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Outstanding Award Application

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List Program(s) that will be highlighted in application	OkAPP Forum 2022

☒ 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?

What We Learned on the way to OkAPP Forum 2022!

Introduction

For consideration for nomination for Outstanding Chapter Operations, the The Oklahoma Association of Public Procurement (OkAPP) would like to formally submit, for consideration, our OkAPP Forum 2022 Conference. This conference was an event that provided new insight into what our chapter was capable of and what impact we could have on our members. This was a great learning experience filled with challenges and rewarding moments. We feel that other chapters can definitely learn from our successes and missteps to help plan their events in the future.

Background

For several years, OkAPP had been presenting single topic/ brown bag style meetings for CEU. These were informative and provided valuable knowledge to the membership, but they were often quick and didn't result in continued discussions. They satisfied a single need for CEU accreditation from the State of Oklahoma, but ultimately that was the end of the discussion on that topic. With the COVID-19 pandemic, these events were switched to webinar style events and stayed that way after we were all back to in person events. In 2022, a group of new members to the board of directors decided to question these events. Several events throughout the year were time consuming and took a lot of effort to get certified for CEU from the State of Oklahoma. More importantly, we weren't getting to connect with our members and spend any kind of meaningful time with them. In evaluating what to do next, we looked at the past events of the chapter and found that we used to host an in-person conference with several sessions throughout the day. After attending the NIGP Chapter Academy and the 2021 Leadership Summit, we decided to apply what we learned and host our own conference.

Planning

We were so excited when our board approved our conference, we immediately hit the ground running on planning the event. We ran into our first logistical challenge right out of the gate in that it had been over seven (7) years since we had hosted a conference and we didn't have a lot of experience planning an event of this magnitude. The other issue was that we got approval from the board in July and were planning a conference in November. So, we had a lot to consider, and we had to move quick. We first chose a name that we felt sent a message about what we wanted our event to convey and that was "OkAPP Forum" (sounds familiar, right?) We researched and [planned](#) for a few days and determined there were a few things that were important to us. 1) The event location was crucial in setting the tone. We had been hosting small events in conference rooms at schools and our own places of work for years. We wanted to set a tone for how important this event was and how it would be our showcase event for years to come. With that in consideration, we chose the [new convention center](#) in Oklahoma City since many of our members lived in the Oklahoma City metro area, but the convention center was also a great venue. We chose a space at the convention center that was not only a bigger space than what we had been accustomed to, but had windows that gave dramatic views of the city. We wanted the location to represent how special this was and would be for years to come. 2) We wanted to make sure that the [food](#) was something that also set the tone that this was a special event. We wanted to be more than "lunch boxes" that we used to cater in. We wanted the membership to feel that this event was special. So, we worked with the catering staff to make sure the food service set the same tone as the location. We picked meal options that we felt were different than what the membership was used to and something we felt would be universally enjoyed. 3) We wanted a keynote speaker that gave the membership the experience they would have at NIGP Forum, and we wanted a speaker that was engaging and truly believes in connecting with the membership on a meaningful level. For that purpose, we selected [Manley Feinberg of Vertical Lessons](#). Manley's take on day to day challenges was unique as he drew comparisons to mountain climbing. Having heard Manley speak at the Leadership Summit in Anaheim, we felt that *he was the obvious choice to establish our new event.



Once we worked through what was important to us, we had to determine what the rest of the [sessions](#) looked like. We drew upon [relationships](#) we built at NIGP Forum and [presentations](#) we had heard along the way to help build our

session schedule. Our relationship as a chapter of NIGP was crucial in this planning. NIGP, specifically the business council, helped us provide content and the event went as far as committing to a new/revamped [presentation](#) that would be debuted for OkAPP attendees. This continued our goal of providing meaningful content to our members. We also decided that we would try our hand at a reverse trade show. Given the time constraints, we had to be creative. We could not establish or properly prepare for the style of reverse trade show we had been shown at NIGP events. We decided to bring vendors into the main session room and just go from table to table (like speed dating) and just meet with the attendees wherever they were already seated. Speaking of vendors, we had to find [sponsors for our event](#). We had to develop our solicitation for our vendors to demonstrate that their financial support of our event was a worthwhile investment. We felt this successfully conveyed our message, but we learned something valuable in the process as we discovered that many of members plan their events months to a full year in advance, so we were not on the radar for several of the folks we reached out to in soliciting sponsorships. We still had great sponsors that not only gave us their financial support, but also participated in our events giving us a more rounded experience.

