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Outstanding Award Application

Chapter Name:	Virginia Association of Governmental Procurement
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List Program(s) that will be highlighted in application	Outstanding Chapter Operations Award: 2022 Sponsorship Program

☐ Yes 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?

VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTAL PROCUREMENT'S SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

1. Explain the program/event/best practice WORTH 25 POINTS - (Choose one or 2 programs; explain the program in detail, how it runs/works)

The Virginia Association of Governmental Procurement (VAGP) 2022 – 2024 Strategic Plan established several new initiatives for 2022. To start and complete several of the new initiatives, we needed to raise additional funds. This was accomplished by first updating our **Sponsorship Program**. During our Strategic Planning weekend, the Board updated VAGP's Vision, Mission, and Values, which started January 1, 2022. We also updated our Strategic Road Map through a series of goals we will start and achieve in each year (2022, 2023 & 2024).

In 2022, changing our approach to Sponsorships was a goal which we successfully completed and allowed us to achieve several other goals. VAGP volunteers spent a great deal of time and effort contacting sponsors asking for contributions for specific events, conference items (i.e., sponsor wi-fi, dinner, lunch, etc.), and silent auctions. We also wanted to improve budgeting and accounting for sponsorship dollars. Prior to 2022, we had sponsorships budgeted as revenue across our two conferences (Spring & Fall). While this was historically effective for VAGP, it also limited how and where sponsorship funds were allocated. The pandemic also demonstrated a need to be nimble in our spending. We wanted sponsorship funds to be considered throughout the year for member benefits, one-time special offers, sponsor engagement and other activities. As such, the Board change our Sponsorship Program to a yearlong sponsorship with higher dollar thresholds and increased benefits through the year. We moved the budget line under Operations Income and spread income across known priorities and budgeted expenses for the entire 2022 budget year. The new approach also allowed volunteers to better focus time on developing and deploying new benefits offerings for VAGP members and sponsors. This change allowed us to engage sponsors with various benefits throughout the year. We knew higher sponsorship thresholds would be a difficult push, especially coming out of the pandemic, but we felt the new benefits would make the case. Our goal for the 2022 Sponsorship Program was to raise \$175,000. The VAGP Board marked all earnings towards improving membership benefits and changing our supplier engagement efforts.

Membership Benefits VAGP Board marked for enhancement included: better membership outreach through new member welcome packages including VAGP swag, information about how to volunteer, and benefits of being a VAGP member (i.e. no obligation scholarships, plus so much more!), increased funding for college and professional development (ProD) scholarships; two free monthly virtual ProD opportunities, enhanced twice annual conference activities with additional food offerings, first time significant investment in VAGP's Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, by hiring a DEI trainer to provide quarterly virtual training for VAGP members, two DEI specific scholarships for free VAGP conference attendance, and VAGP Board Training on DEI efforts.

While all newly proposed member offerings sounded great, we knew none of this was possible if we didn't get sponsors. To attract better responses to our revised Sponsorship Program, we needed to change our approach. Prior to finalizing and announcing our new Sponsorship Program for 2022, we invited past cooperative partners, sponsors, and suppliers with whom VAGP shared a long history, to participate in a meeting via MS Teams discussing plans and obtain their feedback. In the meeting invitation, we provided details on the changes VAGP was considering to the Sponsorship Program, but most importantly, we asked our potential sponsors to provide feedback and input so we could incorporate it into our 2022 Sponsorship Program. We made it clear that we wanted to be their

“Strategic Partner of Choice”, a twist on VAGP’s new 2022 Vision. Our Sponsorship Program needed to be as valuable to our sponsors as they were to us. Prior to the meeting, we sent an email with a list of questions for attendees to consider. We asked sponsors to provide feedback on the following:

1.) What type of event drives the best value for your organization, what specifically about the event made it worth your time and sponsorship money? 2.) What types of activities outside of conference supplier expos, reverse trade shows and other standard events did they find unique, worthwhile, and provided value to them? 3.) What does VAGP do well currently, and why do you continue to participate? 4.) What can VAGP improve, and where do we fall short of bringing the best value for the money you spend as our sponsor?

