

# IABC Central Oklahoma: Professional Development

## Goals and Objectives

### **Background:**

IABC Central Oklahoma is a small but mighty chapter that was recognized as the 2020 Small Chapter of the Year. Our dedicated volunteer board and committee members work hard to advance the profession, create connection, and develop professional communicators.

Professional development programs have been a stronghold for the Central Oklahoma chapter over the past few years with diverse topics, relevant discussions and interesting speakers for members and non-members alike. While we have seen membership decline in recent years, our monthly luncheons have been consistently profitable and regularly bring in new faces to help spread the word about IABC.

Professional development remains a vital component of our Chapter's value proposition for members and the entire communications community in our area. We strive to offer valuable content that differs from the other major communications organizations in the area (PRSA, AMA, Ad Club), often providing more relevant content for in-house and non-agency communications professionals, which comprises the majority of our membership base.

This past 18 months presented two challenges for our chapter. First, the free location where we had previously hosted our monthly luncheons notified us they were planning a remodel, so we needed to find a new location to host our monthly programs in 2020 while still keeping those events profitable. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 caused us to rapidly shift our approach to professional development events overall.

### **Goals:**

Because of the significant pivot required in response to COVID-19 and its impact on our community, industry and the world, we have provided both our initial goals and our revised goals for professional development. While it was difficult to anticipate more than a few weeks at a time initially, we set realistic yet aggressive goals to continue serving our members and community with timely and helpful professional development content.

Initial goals as set during our annual board retreat in July 2019:

1. Provide value to members and attract new guests with quality, current professional development topics designed to develop professional communicators.
2. Increase attendance at luncheons and events to an average of 30 attendees to create connection.
3. Ensure lunches are profitable, which allows our chapter to continue providing learning opportunities that advance the profession, create connection, and develop professional communicators.

In April 2020, our board reviewed goals and revised accordingly given the anticipated impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on in-person events. It was important for us to continue offering

programming that sought to create connection and develop strategic communicators, and we adjusted our goals starting with the May 2020 Professional Development luncheon.

Revised goals:

1. Provide value to members and attract new guests with quality, current professional development topics designed to develop professional communicators. (no change from initial goal)
2. Maintain average attendance of 15 people at monthly professional development events. (50% reduction of initial attendance goal)
3. Ensure lunches break even or show profit, which allows our chapter to continue providing learning opportunities that advance the profession, create connection, and develop professional communicators. (Goal modified to allow for break-even events, as we chose not to charge attendees for spring events.)
4. Continue hosting at least one virtual professional development event per month.

### **Budget:**

We budget for 9 professional development luncheons per year, and these events are the primary revenue generator for our chapter.

Based on our average attendance at past luncheons and the use of a free venue for hosting our lunches in 2019, we budgeted \$350 per monthly luncheon and projected an average of \$425 in revenue per lunch event. Our shift to a new venue in 2020 was anticipated to increase the cost of each lunch, so we also increased the non-member price and adjusted the overall budget for lunches. However, we only hosted one in-person event in early 2020, as we do not typically meet in January and our February event was canceled due to inclement weather.

### **Implementation:**

Each year, we plan our professional development calendar based on topic ideas suggested in past luncheon surveys and ideas brainstormed by the board at our annual board retreat. We promote events on our website, through email marketing, and through social media.

When our free venue notified us that they would be remodeling and we would not be able to use their community room beginning in 2020, we sought a new location for monthly lunches that would allow us to host lunches in a more central location but still maintain a profit for monthly events. Unfortunately, we only hosted one lunch at the new location prior to the pandemic shutting down in-person events, and a miscommunication with our new catering partner led to added expense for that one lunch event.

As with most IABC chapters, the biggest obstacle we faced in 2020 was the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of in-person events for the foreseeable future. Our response to that obstacle can be seen in several key themes:

- **Providing ongoing opportunities to develop professional communicators**  
During the spring of 2020, nearly all local communications (and overall professional) organizations were canceling events, but it took months for many of them to reschedule events or provide virtual options. IABC Central Oklahoma quickly pivoted to virtual

events and missed only one monthly event in April 2020 due to the pandemic.

