

PRSSA



2025–2026

District Conference Execution Guide

An end-to-end resource guide
for hosting Chapters



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Committee Structure

Hosting a District Conference is a huge undertaking, and it requires a strong team to execute. The sample committee structures below are suggested ways to organize your leadership team, but different committee structures will work for different hosts. Regardless of what structure you choose, it is critical that all team members understand their roles and that nothing falls through the cracks. Some teams will host subcommittees under various directors. These subcommittees can be great ways to get more members involved in the planning process, but are not needed if you do not have the capacity to have them.

Example 1: North Carolina State University

Conference Coordinator

- Oversees the conference committee and creates a tailored timeline
- Serves as the primary liaison between PRSSA Headquarters, PRSA Chapters, University and hosting Chapter.
- Ensures PRSSA initiatives and requirements are met

Director of Programming

- Primary coordinator of all speakers, sessions, and special events

Director of Sponsorship

- Organizes the budget
- Secures sponsors
- Leads fundraisers

Director of Hospitality

- Secures the venue
- Organizes welcome items and gifts
- Organizes food and beverages
- Secures hotel blocks (if applicable)

Director of Digital Promotions

- Designs all promotional materials for social media
- Develops a communications plan for attendees

Director of Community Outreach

- Develops a recruitment strategy for attendees
- Conducts PRSSA Chapter and on-campus outreach
- Manages PRSSA initiatives

Example 2: University of South Carolina

Conference Coordinator

- Oversees the conference committee and creates a tailored timeline
- Conducts all speaker outreach and secures speakers
- Serves as the primary liaison between PRSSA Headquarters, PRSA Chapters, University and hosting Chapter.
- Ensures PRSSA initiatives and requirements are met

Co- Social/Promotions Directors

- Create the brand kit
- Design all promotional materials and develop a social media strategy
- Design day-of materials for the conference

Co- Outreach Directors

- Conduct outreach to other PRSSA Chapters and on-campus outreach
- Collaborate with PRSA members and secure PRSA Chapter involvement
- Organize registration and cancellation details
- Secure sponsorships for the event

Co- Hospitality Directors

- Secure food donors for the event
- Set up a hotel block for the event
- Organize decorations for the event
- Secure welcome bag items/speaker gift bag items

Example 3: Boston University

Coordinators

- Oversee conference and pre-conference reception
- Liaise with PRSSA International VP of Events & Fundraising
- Coordinate with BU PRSSA Secretary for room bookings; BU Catering for catering needs
- Create event requests on Terrier Central
- Meet with Advisor about planning progress and direction

Programming Team

- Brainstorm + recruit breakout and keynote speakers
- Send out registration emails + conference invitations to speakers
- Day-of: management of speakers and panels (directions, gifts, etc.)

Networking Team

- Brainstorm, contact, and follow through with Career Fair companies
- Day-of: networking events and career fair participant management

Outreach Team

- Invite local PRSSA Chapters and colleges to attend the conference
- Reach out to high schools in Boston to offer mentorship/pre-professional experience at the conference
- Pitch and invite news outlets
- Find philanthropic partners for the event
- Day-of: registration

Promotions Team

- Run PR Advanced Instagram and LinkedIn
- Countdown, speaker, other posts
- Update PR Advanced website content as information is released
- Prepare day-of-conference print materials (brochure and decor for conference etc.)
- Day-of: Instagram coverage

Sponsorships Team

- Reach out (email, phone, AND in-person) to potential sponsorship opportunities
- Meet with COM Donors office, SABO, SAO re: sponsorship funds and routing
- Maintain strong relationships with sponsors before and after the conference
- Day-of: raffle, sponsor management

Selecting a Theme

Your conference theme and title are a huge part of the rest of event planning. Some teams prefer broader themes, while others select a specific industry to focus on. There is no right or wrong way to do it, but ensure that your topic allows you enough range to create a strong schedule of sessions.