The response to our meeting invite was overwhelming. We received requests from sponsors/suppliers, who initially weren’t invited but asked to participate. Of course, we allowed all who wanted to join. VAGP received a lot of honest feedback. Some of the feedback was expected and some wasn’t, but overall, it gave us the information we needed to make the necessary updates to our 2022 Sponsorship Program. [2022 Sponsorship Package](#)

2. Share Outcomes and Results WORTH 25 POINTS – (Share pre and post results: what you started with, where it ended, was it successful, how was it received, did it have an impact?)

Before VAGP changed our sponsorship program, we earned \$56,275 in sponsorship funds during 2019. I’ve left 2020 & 2021 years out because the pandemic significantly impacted our ability to host in-person events. The “virtual supplier expos” did not go over well with sponsors; they were not interested in participating or spending money with a lack of return on investment.

The 2022 Outcomes and Results are as follows: VAGP posted our 2022 Sponsorship Package to raise \$175K. When we closed the books for 2022, we had 54 participants (strategic partners, cooperative partners, and sponsors) bringing in \$136,350.00 in sponsorship funds, an additional \$50,000 from one strategic partner marked solely for professional development, for a total of \$186,350. This money was used to improve overall member benefits and sponsor relationships. VAGP’s Sponsorship Program for 2022 proved to be the organization’s most successful in our 64-year history.

VAGP noted a significant number of positive impacts based on the increased funds and changes made:

- VAGP’s efforts for members started to pay off during the middle of the year. We had a significant surge in membership numbers (243 new members in 2022). We attribute these numbers to our new marketing and branding efforts. We increased our LinkedIn presence by over 1,000 new connections. This gave us a new platform to showcase our organization, benefits and value. VAGP’s value proposition is simple: \$35 per year for new or renewing members, which is minor fraction of the funds we provide to support our members growth: multiple \$1,000 scholarship award opportunities annually, certification scholarships (CPPO, CPPB, NIGP-CPP, etc.) VAGP covers the application and testing fees once you pass, the cost of a single ProD class is \$50 cheaper for members, two free professional development classes each month, representation at the Virginia General Assembly through our lobbyist, and so many other benefits.
- Enhancements to our Spring Conference and Business Showcase – We changed our traditional “Vendor Expo” to a Business Showcase in 2022. The format was also changed to a mix and mingle during the Business Showcase with sponsors and conference attendees. Dinner and drinks were served with a beach boardwalk theme. We had specialty cocktails, themed food, and

all the sponsors were encouraged to bring “boardwalk games and prizes” for their tables. We removed all “pipe and drape” to allow for more open space and interaction. This format change was based on feedback received from sponsors. The idea was to get away from VAGP members walking up, taking a trinket, and leaving the tables with no substantive conversations. The relaxed atmosphere, removal of pipe and drape, and FOOD/DRINKS really brought down the barriers and encouraged conversations beyond traditional buying and selling. This was a big hit for our sponsors and members. Lastly, the President of VAGP walked around with “thank you” notes for each sponsor. The VAGP President-Elected went to each sponsor and provided business cards and discussed what we were planning for the following year.

3. Explain what makes your program/event/best practice unique or innovative WORTH 25 POINTS (Explain why this was innovative or new for your chapter, how you came up with the idea, how it shows uniqueness to your chapter or innovative to others)

VAGP was involved in a significant amount of research prior to going into Strategic Planning. We researched what our peers across the United States and Canada were providing to their members as “benefits”, and how they managed their Sponsorship Programs. Procurement, for many years, has been changing our approach to the supplier/owner relationship. We have tried to move to a solutions-oriented partnership approach rather than a seller vs. buyer approach. This approach is exactly what VAGP engaged in when working with our sponsors to better our Program. Our new Sponsorship Program is unique because of the way we have engaged our sponsors. Based on the level of sponsorship, we don’t just ask for “money” from sponsors and thank them when the event is done; we ask that they participate in planning of events, marketing through LinkedIn and other social media avenues, and engage with our members training and other efforts throughout the year. For our cooperative partners, we work with them to market VAGP events to their “cooperative contractors” bring them to the VAGP events and ask that we receive information on emerging opportunities in the market. For larger cooperative groups (i.e. NASPO, Omnia, Sourcewell, etc.), we created areas for “cooperative contractors” to be grouped by their Business Showcase table. Again, this approach allowed us to leverage our sponsors’ experiences. Sponsors attend events all over the world, and they are well positioned to tell us what drives value. VAGP’s value proposition philosophy to our membership is the same for our sponsors. If we drive value for them, they will participate. The full year sponsorship approach truly allows VAGP to build a relationship with our sponsors which brings value to both parties.

