



**PRSSA
District Conference
Handbook
2019-2020**

Dear PRSSA Member,

Thank you for your commitment to PRSSA! If you are reading, you are likely considering hosting a District Conference in Spring 2020! This is such an exciting opportunity that will increase professional development, recruitment and overall Chapter funds.

Hosting a District Conference is an experience like no other, but it is a very large commitment. There are many details to consider when planning the best event possible. It is extremely important you review this handbook, consult previous conference coordinators and evaluate the exciting, but demanding, work ahead of you. Let this handbook serve as a reference for how to bid, plan and execute your conference.

When planning your conference, consider what makes a great event experience to you. When attending conferences, what event aspects are most important to you? Do you value agency tours, career fairs, awards or panels? Let your past experiences with PRSSA and PRSA events guide you but don't forget to add what makes your Chapter unique as well!

Your Chapter has something special to offer the rest of the Society and District Conferences can be a great way to show it off. I can't wait to hear your take on executing the best conference possible because District Conferences are the forefront of PRSSA brand exposure, member recruitment and overall advancement of the Society.

Please let me know what I can do to assist your Chapter. Whether it's District Conference ideas, events, fundraising, sponsorships or simple advice, I am here for you.

Here's to the experiences we build!

All the best,



Emily Zekonis
vpevents@prsa.org
2019-2020 Vice President of Events and Fundraising

Table of Contents

2019-2020 District Conference Handbook

District Conference - From the Bid to the Wrap-Up Report	4
Chapter Benefits of Hosting	
Expectations for Host Chapters	
Ready, Set, Bid!	5
District Conference Intent Forms	
PRSSA Districts	
Interviews	
Selections	
The Planning Process	5
Access Community Support	
Assemble Committee	
Decide on a Theme	
Incorporate National Initiatives in District Conferences	
Plan Location, Transportation and Lodging	
Design a Unique Program	
Promote Conference in Advance	
Outline a Budget	
Scheduling	
Sample Schedule	
You Received a Bid, Now What?.....	7
Timeline	
Speakers	
Resources	

District Conference - From the Bid to the Wrap-Up Report

District Conferences are mini-conferences held by Chapters during the spring semester. A traditional District Conference is one to three days in length and consists of educational sessions, networking events and socials. Planned, staffed and hosted by Chapter members, a District Conference offers valuable experience in event planning, sponsorship, fundraising and promotion. Even further, District Conferences may provide unique opportunities for Chapter members to broaden their network and strengthen relationships among local PRSSA and PRSA Chapters.

Chapter Benefits of Hosting

National Recognition — In addition to the selected Conferences and host Chapters receiving recognition at International Conference, PRSSA Headquarters promotes District Conferences through its various national channels. District Conference committees will be encouraged to submit digital promotional content in several stages for recognition on PRSSA National social media channels.

Dr. F. H. Teahan Award for Outstanding District Conference — Chapters hosting a District Conference are eligible to apply for the Teahan award, which consists of a prize of \$300 and a plaque.

Star Chapter Award — Chapters of any size can apply for this award by meeting specific Chapter and professional development goals, one of which is hosting or attending a District Conference.

Chapter Fundraising — If budgeting is completed correctly and sponsorship goals are met, Chapters will see a profit from hosting a District Conference. When beginning the planning process, draft out a projected expense sheet to identify sponsorship needs and a reasonable rate that will allow for chapter's total revenue to exceed expenses.

Membership Recruitment — Showcase the benefits of being a PRSSA member to those on your campus and in the surrounding region. Consider the opportunity to promote PRSSA membership, the affiliate member program and the transition from PRSSA to PRSA.

Expectations for Host Chapters

Because District Conferences are hosted on behalf of PRSSA, coordinators and their committees are expected to remain ethical and professional in the planning and execution of their event.

PRSSA 2019 International Conference (San Diego, Calif.) — The coordinator, or another committee member, should attend the International Conference and help promote the conference for the spring.

Communication — The vice president of events and fundraising must receive regular updates from coordinators in a timely, professional manner before and after the conference. District Conference coordinators should plan to talk to the vice president of events and fundraising according to a schedule set once confirmed conferences are released. Conference coordinators will work with the vice president of events and fundraising on developing a conference specific timeline for check-ins.

National Committee Member — One National Committee member will **be assigned** to each District Conference to support the hosting Chapter. It is the host Chapter's responsibility to plan and budget the hotel accommodations, registration and transportation of their Committee guest for the full duration of your Conference. **No food is expected to be covered with the exception of any food covered by registration costs. Additionally, hotel accommodations must start, at the latest, the night prior to the conference and extend, at the earliest, until the last day of conference scheduling. Accommodation plans must be approved as adequate by the vice president of events and fundraising.** PRSSA National will cover the cost of the individuals travel. Your event schedule should include a short period of time for the National Committee member to present an update on behalf of the Society. The assigned National Committee member will also provide a report and reflection on the conference following the event.

Ready, Set, Bid!

