Communications Strategy

American Planning Association

Pennsylvania Chapter

January 2024

FINAL DRAFT

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Executive Summary

This document contains the recommended communications strategy for the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA. The strategy details strategic initiatives to enhance communication and member engagement. Key findings highlight challenges such as limited volunteer capacity, differences in rural and urban engagement, and website weaknesses. The strategy emphasizes website redesign, improved information processes, content strategy refinement, technology integration, defining membership value, and resource investment. The document recognizes the need for structured communication processes, targeted audience engagement, and the leveraging of digital platforms for increased effectiveness. The recommendations address member preferences and organizational objectives, aiming for a more impactful and engaging digital presence.

Summary of Findings

Bull Moose Marketing's team conducted a thorough analysis of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA Pennsylvania), evaluating its communication efforts' effectiveness and operational capacities through member interviews, surveys, and direct observation. What follows is a distillation of seven key findings that emerged from this evaluation. These insights reflect the current state of APA Pennsylvania's efforts and outline the challenges faced in member engagement, digital presence, content management, and volunteer utilization. This report provides a candid, evidence-based perspective to guide APA Pennsylvania toward enhanced communication effectiveness and member satisfaction.

1. **Limited Volunteer Capacity:** While dedicated and passionate (a point that cannot be stressed enough), the Communications and Membership Committee is, like many volunteer organizations, constrained by the amount of time members can allocate beyond their professional roles. This is further compounded by the increasing complexity of social media channels and the time required to manage them along with APA Pennsylvania's other digital channels. The limited time and skills gap restricts the Committee's ability to perform many of the tasks that are necessary for achieving their outlined objectives.

2. **Rural vs Urban Section Engagement:** A marked difference in engagement levels exists between members in rural areas compared to urban ones, with the western sections particularly affected. Geographical challenges, distances, and limited resources in rural areas contribute to inconsistent involvement and the struggle to launch substantial initiatives, thereby affecting the perceived value of membership in these sectors.

3. **Website Weaknesses:** While APA Pennsylvania's website contains valuable content, its current navigation structure hinders accessibility, lessening the content's utility. Additionally, the website suffers from outdated material and technical infrastructure, while its visual presentation is dated, negatively affecting user experience and the organization's professional image.

4. **Communicating Membership Value:** Communicating the value of membership is complex due to the multifaceted nature of planning and the diversity of entities involved. Certain groups within the chapter feel they need to be more adequately represented, while others question the cost-benefit ratio of their membership dues.

5. **Content Inconsistencies:** The monthly newsletter is well-planned, content-rich, and consistently released. "Webinar Wednesdays" are also positively received. However, other communication channels like social media are managed erratically, undermining their effectiveness. Beyond the newsletter, there is no formal content creation and distribution strategy, nor is there a system for monitoring the impact of these communication efforts.

6. **Communication Process Gaps:** Informal communication within the chapter's various committees can lead to information gaps and compartmentalization, limiting the membership's access to valuable information. This informality can also delay the disseminating of timely information, such as job announcements, legislative updates, and emergent opportunities.

7. **Reaching Volunteers and Students:** Although volunteer planners and students represent a valuable pool of potential assistance for the chapter, there needs to be more resources and informational content aimed at those who may be interested in planning but are still unfamiliar with the field. Current materials do not cater to individuals seeking a foundational understanding of planning.

Summary of Necessary Recommendations

In light of the comprehensive assessment conducted within your organization, we have developed a summarized list of broad recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association. These brief yet pivotal action points are designed to address the core areas identified for improvement and are necessary for executing the proposed communications strategy.

1. **Website Redesign:** APA Pennsylvania's current website requires a comprehensive redesign to address underlying issues with user experience (UX), navigation, and outdated technical infrastructure. Rebuilding the site does not have to be done all at

once but in phases over time. Additionally, a clear maintenance plan should be established to ensure regular updates of content and back-end systems. To streamline efforts and enhance efficiency, we recommend implementing marketing automation tools, and to gauge impact, website analytics should be reviewed regularly.

2. **Information Processes:** It is imperative to implement structured processes for capturing and disseminating information from APA Pennsylvania committees, members, partner organizations, and industry resources. This approach will enhance APA Pennsylvania's role as a knowledge hub, elevate its authority within the field, and amplify the value of membership. Regular analysis of associated analytics and metrics should be integrated into these processes for continuous improvement and accountability.

3. **Content Strategy:** APA Pennsylvania should refine its content strategy to address the specific needs of its varied audiences more accurately. More impactful content can be achieved by repurposing existing content, adapting local-level materials for wider application, curating content from reputable external sources, and collaborating with partner organizations. Intentional content development and efficient production are critical to achieving APA Pennsylvania's goal of increased engagement.

4. **Technology Integration:** Adopting new technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), is essential to improve process management and content production at scale. Delaying the integration of these technologies risks falling behind peers already leveraging such innovations. Moreover, familiarizing members with these tools can assist them in addressing their capacity challenges.

5. **Defining Membership Value:** APA Pennsylvania must articulate its brand promise and define its unique value proposition, both generally and for key member segments. This strategic messaging should be consistently integrated into future marketing initiatives to strengthen APA Pennsylvania's market position.

6. **Resource Investment:** To fulfill the strategic vision of APA Pennsylvania and its Communications Committee, the board should evaluate the benefits of investing in dedicated professional resources. Although the costs of such an investment are recognized and may present short-term budgetary challenges, the potential long-term benefits to the organization's value could be significant. Should direct investment in human resources remain out of reach, alternative investment in tools and technology that enhance the skills and capabilities necessary to support the Committee's objectives must be considered.

Challenges to the Recommended Plan

The proposed initiatives in APA Pennsylvania's communications strategy present multiple challenges that necessitate careful consideration. Firstly, garnering buy-in and support for the allocation of necessary resources will be essential, but this could potentially disrupt existing workflows. Moreover, there is an inherent requirement for stakeholders to invest significant time upfront to familiarize themselves with the fundamentals of the new tools and technologies being introduced. Implementing these new processes will take time and will require a transitional period. Finally, the strategy demands heightened levels of accountability and consistency from all members involved, representing an additional layer of commitment to ensure the success of the new communications paradigm.

Background and Need and Engagement Goals

The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA is a non-profit organization supporting Pennsylvania's professional planners and officials. It was founded in 1985 and has around 2,500 members. The organization has six sections and various committees providing local services to members. It promotes planning through legislative monitoring, awareness campaigns, training, and conferences. APA Pennsylvania collaborates with other groups and manages the PMPEI for training. It offers job postings, resources, and networking opportunities for members.

Need

As part of the organization's recent strategic planning process, APA Pennsylvania Board identified communication gaps and established goals, messages, and target audiences. As a member-based organization that relies on the efforts of volunteers, APA Pennsylvania recognizes the importance of communicating and demonstrating its value to members to continue its mission of advocating excellence in community planning through education, empowerment, partnership, and public policy.

Engagement Goals

To address the above need, APA Pennsylvania's goal for this engagement is to develop and implement a communications plan that:

- Provides an assessment of their current structure and resources
- Incorporates vital messages of the organization
- Conveys value to external audiences
- Evaluates use of existing digital channels and tactics

- Includes process and technical recommendations for content management
- Outlines budgetary and resource needs
- Accounts for stakeholder feedback and additional input as needed

Assessment of Current Situation

The Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association needed a unified, workable communications plan for the American Planning Association that would communicate the organization's goals, initiatives, and messages to key audiences and increase value for existing members and boost new membership. In order to develop an actionable communications strategy as a solution, the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association engaged Bull Moose Marketing. For information on the Pennsylvania Chapter of the APA and Bull Moose Marketing's methodology in executing on this engagement, turn to the Appendix on page 66.

Organization Objectives

APA PA Chapter Objectives

As part of its 2023 to 2026 Development Plan, APA Pennsylvania has outlined three focus initiatives to accomplish within that time frame. These focus initiatives and their goals are:

1. **Strengthen Engagement with Students and Young Professionals**: Get students and young professionals more actively engaged with the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA and Board
2. **Develop Toolkit for Planners**: Develop a toolkit to build the case for planning and planning staff positions and to increase planner salaries in Pennsylvania.
3. **Improve Communication**: Develop an overall communication strategy for the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA that builds/maintains an active, engaged community online and in person.

Communication and Membership Committee Objectives

Congruent to APA Pennsylvania's objectives, the Communications Committee identified six supporting objectives that the committee anticipated would be addressed as part of the process of developing a comprehensive communications strategy. Specifically, these six objectives include

1. Analysis of website usage and social media engagement
2. Survey membership on communication preferences

3. Develop a communication strategy feasible to staff and volunteers
4. Reorganization of Chapter website
5. Develop a social media posting schedule
6. Increase overall usage and engagement on all platforms

As part of this effort, the Committee wanted to better identify target audiences, connect online with allied organizations, evaluate the value of targeted, paid online outreach, and determine the need for additional communications staffing.