While picking a theme, remember to:

- Get creative with your title, but be sure you like it. You cannot change it once you decide.
- Find a way to make the theme appeal to as many people as possible. Before it is set- think:
- What external groups can I market this to?
- Can I bring in a range of speakers and audiences?
- Do we have any established connections that will make this better?

Prior broad themes include:

- I ♥ PR
- Find Passion in the PRofession
- Let your Career Bloom
- House of PR

Prior specific themes include:

- The Power of Sports Media
- Game On: PR in Sports
- PRolitics
- Explore. Experience. Engage (Travel and Tourism PR)

Securing a Venue

You can't host an amazing event without a space to hold it!

Things to Consider:

- Conference type (In person, virtual or hybrid)
- Location
- Goal/Estimated Attendees
- Price
- Accessibility/Risk
- Layout
- Book early, book now.

If you are hosting an in-person conference, make sure you secure your space as soon as you are notified that you will be hosting. Waiting on booking the event space may lead to an increase in price, loss of the venue, or another complication that could cancel your District Conference altogether. Although virtual event spaces may not get booked the same way that in-person ones will, deciding which virtual or hybrid event platform you will use is crucial. This will help with the budgeting and promotion of your event, and you will need to know this information to share it with potential speakers and sponsors. Whatever format your conference takes, it's important you secure your event space right away.

Location

When selecting a space, consider the location of the venue. The location of the conference can greatly enhance the attendee experience and make other aspects of the planning process easier to navigate.

- Will your venue be on-campus, off-campus or at your conference hotel?
- Is there reliable transportation from your conference hotel to this space?
- Will you host close to a city/other desirable location?
- Will your event be online? If so, what kind of security will you have in place?
- Will the platform you are using allow for virtual networking opportunities?

Attendee Numbers

- Make sure your space has the capability to hold your goal number of attendees. A space that is too large will make the conference seem empty, while a space too small can cause logistical issues and potential safety hazards.
- What is the maximum capacity for this venue/platform?
- Can parts of the space be closed off/opened up if attendance is not as expected?

Price

Always keep your budget in mind. Your District Conference is a huge opportunity for Chapter fundraising. Be sure to get an estimated cost for the venue/platform and any potential additional charges.

- Does the space have additional costs? (Cleaning fee, sound system fee, fee for WIFI, etc.)

Event Programming

Speakers: From Interest to Event

Speakers and your program can make or break the event. It is crucial to bring in a range of people with varied roles, backgrounds and experiences to keep attendees engaged throughout the day(s).

It is important to have three tiers of speakers in mind: your dream list, your target list, and your safety list. The dream list consists of people that you wish you could secure for the event, even if it seems unlikely. Your target list includes strong professionals that have some tie to your University, your Chapter, or PRSSA as a whole. Your safety list consists of local speakers that you or your Chapter already regularly work with.

Where to start...

Costs

Throughout the speaker process, it is important to factor in all costs associated with speakers.

When calling for speakers, determine if you will be paying for travel, lodging and other fees for them. Make sure you are clear about what costs will be covered when asking speakers to participate.

- Be sure to factor any costs into your budget. Will speakers from out of town break the budget?
- Will all local speakers draw a local crowd? How much are you willing to spend on speaker fees? It is not required that you pay for speaker travel, meals or other fees, but you MUST be professional and straightforward about what will be covered/provided.
- You must provide all speakers with a thank you gift to speakers following their sessions.

Speaker Outreach

Speaker outreach must start early. As soon as you know that you will be hosting, it is a good idea to contact local professionals and simply inform them about the event and the date(s). Even if you do not invite them to present, you may want local professionals available for a networking hour.

When gauging speaker interest and availability, first hold an informational interview or conversation with the professional to learn about their experiences and gauge what they would be comfortable with presenting. If at all possible, have a mutual connection, PRSA member, or professor facilitate an introduction. Most professionals are more likely to respond if a common connection makes an introduction. Some professionals prefer fireside chats to keynote addresses, so before you make a formal request, it is important to ensure that a range of session types can be represented.