District Conference Interest Forms are due Aug. 29, 2019:

For the 2019–2020 academic year, the former bid process to host a District Conference will change. Interested Chapters should complete the District Conference Interest Form and submit it to the following contacts:

Vice President of Events and Fundraising Emily Zekonis vpevents@prsa.org	PRSSA National President Nicholas Goebel nationalpresident@prsa.org	Executive Director of PRSSA Jeneen Garcia (212) 460-1466 jeneen.garcia@prsa.org
---	--	---

PRSSA District

To provide adequate opportunities for members across the country, PRSSA District Conferences will align with the District guidelines set by PRSA. Only one conference will be hosted per District and not all Districts will have a conference.

Interviews

After submitting the interest form, prospective District Conference coordinators will complete a phone interview with the vice president of events and fundraising. Interview questions will assess the Chapter's ability to host a successful District Conference and will provide an opportunity for Chapters to explain and sell their unique plans. It will last 15–20 minutes and the coordinator is required to participate. Additional planning committee members may join. Interviews will be scored on quantitative rubric; a total of 50 points may be earned during the interview.

Selections

Chapters with the highest total sum of points from the bid form and interview will be selected to host a spring 2020 District Conference.

Chapters will be notified of the final selection prior to the PRSSA 2019 International Conference. At least one member of the selected District Conference committee (preferably the coordinator) is encouraged to attend International Conference to connect with the National Committee and begin promoting the District Conference to the Society.

The Planning Process

In addition to the need for strong support from the Chapter members, planning committee and advisers, Chapters must thoroughly execute each step in the planning process:

Assess Community Support

Conference coordinators should discuss their interest in hosting a District Conference with a member of a local PRSA Chapter. PRSA members can help support District Conference committees when booking speakers, securing funding and executing the event.

Assemble Committee

Assemble a committee and divide the tasks evenly. Possible committee positions may include directors in hospitality, programming, social media, logistics, sponsorship, finance and special activities.

Decide on a Theme

A Conference's theme should optimize the unique strengths of the hosting Chapter and its PRSA neighbors. Please ensure your theme is specific, do not just use "PR" as a theme. To begin brainstorming, read through past conference themes.

Incorporate National Initiatives in District Conferences

High School/Community College Outreach — PRSSA continually provides members with character building and educational sharing experiences. To give back to the community, 2020 hosting Chapters are *required* to incorporate the High School and/or Community College Outreach initiative into their District Conference (see bid form).

Initiatives are not limited to the *High School/Community College Outreach*. Other initiatives include but are not limited to the *Community Service Initiative* and many more. See the 2019 Situation Analysis for the National Initiatives that you could incorporate in your conference.

Plan Location, Transportation and Lodging

When choosing a location, consider:

- Travel and lodging options for attendees, speakers and National Committee representative.
- Hosting on campus, in a city or using local PRSA Chapter facilities.
- The accessibility of the Conference space, parking and public transportation.
- Affordability of a planning/supply room for committee during the event.

Design a Unique Program

District Conference programming is at the discretion of the host Chapter and the theme of the programming should determine the format of the event. As mentioned previously, please consider your Chapter's strengths and resources. Below are some ways to make your District Conference special, as Chapters will be awarded additional points for any unique programming that enhances value:

- Agency Tours — Visit local agencies, media companies or corporations.
- Awards Program — Create and provide awards to Chapters or individual attendees.
- Career Fair/Workshop — Provide an environment for local professionals and students to network. Focus on résumé improvement, etiquette and presentation skills.
- Case Study Competition — Engage teams in a contest to devise a public relations plan, improve a case or present a proposal to a client. Invite professionals to judge. Frequently, a sponsor will provide a case study and prizes in return for the work.
- City Tour — Incorporate city attractions (secure any available group rates). Local tourism bureaus may suggest free activities.
- Panels — Topics could include current events and/or professional development.
- PRSSA/PRSA Benefits — Educate attendees about various PRSSA and PRSA programs and services, especially the PRSA Associate Membership.
- Speakers — Have a local famous athlete, professional or media figure speak.
- Speed Networking — Meet a variety of professionals within a few minutes.
- Special Interest — Focus on a public relations specialty, such as sports or healthcare.

Promote Conference in Advance

Advanced promotion — via social media, emails to Chapter presidents (contact the vice president of events and fundraising for details on how to conduct this successfully), videos on the PRSSA National YouTube channel, outreach to PRSA etc. — greatly impacts the number of attendees, sponsors, speakers and media attention garnered. Social media channels and websites should be up and running for promotion by the PRSSA International Conference.

Please note, all spring 2020 District Conferences will be required to have an event website. This is a crucial tool for communication and promotion of a District Conference. Consider the expense and ability to upkeep the platform chosen to host a District Conference webpage. Suggested platforms include WIX.com and WordPress.com.

Outline a Budget

Include all expenses, such as costs related to facility rentals, audio-visual equipment and publicity. Remember to build meal costs (consider having a local business/restaurant sponsor a meal) into the registration fee. Also, not every meal needs to be provided.

Hosting Chapters must raise funds to cover all hosting expenses. Funds may be raised via sponsorships (from your school, PRSA Chapter, corporations or agencies, for example), registration fees, student-run firm profits, grants and fundraisers. For further ideas, see the FUNdraising Playbook or contact the vice president of Chapter development.