The committee decided that specific action items and timelines would be determined in conjunction with the consulting agency (Bull Moose Marketing). Strategy development, however, and work to reorganize the website was estimated to take a year to complete, and ensuing results would follow within 2-5 years. Anticipated results included increased website usage, social media engagement, event attendance, and membership and improved member satisfaction with the APA Pennsylvania's communication efforts.

Strategy Stipulations and Considerations

The Communications Committee outlined stipulations and considerations that should be accounted for in developing a unified Communications Strategy. Among these was an assessment of APA Pennsylvania structure, staffing, current communication efforts, and known needs, including gaps documented by a recent member survey conducted in 2022.

Additional outreach to APA Pennsylvania leadership, members, and allied organizations was viewed as potentially necessary to refine plan elements further.

Communication goals (legislative advocacy, sharing information with existing members, increasing membership overall) should be clearly identified, and the Chapter's key messages (value of planning and planners) should be reinforced with key audiences (citizen planners, professional planners, emerging professionals, legislators, students).

Based on findings related to the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA's use of existing social media channels and the website, the strategy should provide recommendations for best practices to improve the performance and usage of these channels.

The strategy should provide a schedule and staffing plan to ensure that postings, newsletters, and website updates occur regularly and on time. This included the identification of technical solutions to coordinate content creation and monitor media exposure, social media reach, website usage, and top sources of engagement.

Finally, the strategy should determine the required resources associated with a proposed annual budget and the incorporation of volunteer time through the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA's Communications & Membership Committee.

Proposed Strategy

The following section explains the basis for the proposed strategy. Using feedback from the committee, interviews, surveys, and observations, Bull Moose Marketing compiled an assessment of the APA Pennsylvania's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) which was analyzed to develop the below themes and recommendations. These themes and recommendations were used to guide the actionable tactical efforts to drive the strategy forward.

Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

The Communications and Membership Committee provided a full SWOT of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the APA which can be found on page 73 of this document. In summary, the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA boasts several inherent strengths that position it favorably within the planning landscape. These strengths encompass a committed volunteer base, expansive digital resources, high-value events, and a diverse leadership team. However, the organization is not without its challenges. Financial constraints, aging digital platforms and related in-house skills, limited resources, and issues related to diversity are areas that require attention to ensure APA Pennsylvania's sustained growth and relevance.

Concurrently, APA Pennsylvania is presented with a range of viable opportunities. These include the potential to leverage digital platforms further, amplify member engagement, cultivate collaborations, and better rely on the experience of members. At the same time, APA Pennsylvania must also navigate a shifting terrain marked by evolving member preferences, competition with other member-based organizations, varied political influences, and the multifaceted nature of the planning profession. Addressing these imminent threats is necessary to maintain APA Pennsylvania's stature and efficacy in the planning domain.

SWOT Analysis and Themes

Using the feedback from the Communications and Membership Committee, a SWOT analysis was conducted, first looking at how to use current strengths to capitalize on potential opportunities. Next, the potential of these opportunities was evaluated as a means for countering weaknesses, and finally, strengths were matched to counter weaknesses and mitigate threats. The following themes emerged as a result.

Maximize the Benefits of Remote Tools

The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA has the infrastructure and expertise to further build on post-pandemic remote learning and networking opportunities. By building on this, APA

Pennsylvania can increase engagement, especially within the rural sections of APA Pennsylvania that feel less engaged. By maximizing the use of digital online channels and repackaging content like "Webinar Wednesdays", APA Pennsylvania can cater to the changing networking preferences of newer members, offering them flexible avenues for digital engagement. The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA can also benefit from using appropriate live video channels like Facebook Live, YouTube Live, and LinkedIn Live to cover topics in a real-time setting, allowing for more audience engagement.

Improve the Website's Value and Functionality

Comprehensive Website: The website, which already houses a lot of information, can serve as a platform to support volunteer planners on local planning commissions, zoning boards, etc. It can also be a hub for resources and information on critical, current issues. The website's outdated content management system (CMS) requires an overhaul, and updating the website's UX and functionality will further support leveraging remote capabilities. An updated, user-friendly website can be a hub for remote learning, networking, easily accessible resources, and member engagement. A modern design will also help improve the initial impression of APA Pennsylvania, especially with younger members. Because current CMSs have become more user-friendly, designated members can better manage site content without technical assistance.

Focus on the Multi-Functional Capabilities of LinkedIn

By actively leveraging LinkedIn, APA Pennsylvania can not only enhance its professional networking but also potentially attract new members and engage new organizational partners that could aid in increasing awareness of APA Pennsylvania and its benefits. The potential for increased interaction on LinkedIn can be boosted by demonstrating APA Pennsylvania's strengths through content such as Webinar Wednesdays. LinkedIn offers multiple content and channel formats, including image, text, and video feed posts, polls, events, live video, newsletters, and groups, allowing APA Pennsylvania to demonstrate its value to members in many ways.

Build on the Varied Strengths of Regional Sections

The strength of the section structure can be used more to conduct structured outreach programs targeting active professionals within their individual networks who haven't yet joined APA Pennsylvania. Maintaining visibility of growth within each section and sharing this information across APA Pennsylvania's membership encourages continued focus on not just membership but also delivering promised value. Sections that actively participate in welcoming and onboarding new members can reinforce a positive initial experience and increase the

lifetime value of new members. While the strength and performance of each section varies, sections can still be relied on to foster connections with allied organizations. The organization's regional structure should consciously be used to address the variability in local rules across municipalities. By fostering collaboration between regions and sharing them across its owned communication channels, APA Pennsylvania can develop adaptable models and best practices that can be tailored to different municipal contexts.

Fostering Student Growth and Diversity

The free membership for students presents an opportunity to rejuvenate sections with limited active members and infuse the organization with future planners. This can also be a step towards improving diversity within the organization, which can be a starting point for broader initiatives such as addressing the lack of diversity within the profession and finding more equitable solutions to planning challenges in diverse communities. The Communications and Membership, and Student Committees can collaborate on outreach materials to attract student members. The free membership can be positioned as a stepping stone for transitioning from graduate to young professional.

Collaborating with Allied Organizations

Collaborating with allied organizations can provide mutual support, share resources, and potentially reduce some operational costs. It can also enhance the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA's understanding of its membership and the broader planning community. Many of these allied organizations share the same issues affecting APA Pennsylvania, so by strengthening ties with allied organizations, the APA can pool resources, share knowledge, and jointly address challenges like the revision of the State's Municipalities Planning Code. APA Pennsylvania can evaluate which partnerships contain the potential for the most mutual impact and prioritize its outreach.

> **"APA PA Planning Officials Development Committee has faced similar barriers. Maybe we can leverage municipal manager professional org contacts. PSATs, PSABs, PA Municipal League. But, these orgs also offer competing training for new board members and in other areas."**
>
> **- Committee Comment**

Leverage the Organization's Members for Thought Leadership

The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA has a number of knowledgeable experts among its members. They are a prime source for original and curated content that can be further adapted for

popular platforms like video and podcasts to better position the Chapter as a prominent voice in the planning space. The variety of experiences within the APA Pennsylvania Board can also be utilized to simplify and communicate the multifaceted nature of planning to the general public, making the profession more accessible and understandable. By leveraging the Legislative Committee's advocacy efforts through polished communications, APA Pennsylvania can better engage with elected municipal officials and legislators to educate them about the importance and context of planning, potentially influencing more informed decision-making. In addition, Chapter members could approach conference speakers and FAICPs and request relevant content that could be shared on APA Pennsylvania's digital channels. APA Pennsylvania can also focus advocacy content on key issues like obtaining IIJA Federal Funds to help Pennsylvania become more competitive in securing funding, which can indirectly benefit the organization and its members.

Addressing Committee Objectives

The following section is structured to address each of the Committee's six stated objectives for improving APA Pennsylvania's communication efforts. The information within these sections consists of the summary analysis, considerations, and recommendations to achieve these objectives. In addressing each objective, the intent remained on enhancing member engagement, improving outreach, and streamlining communication processes with solutions that have proven effective and are, as much as possible, easy to implement.

Objective 1: Analysis of Website and Social Media Engagement

Bull Moose Marketing audited APA Pennsylvania's marketing channels, relying on channel analytics, audience engagement, technical tools, best practices, and benchmarking to provide the following assessment and recommendations. For benchmarking, Bull Moose referenced the American Planning Association, the International Economic Development Council, and the Ohio Chapter of the APA, including APA Ohio's Facebook and LinkedIn channels.