Sample of first outreach for a potential speaker:

Good afternoon **NAME**,

My name is **(YOUR NAME)** and I am the District Conference Coordinator for the **(YOUR CONFERENCE TITLE)**! I am interested in learning more about your work at **(X)** company. The host team believes you have incredible experiences relating to **(YOUR CONFERENCE TITLE)**. Our goal is to expose members of PRSSA and anyone interested in the industry to the different roles within your field.

(ONE LINE ABOUT CONFERENCE DATES AND LOCATION)

If this is a time frame that could work for you, I am happy to talk to you about the logistics and answer any questions that you may have!

Best,
NAME
TITLE
EMAIL | PHONE NUMBER

Notes:

- Link relevant content, this may include a conference website, links to the PRSSA homepage, your Chapter/ conference social media, etc.
- Feel free to customize, remove and add content!

Confirmed Speaker Communication

Once a speaker is confirmed, immediately request their headshot and bio for promotional usage. It is important to keep an open line of communication with speakers leading up to the event, with the following recommended timeline:

3-4 weeks prior to the event (minimum)

- Confirm the time of the speaker's session and their availability for the event.
- Get speaker approval for the official session title and description.
- For panels, make sure to put panelists in touch with moderators and each other.
Note: any networking requests such as a mingling hour or other sessions that you would like the speaker present for.
- Confirm any travel accommodations (if necessary) for speakers.

2 weeks prior to the event

- Email the speaker with their full event day details including:
 - Arrival time.
 - Arrival location (and parking location if needed).
 - Point of contact upon arrival (and their phone number).
 - Request any PowerPoints the speaker will use in their event.
 - Allow the speaker the chance to ask questions.
 - (If requested) host a meeting to answer any questions.

1 week prior to the event

- Confirm event day details.
- Share the overall program.
- Ensure the speaker is still able to attend.

After event:

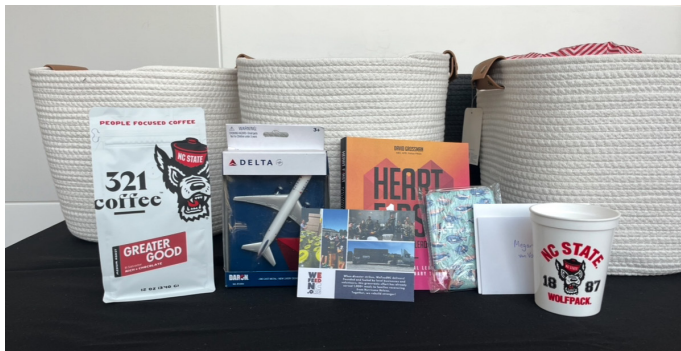
- Send final thank you with statistics and photos from the event.

Speaker Gifts

Speakers are giving up their free time to support you and your conference. It is incredibly important that speakers feel valued and have a positive experience. One way to show gratitude is through speaker gifts.

Great gifts are customized to speaker interests and/or include something local to the host location. Some host teams will have all committee members write personalized thank you notes to place in the gift bags, while others have all members sign one card. There is no “right way” to show gratitude, but these gifts are just as important as all other speaker communication

One to two weeks after the conference, reach out to speakers via email with a secondary thank you and to share any photos from the event.



Non-Speaker Programming

Not all sessions need to be speaker-centric. Some of the best opportunities at conferences include networking sessions, career fairs, and workshops!

PRSA Networking Session

- Connect with your PRSA parent Chapter to organize a networking lunch or mocktail event. Invite speakers, professors, and local professionals to provide students with the chance to build connections!

