



10 Keys to Success for Chapter-Based Accredited in Public Relations (APR) Programming

Introduction

In 2010, PRSA's Accreditation Marketing Committee researched how and why Accreditation programs in PRSA Chapters identified as "high performers" were successful. The goal was to identify tactics that other Chapters could adopt and adapt to achieve similar success in recruiting, supporting and mentoring APR candidates for the Examination for Accreditation in Public Relations.

Representatives of eight PRSA Chapters and one District were interviewed for this project: Cleveland, Detroit, Georgia, Hoosier, National Capital, Oklahoma City, San Diego, Tar Heel and Southwest District. Through comparing and contrasting responses from those interviews, the PRSA Accreditation Marketing Committee developed the following 10 "keys to success."

Keys to Success

1. Have a committed APR chair, backed by a group of APR advocates. Top-performing Chapters have a core group of dedicated members involved in their APR committees (and/or prep sessions), often for multiple years. These members stay involved even as new chairs and committee members come on board to assist Accreditation efforts. In some Chapters, APR chairs consider their involvement a multi-year commitment. In others former APR chairs continue to be available to assist in an advisory or consulting capacity for a period of time.

2. Position APR as a Professional Development program. Many of these "high-performing" Chapters position the APR process principally as a professional development activity. It improves practitioners' knowledge, skills, abilities and professionalism as a whole. These Chapters are strong proponents of using Accreditation as a core feature of their PD programming.

3. Adopt a standardized prep program schedule and reliable calendar executed (with small variations) every year. Formats among Chapters vary in light of local membership needs and recent experiences. Each Chapter establishes for a prep format that meets its local needs; some try multiple formats. Prep sessions vary from two days to 12 weeks.

- 4. Adopt a “mentoring mentality” to see candidates through the process.** Nearly all top-performing Chapters offer mentors to individual members or study groups to prepare for the Panel Presentation and the computer-based Examination. Some of these mentoring programs are formal; others are less informal. The stage at which this mentoring begins varies from the point of application to after the Panel Presentation or just before the computer-based Examination.
- 5. Adapt core Universal Accreditation Board (UAB) resources and course materials to fit each Chapter’s specific needs.** APR chairs indicated the key to a successful Chapter-level Accreditation program was to identify and provide what candidates required to be successful in the Panel Presentation and computer-based Examination.
- 6. Use Universal Accreditation Board (UAB) materials, supplemented by local subject matter experts (SMEs).** While some Chapters rely solely on the APR Study Guide, others have developed their own resource materials. In terms of format, some Chapters continue to offer multi-week courses. Others have one-day Jump Starts. Some conduct two-day prep sessions. SMEs are identified among Chapter members, APRs in nearby Chapter and professors from local colleges/universities.
- 7. Provide Panel Presentation guidance.** While advice and counsel varies from Chapter to Chapter about how to prepare for and package portfolios for Panel Presentation, most Chapters explicitly tell candidates that the portfolio presentation is not a compendium of what they have done over their careers to date. The presentation reviews a particular campaign or case study.
- 8. Encourage “study cohorts.”** Most Chapters find APR candidates benefit from preparing with a small group that goes through the same experience and shares personal knowledge, perspectives and experiences.
- 9. Institute “bridge programming.”** Several Chapters “embed” Panel Presentations into prep programs. Some provide a “bridge” from the Panel Presentation to the computer-based Examination. Most Chapters plan their Panel Presentation four-to-six weeks after their prep sessions to move candidates through the process while they are actively engaged in learning and preparing.
- 10. Celebrate the achievements of new APRs.** Nearly all top-performing Chapters conduct some kind of APR recognition activity. Those activities include “APR Pinning Ceremonies” at Chapter award events, articles in print or e-newsletters, email announcements and Chapter website postings. The APR’s immediate supervisor, employer’s CEO, major clients or professional colleagues are often invited to attend such events or receive such printed announcements.