Website Findings

The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA website appears to be facing several optimization challenges, particularly in the realm of mobile compatibility. A significant concern is the presence of over 700 pages with duplicate title tags, with the majority being course and event pages that differ only in date and time. This issue is compounded by the fact that over 3,000 pages lack meta descriptions, which are crucial for click-through rates. Additionally, there are about 50 pages that either contain broken links or return a 404 error code, and several images on the site are missing alt tags, which are essential for accessibility, especially for users with impairments.

In terms of search engine performance, the website ranks for over 1,800 keywords. However, this only translates to a monthly organic user count of between 200 and 400. Interestingly, many of the keywords that the site ranks highly for, specifically those in the top 1-5 positions on search engine results pages, have a low search volume. Historically, the site enjoyed a healthier traffic flow, with monthly user counts ranging from 400 to 900 between 2017 and early 2022. However, there has been a noticeable decline since March 2022. This drop in organic traffic might be linked to a decrease in the number of ranking keywords, which fell from 2,500 to the current count of approximately 1,800.

For context, the American Planning Association's website boasts rankings for an impressive 45.2K keywords and attracts a substantial 79.7K users monthly. It's also noteworthy that over half of the keywords they utilize are informational in nature. This is reinforced by the vast

expanse of content with over 4,500 indexed pages. To improve your website's search engine ranking, conduct keyword research and incorporate relevant terms into well-optimized titles, meta descriptions, and content. Additionally, focus on enhancing user experience, optimizing for mobile, and building quality backlinks to boost the website's overall SEO performance.

Aesthetically, the national APA site presents a clean, modern look and offers intuitive navigation. Some of its standout features include a "Knowledge Center" that houses various publications, research opportunities, and materials catered to both the general public and APA members. There's also an "About the APA" section detailing the organization's mission and purpose, a page titled "What Is Planning" that delves into the intricacies of planning and its community impact, and a "Conferences and Learning" segment offering additional educational resources for APA members.

The website is the PA Chapter's most important communication tool. Site users will judge the quality of an organization, company, etc., based on the look, feel, and navigation of their website, which means a visually appealing site with a positive UX is critical to APA Pennsylvania's efforts. Due to the shifting nature of planning, content on the site should be reviewed regularly for accuracy, and outdated content should be removed or revised. The committee has put together an inventory of necessary site changes, however, no changes have been made at the time of this report. Upgrading the site could significantly impact the achievement of the organization's strategic goals, but the effort and resources required would be substantial and does not address the issues with navigation, user experience, and an outdated CMS.

The site has a strong library of material; however, based on survey responses, much of it is being missed because users are unable to locate it through the current navigation.

Webinar Wednesdays is a popular resource based on a survey of APA Pennsylvania members and feedback collected in member interviews. Conversely, the Planners and Planning Brochure, while informative and well thought out, was not seen as valuable, largely because many members were unaware of it.

> **"I don't see anything that applies to volunteer planners. I don't really see this website as engaging me as a citizen planner."**
>
> **- Volunteer Planner**

Aside from adding the monthly newsletter content, no defined process for keeping the website up to date was observed. This includes conducting regular maintenance for technical issues within the content management system (CMS).

> **"...the courses mentioned on the site say see the calendar, but the calendar has no dates on it; the training page just links out to other organizations' info, not PA APA's own info..."**
>
> **- Citizen Planner**

Note: A full analysis of the website could not be completed because requested access to the backend of the WordPress CMS, and the Chapter's Google Analytics account were not provided to Bull Moose Marketing. External diagnostic tools were used as an alternative.

Social Media Summary Findings

LinkedIn

APA Pennsylvania has two LinkedIn pages. APA Pennsylvania's website directs users to an inactive page, which creates confusion for visitors. The active LinkedIn account (as of 10/5/2023) has 146 total followers with 0 posts in the last 12 months and only 33 total impressions and 0 interactions over this same period. LinkedIn is a prime channel for APA Pennsylvania and could be used to post jobs and republish their newsletter. It's also an excellent opportunity to share news and engage with their members on social media through tagging and resharing posts. By contrast, the American Planning Association's LinkedIn page is very active, with over 56,000 followers and over 200 members associated with the page. Content includes information about events, sharing content from the organization's website, and more, which the PA Chapter could reshare on its own page.

Twitter

The [Twitter channel](#) is active, with one to two posts per month and over 700 followers. Posts include content about job postings, news, and chapter happenings. However, the posts receive little to no engagement. The national [APA X (Twitter)](#) account shares blogs/website content as well as job postings and gets significant engagement depending on the post - but usually no more than 5-10 likes per Tweet. Due to Twitter's uncertain future and because of capacity, this channel can be a lesser priority for the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA if need be.

Facebook

The Pennsylvania Chapter's [Facebook page](#) has 703 likes and 734 followers. Posting is managed through Hootsuite. Posts are similar to those on X (Twitter), with little to no engagement. The majority of content posted are links to job listings and articles directly from the Planning PA website; however, because of the website's configuration, it doesn't allow for a "featured image," which would make Facebook (and other social channel) posts to Facebook more visually appealing and encourage engagement. The page content appears to focus primarily on announcements and information that would be of interest to chapter members. While this content is important, it also can also appear alienating by speaking to only a singular audience. Facebook had the most overall audience engagement of all its social channels; however, the engagement is only one way with no interactions or responses by the Chapter's page. It should be noted that several of the regional sections of the Chapter have Facebook pages of their own.

> *What specific ways can the Chapter provide better support to members?*
> **"...more social opportunities. Improved social media and webpage with updated information."**
> **- Community Development Director**

Email Marketing Summary Findings:

The email marketing platform being used is Constant Contact. Using client materials, it seems they use email marketing exclusively for monthly newsletters. The content is a mix of news, updates, and topical articles provided by volunteers. We were not provided with administrative access to Constant Contact; therefore, our assessment was limited to external observations and limited data showing open and click-through rates.

From the provided data, it looks like the October 2022 newsletter had the greatest open rate at 41%. The average open rate from October 2020 to December 2022 is approximately 31%. The email with the best click-through rate was the first provided newsletter, which was sent in

October 2020 with a 25% rate. Since 2020, rates have gone down to an average of about 7% per email.

However, it is difficult to make any substantial conclusions without administrative access to Constant Contact. Additional data such as bounce rates, unsubscribes, and number of emails opened would have offered a clearer picture of reader engagement. This would have also allowed us to evaluate the contact database for expired information and segmentation.

Objective 2: Survey of Member's Communications Preferences

Channel Survey

The Communications Channel Survey was conducted from 08/16/2023 to 10/31/2023 and gained 131 responses. The composition and distribution of respondents are outlined below

- **Membership Duration Distribution:** The membership duration of stakeholders in the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA varies, with a notable number of members having been part of the organization for more than ten years.
- **Membership Type Distribution:** There seems to be a roughly equal distribution of organizational and individual memberships.
- **APA Membership Distribution:** A higher number of stakeholders are National APA members compared to those who are APA Pennsylvania Chapter members only.
- **Orientation Received Distribution:** A significant number of stakeholders did not receive an orientation or orientation materials when they joined the chapter.
- **Current Role Distribution:** The stakeholders have diverse current roles, with a notable number of Municipal Planners, Consultants, and State Agency Planners.

After reviewing the responses, the below findings and trends emerged.

Value of Chapter Resources: Based on the most frequently mentioned words, respondents valued educational resources, networking opportunities, and webinars as the Pennsylvania Chapter's top overall initiatives, programs, or benefits. Respondents also indicated that improved communications efforts should include better access to information and resources, including past webinars related to planning. Most were unaware of the Planning Brochure.

Chapter Channel Engagement: Roughly one-third of the stakeholders (34.8%) reported that they do not follow any APA Pennsylvania Chapter-related channels or are unsure of their engagement. In contrast, the majority (65.2%) confirmed their engagement with the APA

Pennsylvania Chapter through one or more specific channels. This suggests that a substantial segment of members may be disengaged with the Chapter's communication channels.

