



2024-2026 Strategic Plan

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

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SITUATION ANALYSIS

The Iowa Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is a professional association working to help communications professionals become smarter, better prepared and more connected through all stages of their careers. PRSA Iowa served as a forum to connect communications-focused individuals and foster an educational environment with networking and leadership development opportunities to support public relations practices and thought leadership in our business communities.

Throughout the year PRSA Iowa provides educational opportunities, recognition, networking, accreditation and student support. The Chapter typically hosts a monthly professional development event, distributes a monthly e-newsletter to members, interacts with members on social media and hosts OctoPRfest – Iowa’s strategic communications conference and the PRSA PRIME Awards.

Over the past five years, the Chapter’s membership has fluctuated between approximately 160 and 200 members. Although attendance at monthly events has steadily grown in the last few years, member engagement at events and social activities is still sporadic and typically the result of a small portion of membership. There are several other professional development organizations that are competing for members’ attention and involvement.

PRSA Iowa is the state’s only professional development organization solely dedicated to serving the public relations profession for communicators across the state. The Chapter instituted its first strategic plan in 2018 – 2020 to set short-term and long-term direction of how best to serve its membership. At the completion of this initial plan, the Chapter leadership reviewed success and areas for continued improvement to develop the next three-year strategic plan for the Chapter.

Research

To gain a more thorough understanding of the status of the Chapter and opportunities for future direction, a quantitative survey was distributed to all members in November 2023. In addition, surveys were conducted after the OctoPRfest/Midwest District Conference and after professional development events to gain regular insights from event attendees.

Annual member survey

This quantitative survey was distributed by email to all members in November 2023. The survey had 41 responses out of the 182 active members at the time of distribution. High-level findings include:

- 80.4% of respondents enjoy their experience as a PRSA Iowa member and 75.6% view the value of membership favorably.
- The Chapter has an opportunity to consider new and additional ways to offer valuable programming to members, as satisfaction scored: programming (63%

favorable), OctoPRfest (70% favorable), networking opportunities (68% favorable).

- Programming and professional development opportunities were rated the most important part of membership, at 92%. This was followed by networking opportunities (80.5%), and accreditation opportunities and leadership opportunities (both 78%).
- While members are largely working in hybrid arrangements, there is continued interest in hybrid and/or virtual programming (66%).
- Overall, most members are satisfied with their membership and would recommend the organization to a friend to colleague (scoring 8.9 out of 10).

Post-event surveys

These short quantitative surveys were distributed to event attendees, including members, guests, and students, directly following the event via email.

High-level findings from surveys for 2021-2023 events include:

- Years of practice were evenly distributed among attendees. Specifically, 29% had 6-10 years or experience; 21% had 1-5 years; 19% had 16-25 years; 17% had 26+ years, and 14% had 11-15 years.
- 46% of attendees came from a corporate work setting.
- Over 50% of attendees found PRSA Iowa programming to be engaging, relevant to current public relations trends, satisfying, and found that they learned something new they could apply to their work immediately.
- Overall, attendees felt that events were engaging, relevant to their work and satisfying (with an average score of 4.6 out of 5) but were less likely to report that they could immediately use learnings from the event (4.3 out of 5).

OctoPRfest surveys

Each year upon the completion of OctoPRfest, a short quantitative survey is distributed to all attendees. The high-level findings from the last three years include:

- OctoPRfest attendee survey respondents cover the gamut of experience from student to seasoned professional. Most reported 0-5, 6-10 and 21+ years of experience. Students represent the smallest portion of the group.
- Nearly all respondents have rated their experience at OctoPRfest as good or excellent.
- Approximately 10 percent of respondents have reported the value of the conference as fair, while the remaining 90 percent said the value was good or excellent.

- Most rate the information presented at OctoPRfest as good or excellent and the number rating the information as fair or poor has declined in the last three years.
- The keynote speakers in recent years seem to be presenting the most valued content.
- Breakout sessions work well for more specific content that doesn't have mass appeal, and there was so much positive feedback on the breakout sessions offered at the 2023 Midwest District Conference/OctoPRfest. It does take more from a budget standpoint, but the variety of content seems to be well worth it.
- We opted not to have a virtual option in 2023 due to high costs and AV intricacies, and that still seemed to go very well.

