



CHAPTER	IABC Ottawa
REGION	Canada East
CHAPTER BOARD TERM	July 1 to June 30
TIMELINE	July 1, 2017 to November 15, 2018
DIVISION CATEGORY	Division 2: Medium Chapter (76 to 200 members)
CHAPTER CONTACT	Kaleigh Maclaren, Past President, IABC Ottawa 613-222-6680   <a href="mailto:kaleigh.maclaren@gmail.com">kaleigh.maclaren@gmail.com</a>

### 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

IABC Ottawa connects nearly 200 members and the greater Ottawa marketing, communication and creative community to learn about best practices, develop skills, create connections, and access resources in a welcoming community. Established in 1976, the Ottawa chapter of IABC has a rich history of striving for effective chapter management to benefit our members, community, and leaders. Our focus is on retaining members, growing chapter leaders, connecting to IABC beyond Ottawa and having a sustainable chapter. We work to help chapter members grow in their careers by providing them with the skills and connections to succeed in their jobs. IABC Ottawa creates interest in membership through a diverse slate of focused quality events, workshops, special interest groups and professional development opportunities. We also create innovative communications content, such as our popular podcast “The Voice”, available around the world. The Voice helps listeners keep on top of the industry’s hottest topics at both the local and international level.

#### ***Chapter History/Challenges***

Despite stable finances and membership becoming more stable this year we had a number of challenges in the season that impacted doing everything to the degree that we would have liked. Three of these challenges include getting our website hacked, seeing diverse interest and value in our events but smaller audiences creating a need to adapt logistics and a number of leaders as well as volunteers experienced significant work, and personal challenges. The nature of volunteer work is that other priorities can arise for leaders, in the past year we noticed more signs of burnout from our chapter leaders who were juggling multiple roles in their jobs and health concerns among board members than in previous years. This meant leaders were turning to the support of the community more and that as Board members we needed to consider how we could support our community, which was not a main goal of the original strategy. Acknowledging the small wins and focusing on what we could do well to advance the chapter strategy was important. To sustain and develop the chapter, we continue to ensure that we focus on the things we do well, achieve our goals, and deliver the most value to our members.

### 2. OVERVIEW

IABC Ottawa focuses on helping our chapter members grow in their careers as strategic communicators by providing them with the skills and networks needed to succeed in their jobs. The local chapter is a vibrant community filled with knowledge, experience, ideas and a generous culture of sharing. Hosting monthly events is a key priority for the chapter and it ties directly to our overarching goal of building a stronger community. Members and the greater communications and creative community attribute IABC Ottawa events as a key factor in their continued involvement with our chapter.

Our event lineup for any given season includes professional development events, networking events, and specialty events, such as half-day workshops. We focus on having 8-10 events per season to ensure both quality and a variation of topics for our membership. We are pleased to have nearly 200 members and many non-members who regularly engage with the chapter through our events. The Events Team at IABC Ottawa plans and develops innovative content delivered through our event activities by listening regularly to member feedback, being excellent IABC brand ambassadors, remaining adaptive, and instituting effective event planning process. Our approach helps ensure overall success both in terms of finances and attendee satisfaction. The Events Team is normally comprised of two Co-VPs of Professional Development, both of whom sits on the IABC Ottawa Board, as well as several volunteer Directors who



work to manage event logistics.

New in the 2017/18 season was the addition of free member-only events – Special Interest Groups (SIGs). These events are designed to be small intimate guided discussions on a particular topic and are hosted by a member or chapter leader. Specifically designed with our membership in mind, these new events bring extra value to the members in the National Capital Region.

### 3. GOALS & OBJECTIVES

**Goals:** The overarching goal for IABC Ottawa events is to connect the Ottawa communications and creative community and offer attendees a high-quality networking and learning experience. This goal connects directly to the overall chapter's strategic direction of building a strong community through the three IABC pillars: advance the profession, create connection, and develop strategic communicators.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives for the 2017-2018 season as well as for the beginning of the 2018-2019 season were/are:

- To develop a set of re-useable tools for managing event logistics.
- To be consistent in event pricing strategy and break even at the end of each season.
- To host 8-10 events per season that consider the needs of our membership (young professionals, mid-year business communicators, senior communicators).
- To attract 40 to 80 attendees at all events and receive “good” to “excellent” on event satisfaction from post-event surveys (goal was re-assessed mid-way through the 2017/18 season to strive for 40 attendees).
- To build and maintain an “Events Team” of 4-5 individuals responsible for the creation and execution of all IABC Ottawa events.