Top Channels Used by Stakeholders
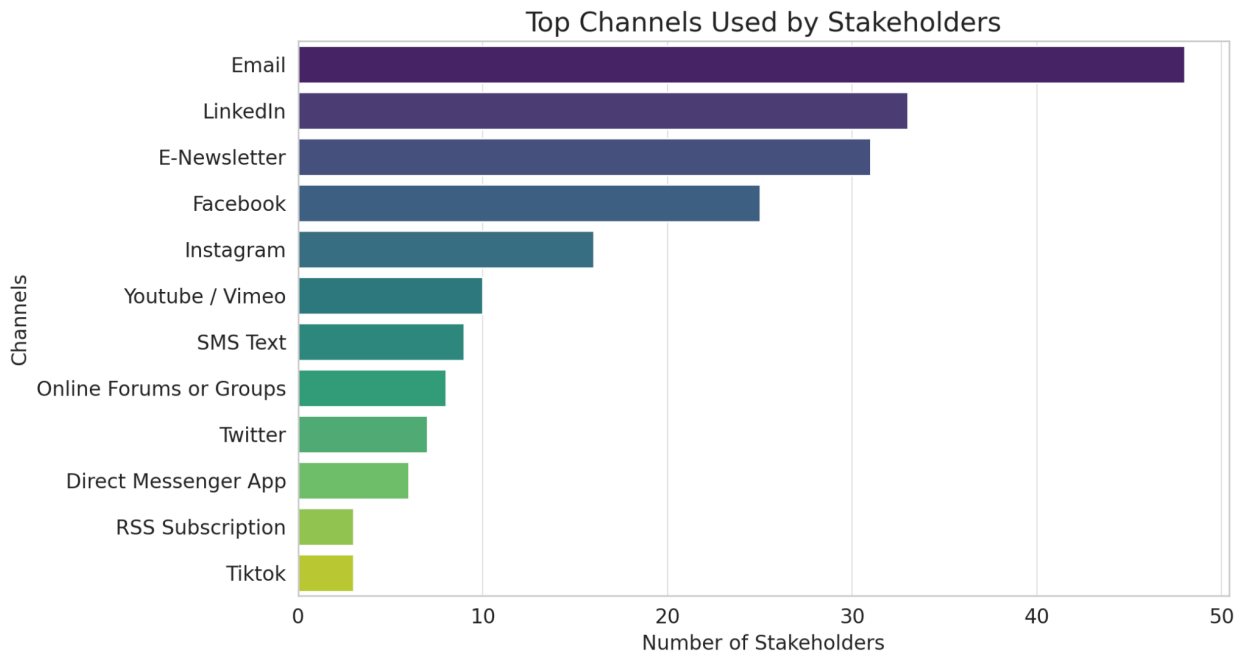
Primary General Channels: Email, LinkedIn, and e-Newsletters are the most frequently used or followed channels for work among the stakeholders. These channels could be crucial for effective communication and outreach by the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA.

Top Channels for Professional Interaction (Column K)
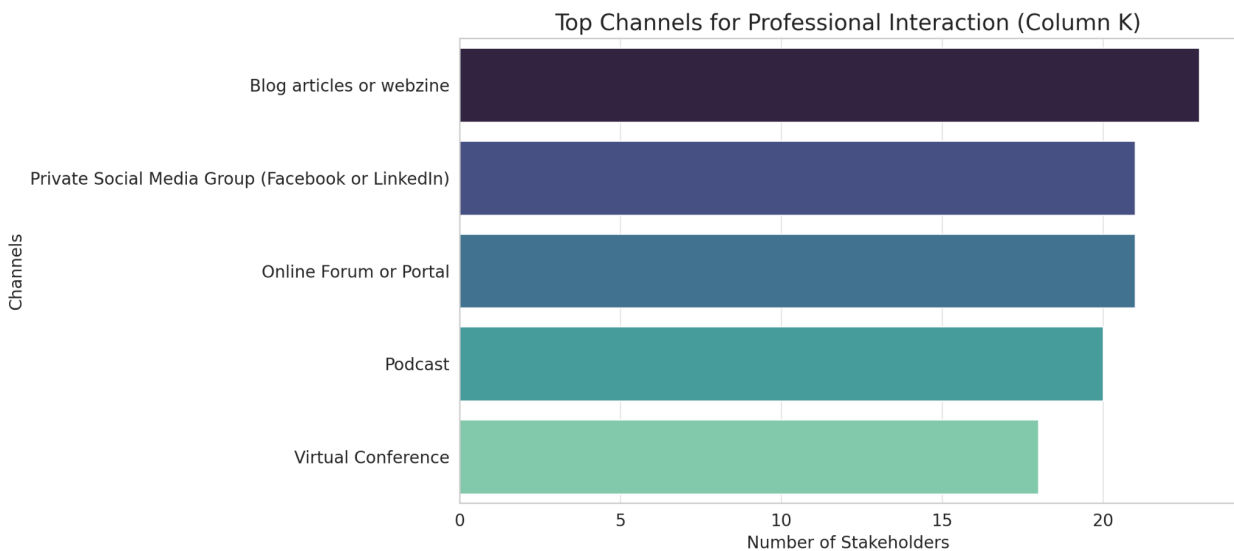
Potential in New Channels: Members indicated they would likely be open to communications in other forms, beginning with blog articles or webzines closely followed by private social media groups (Facebook or LinkedIn) and online forums or portals. Podcasts and Virtual Conferences also hold significant interest for the respondents.

Other Planning Resources: Respondents indicated they relied on other resources for planning information, with Planetizen as the top resource for news, jobs, and education, followed by the APA (American Planning Association). They also follow other social media channels, primarily LinkedIn, and attend webinars from other professional organizations. They search for planning materials on municipal sites across the state and will purchase books and read publications related to planning. Local and Regional Organizations, such as PSATS (Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors), PA Boroughs Association, and county planning associations, are important resources, as are their networks and colleagues.

Similar but Differing Value: There are commonalities in the perceived value of Chapter benefits across different membership durations, indicating a consistent appreciation of specific programs and initiatives. "Annual Conference," "Educational Opportunities," "Professional Development Resources," and "Legislative Advocacy" were viewed as valuable across multiple membership duration groups; however, "Learning about Best Practices'' seems to be a prominent theme for newer members while longer-term members frequently mention "Promoting job openings" and "Professional Development Resources."

Membership Value Survey

The Membership Value Survey was conducted by the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) in October 2023, both online and during the Chapter's annual conference. Among the 17 respondents, there was a wide array of roles represented. Two participants identified as GIS Specialists, the most common profession in the survey. The remainder of the respondents each held unique positions, including a Transportation Planning Coordinator, Project Manager, APA Member, Managing Principal, Senior Planner, County Planning Manager, Director of Planning & Development, Technical Manager - Planning, Planner II, Professional Planner, Assistant Township Manager/Community Development Director, Student, Engineer, Operations Manager, Member of the Association, and Borough Manager.

In terms of APA membership, a majority of the respondents, totaling 12, held a National APA membership, while 5 respondents were exclusive members of the Pennsylvania Chapter. This diverse mix of professionals and membership types reflects the varied interests and engagement levels within the APA community.

Respondents were predominantly from two regional sections of Pennsylvania. The Southeast region had the highest representation with 8 respondents, followed closely by the Central region with 6 respondents. Other regions such as the Northeast, Southwest, and Northwest were minimally represented, each contributing only 1 respondent. This indicates a stronger engagement or membership from the Southeast and Central regions in the activities or initiatives of the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA.

Responses

Satisfaction Ratings: The majority of respondents (9 out of 18) are 'Satisfied' with their membership. There's a notable presence of respondents who are 'Somewhat Satisfied' (3) and 'Somewhat Unsatisfied' (3), with fewer respondents being 'Very Satisfied' (2) and only one being 'Overall Unsatisfied'.

Satisfaction Ratings of APA Membership
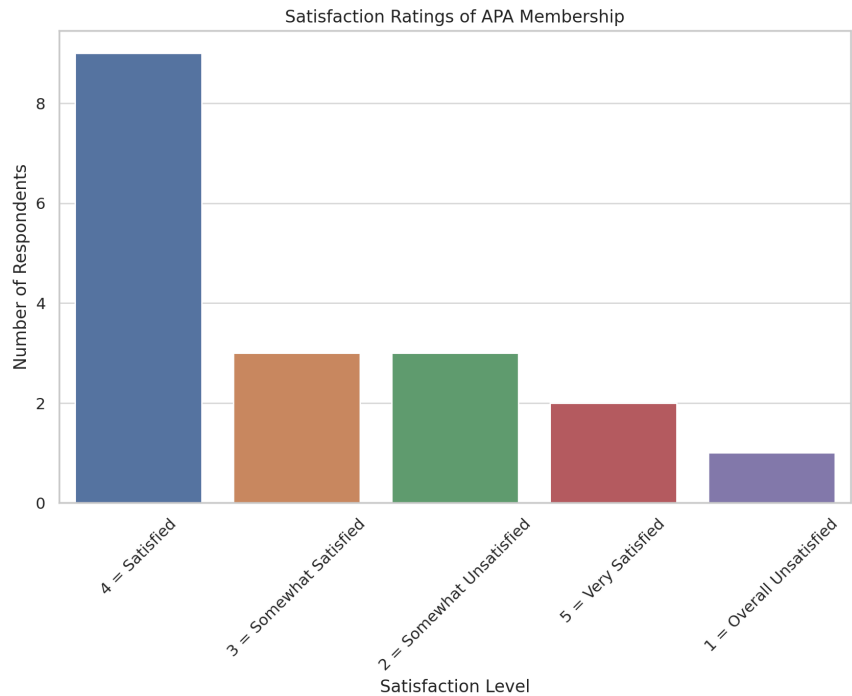
Committee Value: The 'Professional Development Committee' is the most valued, as indicated by 5 respondents. Other committees, such as the 'Legislative Committee' and the 'PMPEI (PA Municipal Planning Education Institute)' also received notable mentions. Interestingly, 3 respondents feel that the committees do not provide any direct value to them.

