



Washington School Public Relations Association | Mark of Distinction Entry

Section II: Special Focus Area - Special PR/Communication Program, Project or Campaign section.

Topic Area: One-Time Project/Program

Project Title: 2020 Winter Storytelling Summit: Joint Conference between WSPRA & OSPRA

Summary

For the last several years, WSPRA members have shared through feedback they would like to see a large-scale conference offered. In the summer of 2019, we hatched a plan with our counterparts in Oregon to provide a regional conference. Collaboration began and in February 2020, the two organizations hosted a joint conference in Vancouver, Wa. With more 125 attendees and \$16,750 in sponsorship money, it was the largest event the two organizations have ever hosted for members.

Research

Before any planning took place for the 2019-2020 year began, the WSPRA board conducted a survey of members in May of 2019. Through a variety of questions regarding conference issues, nearly 88% reported being interested or very interested in the topic of storytelling. Survey results also showed members were interested in seeing bigger speakers and larger conferences offered in our region.

Analysis

Based on member feedback and a review of board capacity, the WSPRA board determined it needed to pool resources in order to provide a large scale conference to members. Teaming up with a neighboring NSPRA association was essential in order to meet the needs of our members. By partnering with OSPRA, the two associations could pool financial resources and spread out the planning responsibilities across two boards.

Goal

WSPRA will work with OSPRA to host a joint storytelling conference in February 2020.

Objectives

- At least 115 people will attend the storytelling conference in February 2020.
- WSPRA and OSPRA will secure a Keynote Sponsor at the \$6,000 level.
- WSPRA and OSPRA will secure an Event Social Hour & Banquet Sponsor at the \$4,000.
- WSPRA and OSPRA will secure at least five sponsors at the \$1,000.
- WSPRA and OSPRA will contract a nationally-recognized keynote speaker that specializes in storytelling.
- Feedback from conference attendees will have an average of at least 4 out of 5 stars.

Timeline and Implementation

Planning for the 2020 Winter Storytelling Summit began in June of 2019. This included an initial meeting with OSPRA to determine if a joint conference was feasible, what our overall goals were with planning a joint conference, and an agreement to move forward collaboratively.

At the 2019 NSPRA National Seminar in Washington, D.C., members of the executive boards for both OSPRA and WSPRA outlined key logistical aspects, including time of year for the conference, main planning duties for each

association, and a timeframe for planning meetings leading up to the event. We also took that time to approach vendors to gauge their interest in sponsoring a joint conference and how that might impact them. With that input, we moved forward in developing our [sponsorship opportunities](#). We also created a [MOU for WSPRA and OSPRA](#) that outlined several key terms including managing registration, conference expenses, sponsorship and registration proceeds, and handling of finances. This document will also serve to guide any future collaboration between the associations.

The initial planning group included WSPRA President Jessica Morgan, President-Elect Tove Tupper and Past President Melissa Laramie; and OSPRA President Kara Yunck and Past President Doreen McKercher. All subsequent planning took place by conference call.

In August, we finalized the date of the event for February 13-14, reserved a meeting venue at Clark College in Vancouver, WA, secured the hotel room block, and began outreach to potential sponsors. By early September, we had secured Ann Wylie as our keynote speaker, and by the end of the month had finalized agreements with keynote and signature sponsors.

We launched our joint communications plan in October. It included *Save the Date* emails and social media posts. We also used the fall months to identify presenters from both OSPRA and WSPRA that could tailor sessions to storytelling across different platforms including video and social media, use of storytelling in election campaigns, and to offer attendees a lens to look through when considering whether a story is empowering for students and staff or could be considered exploitative.

December and January was spent finalizing the agenda, catering, and the many miscellaneous details that are involved in organizing a conference. The two weeks of February leading up to the summit were spent in communication with presenters and venue coordinators.

Communication Plan

Please review the following Google Files to see our planning document and communication plan.

- [Winter Summit Planning Document](#)
- [Winter Summit Communication Plan](#)

Agenda

While every session at the conference had a common denominator of storytelling, it was important each session offered something different to attendees. We enlisted a diverse group of speakers. [View the entire agenda](#), including session descriptions and speaker bios.

Marketing Materials

We also developed a clear and consistent brand for the conference that complimented both the WSPRA and OSPRA brands. Please review all marketing materials in this [Google folder](#).

Results & Impact

- 126 people attended the storytelling conference. Of those, 34 were from Oregon and 92 were from Washington.
- WSPRA and OSPRA secured a total of \$16,750 in sponsorships, including one Keynote Sponsor (\$6,000), one Event Social Hour & Banquet Sponsor (\$4,000), three Signature Sponsors (\$1,250 each) and three Event Sponsors (\$1,000 each).
- Ann Wylie served as a keynote speaker who is a nationally-recognized storytelling expert and teacher.
- Feedback from conference attendees was strong. Five of the six sessions received an average rating of 4 or 5 (out of 5). Attendees also gave an average rating of 4 or 5 to the conference location, venue, hotel, icebreakers, banquet dinner and joint-conference model. Here is some qualitative feedback:

- “I loved being able to collaborate with our peers across the state line. Thank you so much for all the great work to make this happen. I would love to see a joint conference happen more often.”
- “I liked being able to talk to communications professionals from across the PNW. More ideas, more sharing, more conversations. I'm not sure if I would have ever had the chance to connect with some of the communications professionals from a different state had it not been for this conference.”
- More people meant more resources to get high-quality speakers at our conference? YES!”
- “I liked that you were able to get bigger speakers (Ann Wylie) to the conference.
- This conference demonstrated the Northwest SPRAs' ability to organize a high-quality event. NSPRA should take note!”

Connection to NSPRA's Goals and Objectives

Overall, our project aligned to NSPRA's primary goal of being an indispensable resource for furthering the skills of our members, specifically by providing quality professional development in areas directly requested by our members. We tailored our professional development to encompass new and emerging communication channels through which to share stories. We used this opportunity to build a strong partnership with a fellow association, which allowed us to pool resources to secure a nationally recognized expert in storytelling in a fiscally responsible manner. This partnership also benefits our members through the relationships they have made and expands their network to call on for guidance in order to best serve as strategists and counselors in their districts. Lastly, this project allowed us the opportunity to demonstrate the value of being a part of a state chapter associated with NSPRA.