### 4. BUDGET

In terms of budget, the goal of the IABC Ottawa Events Team is to break even at the end of each season. This means that we strive to ensure the costs of the event are covered by the registration fees.

Occasionally event sponsorship is secured. Generally, expenses include venue, food, and promotion (Facebook and Twitter ads for some events). Speakers volunteer their time and expertise to join our events, and are sometimes given a small token of our appreciation whether it be a thank you card from the Board or a coffee gift card. At the end of the 2017/18 season, a donation was made to the IABC foundation in honour of our excellent speakers for the season. This contribution is also planned for the 2018/19 season.

Between July 2017 and June 2018 total profit/loss was C\$856.01. Between September 2017 and November 15, 2018 total profit/loss was (C\$1168.39).

### 5. IMPLEMENTATION

#### **Event Management: Planning and Execution of Events**

In organizing events for the season, the Events Team considers many factors including logistics, promotion, sponsorship, speaker caliber, overall event experience, member and attendee feedback, and post-event activities. Each of these activities is underpinned by an overarching event plan for the year as well as individualized event plans and checklists for each specific event.

#### **Building and Sustaining a Stellar Events Team**

Due to the nature of Events being a work-heavy portfolio, we have learned that an Events Team with consistent leadership of two VPs who can focus on strategy, and 2-3 volunteers that can focus on execution of logistics, is often the best approach. While we have learned this is the best and most effective model, it is a challenge to maintain, particularly when individual volunteers face challenges at home or at work, which of course take priority over volunteer work.

The Events Team of the 2017/18 season did see its fair share of challenges as members of the team changed jobs, got promotions, and moved into new homes. The team also had only one dedicated volunteer for the season, whereas the previous season had three. While the two Co-VPs remained for the entire season and were able to successfully pull off a number of events and make a small profit, there was a certain level of exhaustion by all at the end of the season and one VP decided to move to the membership portfolio to lessen workload.



In an effort to rebuild and reinvigorate the team, the President for the 2018/19 season worked with remaining VP to recruit a second VP with a specialization in events as well as four fully dedicated event volunteer Directors. The planning for the Events team kicked off on mid-July, with a meeting for all volunteers as well as the current and past Presidents. At that time, knowledge was transferred from existing members to new members and all existing templates and work-aids were given to new event volunteers, including the Continuity Manual for the portfolio (see work samples). Also at that time, the team began to plan the content for the new season.

New in the 2018/19 season, the Board was grateful to have an IABC Ottawa Past President take on the role of Host for all Senior Communicator events for the season. This is presently serving to relieve the pressure from the Events Team, while also ensuring Senior Communicators events occur and are designed and led by someone with 10+ years' experience.

One new challenge surfaced in late October early November 2018, where one of the two Co-VPs submitted her resignation due to pressures from a very-demanding work life. While the Board and PD team was very sad to see her leave, the team has remained fairly stable given the early focus on planning and the efforts put toward building a team of four volunteer Directors to support the chapter.

### ***Selecting Event Topics and Format Based on Feedback***

The 2017/18 Events Team focused on planning their entire event calendars at the beginning of the year based on feedback from members, board surveys, and information collected in the 2017/18 IABC Ottawa President's "Listening Tour" where the incoming President held a series of meetings and small workshops to hear feedback and advice from existing members. Also in the 2017/18 season, the Past-President held a dinner for IABC Ottawa Past-Presidents – the first of its kind and an excellent opportunity to receive feedback from senior communicators about how they feel the Chapter is functioning. Similarly, over the summer of 2018, the incoming President held a series of one-on-one meetings with incoming and outgoing board members, as well as IABC Ottawa volunteers to find out what they liked about the chapter, and what they believed could be improved. Much of the discussion focused on events. Taken together, this feedback from leaders, volunteers, and members focused on a few areas that each PD team used to inform their events.

- Events do not need to be massive – smaller well-focused events do bring value to attendees and members.
- Member-only SIGs are well liked – intimate member-only discussions that can be used to sort out the challenges of the day, are well-liked by members.
- Continue Senior Communicator events – events that bring together Senior Communicators with 10+ years' experience for a light lunch or dinner are enjoyed by senior membership and a valuable chance to connect.
- Keep Young pros, Crisis comms, and expert "speed-dating" events – these few topics were noted as the "favourites" by those who gave feedback.

