Schools, repeated her popular “Communications and Social Media” session at this event.

Other Professional Development Activities

This year, we continued our email listserv, the [MSPRA Minute](#) (our weekly electronic member communication), closed Facebook group, and Peer-to-Peer Networking Program.

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

[Note: If any of the links in this document are broken, or if you have difficulty accessing them, please contact Gerri Allen at gallen48@juno.com. These links will remain live until at least 07/31/18. Thank you.]

**Thank you for the consideration and
opportunity to submit this
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