

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



### Introduction

In 2010, PRSA's Accreditation Marketing Committee initiated a research effort with the goals of understanding how and why a segment of PRSA Chapters identified as "high performers" are successful in their individual Accreditation programs. The goal was to identify some tactics that Chapters could adopt and adapt to achieve similar success in recruiting, supporting and mentoring APR candidates for the Examination for Accreditation in Public Relations throughout the process.

Chapters interviewed for this project included representatives of eight PRSA Chapters (Cleveland, Detroit, Georgia, Hoosier, National Capital, Oklahoma City, San Diego, and Tar Heel) and one PRSA District (Southwest District) — all of which have enjoyed expanded participation and success in their Accreditation programs during recent years. Through comparing and contrasting the responses from those interviews, the PRSA Accreditation Marketing Committee has a summary of these "keys to success" to offer.

### Keys to Success

The following pages offer more specific details and responses from Chapter contacts interviewed by the work group to highlight each of the 10 keys to success.

- 1. Having a committed APR chair, backed by a group of APR advocates.** The top performing Chapters have a core group of dedicated members involved in their APR committee (and/or prep sessions), often for multiple years, 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, while in others former APR chairs continue to be available to assist in an advisory or consulting capacity for a period of time.
- 2. Positioning APR as a Professional Development program.** Many of these "high-performing" Chapters position the APR process principally as a professional development activity that improves practitioners' knowledge, skills and abilities, and their professionalism as a whole. They are strong proponents of using Accreditation as a core feature of their Chapter's PD programming.
- 3. Adopting a standardized prep program schedule and reliable calendar** executed (with small variations) every year. Based on local membership needs and recent experiences, formats among Chapters vary. Each Chapter establishes for a prep format that meets their local needs; some try multiple formats. Prep sessions vary from two days to six weeks, and even 12 weeks in one case.

**4. Adopting a “mentoring mentality” to see candidates through the process.** Nearly all of the Chapters interviewed offer mentors to individual members or study groups preparing for Readiness Review and the computer-based Examination. Some of these mentoring programs are formal and others are less informal. The stage at which this mentoring begins varies from the point of application, up to and/or after the Readiness Review, and just before the computer-based Examination.

**5. Adapting 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 is to identify and provide what candidates in your Chapter require to be successful in the Readiness Review and computer-based Examination.

**6. Utilizing Universal Accreditation Board (UAB) materials, supplemented by local subject matter experts (SMEs).** While some Chapters rely solely on the APR Study Guide, other Chapters have developed their own resource materials. In terms of format, some Chapters continue to offer multi-week courses, others have one-day Jump Starts, and some others conduct two-day prep sessions. SMEs are identified among Chapter and nearby Chapter APRs, as well as professors and adjuncts from local colleges/universities.

**7. Providing Readiness Review/portfolio presentation guidance.** While advice and counsel varies from Chapter to Chapter regarding how to prepare for and package portfolios for Readiness Review, most Chapters are explicit in telling candidates that the portfolio presentation is not a compendium of what they have done over their careers to date, but a review of a particular campaign or case study.

**8. Encouraging “study cohorts.”** Most Chapters find APR candidates benefit from preparing with a small group going through the same experience, and sharing with the group their personal knowledge, perspectives and experiences.

**9. Instituting “bridge programming.”** Several Chapters “embed” Readiness Review into their prep programs; and some also provide a “bridge” from the Readiness Review to the computer-based Examination. Most Chapters plan their Readiness Reviews approximately four to six weeks after their prep sessions conclude to move candidates through the process while they are actively engaged in learning and preparation.

**10. Celebrating the achievements of new APRs.** Nearly all Chapters interviewed conduct some kind of APR recognition activity. Recognition activities include “APR Pinning Ceremonies” at Chapter award events and meetings, as well as 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.