Summary

The surveys revealed some key areas for continued effort and focus for the Chapter. There is a strong desire to advance the profession, increase member engagement and add value to membership to retain and recruit members.

With this data, the PRSA Iowa leadership has built upon the previous three-year strategic plan to create another three-year forward-thinking strategic plan to position the Chapter for continued, sustainable growth and success through education, thought leadership, and leadership development.

SWOT ANALYSIS

To best understand where we have been and where we are going as an industry organization, it is important to understand our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Below is a SWOT analysis created by the strategic planning committee members.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active chapter • Accreditation program • Committed board members • Diversity of industries • Local organization; focus on public relations and strategic communications • Programming has wide reach and broad value for professionals within the broader PR and marketing industry 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid- and senior-level members don't see value in programming • No clear differentiating message being used to share the value of our chapter / membership • Reach and engagement outside of Central Iowa
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better define who we are (areas of PR and/or industries in which we focus) 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of public relations • Work priorities • Personal priorities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve look and feel of newsletter and chapter communications • Continue to ensure value of membership for the cost • Diversify programming topics by industries • Increase members within senior leadership or C-suite roles • Reach professionals in PR/communications related roles who don't have traditional PR backgrounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company budgets – decreasing availability of funds for membership/programming • Accessibility and ease of access of membership for young professionals, diverse/under-represented professionals, students, etc. • Cost of membership compared to local peers
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TARGET AUDIENCES

PRIMARY

- PRSA Iowa members
- Prospective members (those working in public relations, strategic communications, marketing or related fields)
- PRSSA chapters

Specifically, within these groups, this plan breaks down focus on professionals at various stages of their careers, including:

- Students and new professionals (in college and 0-5 years experience)
- Mid-level professionals (6-15 years experience)
- Senior professionals (16+ years experience)
- Accredited members and those seeking accreditation

SECONDARY

- Business leaders
- PRSA Iowa board members
- Colleges and universities
- Retired PR and communications professionals

GOALS

1. **Drive member value:** Create an exceptional member experience that educates, inspires, guides, engages and galvanizes a diverse community of ethical, strategic communications professionals in the state of Iowa.
2. **Advance the profession and professional:** Advocate for greater understanding and adoption of public relations services, accreditation (APR) and build respect and credibility for the profession.

OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES and TACTICS

By focusing on the following objectives, strategies and tactics, the Chapter will be better positioned to cultivate an environment of success.

OBJECTIVE 1: Retention – Implement a comprehensive member retention program to retain 90 percent of current members per calendar year.

Highlight accreditation as a professional development tool

- Provide a robust curriculum to mentor professionals through the Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) process.
- Deliver a hybrid APR prep course to better meet the needs of the membership and PRSA members in other states.
- Maintain high pass rate of APR candidates to accreditation through prep course, mentoring, coaching and online courses.
- Provide a minimum of four opportunities per calendar year for APRs to earn maintenance credits through chapter activities; communicate regularly with APR members which opportunities count toward maintenance credits.

Create professional development opportunities for segmented audiences

- Create customized opportunities per target audience to increase the relevance of educational programming. Potential areas of focus: Accreditation, senior level professionals, young professionals, solo practitioners, and/or job functions/disciplines/sections (similar to National PRSA).
- Provide a minimum of two exclusive, member-only events and/or networking opportunities per calendar year.
- Explore how to build a certification element into programming with National PRSA and website partners.

Optimize membership retention activities

- Create at least two touch points for new members. Examples include but are not limited to a welcome email from a board member, coffee with a board member, a virtual welcome via Zoom to answer questions, etc.
- Contact members as they are approaching their expiration date.
- Track members who are making job transitions and remind them to update information through MyPRSA so they will continue to receive PRSA updates, communications and renewal reminders.
- Reach out to dropped members to encourage them to renew their membership; remind them of promotional opportunities/scholarships. If member will not renew, seek to understand reasons for the decision and share back with the board.
- Continue looking for ways to support prospective/current members who cannot afford membership/companies do not pay for membership. For example, leverage National's hardship program and share information with relevant members or develop subsidized membership program through PRSA Iowa.

- Create membership committee to support Membership Chair and Membership Chair-Elect carry out these duties.

