

PRSA

Georgia Chapter

2021 STRATEGIC PLAN

PAVING A NEW PATH

FORWARD



Executive Summary

As a trusted source for hundreds of communications practitioners and aspiring professionals across the state, PRSA Georgia Chapter has long-enjoyed the reputation as a “go-to” industry and career organization. With well over 800 members at its peak, the Chapter has not only been consistently ranked second-largest among PRSA during the last decade, but it is well known for building a robust community of networked professionals, offering a variety of learning and development options and supporting the next generation of incoming young professionals.

The Georgia Chapter has built its success on a foundation of traditions over time, and while it has experienced change through the years, there has never been a greater impact to its current state and future trajectory than now. The cataclysmic disruption of our society in 2020 has ushered in a more urgent need for the Chapter to truly transform. At this writing, the COVID-19 pandemic and its continuing aftermath are taking an enormous toll on our personal and professional lives. At the same time, the reckoning of racial injustices catalyzed by the murder of George Floyd and countless other Black lives, demands disruption to systemic racism and a reawakening to anti-racist action.

Not surprisingly, our recent member impact surveys conducted this summer have confirmed the deep ripple effects of these events on our members and our Chapter as a whole. Amid this disruption, however, we must tap deeply into our nature as strategic PR professionals and forage for new opportunities to thrive despite the obstacles. We must adjust our strategy to reflect current realities and lean into change in order to make bold transformations for our Chapter’s long-term sustainability.

Because our Chapter has been impacted significantly in 2020, and considering the current difficulty in predicting beyond 2021, the Board agreed to alter the schedule for strategic planning from a three-year cycle (slated to begin this year) to focus on the year ahead. This Strategic Plan will provide a framework for our continuing evolution, focusing on 2021 priorities of improving relevancy, increasing membership value and engagement, fortifying the leadership pipeline, and strengthening financials and Chapter operations.

This moment in time will be documented forever as a profound inflection point for our collective society, and so too for our Chapter’s future. If we view crises as an opportunity and embrace change, we will only strengthen our Chapter’s path forward – and there has never been a more important time to pave it anew.

Vision

Evolve PRSA Georgia as a nimble, forward-thinking organization, delivering relevant and timely information and resources to help develop trusted communications counselors, strategic thinkers and sought-after leaders throughout all career stages.

Mission

PRSA Georgia supports a diverse community of professionals, empowering them to excel in strategic, ethical and engaging communications on behalf of the organizations they represent and the constituencies they serve.

The Chapter advances the profession by preparing communicators to:

- Build strategic thinking (professional development, growth opportunities)
- Address critical industry issues as they arise
- Elevate ethical standards
- Understand and drive diversity (not limited to: race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, religion, mental/physical ability, class/immigration status)
- Share and promote best practices
- Foster lifelong learning

Key Audiences:

- Current members at all career stages (e.g. students; beginning, mid-career and senior-level professionals) and communications disciplines (e.g. PR, internal comms, social media, marketing communications, etc.)
- Prospective members
- Key influencers (e.g. media, government officials, community leaders, academicians)
- Current and potential users of public relations (e.g. corporations, non-profits, government agencies, etc.)

Situation Analysis

The current environment demands that PRSA Georgia be more relevant and responsive to its members' needs than ever before, while stabilizing the Chapter's financial health to sustain it for the long-term. Chapter leadership has reviewed recent inputs to examine its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Analysis includes a paid consultation from Georgia Center for Nonprofits to review the Board's operations and share best practices, two Member Impact Surveys conducted in Q2 and Q3 2020, individual interviews with all Board members, and an extensive review of Chapter financials.

While the Georgia Chapter has enjoyed the reputation as the "go-to" PR association, it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract and retain members. While membership has remained relatively flat in recent years at the National and Chapter levels, 2020 has pushed us into a downward trend. And, our member surveys in early and late summer reveal that the current environment is likely to exacerbate the trend.

By Q3, membership dipped into the mid-700s, representing a loss of approximately 100 members – the lowest drop in several years. This is likely due to causes cited in member surveys, including budgets cuts for professional development, layoffs and salary reductions. Until this spring, membership had been the Chapter's second-largest source of revenue at 25 percent.