Value Offered by APA Committees
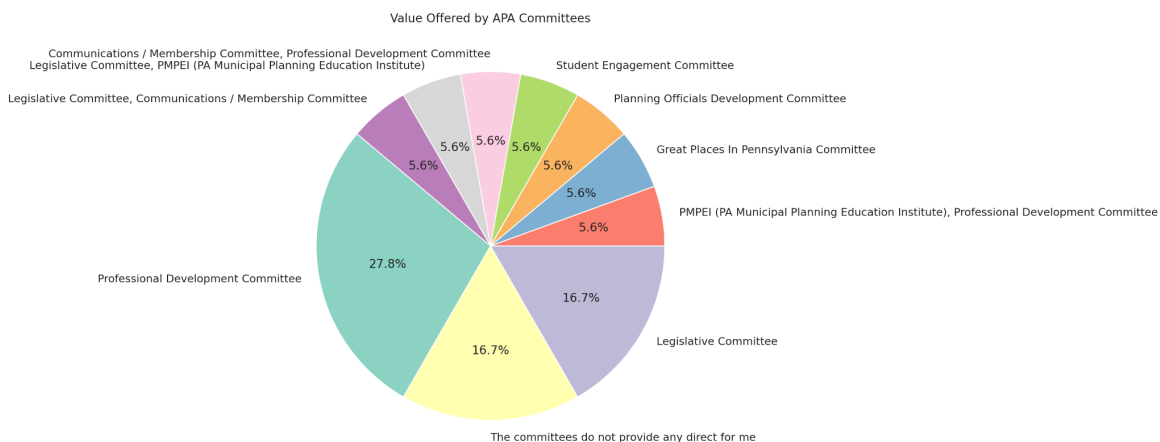
Membership Type: A clear majority (12 out of 17) hold a National APA membership in addition to their Pennsylvania Chapter membership, while only 5 respondents have Chapter memberships exclusively.

Types of APA Memberships Held

PA Chapter membership only

29.4%

70.6%

National APA membership
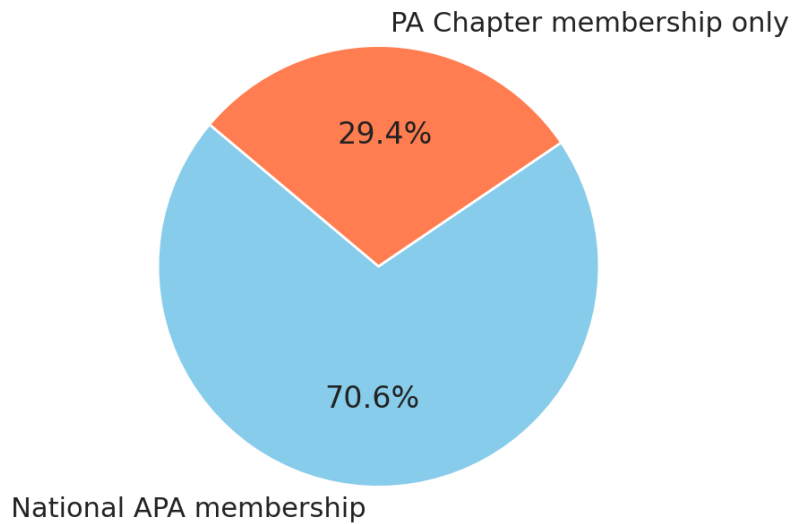
Perceived Value of Educational Opportunities

Somewhat High Value

Moderate Value

Low Value

11.1%

11.1%

No Value

5.6%

11.1%

38.9%

22.2%

High Value
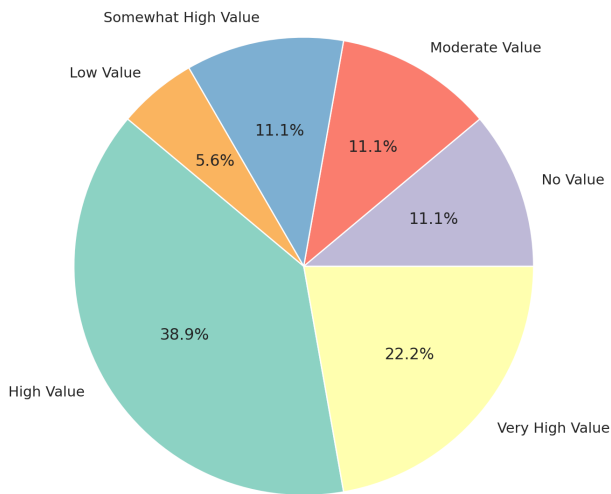
Very High Value

Educational Resources: The distribution of responses suggests that the majority of the respondents found educational opportunities to be of high to very high value, indicating a positive perception of these educational resources among the members.

Planning Support and Best Practices: The majority of respondents perceive high to very high value in the planning support resources and learning opportunities about best practices, indicating a strong appreciation for these networking opportunities offered by the Pennsylvania Chapter of the APA.

Value of Planning Support/Resources and Best Practices

Job and Internship Postings: Opinions are more mixed regarding the value of free job and internship postings, with a notable number seeing very high value, while others perceive little to no value, reflecting diverse needs and expectations among members in this area.

Value of Job and Internship Postings

Value of Attending the Annual Conference

Annual Conference: The annual conference is highly valued, with most respondents rating it as offering high to very high value. This suggests that the conference is a significant and effective platform for members to engage with planning trends and issues.

Perceived Value from Participating in Regional Section
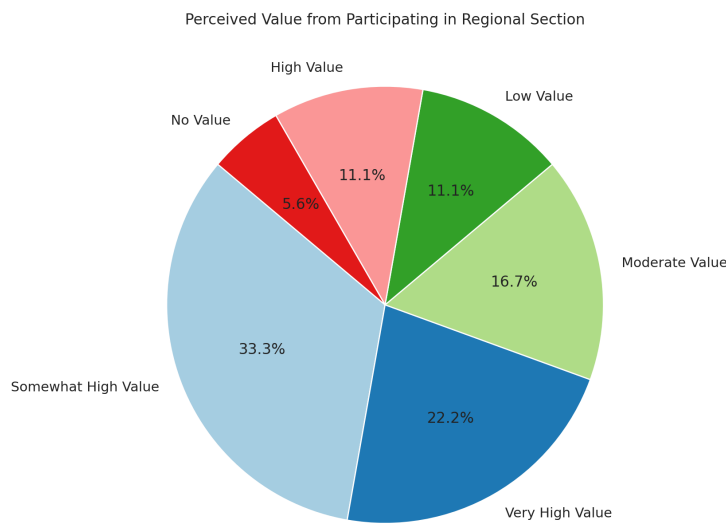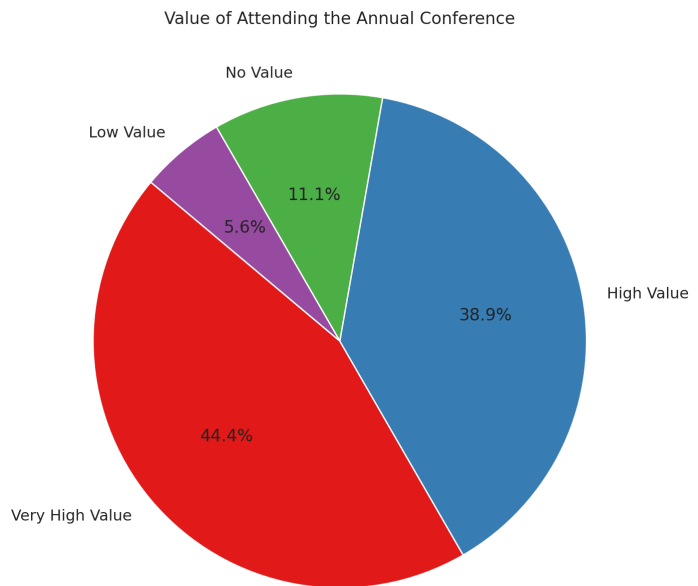
Regional Participation: Responses among the members. The most common response was a neutral rating, indicating that a significant portion of respondents neither strongly valued nor devalued their regional section participation. There's a spread across the spectrum of perceived value, with some members finding it very valuable and others finding little to no value, highlighting the diverse expectations and experiences of the chapter members in their respective regions.