As we drew closer to the event, we realized that there were things we didn't consider such as an official hotel, parking at the event, and name badges. We were very lucky to have help from the Chamber of Commerce in Oklahoma City in coordinating a hotel, parking, and an after hour social event. As the event approached, we had finally got everything ready to go. Our President was event stuffing "swag bags" late into the night hours before the conference. With all of the hard work and planning, OkAPP Forum was finally here.

Event



The morning of the event we were met with challenges from the start. The parking office we had been coordinating with did not have parking passes ready. We also found out that the name badges we had ordered for this event were not ready and would not be ready until well into the start of the conference. We did not panic and just stayed on the course. We had discussed and discovered that the attendees would not need the passes until the end of the day, so we could exercise some patience. We also came up with a unique way of calculating attendance. Rather than the normal sign in sheet, we created a QR code to share with the attendees so that they could use their smart devices to sign in to each event and document their attendance for their CEU. While these were

small challenges, any kind of challenge during an event could pose problems throughout the day. The key to persevering in troubling circumstances is stay calm and keep going. Developing out "gameplan" helped us address situations as they came up and make sure the attendees did not notice and continued to focus on the event.

Surprisingly, our breakfast offering got us off to a great start. We had picked an affordable option that featured steak and eggs, while providing other options for those with dietary restrictions. Many of the attendees came up to us to tell us how pleasantly surprised they were with breakfast and many even mentioned that having steak and eggs for breakfast at a conference was fun and unusual. With breakfast being a hit, we started getting ready for the keynote speaker, Manley Feinberg. We had decided to add an A/V technician to serve as "back of house" to make sure the presentations (all slide shows, videos, and audio) would seamlessly work. We had a great technician and we got ready to go with Manley. As we welcomed everyone in, the moment felt huge as the months of planning came to fruition and we were getting ready to start our event. As we had hoped for in planning this event, Manley delivered our vision for what the conference should be using a unique blend of positivity and empowerment. Manley got a great response from the audience and made the meaning connection with our attendees. He even stayed through lunch to meet with the attendees one on one. This is what made Manny the right person to lead off our very first OkAPP Forum.



In the afternoon, we attempted our simplified version of a reverse trade show. We gave the room about 2 hours to meet with our sponsors and the format was a good way to make sure that all members got to participate. What we didn't expect was that it would be a hit. The sponsors all say that they loved the informal and more intimate discussions with the members and the members made contacts to help establish new business relationships. There were quite a few new contracts and new business that was created at the event, and we felt that it was one of the best functions at our event. It was such a success; we will be doing it again at our next event.

We concluded day one with our after-hours event. We chose something close so that our attendees didn't have to move their cars. We also wanted to find a place that provided good food and a good space for our attendees. We chose Social Capitol, and we were very happy with how it turned out. It gave our members a chance to unwind and get to know one another better. We didn't have a structured event around our after-hours event to allow conversations and connections to be more organic. Friendships were made and great contacts for our chapter were established for future events.



The second, and last day of the conference was a big hit thanks to our friends at NIGP. The NIGP Business Council presented two [presentations](#) that engaged the audience and presented the quality of presentation we were hoping for when planning this event. We got a chance at the end to speak to the members and tell them what our goals for the chapter and what our "community" outlook was for the next year. Many stayed around afterwards to discuss the event and thank the board members for putting this on. We felt our event was a major hit and set the tone and momentum for future events.