PRSA membership is likely to be a harder sell going forward in the down economy projected for 2021. However, even prior to COVID-19, professional associations across many industries were experiencing membership declines. Many professional organizations attribute dwindling memberships due to a weakened perceived value among younger generations in the workforce. Many cite their beliefs that associations do not speak to their wants and needs. In addition, growing widespread access to free or low-cost virtual content remains a challenge to attracting and retaining members.

Given these combined factors, the Chapter will face financial headwinds with the high likelihood of constrained membership and professional development budgets. Doubling down on member engagement and retention efforts will be more important than ever – not only to help generate revenue but to improve and *prove* membership value.

Engagement has its benefits – according to National PRSA, 76 percent of (all) members stay with PRSA after 12 months. At the Chapter level, we also know this to be a similar trend, particularly when we engage with our young professional members (YPs). And looking further upstream, continuing to engage with active PRSSA members will be beneficial to building a stronger YP pipeline.

Ultimately, the question we should be planning against is: *How can we best serve our members' evolving needs now and into the future as our profession evolves?* Considering the lifecycle of organizations noted by the Georgia Center for Nonprofits, relevancy will be critical to its future sustainability (*note: PRSA Georgia is a 501(c)(6), not a nonprofit*). One pathway to these efforts is an honest assessment of the Chapter's relevancy in terms of *what* we offer to members and *how* we communicate.

This includes a review of learning and development opportunities and programming. We need to critically analyze – are we targeting our member needs at various career stages? Do our sessions offer what our members need right now? Are they appealing to non-members? Do offerings reflect their current realities and the world around us? How can offerings better reflect the convergence of communications disciplines? Are we offering programming at the right price points?

We should also take stock of how we deliver on relevancy. How well are we engaging members via our channels (website, social, newsletters) and platforms (virtual experiences)? Is our voice “current?” How quickly can we respond to and pivot to members' needs? Are we delivering in ways that spark opportunities for connections and engagement?

Ensuring the Chapter keeps a sharper lens on relevancy and member value calls for structural leadership changes in 2021. By year-end 2020, the Chapter will have seven Board members finishing their terms, which gives us the opportunity to revisit and re-imagine roles to meet the current demands and pressures before the Chapter.

At the same time, the Chapter's consultation with the Georgia Center for Non-Profits noted that organizations are moving toward smaller Boards for efficiencies in decision-making. A smaller Board can help with better collaboration and ensure more strategic decisions are being made across the full Board.

Changes for 2021 include combining committees and Board liaison roles focused on engagement – Mentorship and College Relations – under the guidance of one Membership, Recruitment and Retention (MRE) umbrella. While this does not mean Mentorship and College Relations activities are any less important – quite the contrary – this change should help streamline the collaboration and direction at the Board level. One recommendation for MRE is to appoint committee volunteers for “member operations” roles (e.g. following up with new, reinstated, dropped members) and “member engagement and retention” roles (e.g. engaging with PRSSA students, developing mentorship opportunities).

Additional Board level changes include combining Phoenix Awards and Awards Celebration into one liaison role to further streamline related efforts. The Sponsorships & Partnerships Board liaison for 2021 will be dropped as a centralized role, so that events teams can assign sponsorship roles, and still have additional oversight from the Treasurer.

Additional recommended structure changes can help ensure the Chapter is targeting members' needs at various career stages and staying relevant. This includes appointing dedicated Young Professional Co-chairs and Mid-Senior level Co-chairs on committees, such as Professional Development, Membership, Annual Conference and a newly created Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) committee. This can help those leaders and committees focus on current topics, programming and offerings that best resonate with members and how best to deliver them. Cross-collaboration among leaders across committees will also be very important.

Another significant change to the Chapter will be its first DE&I Board liaison role starting in 2021. This role will set the strategy and help make significant strides in holding the Chapter more accountable to progress for a more diverse, equitable and inclusive Chapter. While the Chapter has certainly had diversity on its radar, it has not set measurable goals or objectives for the committee. It's also time to focus on the notion of inclusivity in its

present-day definition. DE&I cannot be thought of as a checked box or it will fail. In order to successfully embed DE&I efforts across the Chapter, it needs full buy-in and action – leadership will be key to fostering a more inclusive culture and tracking progress.

