

Regional Conference Handbook 2016–2017

PRSSA Public Relations
Student Society
of America



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Dear PRSSA Member:

By reading this letter you are already on the right track to hosting a Regional Conference. The thought of submitting a bid can be daunting, but this handbook is just one of the many resources that will be at your disposal to host a successful Regional Conference.

This handbook will walk you through the complete process: bidding, planning and executing a successful conference, with tips and timelines to help you along the way. Although this guide is the perfect first step towards hosting your own Regional Conference, it is also a great resource to reference for any other events you may host.

Planning a Regional Conference will give you and your Chapter members valuable experiences that will follow all of you beyond your college careers. The road can be long and bumpy, but nothing feels better than coming out on the other side. Remember to have fun along the way.

Whether you choose to bid for a Regional Conference or not, I am here for you every step of the way. Feel free to contact me at any time with any questions you may have.

I wish you the best of luck. I look forward to working with you this upcoming year.

Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nicole E.K. Price".

Nicole E.K. Price
Vice President of Regional Conferences
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Table of Contents

2016–2017 Regional Conference Handbook

Regional Conference – From the Bid to the Wrap-Up Report	4
Chapter Benefits of Hosting	
Expectations for Host Chapters	
Ready, Set, Bid!	5
Regional Conference Intent to Bid Forms	
Regional Conference Bids	
PRSSA Regions	
Bid Submissions	
Interviews	
Selections	
The Planning Process.....	6
Access Community Support	
Assemble Committee	
Decide on a Theme	
Incorporate National Initiatives in Regional 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?	8
Timeline	
Speakers	
Resources	

Regional Conference — From the Bid to the Wrap-Up Report

Regional Conferences are mini-conferences held by Chapters during the spring semester. A traditional Regional 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 Regional Conference offers valuable experience in event planning, sponsorship, fundraising and promotion. Even further, Regional 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 National Conference, PRSSA Headquarters promotes Regional Conferences through its various national channels. Regional 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 Regional Conference](#) — Chapters hosting a Regional Conference in 2017 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 Regional Conference.

Expectations for Host Chapters

Because Regional 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 2016 National Conference (Indianapolis, Indiana) — the coordinator, or another committee member, must attend the National Conference and the Regional Conference Workshop (scheduled for the afternoon of Friday, Oct. 21).

Communication — The vice president of Regional Conferences must receive regular updates from coordinators in a timely, professional manner before and after the conference. Regional Conference Coordinators should plan to talk to the vice president of Regional Conference at least once a week, and plan for three training sessions via video call with other Regional Conference Coordinators. Conferences will work with the vice president of Regional Conferences on developing a conference specific timeline for check-ins.

National Committee Member — One National Committee member will **be assigned** to each Regional 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 Regional Conferences. PRSSA National will cover the cost of the flight. 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, as a whole, following the event.

Ready, Set, Bid!

Regional Conference Intent to Bid Forms are due July 1, 2016: This is an *optional* form for Chapters to submit in the summer, indicating the Chapter's interest in submitting an official bid in the fall. This submission will allow the vice president of Regional Conferences to have open communication with the interested Chapters to answer questions and assist in the bidding process. Please note that filling out this form is neither a contract nor a commitment that the interested Chapter will submit a bid. It is simply an acknowledgment that your PRSSA Chapter does intend to bid and will likely submit a bid. Intent to bid forms are due July 1 for 2017 Regional Conferences.

Regional Conference Bid s are due Sept. 9, 2016. The bid form should provide a detailed outline of the event and should also reflect the hosting Chapter's commitment in executing a professional, diverse event. Bids are judged independently – with no points given for past selection – based on the following elements:

- *Letter of Recommendation* – From the host Chapter's Faculty Adviser expressing confidence in the Chapter's plan, coordinator, committee and Chapter officers.
- *Bid Form* – Shows the judging committee how creative, organized and prepared prospective host Chapters are. The bid form analyzes the Regional Conference's theme, schedule, budget, promotional plan, registration process, incorporation of National Initiatives, sponsorship possibilities and coordinator/committee details.
- *Optional Materials* – Any other material that enhances your application, such as possible promotional materials to be distributed at the PRSSA National Conference.

PRSSA Regions

To provide adequate opportunities for members across the country, PRSSA will ensure hosting Chapters are spread throughout the various regions, depending on which Chapters decide to bid and are able to host a Regional Conference

Bid Submissions

All bid materials are due **Sept. 9** by email to the following individuals:

Vice President of Regional
Conferences
Nicole Price
nicole.ek.price@gmail.com

PRSSA National President
Emma Finkbeiner
emfinky@gmail.com

Executive Director of PRSSA
Jeneen Garcia
(212) 460-1466
jeneen.garcia@prsa.org

Interviews

After submitting the bid, prospective Regional Conference Coordinators will complete a phone interview with the vice president of Regional Conferences. Interview questions will assess the Chapter's ability to host a successful Regional 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 a quantitative rubric; a total of 50 points may be earned in the interview.

Selections

Chapters with the highest total sum of points from the bid form and interview will be selected to host a spring 2017 Regional Conference.

Chapters will be notified of the final selection prior to the PRSSA 2016 National Conference. At least one member of the selected Regional Conference committee (preferably the coordinator) must attend the Regional Conference Workshop at the PRSSA 2016 National Conference on Friday, Oct. 21.

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 Regional Conference with a member of a local PRSA Chapter. PRSA members can help support Regional 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. To begin brainstorming, read through [past conference themes](#).

Incorporate National Initiatives in Regional Conferences

High School/Community College Outreach – PRSSA continually provides members with character building and educational sharing experiences. To give back to the community, 2016 hosting Chapters are *required* to incorporate the High School and/or Community College Outreach initiative into their Regional 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*, *Fundraising Bowl* and many more. See the 2016 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

Regional 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 Regional 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 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 Regional Conferences 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 National Conference.

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 [National 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; also 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 p.m.	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>
	12–2 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 Regional 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 Regional Conferences to monitor progress, and can become a great portfolio piece or supporting documentation for The Teahan Award for Regional Conference. Involve advisers — bring your timeline to the PRSSA National Conference to discuss with the vice president of Regional Conferences during the Regional Conference Workshop. 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.

Three months prior

- Finalize logo and theme.
- Finalize registration fee, process and cancellation policy.
- Confirm keynote speaker, special guests and session presenters.
- Design communications materials.
- Get printing estimates.
- Create a communications timeline.
- Finalize budget.
- Send mailing to students/Chapters.
- Invite high school students or finalize high school outreach session.
- Launch website.
- Distribute fliers on campus.
- Seek potential sponsors.

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 catering.
- Hold Chapter fundraisers.
- Confirm session presenters.
- Send mailing to students/Chapters.
- Invite local Chapters by phone.

One month prior

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

Two weeks prior

- Print nametags.
- Finalize all details.
- 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.

After

- Compile materials for Outstanding Regional 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 national vice president of Regional Conferences

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 he/she can recommend someone else. If he/she accepts, get the correct spelling of his/her 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 he or she 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 *FORUM*, the website, the Monthly Update, Chapter News, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn 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.



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