Career Fair

- Invite local agencies and organizations to network with your attendees!
- For these agencies, a district conference is a great way to connect with engaged and talented students in the field. They can also use this opportunity to promote internships and other opportunities.
- For students, this provides a valuable opportunity to talk to recruiters and learn about opportunities in the area.
- Do not restrict yourself to PR firms/agencies! Plenty of organizations may want to speak with young communications professionals in their undergrads, like nonprofits and graduate programs.

Budgeting

District Conferences should act as a huge fundraising opportunity. Keep track of your finances to make the most out of all of your hard work!

In order to understand what kind of sponsorship outreach your team needs to do, you need an initial budget. Using this [template](#), you can help you create an estimate of what you think your expenses will be. This will help you and your committee gauge how many sponsors you need, your goal sponsorship amount and what giving tiers to include in your sponsorship recruitment packet.

After creating your estimated budget, track your expenses in the same format to make sure you are on the path to reaching your sponsorship needs and ending the event with a profit. This will also allow you to see where you are spending the majority of your money and where costs can be cut.

More information on sponsorship can be found in the FUNdraising Handbook and Sponsorship Guide.

Event Promotions

Putting on an event requires a thorough and well-structured promotion plan.

Website

For the 2026 District Conference season, all hosting Chapters must create a website for their event. It can be a page on your Chapter's current site, as long as the conference's page has its own space, direct link, and if it is easy and clear to access.

This website should directly include ticket registration, or should link to the registration website. Below are some recommendations to consider when building your site.

- Wix.com
- Eventbrite.com
- Wordpress.com
- Google Sites
- Squarespace.com

What to Include:

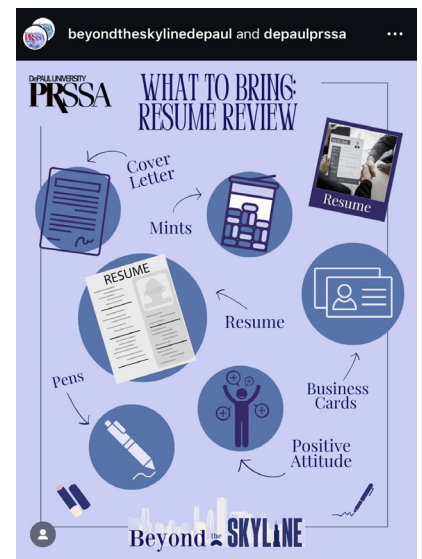
- **Conference information**
 - Overview of District Conference
 - District Conference schedule
 - Speaker bios and information
 - Contact information for committee
 - FAQ's
 - (if applicable) Virtual platform details
- **Travel information**
 - Parking, lodging, venue directions
 - Information for local attractions/restaurants
- **Ticketing information**
 - Registration link
 - Cost of registration
 - Refund policy

Past District Conference Website Examples:

- [PR Advanced](#)
- [Beyond the Skyline](#)
- [Game On](#)

Social Media

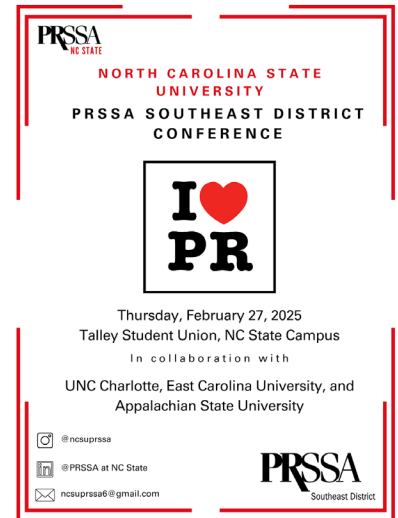
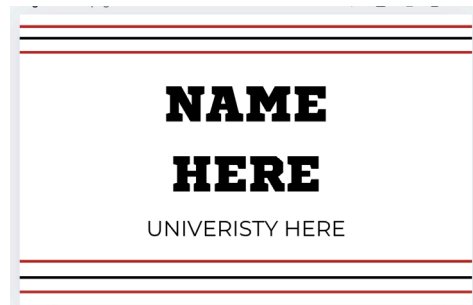
Social media is a key way to connect with PRSSA Students and Chapters. LinkedIn and Instagram are great places to showcase speaker announcements, schedule updates, and other key information. Develop a content calendar and plan content at least two weeks in advance to ensure a smooth and consistent posting schedule. Some conference hosts create separate pages from their Chapter pages, while others utilize their Chapter accounts. Regardless of which option you choose, ensure that all conference social media posts follow your brand guidelines.