Finding new ways to build and strengthen our leadership pipeline and ensure we create positive experiences for our volunteers will be an important focus. Some of the Chapter's threats to leader and volunteer recruitment include the perception of overly time-consuming responsibilities and unclear expectations of roles. To attract and strengthen the leadership pipeline and retain engaged volunteers, Chapter leadership should more clearly define responsibilities and expectations, focus on removing operational inefficiencies, and make more intentional efforts to cultivate diverse talent.

If the Chapter makes gains on improving relevancy, putting member engagement and value on the forefront, strengthening its leadership pipeline, and embedding a DE&I culture – the Chapter's outlook only stands to improve next year. At the same time, however, we also must prioritize activities that position us well for sustained financial and operational health in 2021 and beyond. That includes actively promoting our highest revenue-generating activities, including Professional Development, Awards and related events, Sponsorships & Partnerships, Membership and Annual Conference. We also need to continue thinking about new and different ways we can generate revenue while keeping expenses low.

While the events of 2020 have undoubtedly caused the largest negative impact to our financial picture, we have learned to be flexible, comfortable with change and move more quickly. Since March, we've made many difficult decisions – from converting to an all-virtual format for monthly programming and large revenue-generating events such as Awards Celebration, to lowering registration and awards fees and reducing Chapter management expenses. Moving nearly all programming and events virtually this year has significantly decreased the Chapter's revenue. And while programming and event-related expenses have also decreased, we will still end the year with a significant negative balance that will be off-set by Chapter reserves.

Opportunities to strengthen our financial outlook include examining patterns and lessons learned from our current environment. At the same time, the Chapter's financial model will need to change, as previous revenue streams (and budgeting) were based on a cadence of in-person events. For perspective, 45 percent of 2019 revenue came from monthly Professional Development meetings and awards-related programs and events. And together with Membership revenue, that equaled 70 percent of total annual revenues. Next year will usher in a new balance of programming formats that will likely become a mainstay in the Chapter's future – which should be viewed as an opportunity.

Operationally, the Chapter will also benefit from recent and significant improvements to streamline its financial processes, such as strengthening record-keeping and upgrading our financial planning contractor. This will help the Chapter with better reporting and budgeting. Additionally, changes to our Chapter Management approach and expenses will further stabilize our long-term finances, as we build a succession plan for Denise Grant, our long-time and dedicated Chief Operating Officer.

The challenges we've faced as a Chapter have been difficult; however, we've proven that resiliency can emerge out of a crisis. As we look at the road ahead, we have an opportunity to focus on what's possible, try new things and make a bold change. This does not discount the decisions and efforts of years past to make PRSA Georgia an incredible Chapter – 2020 has simply gifted us a sharper lens with which to focus moving forward.

While some new changes and approaches may not run as smoothly as planned in these uncharted waters, we need to commit to staying focused on our mission, prioritizing our most impactful opportunities, and leveraging the passion of our members and volunteers as we move forward. Our commitment to excellence and our Code of Ethics remains at the core of everything we do, and together we can pave the road for an even stronger PRSA Georgia Chapter for years to come.

2021 Strategic Priorities

- Focus on member relevancy
- Reinvalidate member engagement
- Strengthen the leadership pipeline
- Drive Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Strengthen financial outlook and Chapter operations

The Board has defined these key strategic priorities to serve as a guide in 2021, with the notion that they can serve as a building blocks for 2022 and beyond. These priorities were established after a thorough review of the Chapter's programs and services, findings from Member Impact surveys, a consultation from the Georgia Center for Non-Profits, and a revised budget completed in August.

To align our strategic priorities, we've outlined five goals that we believe will add value and strengthen our Chapter's success in the short and long term. These goals have corresponding objectives for which action plans can be based in 2021.

Goal #1

Ensure PRSA Georgia remains a relevant association that supports professionals' needs throughout their career and as the profession evolves.

2021 Objectives

Objective 1 Beginning in January 2021 provide relevant, forward-thinking learning and development offerings targeting various career stages and diverse disciplines.