Additional analysis showed a correlation of higher satisfaction with a member's regional section in relation to the number of events attended. Members in the Southwest Region showed the highest average number of in-person events attended in a year (1.25), followed by the

Northeast and Central Regions (1.00) and the Northwest and Southwest (0 events). While not definitive, there is evidence that levels of participation at the regional level affect satisfaction. Additionally, the average number of years as a member was higher in the Southeast (8.25) and Central (7.5) regions, which is more than double that of the Northeast and Southwest regions at 3.5 years.

> **"Chapter get-togethers for volunteer planners would be nice too so we could meet planning commission members of other counties."**
>
> **- Planning Commission Member**

Membership Value Influences: When respondents were asked to share reasons influencing their membership satisfaction rating, several themes emerged.

1. **Cost Concerns:** Some respondents mentioned cost as a significant factor, describing the membership as "too expensive" or "obscenely expensive."
2. **Value and Resources**: Others appreciated the resources and learning opportunities provided by the Chapter. There was a specific mention of the value derived from the annual conference, webinars, and networking opportunities.
3. **Student Engagement**: One response highlighted a desire for more student engagement opportunities.
4. **Need for More Activities and Outreach**: There was a call for more activities and outreach by the Chapter Section.

Perceived Membership Value: When members were asked how they would explain the value of membership to someone else, the responses collectively suggest that the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA is highly regarded for its networking opportunities, resource availability, and community-building among planning professionals, though experiences and perceptions vary among members. A more precise breakdown revealed several themes the Chapter can leverage in its messaging to attract and retain members.

1. **Networking and Professional Improvement**: Many responses emphasize the Chapter's role in providing resources and opportunities for planners to network and improve professionally.
2. **Connection and Community:** Several respondents highlight the Chapter's ability to connect planning professionals regionally and across the state, fostering a sense of community.
3. **Resource Availability and Engagement**: A common theme is the availability of numerous resources, with an emphasis that members get out what they put into it.

4. **Employment Opportunities and Camaraderie**: The Chapter is seen as valuable for those seeking networking, employment opportunities, and camaraderie within the planning profession.

5. **Access to Local Network**: Access to a local network of professionals willing to assist fellow planners is also noted as a key value.

6. **Diverse Opinions on Value**: While most responses are positive, some express uncertainty or a perceived lack of value, indicating varied experiences and perceptions among members.

Membership Motivations: Respondents shared their reasons for choosing to be a member of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association or, for non-members, what is keeping them from joining. The top responses reveal several key themes:

1. **Educational Opportunities**: The value of educational opportunities was a common reason for membership, highlighting the importance of professional development and learning resources offered by the Chapter.

2. **Career Advancement**: Some respondents cited career advancement as a motivating factor for their membership.

3. **Access to Resources**: Having access to more resources and learning opportunities was another frequently mentioned reason.

4. **Cost Concerns**: For non-members, cost is a significant barrier, with some finding membership expensive, particularly when not pursuing AICP certification or lacking direct benefits.

5. **Professional Networking**: The desire to connect with other professionals in the field and focus on Pennsylvania-specific planning topics is a key driver for membership.

6. **Professional Association and Accreditation**: Membership is seen as integral to belonging to a professional organization and maintaining accreditation.

7. **Mandatory for APA Involvement**: For some, membership is not optional but a requirement for their involvement in the APA.

8. **Organizational Support**: A few respondents indicated that their office pays for the membership, which eases their decision to join, especially for accessing educational opportunities.

9. **Time Constraints**: A lack of time to engage more fully with the Chapter's offerings is a concern for some, even if they value the membership.

National vs. Chapter Membership: Respondents with a National Membership shared their views on the value that a National APA membership provides over an APA Pennsylvania membership, which indicated the following results.

1. **Broader Professional Network**: A common perception is that the National APA membership offers a more extensive network of professionals across the country, which is beneficial for those considering relocation or broader engagement.
2. **Access to National Conferences and Continuing Education**: Membership is valued for accreditation purposes, attendance at national conferences, continuing education opportunities, and staying updated on new and emerging topics in planning.
3. **Richer Resources and Best Practices**: Respondents appreciate the additional resources, best practices, and more varied learning opportunities provided at the national level.
4. **Quality of Educational Materials**: The educational and reference materials available through the National APA are seen as first-class and invaluable.
5. **Wider Perspective on Planning**: National membership is perceived to offer a broader perspective on planning issues and successes from different parts of the country.
6. **Uncertainty about Differences**: Some respondents are not sure about the specific differences or additional value of a National APA membership compared to an APA Pennsylvania membership.
7. **Individual Perspectives**: There are varied personal opinions on the value of national membership, with some seeing significant benefits and others perceiving little difference between national and state chapter memberships.

Key Target Audiences

The diverse nature of planning, range of roles, and basic demographics present challenges in reaching key audiences. Creating awareness of the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA and its efforts is difficult, especially outside the normal circles of planning professionals. Communicating the Chapter's value is even more complex because value varies widely depending on your role and level of experience. Communicating the Chapter's value is critical, especially when overcoming objections to the cost of membership.

While content creation can help demonstrate value to members, it is also difficult to find balance in addressing the range and variation of issues affecting planning. Networking is another way to demonstrate membership, but networking is viewed differently depending on your role and experience. Geography also impacts this as members and sections in urban locations allow for more opportunity to connect while those in remote regions are constrained by the hurdles of travel and distance.

Understanding and acknowledging these challenges, however, can be an asset in reaching target audiences. Being mindful of these hurdles will help in developing programming, content, and other materials that will be more useful and relevant to target audiences. While planning

encompasses many different functions and roles, defining target audiences in broad categories is still necessary and will help in reaching the largest number of current and potential members.

Members perceive value through the support and resources of the organization, in this case, content and timely information. While reaching all audiences is impossible, focusing content development around issues and topics that are specific to four key audiences will better position the Chapter to provide value through its communications efforts.

The communications strategy identified four target audiences and fundamental motivations based on input from the Communications Committee, interviews with members, and the above survey data.

- **Municipal Planners** - Want to get the job done while navigating a myriad of obstacles, often without adequate resources
- **Planning Consultants** - Want to advance professionally and be part of more complex projects that will result in more responsibility and impact
- **Volunteer Planners** - Want opportunities to actively make a difference in their community, particularly when it comes issues related to livability
- **Students** - Want to find a profession that aligns with their personal values and the path to develop their interests and skills to fit that profession

Key Audience

Municipal Mindy

Wants to get the job done while navigating a myriad of obstacles, often without adequate resources

Municipal Mindy is the embodiment of leadership and foresight in her role as the County Planning Director for Rural County, Pennsylvania. At 52, she has already carved out a significant niche for herself in the rural community development sector. Her annual income of $55,000 is

lower than many of her peers in other urban counties, but she'd rather be appreciated for the value she can bring to the community through her work. Mindy's life is a blend of professional dedication and rich family life, where she is a wife and mother to three children, 13, 16, and 19.

Miny enjoys home improvement projects, reading historical fiction, and spending time in her garden. These hobbies offer her a respite from her demanding career and a chance to recharge. Yet, even in her leisure, one can see the reflections of a person who appreciates the intricacies of landscapes, whether they be in the garden or within the pages of a book.

At work, Mindy is known for her strategic thinking and proactive approach to community engagement. She is not just a planner; she is a visionary who seeks to integrate historical preservation with Main Street redevelopment. Her aspirations go beyond the day-to-day tasks of planning and delve into influencing policy-making for rural development. Mindy aims to lead her county through successful large-scale infrastructure projects like rural broadband that not only meet today's needs but also pave the way for future generations.

However, Mindy's journey is not without its challenges. She often finds herself navigating complex local political landscapes and working tirelessly to secure funding for her initiatives while being understaffed and contending with regular turnover. Implementing planning best practices within the constraints of the county's budget, outdated processes, legacy officials, and local resistance is a delicate balancing act she performs regularly.

Despite these hurdles, Mindy's needs are clear: she seeks access to the latest trends and data in planning to ensure her strategies are cutting-edge and effective, and she needs resources and processes that allow her to overcome her office's lack of capacity.

