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It does not count as 1 of the 4 page totals for the submission.

## Outstanding Award Application

Chapter Name:	Central Florida Chapter of NIGP
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List Program(s) that will be highlighted in application	Hybrid Chapter Meetings

☒ Has your chapter submitted your Performance Standard SEAL?

Check the box for the Outstanding Chapter Award you are submitting:

- ☐ Outstanding Chapter Operations Award
- How does your chapter excel in its operating processes, including policies and procedures, budgeting, recognition of agencies and individuals and involvement with NIGP?
- ☐ Outstanding Chapter Membership Award
- How well does your chapter market membership benefits and resources and what are your methods for membership retention and growth?
- ☐ Outstanding Chapter Advocacy and Outreach Award
- What practices and operations has your chapter demonstrated to be an effective advocate for members and our profession?
- ☒ Outstanding Chapter Professional Development Award
- How does your chapter go above and beyond providing educational resources and other opportunities to your membership?

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**Central Florida Chapter of NIGP**  
**Outstanding Chapter Award – Professional Development Category**

Hybrid Chapter Meetings

1. Explain the program/event/best practice – Worth 25 Points

The coronavirus pandemic affected all of us, and in our corner of the world it resulted in the facilitation of virtual chapter meetings, workshops, and conferences during 2020 and 2021. As 2022 rolled around and in-person meetings were possible, there were many of us that wanted to share the same space once again with our colleagues and friends from other agencies! However, we recognized the need to offer a solution for those that preferred to attend virtually. The solution we determined to be the best fit for our chapter was the adoption of hybrid meetings. Hybrid meetings offered an innovative solution that has allowed our members to attend membership meetings both in-person and virtually. This solution addressed pandemic and social distancing considerations, the lower travel and professional development budgets of agencies resulting from the pandemic, and the desires of those members wishing to network in-person.

Preparation began with an idea. The idea was an election platform goal of our 2022-2023 President, “continue to offer pertinent professional growth to our members, with a hybrid model of virtual and in-person options”. At the 2021 Chapter Academy, the NIGP Chapter leadership program, there was a discussion regarding camera, microphone, and speaker systems. The discussion prompted our own research into the technology needed for hybrid chapter meetings. We did not have a camera, microphone, or speaker system, so a line item was included in the 2022 budget. An approved budget item is an actionable idea. It means you have designated funds to make it happen.

There are many variables to consider and questions that need answers when considering a hybrid platform. If we offer a hybrid option, will anyone show up in-person? What type of technology is needed? What is the overall cost for the technology required to run a hybrid Chapter meeting? What, if any, technology does the facility need to have available? How do we track attendance? How are scholarship points distributed? What is the pricing for members? Is member pricing the same for both in-person and virtual attendance? Will our members put forth the effort to engage and make this work? This was uncharted territory and required a leap of faith, but we saw opportunity and promise and said YES! We can do this!

Our newly elected officers began communicating with each other in September 2021. We were lucky as two officers were on the previous board, and we were all well acquainted with each other. Research for a camera, microphone, and speaker system was presented and voted on at our first board meeting. The Owl Labs Meeting OWL Pro was the system we decided to evaluate and purchase. As a precaution, we also ordered a portable speaker with wireless microphone system that was ultimately returned.

Our Treasurer engaged as the Audio/Visual Chair, testing and configuring our new video conferencing technology prior to the meeting. The system is plug-and-play with a computer. There is a mobile application required to register your Meeting OWL Pro and to access features and system controls. The mobile application includes controls such as setting a static camera zone, presenter following enhancement, and areas to be excluded from the 360° view. Becoming acquainted with functionality prior to use was beneficial to smooth operations during the meeting.

We determined that the technology requirements for hybrid meetings were as follows:

1. Zoom or comparable video conferencing software;
2. Video conferencing system, such as the Owl Labs Meeting OWL Pro;
3. Dedicated laptop (verify the connections) to run the video conferencing system and projector;
4. Presentation material and software;
5. Projector;
6. Projector screen or facility wall; and
7. Cables/extension cords necessary to connect the system.

Facility requirements include accessible electricity and Wi-Fi. In lieu of Wi-Fi, a mobile hotspot from a cellular telephone may be used. Our Chapter utilizes Zoom available through NIGP for virtual meetings. Members and their agencies donated certain technology items for the meeting that the Chapter did not have.

## 2. **Share Outcome and Results – Worth 25 Points**

Annually the Chapter hosts four afternoon meetings and two full day workshops. Each event begins with a business meeting to review chapter business. Five of the events include educational sessions where presenters cover various procurement topics providing contact hours for attendees. Our final business meeting in December includes a State of the Chapter presentation by the Board. After implementing this hybrid meeting program for one year the chapter was able to evaluate its effectiveness by comparing unique member attendance and volunteering engagement.

