



National School Public Relations Association Mark of Distinction Recognition Program

2020 Application

Illinois Chapter of the School Public Relations Association | inspra.org

Section II – Special Focus Areas

The INSPRATIONS state conference provides a high quality, low-cost opportunity for school communicators across Illinois to engage in a full day of professional development. The inaugural event, held in November 2019, featured eight sessions led by local INSPRA members who had expertise in critical issues including crisis communications and community engagement. The professional conference provided nearly 350 hours of professional development opportunities for its 67 attendees.

Overview

The INSPRATIONS conference was created with three primary goals in mind:

- (1) to provide a more accessible professional development opportunity for INSPRA members, especially those who work/reside in Illinois counties that are underrepresented in the organization;
- (2) to provide opportunities for INSPRA members to present before a large group of professional colleagues and receive experience and feedback on their presentation; and
- (3) to increase the number of INSPRA members.

Date: Friday, November 15, 2019

Location: Northern Illinois University – Hoffman Estates

Attendees: Sixty-seven attendees, including school communications professionals, superintendents, students, and education foundation board members participated in the state conference.

Format: Two education tracks (tactics and campaigns) were offered through hands-on and interactive sessions. There were eight sessions offered, each 60 minutes in length, plus networking opportunities with like-districts in the afternoon. A continental breakfast and common lunch were included in the event.

Background

In Illinois, the majority of INSPRA districts are located within the northern portion of the state. In an effort to reach out to school districts in central and southern Illinois, INSPRA established an annual “Road to Normal” workshop. During the Road to Normal, INSPRA members would travel to Normal, Illinois to participate in the workshop, making it more convenient for those in the less served areas of the state to attend in person. Over the years, the participation in the downstate workshop decreased.

Although the decision was made to cancel the Road to Normal program, there was still a desire by the INSPRA Board to reach out to and serve its downstate districts.

In addition, INSPRA moved its monthly professional development workshops to a location further west to address some logistic and financial concerns. This made the monthly travel time a bit longer for the attendees in the association's heavily populated northern region.

Finally, a number of INSPRA members presented highly regarded sessions at the national NSPRA conference. It was important for the INSPRA Board to highlight the local expertise of its membership to 1) build pride among current membership and entice new members to join; 2) build a strong network of local resources for members; and 3) give members who want to present nationally—but want to perfect their presentation in a “friendly” environment—confidence and feedback.

To address these considerations and add value to memberships in a profitable manner, the INSPRA state conference was developed.

Although our downstate members (and potential members) may not have been able to dedicate the long travel time to participate in INSPRA's monthly 3-hour workshops in person, a full day, multi-session event on a Friday seemed to be a more realistic option.

The selected conference location was in the northern suburbs of Chicago to be closer to where the majority of INSPRA members live and work. The conference center, located in Hoffman Estates, was in an area that had multiple hotel options for those traveling to the conference from downstate who needed lodging. Because of its proximity to nearby states, the INSPRA conference was also a viable professional development opportunity for those in neighboring chapters (WSPRA, INDSpra, and MSPRA).

The educational sessions were built upon the expertise that has been developed by INSPRA members throughout their careers. INSPRA wanted to showcase their expertise, encourage knowledge sharing with early careerists, and provide these members the opportunity not only to present, but to also receive constructive feedback. The presenters gained confidence and it encouraged them to explore speaking opportunities at other local and national events.

Educational Sessions

Sessions were identified and categorized as either a “campaign” or “tactic,” and attendees were able to follow sessions in a single track or mix and match sessions based on their interests. Attendees learned practical takeaways in the tactic track, including improving presentation skills, creating data dashboards, storytelling with video, and streamlining tasks through apps and services. In the campaign track, presenters shared their successes and best practices in creating a recognition program, managing crisis communications, expanding community engagement events, and navigating political campaigns. These sessions were well received, with 95% of the attendees indicating they were “Very Satisfied” or “Extremely Satisfied.” The culmination of the event was a networking discussion with participants meeting together with those in like districts (unit, elementary, high school) to discuss current issues and topics.

Marketing and Communications Timeline

The idea to revamp the state conference came from feedback on the INSPRA membership survey, as well as the annual summer INSPRA Board planning session held in June. Just as the national organization does, INSPRA regularly assesses needs and feedback of membership in determining professional development offerings, support resources, and networking opportunities.

A dedicated committee developed a detailed plan, timeline, and marketing materials during a 12-week period, from September to November.

The multi-channel marketing campaign included fliers that were announced and distributed at INSPRA events and workshops; emails and social media posts; and word of mouth referrals. The consistent branding relied on vibrant colors to attract attention.

- [Email Message](#)
- [Conference Program](#)
- [Conference Flier](#)
- [Social Media Posts](#)

Sponsors

Blackboard and School Messenger Intrado provided sponsorships at \$1,500 each. One of the initial goals for the conference was to ensure that the registration fee stayed low (\$50, which included a continental breakfast and lunch) to encourage members from all parts of the state could afford to attend, so these sponsorship dollars were especially vital to the measurement of success.

Metrics and Measurement to Success

The overall satisfaction of the event was extremely high, with 95% of the attendees indicating they were “Satisfied” or “Extremely Satisfied.” “I believe this event was a great success. It shows the caliber of people we have in “INSPRA,” wrote one attendee.

INSPRA gained six new members who joined after they attended the INSPRATIONS conference. Several people attended from out of state and provided positive feedback, as noted by a participant who commented, “Great price; great program. I will try to get more of my Wisconsin colleagues to attend.”

The INSPRATIONS committee set a goal of 25 attendees to break even on this event. The Chapter exceeded this goal with 67 attendees. Event participation is expected to increase in future years.

Due to all presenters being willing to present at no charge to the association, and securing two sponsorships, the chapter was able to host a high quality, low-cost event and turn a profit of \$3,300 during its’ first year.

INSPRATIONS Conference and Alignment to NSPRA Goals

The INSPRATIONS state conference complements many of the objectives and goals outlined by the National School Public Relations Association.

Just as the national organization does, INSPRA regularly assesses needs and feedback of membership in determining professional development offerings, requested resources, and membership mentoring/networking needs. The idea to revamp the state conference originated from feedback on the INSPRA membership survey, as well as the annual summer INSPRA Board planning session.

The INSPRATIONS conference was also created to create, develop and highlight the expertise developed by members throughout their careers. INSPRA leadership knows its members are the primary source of expert information and that they possess deep knowledge regarding school public relations. Providing mentorship, knowledge sharing, and networking opportunities during the INSPRATIONS conference ensures that members will continue to develop and share that knowledge with professionals new to the school communications field, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the association.

Finally, the diverse makeup of participants provided many attendees their first exposure to the NSPRA and INSPRA organizations. Attendees learned that the association serves not only school communicators but superintendents, educational foundation board members, and students as well, widening its appeal to a larger future membership base.