When it comes to professional development, Mindy is methodical and intentional. She allocates a specific budget for memberships and resources, engaging with material biannually and keeping a keen eye on planning tools and resources regularly. Mindy finds value in attending industry conferences but can't afford to be away from the planning office for long and has to justify such an expense every year.

She is always on the lookout for new resources but doesn't have a lot of time, so whatever resources and content she finds has to be high-quality and easy to engage with. Mindy often wishes she could find easily explainable content she could share with her staff and board of commissioners as a way to improve their understanding of issues.

Her preferred channels of information are through governmental bodies and professional networks, where she can stay abreast of best practices and case studies that inform her work. Mindy subscribes to multiple e-newsletters from agencies, organizations, and associations and

relies heavily on them for updates and developments as she scans the subject lines in her inbox daily.

Mindy uses several social media channels, including Facebook, which she checks a few times a week to maintain personal connections and to gain insights about the local community. She uses LinkedIn weekly to follow planning-related policy developments, learn from thought leaders, participate in relevant group discussions, and review job postings.

Despite time constraints, lack of capacity, bureaucratic process barriers, and better compensation in the private sector, Mindy is driven by an unspoken commitment to leave a legacy of improved infrastructure and livability for Rural County, PA. Such work is difficult to explain to her family and friends, and connection to others in the planning community is important and affirming.

> **"The value of the PA Chapter lies in its ability to connect planning professionals regionally and across the state." - GIS Specialist**

Key Audience

Consultant Chris

Want to advance professionally and be part of more complex projects that will result in more responsibility and impact

Consultant Chris is a 35-year-old urban planner at a mid-sized urban planning firm in Third-Class City, Pennsylvania, where he lives with his husband and two children, ages 5 and 8. With an annual income of $85,000, Chris is keen on staying updated with the latest in urban planning and networking with professionals in his field.

Chis's underlying motivation behind his career choice was to contribute to the development of sustainable cities, and he hopes to lead a major urban development project in the next five years. His ultimate dream is to be recognized one day as a leading urban planner in Pennsylvania.

In his work, Chris is detail-oriented, forward-thinking, and analytical. His core interests are sustainable urban development, public transportation, and green spaces, and his hobbies reflect those interests as Chris enjoys reading urban development journals, attending planning seminars, and hiking.

He is active on social media. He uses Facebook and Instagram for personal connections and to share images and videos of him engaged in activities that demonstrate his values and interests. Chris uses YouTube for both personal entertainment and to gain an understanding of technical solutions to work-related topics. Chris uses curated lists in X (Twitter) for industry-related news from reputable sources. LinkedIn is also an important channel for Chris professionally, and he uses it to connect with others in his profession to post about his accomplishments, who he's met, events he's attended, and projects he's worked on.

Keeping up with rapid urbanization and balancing work and family life are constant challenges for Chris. Success for Chris involves continuous learning, professional certifications, and regular networking without detracting from responsibilities at home or eating into his personal budget at the same time. Job pressures and parenting priorities can take precedence over keeping up with planning regulations, accessing accredited courses, and connecting with the right professionals.

Chris believes joining organizations and associations provides him with the resources and connections he seeks to help him achieve these goals. Chris's employer doesn't currently cover membership costs, and he has budgeted $1000 annually for professional memberships and seminars. Hence, he wants to apply it to opportunities that offer the most value in relation to his goals.

Chris relies on the Internet to see how thoroughly a professional addresses the latest urban planning trends and will ask peers before joining any association. Networking opportunities, continuing education credits, and access to the latest research and resources are elements he is evaluating during his search so Chris will look at an organization's activity on social media and the quality of material on the organization's website. He will also subscribe to newsletters but is very picky, and he will unsubscribe if the content isn't valuable or useful.

He may be trying to decide between joining (or renewing) membership in the Urban Land Institute or American Planning Association, yet he is unaware he can join the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA without joining the national APA. The national APA offers more networking and learning opportunities but high membership fees and a lack of clear, tangible benefits will be the barriers that will keep Chris from joining any professional organizations he is considering.

> **"There are many resources available but you tend to get out of it what you put into it." - Consultant Planner**

Key Audience

Volunteer Vinny

Want opportunities to actively make a difference in their community, particularly when it comes issues related to livability
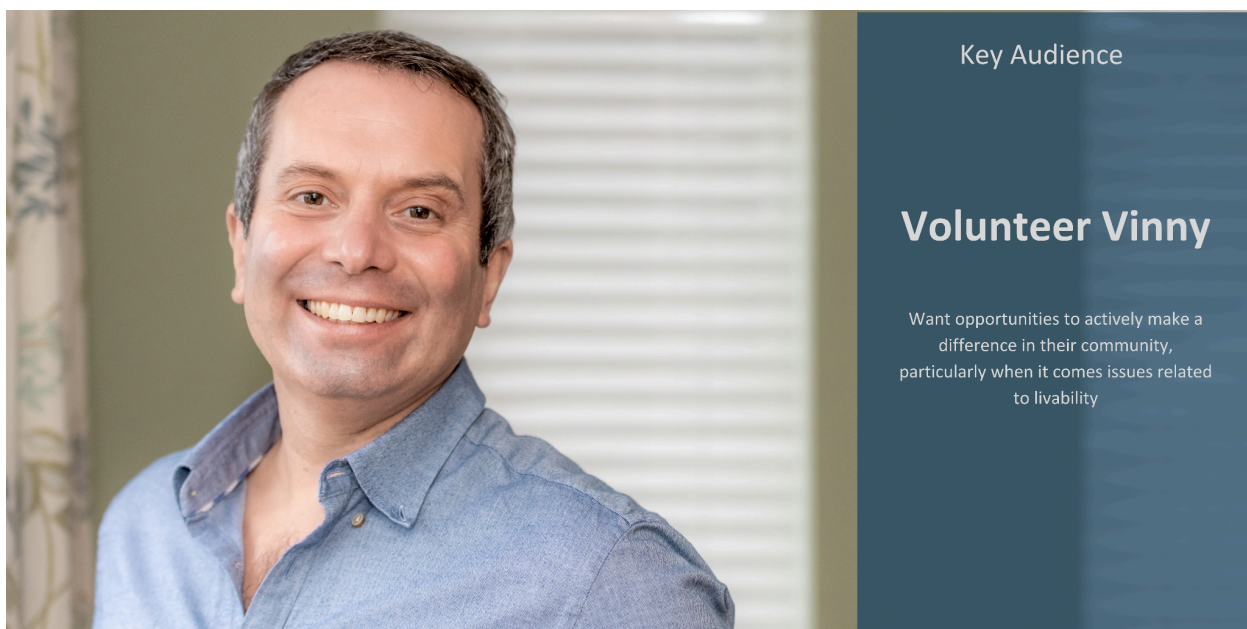
Volunteer Vinny, at 42, is a true example of civic engagement in Third-Class County, Pennsylvania. His commitment to the community is evident in his role as a volunteer board member on the County Planning Commission, where he lends his expertise and insight. Vinny's professional life is equally commendable, balancing his career at the Penn State Extension Office with his passion for community development. With a household income of $68,000, he, alongside his spouse, who teaches third grade at a forest school and a nine-year-old child, exemplifies the quintessential community-oriented family.

Vinny is proactive in his approach to local issues and highly collaborative. His hobbies reflect his love for the community; he tends to the local community garden and delves into the history of Third-Class County, all while enjoying the simple pleasure of cycling through the local area.

These activities are not just pastimes but fuel his interest in the county's development and the intricate dance of local politics.

His aspirations are rooted in the well-being of his community. Vinny dreams of fostering a vibrant and engaged Third-Class County where education is prioritized and local development is undertaken thoughtfully and sustainably. Professionally, he aims to be a catalyst for positive change, influencing growth and ensuring that the county's future is as bright as its rich historical past.

However, Vinny's efforts carry challenges. The most pressing is balancing his volunteer work with personal and professional responsibilities. Because his attention is divided, he doesn't always feel prepared or as informed as he'd like to be on issues being addressed in commission meetings. It took him nearly a year to fully grasp the county planning office's duties and the role of the planning commission. Since then, he sometimes finds himself frustrated by the lack of effort put forth by other commission members and the pettiness of local politics.

To better understand how planning affects the issues he cares about, he seeks out resources that enable him to make informed decisions that serve the community's best interests. He frequents local businesses, attends community meetings, and stays informed through county and state websites. He researches community issues, planning initiatives, and resources that support the commission's work. Vinny has visited many sites with relevant content, including the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA, but he's yet to find a source of content that speaks directly to volunteer planners.

