

## **Section II: Special Focus Area/Category A**

### **Professional Development/PR Skill-Building**

Of CHESPRA's 123 members, many are one-person or small staff operations with limited budgets that often don't adequately address the professional development needs of Virginia, Maryland and West Virginia's school public relations practitioners. Since 2011, CHESPRA has entered partnerships with key vendors. The goal has been to obtain enough funding to buy down the costs of chapter-sponsored professional development. This commitment undeniably has helped build the membership, from 81 in 2011 to its current level. For the 2013-14 chapter year, \$11,460 was contributed by vendor partners, not including in-kind donations with a value of more than \$6,800. With this much welcome third-party funding, CHESPRA has programmed conferences based on the express needs of members who regularly deal with the public relations issues that are now part and parcel of public education.

#### **Professional Development Goals**

- Encourage increased attendance at the fall and spring conferences by providing valuable professional development. Past conferences had typically recorded attendance in the 30's. The goal was to increase attendance to the range of 50-60 attendees for each conference.
- Recruit enough sponsors to make the cost of attending the twice yearly conferences extremely affordable for members.
- Offer quality programming designed to meet the needs of members and measure the success by issuing a satisfaction survey after each conference.
- Use the affordability of the conferences as a CHESPRA recruiting tool.

#### **Communication/Marketing Strategies and Tactics**

- Surveyed all members regarding topics of interest.
- Recruited presenters reflective of those interests.
- Recruited sponsors in an effort to keep costs low.
- Developed email mailing lists; one a member's list and the second, a list of non-member school public relations practitioners targeted for membership.
- Promoted the conferences on the chapter website, including online registration.
- Made some personal calls to targeted non-members to encourage attendance.
- Differentiated the cost for members and non-members; registration cost for non-members included a membership.
- Designed an electronic promotion campaign that highlighted location and low cost of conference as well as each individual presenter. For 2013-14, 14 electronic ads were sent to current members and prospective members. All sponsorships were highlighted in these ads to

contribute to their visibility (and hopefully to encourage their continued sponsorship). These ads have proved very effective. Since CHESPRA has begun employing them, conference attendance has increased. Following is a brief overview of fall conference and spring conference ads. However, to provide a sense of how they contributed to CHESPRA's marketing success the physical ads accompany this awards submission.

### **Fall Conference ads**

1. Promotion of date and location as well as 2013 Communications Contest
2. *Social Media Next* presentation by Evelyn McCormack, vice president at-large for Technology and Innovation for NSPRA
3. *Effective Issues Management* presentation by Bob Mosier, public information officer, Anne Arundel County Public Schools
4. *When You Can't Erase Bad News* presentation by Bethanne Bradshaw, public information officer, Suffolk Public Schools
5. *Spark Sessions* (roundtable topics)
6. *State breakout sessions* (Maryland and Virginia)
7. Social media reminder ad
8. 2013 Communications Contest reminder ad

### **Spring Conference ads**

1. Promotion of date and location
2. *Strategic Public Relations* presentation by Nora Carr, president of NSPRA
3. *Effective Media Relations* presentation by Mike Mather, investigative reporter, WTKR-TV
4. *Snow days* presentation/group dialogue facilitated by Linda Erdos, assistant superintendent for school and community relations, Arlington Public Schools
5. *Spark Sessions* (roundtable topics)
6. *State breakout sessions* (Maryland and Virginia)

### **Evaluation: Were our professional development goals met?**

- The fall conference recorded a new high for attendance at a CHESPRA conference with 72 attending.
- The spring conference (typically smaller than the fall conference) met the goal with 50 attending.
- Six cash sponsorships totaling \$5,830 and two in-kind contributions of approximately \$3,800 were recruited for the fall conference.
- Seven sponsorships totaling \$5,630 and two in-kind sponsorships totaling approximately \$3,000 were recruited for the spring conference.

- More than 96 percent of those attending the fall conference were very satisfied/satisfied with the seminar topics. Constructive feedback was the roundtables hosted by vendors were somewhat uncomfortable for attendees. This feedback was taken to heart and the presenters for roundtables for the spring conference were all member-led.
- 100 percent of those attending the fall conference were very satisfied/satisfied with the seminar topics. In fact, comments on this conference were particularly good such as: “This was one of the best conferences I have ever attended. Every session was just terrific.”
- Twelve new members were recruited as a direct result of these conferences.

### **Explanation of how program/relates to NSPRA’s Goals and Objectives**

The Chesapeake Chapter of the National School Public Relations Association’s stated professional development goal is very much in line with the approach of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). NSPRA works to provide its members “resources that enable school public relations professionals to learn and expand their expertise.” CHESPRA has borrowed a page out of the NSPRA professional development playbook. In fact, CHESPRA’s stated goal is “to provide its members quality, low-cost professional development that will help school public relations refine and improve their public relations practices to benefit their respective school districts.”

In addition, a major outreach of the fall conference was facilitating a greater understanding of the power of social media. This was accomplished by scheduling Evelyn McCormack, vice president at-large for technology and innovation for NSPRA, as a keynote speaker. This programming was designed to support NSPRA’s goal 2 and objective 4 (and undoubtedly the goal of individual school districts as well): *“Members will use new and emerging technology to expand outreach and engage families and communities in schools.”*

In addition, a keynote speaker at the spring conference was Nora Carr, president of NSPRA. Her topic was “Strategic Communications.” Her superb presentation was in line with NSPRA’s objective 1, under goal 1: *“NSPRA members will have the skills they need to plan and implement an effective public relations program.”* CHESPRA members are well aware that gone are the days when random acts of excellence were enough to fuel success. A strategic public relations program is more than a “must;” it is a survival skill. Nora Carr’s presentation drove that point home successfully.

### **Budget**

\$8,393 for the fall conference

\$6,309 for the spring conference