What Was Unique About Our Forum

For our chapter, this event was unique because we hadn't hosted any kind of event remotely close to it in seven years. Our members had gotten used to the one hour, half day, and full day single sessions that the chapter had been presenting, that a full event with many topics provided a unique opportunity. Our Reverse Trade Show was also different in not only what our chapter had been doing, but what other chapters had been doing. An informal setting with limited structure allowed for conversations and connections to be made without the normal pressures of vendors seeking out attendees and vice versa. The use of QR codes also allowed us to manage our attendance and evaluations with ease. This allowed us to quickly prepare reports that we have to submit for the State of Oklahoma, and it allowed us to look at responses in real time and tailor the event as we moved through the day.

Best Practices

We learned a lot about our membership throughout the event and we would not have been able to do so without taking what we had learned through NIGP's Chapter Academy and Leadership Summit and applying it to our planning of, and execution of, our event. The Reverse Trade Show idea came from meeting with other chapter leaders at Chapter Academy. The After-Hours event and presentation came from watching and learning what NIGP did in the execution of their events. We took a play from their playbook in hiring Manley to be our keynote speaker. NIGP used him as their first plenary session at the 2021 Leadership Summit in Anaheim, CA and those that attended felt he set the tone for what that event was supposed to be. Overall, we formed structure and defined responsibilities so that everyone knew their role and how to contribute to the event. We made sure to follow our game plan but kept our minds open to the potential of having to change and adapt on the fly as all events have some degree of hiccups. Staying true to ourselves, game planning, open mindedness, and learning from the successes (and failures) of others allowed our event to be special for all in attendance.



What Did We Learn?

The biggest thing we gained from this event was that it gave us the confidence to plan future events. Since many of us had not planned an event of this magnitude, we were all a little unsure of how it would turn out. Ultimately, a successful event gave us the assurance in our ability to plan events that we feel more certain about how we want to plan future events. We simply learned that putting ourselves out in front of the membership this way helped establish what this event was going to be and what it would look like for future events.



We also learned something about how sponsorships work. We followed a template from another chapter to build ours and we felt comfortable with the information, but we noticed that we didn't have a lot of vendors we contacted responding or buying sponsorships. It turned out that many plan these events over a year in advance. With only a few months to go, we learned that we needed to start recruiting **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE** to make sure that we could be on the radar for other sponsors. We also had no prior event to compare to when they would ask how these events looked in the past. Having more information and being early at recruiting helps vendors looking to sponsor establish the credibility of the event. This should be going as soon as possible, even as soon as the end of the previous year's event. We also didn't have as much time to promote and recruit attendees. We learned that our membership needs more time to plan and budget for this event. We learned that if some of our members had more time, more would have attended. For our future event,

we are advertising in the spring for an event in the fall which gives us three (3) more months to recruit and prepare. Timing is huge and you should be ready to go as soon as possible with announcements or "save the dates"/

We also learned how costs can add up quickly. We made several last-minute decisions to adapt to our event but did not necessarily realize all of the financial implications of those decisions. Venues have several costs, and it is important to consider everything. Parking was something that we hadn't considered, so it was not part of the budget. AV help was huge, but again, added more costs to the event. It is important to not only game plan every aspect of the event, but don't be afraid to ask others how they planned their own events. There may be things that you never considered.

Conclusion

We are very proud of the event we put together. We felt we represented the chapter and ourselves well in how the event was executed. There were plenty of things we did right, a lot of things that were honest luck, and some things that we look at and wish we would have handled differently. We feel this event should be nominated because of how it changed the perception of what our chapter does and how our membership views what we do on their behalf. It helped build great relationships and we have even had several who attended come back this year and support us because of what this event did for the chapter. We appreciate that are several events that occur in the name of procurement, but we feel that our event was special because it fundamentally changed our chapter and built momentum for the next OkAPP Forum, which if anyone reading this has time, you are welcome to attend [OkAPP Forum 2023](#) in Tulsa, OK (October 19-20). We thank you all for your consideration and look forward to seeing everyone at NIGP Forum in Louisville!