In addition to selecting topics based on feedback from the community, the VPs from each season used the IABC Ottawa Board for additional insight and advice, particularly for speaker selection. One key reoccurring challenge in recruiting speakers is mitigating "speaker fatigue." To combat this issue, the current Board is in the process of considering an events advisory group of senior and well-connected members to make speaker recommendations to the team, ensuring that new speakers are worked into the fold, and topics and insights remain fresh.

Finally, the Events Team meets on a regular basis in person and on video to check in and refresh or rework plan as needed. This continuous planning and re-planning contributes to the success of all chapter events.

### ***Working Toward Excellent Event Logistics***

In order to execute excellent events each month, a solid plan for logistics must be in place. Over the course of the last two to three seasons, several protocols were put in place to ensure smoothly run events. For example, the volunteer Director in charge of the event (the Event Lead) creates an event plan approximately 5-6 weeks in advance and presents the plan at monthly Team meetings. This allows the entire Events Team to give in-person feedback while helping the Lead mitigate any foreseeable logistical challenges. This plan is accompanied by an Events Checklist that lists the key responsibilities and tasks for execution of the event (see work sample). The creation of run-sheets for the day of the event is also key to a successful event. The IABC Ottawa Events Team has a template (see work sample) that is used over and over to ensure proper timing of events and allocation of roles and responsibilities. Extra copies of speaker notes and testing all AV equipment at least 30 minutes



prior only serve to add to the success of events.

There are, of course, unexpected logistical challenges that come up, a couple of which we as a chapter have dealt with over the past two seasons. One notable example is when a confirmed speaker for a Panel event failed to show up for the event and was not reachable. The President, who gave welcoming remarks, communicated to the audience that the Panelist had a last minute conflict and could not attend. While this is a highly unique situation, it was also a lesson learned from the Events Team to ensure constant and continuous communication with speakers in the lead up to the event, including the day of the event. Going forward, the Events Team will also strive to have a couple back up speakers to reach out to in the event that a confirmed speaker can no longer attend.

Another lesson learned in preparing logistically for events is to make sure there's enough food but be mindful of the fact that we are not responsible for providing dinner for our guests. The majority of IABC Ottawa's events happen directly after work (5:30 – 8:30 p.m.), meaning the audience comes hungry. One event in the 2017/18 season saw an abundance of left-over food, much of which went to waste. Learning from this lesson, the Events Team now ensures to account for an amount of food in accordance to number of attendees expected, understanding that they can always add a few extra appetizers if several tickets are sold at the door and additional food is necessary.

### ***Managing the Addition of SIGs***

Special interest groups were added to the IABC Ottawa line-up of events in the 2017/18 season and were led by the Leadership Development team rather than the Events Team. One challenge of having SIGs lead by a portfolio other than the Events Team was that the two portfolios needed to coordinate calendars and promotion efforts. On one occasion, there was the unfortunate situation where the chapter had a Panel event one day, followed the next day by a SIG. For the 2018/19 Season, the management of SIGs has been taken over by the Membership portfolio, which coordinates with the Events Team and the Marketing Communications team to minimize overlap of efforts.

### ***The Value of Post-Event Activities***

Post-event activities, such as surveys that collect feedback from attendees, are important to be able to improve for the future. Given the tumultuous year experienced by the VPs in 2017/18, few event recaps and surveys came to fruition – rather they focused their limited volunteer resources on speakers, logistics and overall event experience. Event recaps were reinstated at the beginning of the 2018/19 season when the Events Team began collaborating with the Marketing and Communications portfolio to attend each event and write a short recap that could be e-blasted out to members (see work sample). The 2018/19 Team still has plans to reinstate the post-event survey, but has made that a focus for the 2019 calendar year.

### ***Considering Partnerships and Sponsorships***

Strong relationships and partnerships are key to the continued success of the events portfolio. The events team is fortunate have partnership opportunities with other professional groups in the Ottawa area for some of our social events. These groups include Women in Communications Technologies and the Canadian Public Relations Society for example. In the 2017/18 season, the Events Team worked on a large holiday social with seven different partners. The lesson learned from this uniquely large partnered event was that it did not meet our objectives as a chapter in providing a valued experience for our members. This was largely due to the fact that we had limited tickets to sell to our members, and limited control over the event. The 2018/19 Team took the lessons learned from this event last year and decided to partner this season with a smaller number of organizations to deliver an event that could be attended by more of our members and have more IABC Ottawa-specific visibility. We do believe that partnership opportunities such as these help grow the network and demonstrate our value within the community.

Sponsorship is also an important consideration for the events portfolio, especially as the Events Team is often challenged with breaking even on events. Sponsorship is an area that the Community Outreach portfolio is developing a strategy around for the 2018/19 season. Two in-kind sponsorships currently help us reach our events goals: (i) partnership with a local photographer who covers most IABC events (ii) partnership with an agency who covers the cost of the venue for our Senior Communicators lunches and dinners. IABC Ottawa recognizes each sponsor in its newsletter and at each event.





### ***Types of IABC Events and Their Unique Value***

The Events Team focuses on executing four main types of events throughout the season. We work to ensure that event logistics match the unique events formats for an enjoyable event experience. Senior Communicators Dinners, Young Communicators/Professionals Dinners, Professional Development Panels, and Networking Socials.

- **Senior Communicators Breakfasts** are intimate events with one executive-level speaker (VP level and above) and 12 to 14 attendees with 10 to 15 years of professional experience. We strive to host at least one SC breakfast per season to provide senior communicators with a safe and collegial atmosphere in which to discuss pressing issues among their peer group.
- **Special Interest Groups (SIGS)** are an opportunity for members with similar interests or skill sets to network, obtain knowledge and share ideas and resources through smaller, more intimate events (5-7 people). These offer great value to the Chapter including exposing non-members who attended because of the special interest, to IABC, and allowing smooth transition into larger organization involvement.
- **Professional Development or Expert Panels** are large, multi-speaker events that focus on a particular topic of interest such as content strategy, measurement, or government relations. Attendees are normally from all levels and there is always a portion of the event dedicated to networking. It is during these events that IABC Ottawa Members have the opportunity to moderate panel discussions.
- **Networking Socials** are large-scale networking events with mainly a social component. Popular networking socials include the Season Openers and Closers as well as the Holiday Mix 'n Mingles. The overarching goal of these social events is to build networks and strengthen the community. Key strategies for accomplishing this goal include having on-site activities such as photo booths, free headshots for members, and draws for prizes. Occasionally we aim to partner with like-minded professional groups. Events such as these are also excellent spaces for handing out awards or recognizing important volunteers. Recognition efforts such as these further reinforce our goal of community building.

### ***Event Marketing: Promotion and Results***

#### ***Planning for Event Promotion***

One challenge that continues to be prominent each season is hitting target ticket sales within a competitive events landscape in Ottawa. To help mitigate this challenge, the 2017/18 and 2018/19 Events Teams worked with the Board, and Marketing and Communications Team to first, identify dates of any other large events happening in Ottawa, and second to increase promotion of IABC Ottawa's events on social media channels. The 2017/18 and 2018/19 Events Teams have also worked strategically to time events around current issues. For instance, we hosted a Government Relations Panel in June 2018 directly following the Ontario provincial election. This timeliness definitely resulted in a boost in ticket sales as communicators were seeking advice on how to best approach planning for a new government.

The Events Team also works regularly to provide the Marketing and Communications Team with event details and key messaging approximately one week prior to tickets going on sale. The ongoing use of a Slack account has greatly facilitated team interactions and sharing of files. This has allowed more time for planning and execution of social media promotion, thereby resulting in good attendance rates. These practices have continued into the 2018/19 season.

Other methods used to help increase overall event attendance are: including promotions in the monthly IABC Ottawa newsletter, distributing occasional e-blast reminders to the IABC Ottawa mailing list (see work sample), and creating a Facebook event for each upcoming event. On-site marketing materials for events such as banners, membership brochures, and signage promoting the next event are also requirements for all events. Finally, one volunteer is chosen to live tweet from the IABC Twitter account at all events with the hashtag #IABCottPD. This showcases the value of the event to attendees helps to encourage future attendees to connect with IABC. Speakers are also encouraged to promote their events within their networks. When considered together, we have found these tactics to be successful in meeting our attendance goals.

## **6. MEASUREMENT**

### ***Event Attendee Measurement***

The following chart shows all events hosted between September 2017 and November 2018. Event type is



noted in parentheses. Note that for this timeframe, the Events Team also held one special workshop-type event “Coding for Communicators.” For each event, member (M), non-member (NM) and student (S) attendees are noted.

Date	Event Name and Type	Attendance
September 28, 2017	PD Event Season Opener: Professional communicators at the heart of every organization (Networking)	Total: 56 M: 32 NM: 23 S: 1
October 26, 2017	Exclusive PD Event: How BDC is transforming perception about its brand (Panel)	Total: 32 M: 32 NM: 23 S: 1
November 21, 2017	The Role of Communications in Creating a Great Place to Work (Panel)	Total: 53 M: 17 NM: 35 S: 1
December 11, 2017	Partner Social Event: Holiday Mix 'n Mingle (Networking)	Total: 250 (M/NM data not available)
January 30, 2018	Networking in the New Year: Powering Communicators for 2018 (Panel)	Total: 33 M: 12 NM: 16 S: 5
February 12, 2018	SIG: Members Event – Maneuvering your career as a young communicator (SIG)	Total: 10 (all members)
March 1, 2018	Workshop: Coding for Communicators (Special Event: Workshop)	Total: 25 M: 10 NM: 15
May 2, 2018	SIG: Measuring What Matters: Communications Evaluation (SIG)	Total: 10 (all members)
May 22, 2018	How to increase the value of communications with public consultations(Panel)	Total: 18 M: 8 NM: 9 S: 1
May 23, 2018	SIG: Members Event - Maneuvering your career as a young communicator PART II(SIG)	Total: 9 (all members)
June 12, 2018	PD Event: How to Execute a Stellar Government Relations Strategy: GR for Comms Pros (Panel)	Total: 34 M: 12 NM: 15 S: 7
June 15, 2018	Senior Communicator Series: Communications and the C-Suite (Senior Communicators)	Total: 15 M: 8 NM: 7
June 25, 2018	SIG: Members Event: Including Wellness in the Communications Practice (SIG)	Total: 7 (all members)
June 26, 2018	PD Event – IABC Ottawa Season Closer (Networking & AGM)	Total: 32 M: 14 NM: 18
September 13, 2018	PD Event – Season Opener: Ask-Me-Anything with CEO Caitlin Kealey! (Networking & AMA)	Total: 52 M: 25 NM: 27



October 12, 2018	Sr. Comms Event: Smoke and Mirrors: marketing Cannabis with Credibility (Senior Communicators)	Total: 14 M: 9 NM: 5
October 17, 2018	SIG – Members Event: Being Unilingual in a Bilingual City (SIG)	Total: 7 (all members)
November 8, 2018	SIG – Members Event: Tips and Techniques for Stellar Speech Writing (SIG)	Total: 10 (all members)

**Measuring Marketing Success**

While event attendee metrics is key to measuring the success of IABC Ottawa events, the Chapter also closely monitors its social media channels to get feedback and gauge engagement of its followers (see work sample).

**7. RESULTS**

Goals	Results
To develop a set of re-useable tools for managing event logistics.	<u>Achieved:</u> The Events Team has a series of event templates and tools that are now passed from season to season and team to team (see work samples). These include: Continuity Manual, Season Planning Template, Event Checklist, and Event Run Sheet.
To be consistent in event pricing strategy and break even at the end of each season.	<u>Achieved:</u> Event budgets with fairly consistently priced throughout the season (special events and workshops differed in pricing): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o \$25.00 Early-bird member / \$30.00 regular member</li> <li>o \$35.00 Early-bird non-member / \$40.00 prospective member</li> <li>o \$10.00 Early-bird student / \$20.00 student</li> </ul>
To host 8-10 events per season that consider the needs of our membership (young professionals, mid-year business communicators, senior communicators).	<u>Exceeded:</u> With the addition of SIGs, the Chapter was able to exceed its goal of offering 8-10 events per season for its membership.
To attract 40 to 80 attendees at all events and receive “good” to “excellent” on event satisfaction from post-event surveys (goal was re-assessed mid-way through the 2017/18 season to strive for 40 attendees).	<u>Somewhat Achieved:</u> Some of the larger Panel events indeed met the mark of attracting between 40 and 80 attendees (see table above). However, the team reassessed mid-way through the season realizing that striving for approximately 40 attendees was best. We are still having trouble meeting this mark for some events. After careful assessment, we believe earlier promotion, and a focus on speaker promotion will help us achieve these results going forward.
To build and maintain an “Events Team” of 4-5 individuals responsible for the creation and execution of all IABC Ottawa events.	Achieved in the 2018/19 season: While this goal did not come to fruition during the 2017/18 season, a focused effort by the President and Past President in summer 2018 helped the chapter meet this goal for the 2018/19 season.