For some Chapters, co-hosting is the best option. Co-hosting is most effective between Chapters who already have a relationship and whose campuses are close. Co-hosting Chapters split costs and responsibilities.

Scheduling

Avoid conflicting dates in the spring such as National Assembly and spring break. When scheduling, also consider:

- Speaker availability; consider when during the event the assigned National Committee representative will speak.
- How to most efficiently use the facility's resources, room space and location.
- Know how long it will take volunteers and attendees to move between events.
- How the programming will balance free time, social and professional events.
- How to incorporate reporting tools and surveys post-conference.

Sample Schedule

<i>Friday</i>	5:30–6:30 pm	Registration and Welcome
	6:45–11:30 p.m.	Dinner, National Committee Presentation, Social
<i>Saturday</i>	9:30–10:30 a.m.	Session 1
		1. <i>PR in the Entertainment Industry</i>
		2. <i>Interpersonal Communications</i>
		3. <i>Nonprofit PR</i>
	10:45–11:45 a.m.	Session 2
		1. <i>Digital PR</i>
		2. <i>Corporate PR</i>
		3. <i>Recruiting Members</i>
	Noon–2 p.m.	Lunch on Your Own
	2–3 p.m.	Panel Discussion
	3:15–4:15 p.m.	Speed Networking
	6–8 p.m.	Dinner and Awards Banquet, Closing Speaker

You Received a Bid, Now What?

Congratulations! Your Chapter was selected to host a District Conference. The following section is devoted to helping you finalize your event.

Timeline

Your first task is to gather your committee and set a timeline for the rest of the planning. This timeline will keep planning objectives on schedule, will allow the national vice president of events and fundraising to monitor progress and can become a great portfolio piece or supporting documentation for The Teahan Award for District Conference. Involve advisers — bring your timeline to the PRSSA International Conference to discuss with the vice president of events and fundraising. Use the following sample timeline as a reference, remembering you'll need to set individual dates for each task.

Six months prior

- Announce event.
- Begin work on logo, branding, theme and budget.
- Get printing estimates.
- Create a communications timeline.
- Finalize budget.
- Send mailing to students/Chapter.
- Invite high school students or finalize high school outreach session.
- Launch website.
- Distribute fliers on campus.
- Seek potential sponsors.

- Finalize registration fee, process and cancellation policy.
- Confirm keynote speaker, special guests and session presenters.
- Design communications materials.

Two months prior

- Visit classes to promote event.
- Recruit volunteers.
- Announce keynote speaker.
- Design remaining publicity materials.
- Create registration packet.
- Create program.
- Plan socials.
- Confirm caterings.
- Hold Chapter fundraisers.
- Confirm session presenters.
- Send mailing to students/Chapter.
- Invite local Chapters by phone.
- Reconfirm everything including keynote speaker.
- Ensure guests have directions, hotel reservations and parking passes.

On-site

- Execute successful event.
- Assist speakers and attendees as much as possible.
- Distribute and gather satisfaction surveys for each session.

One month prior

- Determine session titles.
- Send registration reminder.
- Send reminders to speakers, vendors and sponsors.
- Print event program.

After

- Compile materials for Outstanding District Conference Teahan Award.
- Send thank you notes to speakers, sponsors, etc.
- Distribute the electronic evaluation survey.
- Thank committee members and volunteers.
- Complete summary report and send to the Vice President of Events and Fundraising.

Two weeks prior

- Print nametags.
- Finalize all details.

Speakers

Where to Look

- Local PRSA members or other public relations or marketing professionals
- Personal contacts
- PRSSA Chapter or university alumni
- Presenters/speakers at other events
- Speakers bureaus
- Chamber of Commerce
- Nonprofits or special interest groups
- Faculty, authors, athletes, celebrities
- Champions for PRSSA

Contacting Speakers

Making contact with a speaker is important. Seek them with etiquette and professionalism.

Initial Call — Introduce yourself. Describe PRSSA, your event and your Chapter, the program theme, the audience, the date, location and basic program outline. Explain how they can participate. Share how to contact you and when you need a response.

Follow-up — If the speaker declines, ask if they can recommend someone else. If they accept, get the correct spelling of their name, title, organization, email and mailing address.

Confirmation — Send the confirmation by mail or email as soon as possible, with a copy of your brochure if it's finished. Confirm the speaker's participation, topic and the session date and time. Describe your goals and audience again and explain who else is speaking. Ask if the speaker needs audio/visual equipment, request a biography for introduction and publicity purposes, and ask if they will be bringing guests or handout materials. All details should be determined one month before the program. (At this point, it may also be in your best interest to ask for a speaker contract to be signed.)

Resources

Using the National Committee, PRSSA and PRSA will guarantee a support system to help your event succeed. PRSSA can promote your event through the website, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and the National Committee. Contact any National Committee member with publicity, programming, financial or speaker ideas. If they cannot answer your question, they will help you find someone who can.



PRSSA

Public Relations
Student Society
of America

ADVANCING THE PROFESSION
AND THE FUTURE PROFESSIONAL.

120 Wall Street, 21st Floor
New York, NY 10005-4024