4. Lessons learned (so that others can adapt or replicate) WORTH 25 POINTS (Talk us through the process of what you learned about the program, what worked what didn’t, how would you do it differently, will you continue to do it?)

We learned a great deal of information from our new approach to the Sponsorship Program. Starting early is a **MUST**. Incoming President’s should:

- 1.) Get to work early! Start planning a full year as president 12 months in advance. Find your volunteers who will help you 12 months out. You will need support to deliver a successful year and it cannot be done by starting to plan when you become President.
- 2.) Host information gathering sessions with your best volunteers and sponsors. Find out what is important to them and where your organization can improve. This was the start of a great success for VAGP. We learned so much through this session. One thing to improve on is to invite as many people as possible. Consider hosting more than one session.

- 3.) Plan your events for a full year with dates and locations locked down no later than the NIGP Forum. While this is something VAGP tries to do each year, we weren't successful locking dates/locations for 2022 prior to NIGP 2021 Forum. In 2021, it was difficult to consider committing a significant amount of money for a venue, food and beverage minimums, etc., when we were unsure if the pandemic would shut down in-person events even further. In addition, asking volunteers to attend an in-person hotel walkthrough of rooms, event space, etc., was still risky. Luckily, VAGP truly has some of the best volunteers, conference planning committee team members, and sponsors, so we forged ahead, but it was significantly later than our new approach recommends.
- 4.) Incoming chapter presidents need to attend NIGP Forum and be prepared to market their upcoming sponsorship package at the NIGP Supplier Expo.
- 5.) Bring postcards with event details to leave with suppliers and take a supplier business card for follow-up outreach. Most sponsors are allocated a specific amount of money to sponsor events. Typically, their money is allocated a year plus in advance. Lock your sponsors in starting 3 months or more from the start of your presidency. VAGP has again adapted our approach in future years to book events over a year out. That is being done in 2023 and we will be ready to announce all 2024 events at the 2023 NIGP Forum in Kentucky. VAGP's President and President-Elect will handout "save the date" cards during NIGP's Forum. Using the business cards obtained, follow-up in writing with each supplier as soon as you return home from NIGP Forum.
- 6.) Invite certain levels of sponsors to participate in planning events for which they are contributing and participating. Sponsors are full of great ideas; some ideas might push you past budget and other constraints but try new ideas while still sticking to the budget.
- 7.) Little details matter! Sponsors like recognition, make sure you have a social media platform or other public ways to thank your sponsors for their participation. Connect with them on LinkedIn and encourage them to comment on your events. This is a win-win!
- 8.) Debrief after events with your members and sponsors. It is good to hear and use ideas on how to improve events. Nothing is ever perfect with events, be open to feedback provided and use it for improvement.
- 9.) Don't be afraid to try new ideas! It is very easy to retread a great event, but it eventually gets stale. Keep things fresh and new by using new ideas. Bring in new event planning volunteers to learn and share in the load. This is also a wonderful succession tool.
- 10.) Do not treat your sponsors as a check. Building relationships matters and is something that will pay dividends to future programs.
- 11.) Remember that your members and sponsors need a good value proposition. Organizations should always ask what value they are providing for the dollars they are charging. If you don't have a good answer to that question, find one before Step 1 above! Members and sponsors have a LOT of options for where/how they spend their money. If you don't provide them with value, another organization will.
- 12.) Once President, encourage and support your successor in their planning efforts. Being president of an organization is much more enjoyable and successful if you are executing a plan rather than building an executing simultaneously.

VAGP has continued this approach in 2023. It has proven again to be a very successful approach, and we are planning to be at NIGP's 2023 Forum laying out our plans for building 2024.