

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE TO STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR NSPRA CHAPTERS

A successful chapter is one that meets the needs of its members. But, how to you do that? Experience has demonstrated that chapters which engage in strategic planning every two or three years will meet the needs of their members and prosper.

Strategic planning for a chapter is very similar to the four-step process that we all engage in when planning a public relations/communications effort for our employer – Research-Planning-Carrying out the Plan-Evaluation. Much of the strategic planning can be done in a one-day meeting of the chapter's officers.

The first step in strategic planning is making the commitment to do it. Indicators that strategic planning is needed are few, poorly-attended meetings and a general lack of enthusiasm for chapter activities. This is frequently the result of planning isolated activities, rather than helping chapter members improve or learn new skills that have a pay-off in their daily responsibilities. If this describes conditions in your chapter, it's time to make the commitment to strategic planning.

Research

- Prior to the leadership's strategic planning session, gather some data about the chapter's last three or four years:
 - What is the membership trend? New members? Renewal rate? Percent who are NSPRA members?
 - What have been the chapter's most successful activities from both attendance and financial viewpoints?
 - What is the geographical distribution of chapter members?
 - What types of PR/communication responsibilities do various members have?
 - Does location or length of activities seem to make a difference in attendance?
 - Are there other data that may be useful in assessing member preferences?
- Develop a brief survey form and send it to chapter members – and to those who are no longer chapter members but still work in the chapter area. A sample survey, which you can modify, can be found on the last page of this brochure.

Planning

- Set a convenient date and location for the chapter leadership to meet. A week or two prior to the meeting, send copies of the research information that has been developed, including survey results, so participants can begin thinking about its implications.

- Begin the planning session by discussing the research information that has been developed and its possible implications for the chapter.
- Based on the implications of the research data, discuss chapter goals (i.e., why we exist; what we want to accomplish). Some chapters have included goals in their Bylaws. If goals were formulated many years ago, brainstorm their relevance to the current membership and times. If goals have not been stated or are too general, brainstorm what the chapter's goals should be. After developing a list of potential goals, reach agreement on the four or five that are most important to help meet member goals and interests.

Goals should be stated clearly and in a way that can be evaluated. For instance:

- Conduct programs that will help members improve two-way communication between their school district and its patrons.
- Over a two-year period, increase chapter membership by 40% and members' membership in NSPRA by 30%.

Make sure the chapter goals will help members achieve the personal goals they have expressed on the survey form and that the chapter will be able to offer programs/activities that will lead to achieving those goals.

- Based upon the goals the leadership has agreed upon, consider types of programs/activities and the priority for carrying them out, timing, preparation required, cost.

Draft a chapter program/activity calendar for the next two years. Consider programs that:

- Respond to members needs as expressed in the survey;
- Will achieve the agreed-upon chapter goals;
- Build upon popular and successful chapter activities in the past;
- Engender enthusiasm on the part of the leadership group.

Based upon the member survey and prior discussions, consider timing, location and cost factors. Reach agreement on who will chair and who will assist in planning the specifics of the first chapter activity. As part of that activity, make time for explaining chapter goals to members and get volunteers to help amend or plan future programs.

Discuss membership/program marketing. With new or updated goals, and programs that respond to the needs of members who responded to the chapter survey, consider how to increase chapter membership and attendance at planned programs.

- Are there state or regional directories that will yield names of potential chapter members?
- Can we create a contact referral form that chapter members can fill out with the name, address and title of colleagues they have invited to become chapter members?
- How should the chapter take advantage of the NSPRA membership incentive program to get chapter members to also become NSPRA members?

- What does the member survey tell us about planning, locating and publicizing chapter programs/activities?
- What is the most desirable timeline for program marketing materials?

Program Implementation

- A member of the chapter leadership cadre should coordinate the planning of each chapter activity, but should be assisted by several other members who can assist with the planning responsibilities.

Determine at the strategic planning session which chapter leader will chair which programs. Get additional volunteers to help with the program planning. The leadership group should identify a general timeline for each activity to ensure that planning, reservations, marketing, and other details are taken care of in a timely and professional manner.

Evaluation

- Discuss at the strategic planning session how each activity and how progress toward the chapter's goals will be evaluated.

Make sure that part of the responsibility for planning each event is the preparation of an evaluation instrument. Participants should be asked about the extent to which the program met their needs; the quality of the presentations; and the facilities, location, food, etc.

- How will the chapter leadership evaluate its success in reaching chapter goals?
- How will the chapter leadership evaluate its success in reaching NSPRA goals?
- How will program and goal evaluations be used to modify future chapter programs and plans?

State Chapter Member Questionnaire

The State Chapter leadership will meet (date) to develop a two-to-three-year plan for chapter activities. For this planning to be effective, we need to determine how best the chapter can serve each of its members. Please complete and mail this questionnaire by (date) to:

1. What is your job title? _____
2. How many years have you been a chapter member? _____ An NSPRA member? _____
3. Date you last attended a chapter event? _____
4. Was that program worth your time and expense? Yes _____ No _____
5. Please check the following topics that would be of interest to you:
 - _____ Developing PR/communication plans
 - _____ Providing PR counsel to the superintendent, staff and governing board
 - _____ Developing crisis communication plans
 - _____ Producing award-winning publications that are read
 - _____ Developing school-business partnerships
 - _____ Dealing with controversy
 - _____ Developing a school foundation
 - _____ Winning finance campaigns
 - _____ Designing/updating school/district websites
 - _____ Using new media as an information vehicle
 - _____ _____
 - _____ _____
 - _____ _____
6. What's your preference for length of chapter programs?
 - _____ Half-day _____ Full-day _____ Two half-days with overnight
7. How many good chapter meetings would you attend in a year? _____
8. How many hours are you willing to travel to a chapter event? _____
9. Please give us any other information that would help us make chapter events meet your needs: