



2023 FPRA Ocala Chapter Management Report

Respectfully submitted to FPRA President Jay Morgan-Schleuning, APR, CPRC,

by Ocala Chapter President Tammy A. Gantt

on behalf of the board and chairs of the FPRA Ocala Chapter

June 1, 2023

Our theme, **Set Your PR Pace**, connected with our area's Horse Capital of the World® brand, and gave us an opportunity to look at our chapter year as though it was a horse race unfolding. We began with our pass-the gavel past presidents' event, Break from the Starting Gate, then to our Run for the PR Roses local Mid-Florida Image Awards, and now followed by our Ocala Chapter crossing the finish line with this report.

Additionally, we believed once the overall FPRA theme, **You Belong at FPRA**, was unveiled, we had a duty to connect this very important purpose to our moniker, so we added three simple words: **Belonging. Purpose. Meaning.** We hope we have fulfilled not only our theme, but the true meaning behind these words as we served our membership this year.

Throughout this report, we will exhibit many of the ways we believe we incorporated a sense of belonging into our messaging. You will find our report has been a team effort with reports in each section being provided based upon feedback from each officer and chair in consultation with the chapter president.

You will also find that we have placed our members' names in bold when we refer to them. This is to recognize them and the importance of their efforts, time, dedication and leadership to make our chapter successful.

The FPRA Ocala Chapter Trifecta (Top Three)

Professional Development

Our Back to the Roots PR and Communications Conference is likely one of our proudest moments of the year. By the numbers it included \$3,000 in sponsorships, 110 attendees, 18 FPRA members, 15 presenters, 14 sessions covering 13 different topics, a 12 page donated program, eight pieces of collateral, eight front porch vendors, seven sponsors, and six packed hours. The event included five scholarships, four speakers of diversity, three FPRA committee members, two co-chairs, one inspiring keynote address, one partnering organization, two home-cooked meals, one pre-event mixer, one community service project, one awesomely branded gift bag, and a half CEU credit for ethics. The co-chairs were Rising Star nominated **Rachel Cote** and FPRA Ocala Chapter President **Tammy Gantt**.

S.M.A.R.T. goals were set prior to the local conference including garnering 100 attendees. We particularly focused on diversity of our speakers and diversity of thought as part of our speaker recruitment process. We followed the RPIE public relations process with research about successful conferences we had held in the past and we conducted a pre-event survey. The survey was special because we asked additional questions related to making people feel welcome and comfortable by considering items like stand-up options, chair movement options, special menus, and items to help people who have shorter attention spans. These special touches were noticed by attendees. We created planning and implementation documents including work plans, delegation charts, budgets, and logistical timelines.

We evaluated the program with a post-conference survey where 20% of our attendees responded. The results were attendees were 100% very satisfied/satisfied with the event, 91% felt the conference was relevant to their current role, and 100% reported the conference was worth the registration cost. Branding was the most popular topic based on comments.

One survey respondent summed up the day by saying, “Incredible program and line-up”. Another said it was the best and most professional conference they had attended all year.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

Another of our chapter’s greatest accomplishments this year has been working toward building a true culture of belonging and a feeling of welcome for all our members. We weaved that meaning into each focus area including leadership development, membership development, external communications, professional development, and community service.

The best way to showcase this in action is an excerpt of a paraphrased conversation about our progress that was captured in our Board minutes in February thanks to our Secretary **Danielle Veenstra**.

Tammy: Part of what the State Office is working on and has asked the question about is, “What are we doing to build a culture of belonging?”

Heather D.: I put this in my report but I think it’s worth bringing up. All the special touches we are doing at the meeting like the photos, the takeaways and tokens, I think it sets us apart. You’ve made it personal and special.

Allison C.: And fun! Something our guest speaker Jeanne Henningsen said was that we are a fun group to be a part of. We have to be personable and an element of engagement that’s fun and it speaks to who we are in general.

Tammy G.: Our new members are saying that they look forward to the meetings every month.

Danielle V: I like the questions (related to diversity themed days on the calendar) and ice breakers.

Tammy G.: The work is getting done but it's a group effort. How do we get to the next part of that? How can we personally carry it to our membership?

Lindsay: One thing I'm hoping to add to next year's board is a DEI person to focus on those things and that we are accommodating to new members, those with allergies, those with disabilities, etc.

Tammy G.: Two other chapters have added DEI positions. I recommended an Inclusion or Belonging person not DEI to keep it as open as possible.

Allison C.: How does this differ from a Hospitality chair? When we are talking about belonging, it's hospitality. So maybe we just adjust the name and transform the position.

Heather D.: Another thing to add, you and the board have done creative things with the ice breakers. The energy is great and loud. It's a great mix.

Greg D: I know you (Tammy) were the person who ignited the change of what we are seeing in the chapter. It might not happen right away but we are getting to where we want to be.

Tammy G.: You (Greg) try to meet (personally) with potential members and it wasn't something that we did in the past (on a focused basis).

Greg D.: The culture of the chapter may have pushed some away (in the past) and we won't get to everybody but we can find out what pushed them away from just supporting us. To speak to their needs. We've worked on that and it's going in a great direction. Even the personal touches where we get together and talk like we've been peers for 10 years. It makes me feel more included and that plays a big part in this.

Tammy G: You're right, culture is gradual. It's a little compartmentalized and it's hard for timing and schedules. We are moving in a forward direction and it's good not to dwell in the past. Now, we are infusing the culture a small step at a time. What is our chapter's top strategic priority? We think it is building a culture of belonging. I don't want to accomplish a thing without it, plus having fun, and being engaged.

Membership Development

Our third accomplishment has been retaining and growing membership and we have been very successful at it this year. We set a target of retaining 95% of our membership or 42 out of 45 members and we conservatively budgeted for a 90% rebate rate. We achieved our goal by retaining 43 out of 45 members (nearly 96%).

We set another goal of increasing membership from 45 to 60 members by the end of the chapter year, and that was stacked upon our retention plan, for a growth rate of 25%, unprecedented for our chapter.

However, by creating a membership development plan based on the growth and demographics of the area, the chapter has been able to understand our growth potential and how to achieve it with specific tactics. As of May 31, 2023, the chapter has a growth rate of 13.6%, with a total of 50 members. We believe some of our most recent efforts could help us close the gap to improve this outcome by August.

Accreditation

Lauren Debick, APR, served as the accreditation chair. She brought with her a wealth of knowledge of the Chapter and leadership roles within our community. She is a cheerleader and connector, applying those traits to promoting the Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) and the Certified Public Relations Counselor (CPRC) programs. She is also a personal coach and brought forward her positive model of leadership to the group.

Currently, we have 29% of our Chapter as APRs, and 18.75% as CPRCs. We set S.M.A.R.T. goals of two new APRs (4% of membership) and one new CPRC (2% of membership) for the Chapter year between September 1, 2022 through August 31, 2023.

We also set a goal for our board members to begin the accreditation process as none of the members of our core board consisting of the president, president elect, secretary, treasurer, or membership were APRs. At the time, two out of eight of our board positions were filled by APRs (25%) and two out of eight were filled by CPRCs (25%). Six out of seven (86%) of our chair positions were filled by APRs and of those three 43% were CPRCs.



To accomplish our goals, we planned communications for each quarter both from the chair and the president. Basing our plan on feedback from previous APR students, our tactics included a kick off meeting, a private one-on-one approach, an invitation to all members, widespread recognition of APR, CPRC credentialed members, offering study materials, and hosting study sessions.

We highlighted recent APR recipients **Kristina Donahue, APR** in August and **Beverly Brown, APR**, in February in our newsletter, in our meeting visuals, and on social media platforms. As part of our professional development meetings, we held a formal pinning ceremony for each newly accredited member with APRs and CPRCs joining at the front of the room to do the honors rather than the president.

We promoted accreditation in conjunction with the State Office APR month by sharing and resharing testimonial posts by members, including our own. Our chapter also invested in and provided the APRPREP online course for all members to utilize (\$195.00 expense).

Additionally, we set up a study hall for both accreditation practice and for working on local Image Award entries. An e-mail highlighting the benefits of accreditation and an invitation was set to all members from the president. Lauren Debick also communicated to potentials APRs about the opportunity on a consistent basis one-on-one.

Five different members (10%) attended these sessions which were two and a half hour blocks set up on

Monday evenings in January and February. Seven sessions were held, totaling 17.5 hours and averaging 2-3 members per week.

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To date, we have accomplished 50% of our APR goal and 0% of our CPRC goal, however, we have in the pipeline five APR candidates (nearly 15% of eligible membership) and one CPRC candidate (representing 2.5% of eligible membership).

Additionally, we added one APR to our board (from 25% to 37.5%), attributing to 20% of our core board as of May 31, 2023. We anticipate that one or more of our five candidates will complete the process by the time of the FPRA Annual Conference, as they would love to stand on the stage and be recognized for that achievement in front of their peers.

Another way we are showing the importance of APR is by updating our Chapter history to include all APRs and CPRCs throughout our history thanks to **Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC**.

Membership Development

Membership development is a function of recruiting new members as well as retaining existing members. These were our overarching goals for membership for the Chapter year. We also set a goal of focusing on recruitment all year long, with regular Board reports reflecting those efforts from 50% of our Board.

We set a target of retaining 95% of our membership or 42 out of 45 members and we budgeted for a 90% rebate rate conservatively. We achieved our goal by retaining 43 out of 45 members (nearly 96%) and an initial rebate of \$1,895. We believe these were all the members we could retain, based on the retirement of one member and the planned relocation at the time, by another member. Our retention was the highest of all chapters as of October 31, 2023.

Our tactics for membership retention included assigning board members to members they had recruited and encouraging personal contact with members each board member had a strong relationship with, or crossed paths with in their work. This work took place at our first board meeting. The impact rebates have on the financials served as an unexpected incentive for board members to follow through.

This approach was based on a successful membership drive spearheaded in the same manner the previous year, thanks to Ocala Chapter President **Heather Danenhower, APR, CPRC**. However, instead of waiting until the second or third board meeting like the previous year, the board tackled the challenge earlier. Doing so meant time to adjust the approach, or timing of the ask to ensure all members had time to approach decision makers, get their payment in the pipeline, and create a sense of urgency.

Another tactic was to let our members know the financial impact their timely renewal meant for the chapter's bottom line. We identified this as an area of improvement from the previous year. A campaign highlighting rebates was placed on socials and delivered via e-mail.

We set another goal of increasing membership from 45 to 60 members by the end of the chapter year and that was stacked upon our retention plan, meaning a growth rate of 25%, unprecedented for our chapter. Several of our seasoned past board members considered it a serious stretch, however, the president based her research upon numbers provided by the Ocala Metro Chamber and Economic Partnership.

Ocala has increasingly become a hub supporting a diverse regional economy of equestrian businesses, manufacturing, distribution, healthcare, and service industries. The economy reflects strong and growing

service and local transportation sectors that have nearly doubled in recent years. The Ocala Metro has a population growth that is more than double the national average. (Summary of Employment, Demographics, and Commuting Patterns for Marion County, Florida report)

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Forbes magazine named the Ocala MSA in the Top 10 Metros for future job growth for five consecutive years, especially in the areas of transportation, manufacturing, healthcare, and professional services. Recruitment efforts were based on targeting those growing sectors, specifically healthcare and professional services, and the PR professionals associated with them.

Additionally, the president worked with several board members brainstorming a list of overlooked marketing, PR, and communications professionals that already have or have had at least one FPRA member from their business in the past. Chapter members were also recruited to suggest potential new members, which led to referrals on a regular basis. The board approved a line item in the budget for membership recruitment which included paying for coffee or a pastry when meeting with potential members.

The president also partnered with FPRA Ocala Chapter founding member, **Toni James, APR, CPRC**, to develop a list of 29 potential allied members, create an invitation, an agenda, and a meet and greet event to welcome this target audience by introducing them to some of the FPRA members that are representative of the potential business they could garner by participation in the Chapter. This has been a moving target and is in the works but not finalized.

Younger members on the Board, including membership chair **Greg Davis**, wanted to encourage millennials to join by reviewing what would attract them to FPRA in the first place. It was decided a personal approach and conversation would be the best way to introduce this audience to the importance of the PR profession and the role that FPRA plays. We received feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the chapter as well as what drives the members to be a part of FPRA.

Part of the feedback was putting some focus on the social aspect of membership. Typically, the chapter hosts two socials annually and the winter social was attended by a student member of another chapter who will now be transferring/or has transferred to the chapter.

The approach was boosted by a report by Avalanche Consulting regarding the double digit growth of millennials in the area that ranks the Ocala metro in the top 15 of all metros under 500,000 in the growth of millennials (ages 25-34) from 2012 to 2017. By creating a membership development plan based on the growth and demographics of the area, the chapter was able to understand our growth potential and how to achieve it. As of May 31, 2023, the chapter has a growth rate of 13.6%, with 50.



However, we believe we still have enough referrals to follow up on that we may reach our goal by August 31, 2023. This includes one student scholarship provided by Advanced Career Enhancement Series participants (ACES) and two Citrus County area practitioners who have made verbal commitments.

Additionally, our Back to the Roots Conference yielded five interested individuals that have been added to our 'hot list'. As the time of filing this report, a modest allied membership recruitment event is being planned for late

July/early August, in addition to an added second fundraiser at a summer polo event that may fund one additional membership for a scholarship applicant that wants to join, but the fee is a hardship for them.

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We also plan to do a survey asking new members what helped them make the final decision to join. We also have follow-up calls to our potential recruits. We plan to ask them ultimately why they did not join, so we can address those pain points.

Additionally, it should be noted, we had a goal of hosting two socials for the year and we hit 200% of our goal by hosting four starting with our September polo social, our December Merry Mixer, the MCA Magic Arts program which included a social after the program and the World Equestrian Center Mixer prior to the Back to the Roots Conference.

Also in our membership report, we were saddened by the sudden loss of our longtime member **John Podkomorski**.

Membership Communications

Our leadership communicated with members in the traditional methods with a monthly newsletter, sending meeting reminders, and via social media. Relying on our 2022 survey of membership and after a Fall Board retreat (and again at our Spring board retreat), we did make some changes to our member communications to better serve our members. Our overarching goal was to grow our audience on all platforms and to move our open rate for newsletters from 30% to 90% by the end of 2022. We did increase engagement on our social media pages, but we did not meet the goal of a 90% open rate for our newsletter. The open rate rose to 40%.

Based on our survey results and after polling our board, we found that members generally wanted a reduction in the number of newsletters sent monthly, less follow-up surveys after meetings/events, much shorter newsletters with events in chronological order, and more background on topics such as local Image Awards, scholarships, etc. Members also reported, and our data supported their feedback, that our members did not follow or engage with our social pages much.

Our communications chair **Savannah Silliman** implemented tactics including shortening the monthly newsletter, which increased open rates and click throughs. The Ocala chapter eliminated the second newsletter each month. The chapter president instead sent specific messages with specific timing to deliver the right information. Examples of these communications include a local Image Awards communication that explained the difference between the local Image Awards and Golden Image Awards, their timelines, and promoted training sessions for the awards program.

Another e-mail focused on scholarship communications showcasing available scholarships all in one place. This communication was sent to coincide with timelines provided by the State Office. The e-mails are sent from the president's e-mail which also ensures they are not getting discarded as junk mail, which at times has led to the decrease in open rates for the chapter newsletter via Mail Chimp.

To combat survey fatigue, members were informally polled as needed. Feedback was solicited about changes being made to meetings, the effectiveness of speakers, and as events were being planned. The surveys to membership went from 11 for the 2022 chapter year to three after-program surveys, and a pre and post Back

to the Roots Conference survey via e-mail. Members were incentivized with a prize and both Back to the Roots surveys were incentivized with a free local conference registration if they submitted the pre conference survey and a \$50 gift certificate to one lucky winner for completing the post-event survey.

To find a way to increase the performance of the chapter's socials to engage members, Savannah implemented the tactic to divide up the social media role making it beneficial to provide timely and frequent content. Savannah, president elect **Lindsay Tozer**, and Tammy were assigned as a team to the Facebook

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page, with Lindsay paying particular attention to posts from the State Office that could be reshared to the chapter pages, special occasions of members (two weddings), and accomplishments of members in the news.

During this process, Savannah created a social media plan and calendar and gave regular reports on what was working and what areas might need improvement. She also focused on Instagram reels and worked to shoot videos at the meetings. The hashtags YoubelongatFPRA and SetYourPRPace were used nearly each time a post was made throughout the year.

Lindsay Tozer activated the first LinkedIn account for the chapter and Tammy began to regularly post there and on Twitter which had not been used since 2019. Approximately 65.5% of those engaged with the LI page are media, communications and marketing professionals and comprise part of the total of page visitors at 129 with 180 followers. The biggest increase in visitors followed the Back to the Roots Conference. Our analytics have shown that shouldering a State Office post with an Ocala chapter post increases views of both, as much as 30%.

Our highest viewed posts were as follows:

<p>Elise Ramer Named One Of The Top Women In PR 2022 By PR News - Realty Times</p> <p>Posted by Tammy Gantt</p> <p>12/11/2022</p> <p>Boost</p>	Article	All followers	1,948
<p>Lisa Lombardo, MPA rocks the professional development meeting! Florida Public...</p> <p>Posted by Tammy Gantt</p> <p>10/28/2022</p> <p>Boost</p>	Image	All followers	989
<p>The FPRA Mid-Florida Image Awards recognize the best in research, strategy,...</p> <p>Posted by Tammy Gantt</p> <p>1/17/2023</p> <p>Manage ad</p>	Image	All followers	704



Also of note, President **Tammy Gantt** reviewed each social page and determined that most of the members of the chapter were not connected to the chapter's Facebook or Twitter pages, so she invited and added members that had their own socials. Additionally, she placed a small ad buy (\$15) behind the pages to pick up those interested in the chapter and to capture members who had pages that she did not find immediately. This worked wonders in building an audience and ensuring members were connected to the pages.

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She took additional steps on LinkedIn to connect to all the State Board members she could, searching by name or by the keyword FPRA. This helped the page be found in more searches on LinkedIn.

When the trio sent out communications on socials, they tagged #youbelongatFPRA and #SetyourPRPace regularly to build branding for the chapter and to place focus on the State Office messaging. At the end of 2022, several Board members asked for the Facebook members-only group and Board-only pages to be reactivated and they were. Lindsay additionally opened a YouTube account and Google mail for the chapter and plans to purchase a Canva account for the chapter.

External Communications

As part of our community outreach **Tammy Gantt** made a concerted effort to speak with community groups to create awareness of FPRA, advance the PR profession and its role in the community, and target a more diverse audience for membership. She presented or co-presented seven presentations from September 1, 2022 through June 1, 2023 to groups that had not been previously presented to by FPRA leadership.

These include: two Annie's Project classes for minorities and women farmers, 3) Agriculture extension agents on the power of the perfect press release, 4) the Marion Cultural Alliance PR Magic Storytelling program with **Carole Savage, APR, CPRC**, Communication Plans and Canva training for equine non-profit executives and production teams with **Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC** and Board member **Danielle Veenstra**, 5) the Hispanic Business Council, 6) the Ocala Polo Club and 7) Florida Thoro-bred Fillies club. These programs also partnered FPRA members **Lauren Deiorio** (2011) and **Jaye Baillie, APR** (2016).

President-elect **Lindsay Tozer** also promoted the chapter in Citrus county via her connections thanks to her past experience having served on the former Citrus chapter board.

Additionally, our one-day local conference focused on the small business community as an added target audience which did lead to increased awareness of FPRA in the community.

Members of our ACES group attended marketing classes to promote FPRA and promoted the student membership scholarship.

The chapter social events were held in four different locations including the downtown, World Equestrian Center, polo at the Florida Horse Park, and in the Arts area.



The creation of the chapter LinkedIn account and additional posts led to more engagement with all the chapter socials expanding the awareness of FPRA within the community.

The chapter sent out media releases for the Starting Gate event honoring past presidents, new APRs, local Image Awards, the Back to the Roots Conference and a 2022/23 officer announcement.

Earned media included two placements in Florida Trend's Movers & Influencers showcasing **Tammy Gantt** as president and **Beverly Brown's APR** accomplishment. Earned media in the *Ocala Gazette* included

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extensive coverage of our Starting Gate event, which included honoring **Toni James, APR, CPRC** with addition of her name to the chapter PACEsetter award. The paper also covered the Run for the PR Roses local Mid-Florida Image Awards. Placement of photos from both events in the local media was also key to increasing the community's awareness of FPRA. The group photo from the local Mid-Florida Image Awards, in which a majority of the attendees posed outside, is an outcome of our planned efforts.

Professional Development

Two-time chapter president and member since 2000, **Lisa Varner, APR, CPRC**, and past chapter president and member since 2002, **Allison Campbell, APR, CPRC** were the most seasoned members of the board and that experience was a perfect match for continued success with the chapter's professional development meetings. They brought 44 collective years of FPRA membership experience and countless community connections and resources to programming.

Once identified as the chairs, the president-elect at the time, Tammy Gantt, met with Lisa and Allison in July 2022. Goals were set to ensure engaging programs and increasing attendance at the meetings. Additionally, the program co-chairs promised to schedule meetings through September 2023 meeting as a cushion for the new slate.

The brainstorming proved valuable and set the tone for programming for the year. Part of the planning phase included thinking about how to strategically incorporate the State Office theme, create a sense of belonging, as well as focusing on ways to add diversity, equity and inclusion to the conversation, the topics, and to the speaker mix.

The previous chapter year had a strong professional development schedule but featured only one speaker related to a diversity topic (Latin X) and she was the sole Latin speaker that year. It was determined there was room for improvement in this area. Additionally, identifying speakers that had not spoken to the chapter previously or were not easily accessed by the community was also a consideration. Expanding to new speakers was key.

Additionally, consideration of past program surveys and participant feedback was discussed. Popular

programs including a case study; an FPRA leadership roundtable; and a round-robin program that included headshots, a session on the power of planning when shooting video, and the importance of research and metrics were discussed to determine a model for successful programs for the upcoming year based on previous membership engagement.

Initially, a secondary goal was set to book programs through January 2023, rather than working two months ahead. This decision provided more time to focus on other aspects of professional development and led to timely board reports. Programs also had a financial goal of securing speakers who would waive a possible speaker fee.

Past challenges include ensuring a September meeting was set up and establishing a back-up plan for canceled speakers. Additionally, in the past at times co-chairs were not equal partners, however, Lisa and Allison worked well together sharing responsibilities and the workload, as needed.

At the meeting, each identified potential program topics based on feedback from members in a survey a few months before. In planning, all kept in mind our purpose of furthering members' professional development by presenting relevant and informative subjects/topics for public relations professionals. We followed the policies and procedures put forth by the chapter board to plan for the year.

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Nine monthly programs were planned (the tenth was already set). Of note, the chapter historically skips a December meeting to host a holiday social and a Spring meeting is skipped to accommodate the professional development seminar/conference. The August meeting is set aside for past presidents' recognition, a gavel pass, and a presentation by the incoming FPRA State President Wendy Crites Wacker.

At the brainstorming session, the program directors and president identified potential speakers that would be able to address the following topics of interest by members:

- Local case study (Golden Image Award winner)
- Social media
- Personal career advancement
- Crisis communications
- Grassroots PR
- Internal communications and employee engagement
- Time management
- Author panel discussion
- Digital marketing

In advance of each meeting, each speaker was given direction on the program topic and feedback to ensure professional development goals were met. They were asked to provide an inspirational quote, a professional head shot, a bio and a program summary. Each speaker was greeted upon arrival, introduced, thanked, and presented with an FPRA branded gift bag and an FPRA branded gift at each meeting. These elements were important to show gratitude.

Feedback surveys were conducted for three of the nine meetings (33%). More surveys were not given based on feedback from 2022 that less surveys should be administered. Additionally, the method of survey delivery was tested – with one being delivered by e-mail and the other two by text to meeting attendees delivered within an hour of the session ending. Evaluations from meeting attendees showed high levels of satisfaction

with the monthly programs. The rating for each program was 4 to 5 out of 5 (outstanding) for both the program topic, for the choice of speakers and their ability to convey the message, and for the relevance to the PR profession and professional development. Seven out of the nine topics originally brainstormed were used, with an additional one scheduled, but cancelled due to proximity to the local Mid-Florida Image Awards and Spring Break.

The monthly programs averaged about 20 people each month, nearly 42% of membership. At least one meeting had 30 attendees (62.5% of membership). More than 85% of the total membership attended at least one professional development program from September 2022 through May 2023. Most of the speakers resided in the local area, which highlighted the level of expertise in the surrounding community.

All the speakers were booked for free, and one speaker, our hometown's national celebrity chef Rashad Jones of Big Lee's BBQ waived a fee of \$750 for the chapter thanks to his long-term relationship with the programming chairs and their ability to convey the importance of the FPRA's role in the community. His fee can range as high as \$7,500 at times.

Upon evaluation, the program directors made the following recommendations including not scheduling a professional development program the same month as the local Mid-Florida Image Awards and the same week as the start or end of Spring Break, and to consider timing if a May program is held the same month as a local conference program.

Financial Management

The President **Tammy Gantt**, President-elect **Lindsay Tozer**, and Treasurer **Beverly Brown, APR**, met to set the budget based on historical data based on an expired five year plan provided by past President **Tina Banner, APR, CPRC** and last year's budget created by Tina, immediate past President **Heather Danenhower, APR, CPRC**, President **Tammy Gantt** and last year's Treasurer **Kristina Donahue, APR**.

These documents served as a roadmap to create a breakeven budget that included growth in sponsorships to offset the goals of 1) providing more scholarships to members, 2) a confirmed rented regular meeting location with hot meals versus cold sandwiches, 3) branded speaker gifts, and 4) a \$20 'get your lunch money back' door prize promotion for members. The budget also included funding for membership recruitment and for APR needs.

The previous year, \$3,000 was placed into savings and these funds were considered off-limits as budgeting occurred. The bank statement as of Sept. 1, 2022 was \$4,080.89. The financial standing of the chapter is solid with \$8,527.31 as of April 30, 2023, a 48% increase. The chapter had no material unbudgeted expenses to speak of.

Sponsorships were added to the revenue line item during budgeting, along with two fundraisers. The sale of media directories surpassed what was budgeted thanks to active promotion by the president at both community and member meetings. Three fundraisers were ultimately held raising nearly \$800. The chapter also raised \$2,000 in meeting sponsorships, \$3000 in local conference sponsorships (split), and \$2,000 for the local Mid-Florida Image Awards for a grand total of \$7,800. After expenses are deducted, the Board will be approached to approve issuing additional scholarships than originally budgeted for, as demand and qualified candidates come forward.

The chapter issued five Back to the Roots Conference registration scholarships. The chapter budgeted for one LeadershipFPRA scholarship and three FPRA Annual Conference scholarships. Via ACES, the chapter

fundraised to give one student scholarship, including the cost of professional development meetings. We issued two APR rebates and paid for Toni James' retired membership.

We secured \$2,000 in in-kind sponsorships/speaker fees waived and received a 30% discount for our local conference rental fee. During transition training from president elect to president, Beverly was sharing the

steps she takes and PE Lindsay identified a more efficient way to perform the task in QuickBooks. This shaved hours off of the work

for the treasurer. Over time, there are

likely more time-savings apps that can be put into place to save some effort.

Community Service

Our previous chapter year proved successful with community service projects so we planned immediately to expand upon that. Our celebrated new APR, **Kristina Donahue, APR**, served as the community service chair. She identified immediately that our chapter liked to give – not necessarily time – but items. She noticed this in 2022 with our diaper drive and with our school supply drive.

The goal was set to increase the number of community service projects over the previous year from four to six. This goal was met with four programs so far and two more to go – a toiletries drive, a

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school supply drive, a canned good drive, and a community closet drive for business interview clothes for the Hispanic Business Council. This community service project was also offered at the one-day conference as the overall service project.

Additionally, the chapter voted to donate on behalf of Bill Mansfield \$100 to the Florida Public Relations Education Foundation. A large segment of our membership participated in the FPREF Valentine's drive and several make regular contributions to the FPREF.

The chapter also provides a consulting service to non-profits via the non-profit business council. Typically, a one-hour service is offered on behalf of the chapter. Our president met with four non-profits directly over the course of the year and **Lauren Debick, APR**, also expressed interest as these opportunities have occurred.

Thanks to a prompt from **Kevin Christian, APR, CPRC**, our members volunteered as judges for the Marion County Media Festival in February. Twelve members (27% of our membership), many of whom cannot attend pro-development meetings regularly, spent 27 hours collectively giving feedback to students on their media projects.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Belonging

One of our greatest accomplishments has been the process of starting DEI and Belonging conversations in a way that is meaningful and challenges members to think about what DEI&B means for all of us as professionals and as FPRA leaders.

The goal of bringing the conversation of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging into the meetings was accomplished by the selection of diverse speakers and cognitive diversity for our professional development



meetings.



This flowed into the environment at the professional development meetings. Our president, who also served as hospitality chair this year, eliminated the barrier of a check-in table, did not collect payment at the meetings, placed nametags accessible for members to pick up, added photos of members from previous FPRA events and outings that were framed gifts to take home, ensured there were gifts based on the theme, offered a variety of seating and meal types, and opened each meeting with icebreakers or meaningful questions for the members to discuss.

She added a hot menu (a real meal) and skipped questioning someone who did not RSVP, choosing to extend a warm welcome instead. New members and APRs were recognized by their contemporaries

in front of their peers. Additionally, the meetings featured monthly themes including Chinese History Month, Black History Month, etc. to tie in with national events. The goal of the icebreakers and conversations was to create a safe place to share.

A side-effect of the change in the meeting set-up and style led to many comments about ‘how fun the meetings are’.

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As part of our leadership development at Board meetings, here’s our chapter leadership’s thought process, transcribed below from January shortly after the FPRA membership survey was released.



Lindsay: The State Office is asking if (our chapter) plans a diversity chair as well.

Lisa V: I have a comment about the DEI position. Until our profession is more diverse, it's going to be challenging to diversify our membership.

Tammy G: All of our analytics say it's mostly women. But a diversity chair will ask what diverse programming looks like. It could mean certain things, but it's more about DEI best practices in the PR field.

Lindsey T: It's for an 'accommodation' purpose too. I'm classified as disabled but there are things I don't think are accommodating from our chapters. The purpose of the survey is more than

race, it's also LGBTQ+ and from an inclusion perspective - do you feel included?

Tammy G: Another good example is financial. If you have the fee(s) so high, there will be people that can't afford it. It's not all about DEI (in the traditional strictest sense), but the inclusion and the

barriers to that. We don't know what we don't know, so the FPRA member survey was (designed) to help shed light on that. Also, (there's a range of) people who are beginning in the profession to those that are experienced.

The inclusion conversations aren't (always) getting to the local boards that help us move forward. Lisa V: What do we need to do from an inclusion standpoint? ADA?

Tammy G: Here's an example. We have a website designed to be accessible from that perspective. We have gluten free options (for meals currently). We have some financial help for members. And that survey will help find some other pain points too.

Lisa V: It's worth updating the people at the meetings with this info.

Tammy G: There's good stuff (from this discussion). We want our chapter to understand why we do what we do. And that they can guide what the position does.

As DEI&B relates to our external communications, out of our 220 posts on LinkedIn, 28 were diversity oriented or featured diverse people, roughly 13% of the total posts. We also provided social links to three white papers on gender, women's issues, and Hispanic Heritage.

Our community service program connection to the Hispanic Business Council was intentional. We wanted to connect with a more diverse audience that is not reflected in our membership already.

Leadership Development

Nearly 56% of the nominated Board positions for 2023-24 have never served on the Board. Of the remaining Board slate, four have served in a Board role for two years or less. As far as leadership development and bringing in fresh and new members to the Board, this slate has done that.

Shadowing current Board members in the roles prior to a new chapter year has been successful, so we have already begun to encourage the last two Board members in each role to allow shadowing and provide an orientation to new Board members, so new leaders can see differing styles within the same role based upon how each Board member approaches the task and also the skill sets they bring to the table. Overall, the current Board reported favorably to the job shadowing this past year.



A concerted effort to continuously update job descriptions, policies and procedures has been made and will be vital to the success of Board members in those roles going forward.

Treasurer **Beverly Brown, APR** identified an opportunity to reduce the administrative workload of the treasurer position which makes the role more appealing to future candidates. This led to the Board codifying a non-voting,

assistant treasurer position. In short, they are the next treasurer in-waiting, which will provide a seamless transition from year to year, as needed.

PE Lindsay Tozer also identified a change in titles from director to vice president for several roles and the Board approved her idea. She believes this change gives the roles more prestige and looks good as part of a resume for those leaders looking for that.

As part of leadership development, our member **Christopher Bradford** is in the current LeadershipFPRA class and we believe he is part of our future. Last year's participants **Greg Davis** and **Allison Campbell, APR, CPRC** assumed leadership positions this year. We expect at least one, maybe two members, to apply for and hopefully, be accepted for the upcoming program, as we believe it is a good pipeline leading to leadership opportunities.

Our Board was asked a follow-up question regarding culture in May, "Did you notice a change in the culture of the chapter?"

The Board secretary Danielle Veenstra, whose outcomes included turning around the board minutes within days each month, said, "From my perspective, there was a new warmth and more open feeling within our meetings. I felt that members were more at ease to talk about not just work, but their personal lives. We celebrated differences. Our meetings had themes and topics surrounding different cultures that I enjoyed from Chinese New Year to Black History Month. We've also recruited student members from the local colleges. I would like to see more of what we accomplished this year. Keep on the same path but build upon it."

Our future Ocala Chapter President Lindsay Tozer said, "Tammy did an excellent job at hospitality in ensuring there was a balanced level of diversity and inclusion at ALL professional development meetings. My goal for next year would be to continue our DEI initiatives."

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Membership director Gregory Davis said, "I believe there were more efforts made in attempt to make new members feel involved and valued."

To ensure board performance and manage expectations, we recently formed a plan to place job descriptions in each board report under each position so they are always top of mind. This will occur in the June 2023 through August 2023 board meetings.

Beginning with the June board meeting, our president will be reinforcing the importance of ethics in both the FPRA's mission and for the advancement of the PR profession. The FPRA's ethics doctrine will be in each board report with the intention of covering one to two tenets at each board meeting.

The topic of succession planning is addressed under challenges below, as that is the looming question overall, as to what our chapter can do to encourage members to become involved in leadership roles and how do we ensure stability of leadership for years to come.

Other - Mid-Florida Image Awards and ACES

The chapter set a goal of creating a revenue positive Mid-Florida Image Awards event, Run for the PR Roses, which was accomplished after expenses with a profit of \$485. Fifteen entries were submitted and three were selected for awards – all going to Liquid Creative's team with **Jen Pagh Houser**. The COTY awards were

also presented with the venerable **Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC** serving as the COTY chair, and gifted planners and sponsorship gurus **Lisa Varner, APR, CPRC**, and **Allison Campbell, APR, CPRC** served as co-chairs/emcees. **Tammy Gantt** served as an emcee and venue/event coordinator. Legacy member **Toni James, APR, CPRC**, served as an emcee also. Attendance at the event was 30 people. COTYs went to the Supervisor of Elections office with Wesley Wilcox and FPRA member **Starley Ard Cetina** and the individual went to the well deserving Tom James.

The Run for the PR Roses, Kentucky Derby theme, was well received and it was fun to see guests with Derby hats, fascinators and Derby style outfits. The food also represented traditional favorites served the day of the big race, including Derby pie and Bourbon balls. Coverage of the event has appeared in the press with photos of the award winners and a majority of the attendees represented. We intentionally took a photo of most attendees outside by a horse statue and sent it to the press followed by our YoubelongatFPRA hashtag.

After the event, we created an action plan to increase attendance next year and we plan to review the number of sessions we should do to promote entries (we had two via Zoom and one in-person session this year led by the award-winning **Jen Pagh Houser**).

Fifteen of 26 ACES members completed an ACES survey directing the group's efforts. ACES members were asked if they could present a five minute topic at each professional development meeting. Topics included burnout, leadership, time management, and were well received by the membership.

ACES additionally spun off a wide range of projects including a speaker's bureau directory about members, marketing class talks, quarterly luncheons, and a town trivia event.

Unexpected Challenges

The president appointed a nominating committee of five seasoned professionals with a combined 109 years of membership in the FPRA, with an average of 23 years each, from 16 years of membership being the lowest to 36 years being the highest. Even with the cumulative total of 109 years of experience, the nominating process involved a commitment of more than 50 hours+ and 4-5 meetings to establish a list of

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candidates that had the experience within the chapter, experience within the field, understanding of the Board role, had a basic understanding of how a Board functions, had the business and financial acumen to contribute to Board business, the time to devote, the attitude of service, the ethics required, the understanding the Board is a working Board with a hands-on need and all team approach, and the buy-in of their employer.

At least two committee members reported that they felt the process was harder than it has ever been. This may be partly due to the current Board make-up. The current core chapter board reflects the least number of years as FPRA members in recent years for this chapter, although the Board has a whole had a vast amount of experience from outside the Association. This perhaps led to some of the current Board feeling not ready for additional roles.

This also may be reflective of the changing role of a working Board in a PR professionals' leadership development model. PR professionals are stretched thin on time and having a healthy balance of work, volunteering and a personal life may be part of the ROI equation when it comes to the time commitment needed for success.

Our past chapter success and the fact that we are viewed as a strong chapter traditionally also might be a deterrent for potential new leaders to take the risk to develop into a leader in our Chapter for fear of high or unrealistic expectations, whether real or perceived. This viewpoint might also be because many of our strong leaders throughout the years come back to serve again. This may be intimidating to some members, even

though they are successful committee chairs and engaged with the chapter at meetings and with projects.

A takeaway is that we must do better to create a pipeline for leadership in a majority of our chapters, including ours, and to step up to mentor the next potential leaders as soon as they join as members. This will take planning, a time commitment from seasoned leadership, Board training, and reviewing the obstacles to the path to leadership on the Board. We strongly feel this would be one of the top priorities for the chapter and for the State Office to address in the future.

Supporting Documentation

[Back to the Roots Conference program](#)

[FPRA Ocala Chapter LinkedIn](#)

[FPRA Ocala Chapter Facebook](#)

[FPRA Board Reports](#)

[FPRA Photo Library](#)

We wish to thank the FPRA President, Executive Committee and officers for making this year a rewarding one both professionally and personally for many members of the Ocala chapter. We have appreciated all you have done and the path forward you have created for the Association and for our profession. The task took bravery, courage and powerful leadership. Thank you for showing us what that looks like.

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New members receive the code of ethics from the State Office upon joining FPRA. The code of ethics is one of the most important facets of FPRA membership and these principles are included here to signify their importance.

Adherence to the Code of Ethics

As a member of the Florida Public Relations Association, I subscribe to the belief that inherent in the practice of public relations is the obligation of a public trust which requires adherence of these principles:

A member shall conduct their professional life in accord with the public interest.

A member shall exemplify high standards of honesty and integrity while carrying out dual obligations to a client or employer and to the democratic process.

A member shall deal fairly with the public, with past or present clients or employers and with fellow practitioners, giving due respect to the ideal of free inquiry and to the opinions of others.

A member shall adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth, avoiding extravagant claims for ideas and words borrowed from others.

A member shall not knowingly disseminate false or misleading information and shall act promptly to correct

erroneous communications for which they are responsible.

A member shall not engage in any practice, which has the purpose of corrupting the integrity of channels of communication or the processes of government.

A member shall be prepared to identify publicly the name of the client or employer on whose behalf any public communication is made.

A member shall not use any individual or organization professing to serve or represent an announced cause, or professing to be independent or unbiased, but actually serving another or undisclosed interest.

A member shall not guarantee the achievement of specified results beyond the member's direct control.

A member shall not represent conflicting or competing interests without the express consent of those concerned, given after a full disclosure of the facts.

A member shall not place themselves in a position where their personal interest is or may be in conflict with an obligation to an employer or client, or others, without full disclosure of such interests to all involved.

A member shall not accept fees, commissions, gifts or any other consideration from anyone except clients or employers for whom services are performed without their express consent, given after a full disclosure of the facts.

A member shall scrupulously safeguard the confidences and privacy rights of present, former and prospective clients or employers.

A member shall not intentionally damage the professional reputation or practice of another practitioner.