- **Offering additional opportunities to create connection**

One of our strongest pillars as a chapter is our connection. Nearly all of our members and attendees continue to return because of the genuine connection they feel at our events. As communicators, we all needed more connection while in various stages of lockdown early in the pandemic, so our monthly professional development events all included 15-30 minutes of networking where each attendee could introduce themselves and their business followed by a few specific questions or topics provided by the board. It was important for us, in the midst of a very lonely time, to focus on continuing the most valuable benefits our members receive: connection. While we had to cancel our April professional development event due to the pandemic, we did host a virtual happy hour in mid-April to provide another opportunity for connection to our members and guests.

- **Maintaining high standards for quality of events**

Another main value point for our chapter is our strong speaker lineup. Without the confines of physical location, we were able to tap into more resources for our virtual events. We hosted a panel of print media experts, a nationally recognized business and leadership coach and multiple other communications experts to maintain our chapter's high standards for engaging and dynamic speakers. Our attendees spanned the metro area and state to reach a significantly broader population area than our in-person events usually allowed.

- **Adapting to difficult times**

We wanted to provide additional value to our members and prospective members during a challenging time. To show communications professionals in our area that we are a community supporting each other, we decided to offer all of our virtual events at no charge through the end of 2020. We understood the barriers professionals were facing with budget cuts, uncertain circumstances and limited connection in their daily lives compared to pre-pandemic times, so we made the decision as a board to forgo any potential income from monthly events and instead focus on meeting the needs of our community.

- **Adjusting budget in light of lost revenue**

We understood losing our largest source of income by shifting to no-cost virtual professional development luncheons could majorly impact our chapter, so we needed to ensure we were being fiscally responsible with our professional development budget for the remainder of the year. Our shift to virtual events naturally cut catering costs, and we sought out speakers that did not charge speaker fees. As a board, we examined other areas of our budget as well and reduced expenses where possible.

### **Measurement:**

Our primary measurements for professional development events are attendance, expenses, and revenue. For in-person events, we measure attendance by our sign-in process as people arrive at the event. For virtual events, we measure attendance by the highest number of people signed in to the Zoom call at any one time. As with any virtual event, people may join late or drop off early.

While our numbers fluctuated from month to month, we maintained over 50% of our initial goal of 30 attendees, with an average of 20 registrations for our six virtual-only events in 2020.

**Results:**

<p>Provide value to members and attract new guests with quality, current professional development topics designed to develop professional communicators.</p>	<p>Met objective.</p>
<p>Initial goal: Increase attendance at luncheons and events to an average of 30 attendees to create connection.</p> <p>Revised goal: Maintain average attendance of 15 people at monthly professional development events. (50% reduction of initial attendance goal)</p>	<p>Did not meet initial objective in the few months of in-person events we hosted.</p> <p>Met revised objective with average monthly attendance of 20 people at virtual events.</p>
<p>Initial goal: Ensure lunches are profitable, which allows our chapter to continue providing learning opportunities that advance the profession, create connection, and develop professional communicators.</p> <p>Revised goal: Ensure lunches break even or show profit, which allows our chapter to continue providing learning opportunities that advance the profession, create connection, and develop professional communicators. (Goal modified to allow for break-even events, as we chose not to charge attendees for spring events.)</p>	<p>Met objective for all but one monthly luncheon.</p> <p>With the exception of March 2020, our first event without our free venue where a miscommunication with the new caterer occurred, we consistently made a profit from each in-person luncheon. We broke even for all virtual professional development events, as no costs were incurred for those events.</p>
<p>Continue hosting at least one virtual luncheon per month according to our usual calendar of nine events per year.</p>	<p>Met objective.</p> <p>We set this revised goal in April 2020 and continued hosting monthly events throughout 2020, with the exception of our usual break in June and July. The only month we canceled due to COVID was April 2020, which allowed our board time to assess the situation and figure out a plan.</p>

**Attachments:** IABC PD Registration & Revenue Tracker