- Leverage industry trend data, member surveys and Chapter demographics to prioritize topics that resonate
- Consider professional learning tracks/series to focus content and structure
- Generate networking opportunities by interest

Objective 2 By January 2021, structure the PD committee to conduct activities focused on professional interests and marketed to existing and prospective members.

- Appoint Young Professional Co-chair(s) and Mid-to-Senior Co-chair(s) to the PD committee
- Integrate Special Interest Groups (SIGs) such as Young Professionals, as necessary, into the PD committee to streamline planning
- Foster cross-collaboration and planning among committees, for example:
 - **Membership, Recruitment and Engagement** – target and market learning and development sessions for existing and prospective members
 - **Annual Conference** – coordinate offerings, collaborate and share learnings during the planning process
 - **DE&I** – ensure a diverse representation of speakers and balance of topics
- Appoint PD committee/task force that reflects Chapter demographics

Objective 3 Reinvent the structure of the Chapter's professional development calendar so it offers flexibility while generating the best possible revenue opportunities

- Examine the structure of monthly luncheons and seminars to create more variety of learning opportunities
- Consider popular, high revenue-generating events, such as the Annual Media Panel
- Continue with a mix of virtual and in-person (when available) programming

Objective 4 Ensure event programming and events logistics are well-executed through advanced planning and promotions, as well clear committee assignments

- Focus on a longer-term view of programming and curate speakers on a bi-annual basis; establish PD task force meetings in December 2020 and April 2021
- Assure consistent execution of tasks through specific volunteer roles (i.e. virtual and on-site hosting, promotional copywriting, social media committee liaison, etc.)

Goal #2

Reinvigorate member recruitment, retention and engagement efforts to boost Chapter memberships and member involvement to pre-COVID-19 levels by Q4.

2021 Objectives

Objective 1 Restructure Membership, Recruitment and Engagement (MRE) Board Liaison committee and implement clearly defined roles/areas of focus by Q1.

- Consolidate Mentorship and College Relations committees under the MRE umbrella.
- Appoint Recruitment & Engagement co-chairs by career group focusing specifically on programming and other offerings through partnerships with Professional Development:
 - Students and Young Pros
 - Mid-Senior Pros and Independent Consultants
- Appoint Membership Operations co-Chairs to communicate with new, reinstated and drop/about-to-drop members; coordinate member promotions, group memberships, etc.
- Ensure collaboration with other committees such as PD, Annual Conference and DE&I align with overall Chapter priorities.

Objective 2 Increase member and non-member participation in Chapter offerings and revenue through implementation of membership outreach plans by December 31.

- Identify three new industries that are not represented in our current membership base by March 2021; recruit at least 30 new PRSA members from those newly identified areas by June 2021.
- Gather and track trends based on Chapter participation for members as well as non-members.
- Understand competition and what is being offered in other organizations. Use data to improve retention of members.
- Refine strategies based off what's working and what's not; use refreshed messaging to tailor outreach.

Continued: Goal #2

Objective 3 Conduct a review of the Chapter's membership value messages to ensure they reflect the current strategic initiatives and focus on relevancy for PRSSA, YP, Mid-Senior career and Independent Counselors audiences by June 2021.

- Develop a message map to guide language to engage members
- Channel considerations:
 - Website content
 - Social
 - Newsletter
 - Member events
 - Emails/letters to existing and prospective members

Objective 4 Develop and implement a recruitment plan that identifies and reengages at least three new PRSSA college Chapters, continues growth of YP and mid-senior professionals and includes helpful resources for independent professionals by end of Q1.

- Map to current audience (PRSSA, YPs, Mid-Sr Career Professionals and Independent Counselors).
- Consider industry research on what generations want from associations and develop strategies accordingly.
- Prioritize engagement strategies that deliver the highest value for retention and growth.

Goal #3

Strengthen the Chapter's leadership and volunteer pipeline while cultivating diversity.

2021 Objectives

Objective 1 Establish quarterly check-ins with Board liaisons to help identify and track a slate of potential Chapter leaders.

- Seek regular feedback from volunteers and map interests and leadership potential
- Create a leader tracker that notes leadership qualities, milestones, goals and Chapter experience
- Refresh the Chapter's Path to Leadership roadmap so it's consistent with the current environment

Objective 2 Increase awareness for leadership roles by raising visibility of Chapter leadership in owned media channels and events quarterly.