Expand member-exclusive opportunities through peer groups, roundtables and mentorship program

- Ensure Membership Chairs/committee and Programming Chairs/committee are working together to continue planning, promoting and leading regular peer group and roundtable opportunities for members.
- Develop a mentorship program that enables PRSSA members and PRSA members to opt into mentorship programs; define expectations for mentors/mentees and facilitate connections between the two.
- Feature these opportunities within regular chapter communications and share success stories as relevant.

Continue to distribute timely and relevant member communications

- Create and send timely, informational emails and newsletters for professional development programs, events, Chapter information and other relevant topics at the local level.
- Continue monthly newsletter for chapter members; explore opportunities to improve look and feel of the newsletter through website tool and/or other available tools.
- Develop an annual report for the membership and deliver in final newsletter of each year.
- Evaluate ways to enhance the careers section of the website while making sure job opportunities are kept up to date.
- Create exclusive, member-only content and publish on website and/or email.

Increase the focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) within the Chapter

- Provide monthly DEI columns for the newsletter.
- Continue offering a minimum of one of the quarterly program annually that addresses a DEI topic.
- Explore opportunities to support/minimize barriers to access (membership) for practitioners from diverse/marginalized backgrounds. Partner with PRSSA liaisons to begin this effort with students at partner universities.
- Ensure the OctoPRfest agenda represents diversity among topics and presenters.
- Leverage diversity initiatives and resources from PRSA National to support our chapter's DEI efforts.
- Review materials from PRSA on their website, as well as the PRSA Iowa Chapter website to audit existing materials. Ensure inclusive language is used throughout.
- Consider ways to involve more members in these efforts through creation of a DEI committee.

Expand opportunities to include ethics in Chapter events

- Stay up-to-date on research and information provided by the PRSA Board of Ethics and Professional Standards (BEPS) and report back to membership.
- Institute best practices as advised by the BEPS.
- Promote ethics month each September and offer a minimum of one program annually that incorporates ethics.
- Ensure PRSA Iowa website provides access to ethics-related resources.
- Review PRSA ethics resources and develop posts for use on PRSA Iowa social media accounts.
- Review ethics resources and develop articles that can be featured in PRSA Iowa Chapter newsletter at least quarterly.
- Take part in relevant PRSA webinars related to ethics, proposed changes in PRSA, little-known resources, etc., and share relevant information with PRSA Iowa Board and/or membership.
- Monitor news to consider what topics may serve as conversation starters, examples, lessons learned for communicating with PRSA Iowa Chapter members.
- Deliver ethics presentation to at least one PRSSA Chapter a year.

OBJECTIVE 2: Recruitment – Expand visibility of PRSA Iowa and member benefits to increase new membership by eight percent per calendar year.

Define and elevate PR through increased communication

- Establish plan for communicating programming and events as well as positioning the Chapter as a communications leader in Iowa. Ensure PRSSA chapters/students are included in programming emails.
- Create a social media content outline that is shared with the Board each quarter. Also, re-invest in Hootsuite as a posting tool to better support social media chair. Social media content plan should include:
 - Chapter programming and events.
 - Chapter updates; cross-promote updates, articles, etc. from monthly newsletter.
 - Paid ads to boost event attendance.
- Execute the social media strategy that informs and engages the Chapter’s target audiences. Evaluate social media platforms on which the Chapter should have a presence and start/downscale as needed based on relevancy and member interaction.
- Define how the Chapter could support more content through its blog. For example, consider asking board/committee members in each area to provide 1-2 articles per year (topics could include reasons to become a member, membership value, DEI topics, ethics, professional development, accreditation, etc.)
- Monthly spotlight on members who have surpassed a specific period of time involved with PRSA (5 years, 10 years, etc.). Create an intake form to capture information that can feed these spotlights or fill in material for social media.
- Explore new website partners using National’s approved website vendor list with the goal to modernize the user experience on the front end of the website and improve

capabilities/usability for board members on the backend of the site. In this process, review the PRSA Iowa website content for SEO and rewrite as appropriate.