Prior to the pandemic our six meetings in 2019 were all held in person and 99 unique members, or 33% of our total membership, attended at least one meeting. During the pandemic in 2021 all six meetings were held virtually and 96 members, or 30% of our total membership, attended at least one meeting. In 2022 all meetings were held via the new hybrid format and unique member participation jumped to 162, or 50% of our total membership.

Creating a new program means the need for additional volunteers to keep the program running smoothly. To assist with hybrid meeting responsibilities, we created a Virtual Committee. This Committee coordinates all virtual requirements in support of Chapter events

and meetings, assists with managing the virtual comments and questions during Chapter meetings, and works with the Treasurer to record virtual attendance as needed. The required outcome/deliverable is to provide virtual coordination at all chapter meetings. This is a great committee for episodic members. It is a way to engage members for a small, one-time commitment, like a specific meeting or event. Unique member involvement in chapter volunteering activities rose from 30 members in 2021 to 57 members in 2022.

3. Explain what makes your program/event/best practice unique or innovative – Worth 25 Points

Hybrid meetings have allowed Chapter members to join virtually, or in-person, while still providing the same experience to everyone involved. We have been able to offer the best of both worlds to our members: the benefits of face-to-face interaction and the convenience and accessibility of virtual meetings. This has given the Chapter the opportunity to attract a wider audience, while still providing the same level of interaction and collaboration. Additionally, hybrid meetings allow chapter members to participate in a more convenient and cost-effective way while still networking with a large group of people.

The Owl Labs Meeting OWL Pro adds an additional layer to the hybrid experience because of its 360-degree video conferencing camera designed to enhance remote meetings. Using an array of microphones and cameras it captures a full view of the room and everyone in it, and it will automatically focus on the person currently speaking. It is meant to help remote attendees feel more engaged and connected to the presentation and in-person attendees.

4. Lessons learned (so that other can adapt or replicate) – Worth 25 Points

Keeping both in-person and virtual attendees engaged can be difficult. During the Chapter Business meeting, we engage our in-person and virtual audience by asking direct questions, acknowledging members by name, and giving them time to respond. As an example, we would ask committee member “John” to give his report. “John” attended virtually. We found that in-person Board Members would often look at the projector screen when engaging a virtual member instead of the video conference camera. Reminding in-person speakers to look at the camera is important to help virtual attendees feel they are part of the conversation. We have also asked in-person attendees that were asking questions or providing reports to stand up so the virtual attendees could see who is speaking.

Ensuring engagement of attendees during the educational presentation has had a variety of issues that change from one meeting to the next. Board Officers and many Committee Chairs are now familiar with the hybrid solution, however for many of our presenters, a hybrid meeting is a first. The presenter we had for one meeting walked around quite a bit. This is typically not an issue and is beneficial to the engagement of an in-person audience. However, we did not have the video conferencing system set up to follow them around the meeting space. As a result, the virtual attendees occasionally lost sight of the speaker.

During another meeting, the Meeting OWL Pro was set up to follow the speaker. However, at times the speaker would move so their back was turned toward the camera. This greatly reduced virtual attendee engagement and satisfaction with the presentation because they felt left out. It is best to verify all technical settings to ensure the system is appropriately set up for the events of that meeting. If necessary, utilize floor markers to communicate the camera zone to the presenter effectively. Selecting the appropriate location for the camera, presenter area, and tables for in-person attendees may not be the same for each event.

A challenge we are still adapting to is issues with the volume of in-person attendees and whether virtual attendees can hear everything clearly. With an in-person audience of about 25-30 we have had little issue with this because attendees are not seated too far away from the Meeting OWL Pro. However, as in-person attendance reaches 45-50 and attendees are seated further away they cannot be heard by virtual attendees when asking questions during the presentation. The use of wireless microphones can help in some instances but has proven to be a bit of a hinderance. The speaker system in the facility is a separate system from the OWL so sound distortion will occur for virtual attendees as the OWL system attempts to pick up the person's voice as they talk and pick up the sound coming from the speakers. The best current solution has been to ask presenters to repeat any questions asked for virtual attendees to hear clearly, which does have its own challenges when this is not the norm for the presenter. The Chapter has been researching the use of additional technology to assist with these audio issues.

## 5. Conclusion

Our Chapter's hybrid membership meetings and presentations have ultimately been a success! There has been increased member attendance and volunteering opportunities and feedback from attendees has been very positive. We will continue with hybrid meetings and will implement identified improvements and continue to monitor and evaluate member feedback. We hope to share lessons learned with others, so the implementation process is successful for them as well.