Printed Materials

Printed materials often come with a cost, but are frequently necessary for your conference. Common printed materials include but are not limited to:

- Promotional flyers
- Brochures
- Name tags (do not use stick on name tags)
- Event day signage



Targeted Outreach

PRSSA Chapters are a key audience for District Conference promotions. Chapter Presidents and PRSSA International are great ways to reach members in your area. Connect with other Chapter Presidents on LinkedIn or via email.

Other audiences to consider include related majors and departments on your campus, neighboring universities without a PRSSA Chapter, Community Colleges, High Schools and local professionals.

Hospitality

It's amazing to bring people together for a conference, and as the host team, it is your responsibility to create a welcoming experience for all attendees. Key hospitality functions include:

- Organizing a discounted hotel block for attendees
 - **Tip:** work with your city's tourism/travel organization to set up hotel blocks! Hotels frequently require minimum guarantees, but local tourism focused organizations can help you ensure hotels waive the minimums.

- Create welcome bags
 - Welcome bags help attendees get excited at the start of an event! Be creative while finding low cost options (and in kind donors).
 - **Tip:** Ask local banks for folders, pens or notepads (they come at no cost).
 - **Tip:** Organizations that turn down fiscal sponsorships may be willing to extend in-kind sponsorships.
- Decorate the venue
 - Set up a step and repeat, directional posters, and photo opportunities!
 - Create thank you gifts for speakers
 - For more information, see the speaker section of programming.

PRSSA Initiatives

As a District Conference Host, you are required to host a keynote Leadership Summit, include a BEDI initiative, and organize high school outreach or a community service initiative.

Leadership Summit

- One-hour keynote session featuring a member of the PRSSA International Committee
- The speaker will present PRSSA updates and present on a leadership topic determined by the speaker in collaboration with the conference committee.

High School Outreach Ideas

Buddy System

- Pair attending high schoolers with reliable Chapter members to encourage relationships between high school students and your PRSSA Chapter.

High School Info Panel

- Host a “High Schooler Exclusive” Panel during your conference where PRSSA members chat about college, internships and PRSSA

Community Service Initiative Ideas

- Collect cans/non-perishable foods for a local pantry.
- Collect toys/school supplies for a local school or shelter.
- Create communications/marketing materials for a local charity through a “day-of” CreateATHon style competition.
- Partner with a local literacy organization or library to host a book drive.
- Please contact the Vice President of Chapter Development (vpchapterdev@prsa.org) for more ideas and tailored advice on planning a community service initiative.
- Belonging, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Initiative Ideas:
- Make sure your speaker lineup includes a diverse group of individuals who can provide representation to a range of audiences and communities.
- For an in-person meeting, you can provide pronoun stickers for badges.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has a set of guidelines that event organizers can use to make events accessible to people with disabilities.

Belonging, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Initiative Ideas

- Make sure your speaker lineup includes a diverse group of individuals who can provide representation to a range of audiences and communities.
- For an in-person meeting, you can provide pronoun stickers for badges.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has a set of guidelines that event organizers can use to make events accessible to people with disabilities.
- Provide real-time translations to multiple languages during your virtual conference for global participation.
- Visit the PRSSA Diversity Toolkit for more information and ideas on how to include BEDI initiatives in the planning of your conference.

Please contact the Vice President of Belonging, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (vpdiversity@prsa.org) for more ideas and tailored advice on planning a BEDI initiative.



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