- Generate profiles of leaders' positions, highlighting what it's like to be a Chapter leader and the benefits
- Position leadership as sought-after roles that help advance personal and professional development
- Collaborate with MRE to ensure leadership is expressed as a benefit to Chapter involvement

Objective 3 Seek to identify and actively recruit diverse leader candidates through collaboration with the DE&I and MRE committees by Q4 2021.

- Working with DE&I committee, identify gaps in Chapter demographics and set goals to close
- Start an early-stage pipeline; engage with MRE committee to tap PRSSA leadership, leverage Chapter Advisors and DE&I connections with organizations such as HBCUs/HSIs

Objective 4 Ensure a positive Chapter leadership experience throughout the year.

- Clearly define roles, responsibilities and expectations
- Conduct a Board retreat for team building and idea generation
- Ensure an inclusive Chapter environment where leaders ideas and voices are heard
- Identify areas where the Chapter can improve/streamline operations and commit to resolving issues quickly
- Ensure thoughtful integration of new Chapter Administrator so that the Board is clear on roles and responsibilities

Goal #4

Propel PRSA Georgia toward a more diverse, equitable and inclusive organization.

2021 Objectives

Objective 1 Establish a DE&I committee and clearly define roles, responsibilities and expectations by January 2021.

- Appoint Co-Chairs to focus on Young Professionals and Mid-Senior Professionals
- Appoint leaders to form relationships with HBCUs/HSIs
- Finalize role responsibilities

Objective 2 Develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strategy for the Georgia Chapter by Q1, 2021.

- Leverage PRSA National's DE&I strategic plan and toolkit for guidance; outside research
- Set goals and measurable objectives

Objective 3 Create a system of checks and balances by seeking out guidance from a senior leader advisory group consisting of members with DE&I experience and other resources by January 2021.

- Set up quarterly advisory group check-ins
- Tap PRSA National DE&I leadership
- Seek out Chapters Leaders in other states and districts for idea-sharing and best practices

Objective 4 Generate awareness for DE&I plans and report progress on an on-going basis

- Formalize cross-collaboration across committees through regular meeting attendance
- Ensure monthly reporting and quarterly presentation to the Board
- Share quarterly progress through Chapter-wide channels

Goal #5

Ensure the Chapter's financial security and set a path for its future sustainability.

2021 Objectives

Objective 1 Ensure new financial tracking and reporting practices are in place by January 2021.

- Leverage Chapter's new financial partner for more insightful planning and financial decision-making
- Structure reporting so all Board members find it useful and it contributes to their ability to conduct Chapter business
- Leverage technology, e.g., QuickBooks, to create easier processes and better record-keeping

Objective 2 Create a plan to diversify revenue streams beyond the historic "big three" (Member dues, Professional Development, Phoenix Awards + Awards Celebration) by end of Q2.

- Restructure how we approach sponsorships to find new ways to bring in revenue
- Refine our marketing strategy to target revenue from non-members
- Create a task force of Board Liaisons and volunteers to create a revenue diversification strategy
- Consider re-defining responsibilities and expectations for sponsorship/partnership roles

Objective 3 Increase knowledge and understanding of Chapter's finances among Board leadership and volunteers to contribute to a greater sense of ownership and accountability for generating revenue

- Conduct Chapter Finance 101 sessions for Board Liaisons and Co-Chairs
- Create reporting that's relevant and useful for Board Liaisons

Objective 4 Ensure a smooth succession for Chapter Management, with new Chapter Administrator in place by Q1 2021

- Establish clear job description and selection process
- Provide ample time for transition and knowledge sharing with current COO Denise Grant
- Set up Chapter Administrator for success by maintaining a welcoming Board culture, transparency and open lines of communication

Acknowledgements

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2021 PRSA Georgia Leaders:

- **Angie Champsaur, APR** – Secretary
- **Karen Cole** – President
- **Caroline Huston, APR** – Treasurer
- **Kristie Swink Benson, APR** – Board Liaison, Membership, Recruitment & Engagement
- **Keri Tomsic** – Board Liaison, Professional Development