Increase member and industry engagement with awards

- Review current awards program, including through survey to membership, and determine what changes need to be made based on results.
- Evaluate awards timeline that could drive stronger nominations/submission numbers.
- Evaluate benefits of a stand alone awards event versus inclusion within the annual conference based on past attendance and attendee/award winner feedback.
- Provide award ceremony attendees with visual examples of work, including why specific recipients won.
- Increase awareness of award winners by including them in future programming, posting on social media and including as newsletter features.
- Send post-event survey to determine satisfaction.

Identify opportunities to better serve communicators statewide

- Determine long-term approach to providing more hybrid and/or virtual events in order to serve programming to more members.
- Review technology/tools needed to provide hybrid/virtual programming effectively; determine hybrid/virtual meeting cost structure to offset new expenses incurred from technology investments.
- Promote virtual programming to chapters beyond Iowa, such as those included in Midwest District.
- Build relationships with board members and Chapter members in other parts of the state to foster more engagement and support of localized networking/programming opportunities.
- Connect members with Midwest District and National programs and educational opportunities.

Collaborate with statewide Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) chapters

- Create PRSSA engagement strategy that can be shared with PRSSA chapters at the board transition.
- Engage PRSSA chapter liaisons to frequently connect with their specific chapters.
- Feature PRSSA Chapters in the monthly newsletter at least quarterly.
- Engage PRSSA Chapters in the mentor/mentee program once established.
- Ensure liaisons and membership committee are connecting with graduating PRSSA student and encourage them to join PRSA Iowa if they're staying in-state, or sharing information about other PRSA chapters if moving elsewhere.
- Continue providing financial support to PRSSA chapters to be used for participation in conferences, local dues (as needed), and other student chapter development activities.

Identify opportunities for sponsorship growth

- Increase Chapter revenue by reviewing, revising and expanding sponsorship (and in-kind) opportunities for programming, networking and special events and promoting what is unique to these sponsorships.
- Create protocol for comprehensive sponsorship fulfillment to ensure rights and assets are fully leveraged as promised/agreed to and captured for reporting.
- Develop benchmarks for engagement to effectively and efficiently gauge sponsor satisfaction and identify strategic enhancements to sponsorship inventory.

OBJECTIVE 3: Education/Professional Development – Create regular and varied public relations education and professional development opportunities that garner a minimum 90 percent satisfaction rate on participant surveys per calendar year.

Increase attendance at and maintain high satisfaction with OctoPRfest

- Book diverse and engaging speakers that provide education on a variety of communications topics in a variety of ways – panel discussions, breakout sessions, workshops for hand-on experience, etc.
- Consider additional ways to engage prospective attendees who cannot attend a full day conference – half day pricing, virtual options, etc.
- Review survey responses from previous OctoPRfest events and determine what elements worked well or should be modified.
- Conduct post-event survey after each event to gauge satisfaction.

Expand member programming

- Host a minimum of one event per month (could include monthly luncheons, virtual programs, networking events, etc.).
- Diversify program topics that focus on best practices for a variety of communications areas (i.e. media relations, measurement, issues management, social media, ESG and sustainability, AI, internal communications, investor relations, and other relevant topics based on member input)
- Ensure programming topics resonate with professionals at various levels of experience; consider planning at least one APR-specific programming event per year.
- Create criteria to determine appropriate speaking topics and a briefing guide for speakers in order to foster a strong understanding among speakers of presentation goals.
- Promote Midwest District events with PRSA Iowa members and leverage Midwest District to cross promote our own events.
- Investigate opportunities to collaborate with other states’ chapters to host virtual events.

Re-establish networking opportunities to engage members

- Create opportunities for networking connections through fun events such as coffee meetings, happy hours, holiday gatherings, and more.
- Continue partnering with other local communications/advertising/marketing organizations to promote PRSA Iowa (i.e. Metro Marketing Mixer, and others, as relevant).
- Offer discounts and incentives to encourage current or potential members to attend programming; promote these through newsletter, program announcements and social media.
- Inform members and prospective attendees of networking events through several channels such as the website, newsletter, emails and social media. In particular, focus on new members, young professional members, and PRSSA members.
- Assign responsibilities for board and committee members at networking events; require board member attendance at a minimum of one networking event each year.
- Schedule networking events at varied times of day/days of week to reach more members and increase participation.
- Send personal thank you emails or cards to new program attendees, potential members or others, as appropriate.