Facebook is broadly used by county residents and it allows Vinny to reach a broad local audience with opinions and issues related to his interests in planning. He co-manages a Facebook group that shares updates, event announcements, local issues, and developments related to the county. He also uses [Nextdoor](#) to engage with residents on hyper-local issues and to gather feedback he can share at planning meetings. Vinny enjoys posting images of his favorite spots in the local area on Instagram, and he relies on LinkedIn for career connections and to find people in other parts of the state who share his pursuits as a volunteer planner.

Vinny is aware of several planning-related organizations, groups, and events but assumes they are intended for professionals and full-time planners. He's glanced at planning-related training and certifications, which seem interesting; however, he sees no advantage in paying for them himself.

Vinny's dreams for Third-Class County are both personal and communal. He envisions a county that thrives economically and maintains its communal spirit and historical charm. Serving on the

County Planning Commission is not just a role but a chance to contribute to the narrative of Third-Class County and ensure it remains a place where community and history attract others to the area.

> **I don't know if the APA Pennsylvania conference already has this, but it would be cool if at the conference, there could be a section about what volunteer planning commissions have done, their ideas, where they've found success, etc. I'd be willing to do something like that, but don't know any planning people from other counties in order to get a panel together about it. - Planning Commission Member**

> **Free training (not over the cost of membership) on different topics would be welcome. If the planning office/county is paying for us to be members, the chance of me paying out of pocket individually for a training or something is pretty much zero, and the office/county doesn't have more money to throw at it. I've missed out on many trainings from other planning entities because of cost, and it's unfortunate. - Volunteer Planner**

Key Audience

Scholar Stacy

Wants to find a profession that aligns with their personal values and the path to develop their interests and skills to fit that profession
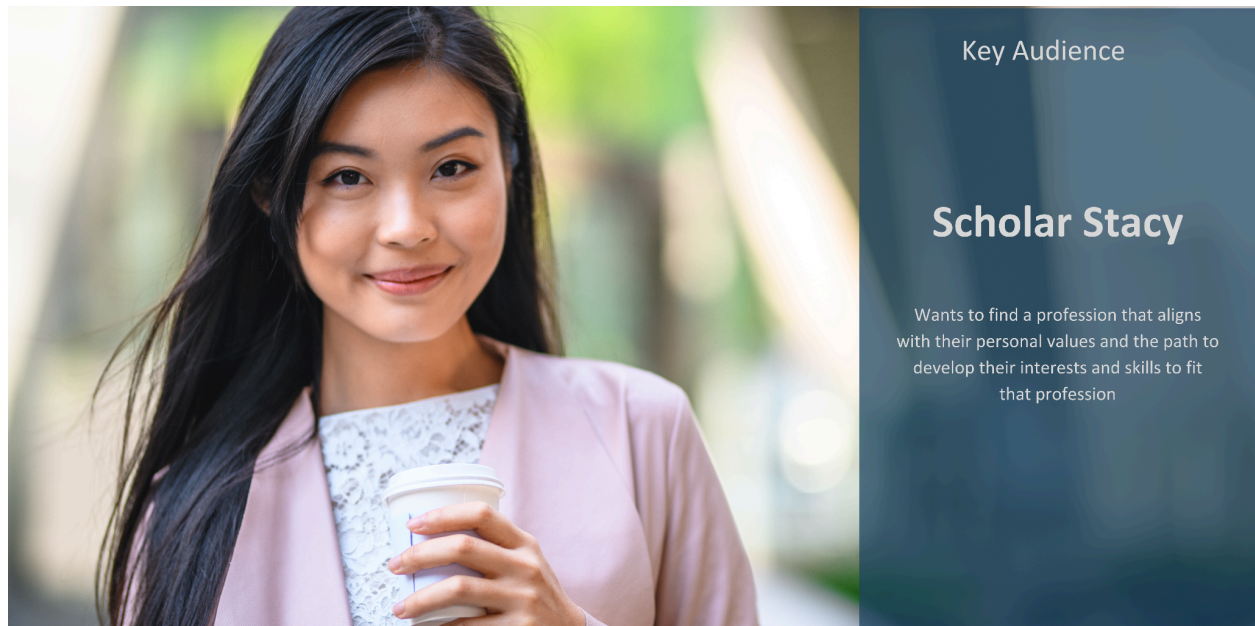
Scholar Stacy is a 25-year-old graduate student deeply immersed in the world of urban planning at a Pennsylvania University. Her life is a balancing act between rigorous academic research and part-time work, all underpinned by a modest stipend of $15,000 a year. She was not aware of a career in planning until her sophomore year of undergraduate study. Since then, she's selected courses and certifications aligned to her desired profession. As a single woman without children, her focus is sharply tuned to her studies and the professional horizon that lies beyond.

In Stacy's world, the lines between hobbies and professional interests blur; urban gardening and cycling through the city's diverse neighborhoods fuel her passion for sustainable urban development and smart city technologies. She aspires to be more than just a city planner; she dreams of being at the forefront of sustainable planning, influencing policy, and joining a planning firm that leads with innovation and environmental consciousness.

However, Stacy faces challenges typical for a student in her field. Her budget is tight, earmarked for educational and professional development expenses, leaving little room for leisure. She shops infrequently, but her purchases are chosen for their utility and ability to enhance productivity, reflecting her preference for brands that align with her personal values and professional ethos. These financial constraints and the time demands of her academic commitments limit her ability to engage fully with the professional world she is eager to enter.

As in her undergraduate days, Stacy has found it difficult to locate a reliable source of planning-related jobs and internships. While she uses Indeed and other job sites, like many

students, she relies on her school's Handshake page as a trusted source for jobs and internships. She also keeps an eye out for career opportunities through networking on LinkedIn.

Her online behavior is meticulous and purposeful; she researches scholarly articles, participates in planning forums, and attends webinars—all aimed at expanding her knowledge and network. Search terms like "urban planning trends" and "sustainable development" dominate her browser history, alongside queries about "AICP certification prep materials," reflecting her interests.

Stacy actively engages with the American Planning Association for its invaluable resources and the Urban Land Institute for insights into responsible land development. She's inspired by the Congress for the New Urbanism's advocacy for walkable communities. Eager to connect with peers, Stacy seeks out a local Young Planners Group and joins urban planning LinkedIn Groups, which are vital for her professional growth and networking as she steps into her urban planning career.

Stacy strategically uses social media to advance her career goals. On LinkedIn, she expects to find industry groups or at least a network of other young professionals and a channel to share her academic work. X (Twitter) is a platform for engaging with current trends and thought leaders in real time. Instagram allows her to showcase her fieldwork and passion for sustainable development through compelling visuals. Facebook groups serve as a forum for resource sharing and advice within the planning community. Additionally, academic networks like ResearchGate amplify her research visibility, while video platforms like YouTube present her public speaking engagements and educational content, rounding out her online professional persona and enhancing her academic journey.

For Stacy, joining an organization like the PA APP is a gateway to the professional community she seeks to join. It's not just about membership; it's about entering a realm where her dreams of leading major urban development projects can take root and flourish, all while prioritizing the sustainability she values so highly. As she evaluates her options, Stacy is still trying to decide if joining an association that broadly represents planning is better than one with more focus on urban planning. She's also not sure what she can contribute as a member, given how little experience Stacy has at the moment, but seeing a lot of content for students and young professionals on the organization's website is a signal that they value students.

> **I really only engage in a few events--I wish there were more opportunities for student engagement. - Student Member**

> **"Other professions, like engineering, have a development pipeline for membership. We have pricing structures for membership but not necessarily an intentional development strategy to keep students in the organization."**
>
> **- Committee Member**

Objective 3: Development of a Feasible Communications Strategy

The following section outlines a strategic approach for more effective communication and efficient content creation. This process begins with aligning APA Pennsylvania messaging with target audiences so members can resonate and use them. Included are tactical recommendations for several key APA Pennsylvania channels. This section also discusses content creation efficiencies to help the Committee produce effective content at scale. A list of low-cost, easy-to-use software tools found in this section will further help the Committee with this. The final element of this section is a detailed workflow that outlines a timeline for planning, creating, and publishing content, along with how to apply the recommended software tools.

Aligning Messages and Content

Developing, producing, and sharing content begins with the target audience. Topics, formats, and distribution will offer more value when aligned with the specific needs, preferences, and behaviors of the four target audiences detailed earlier. Secondary audiences such as government officials, community residents, developers, and educators must also be considered.

For example, Mindy Municpal's initiatives are slowed down after each election because newly elected officials are unfamiliar with the scope of her and her department's role. A short guide entitled "What Elected Officials Should Know About Planning," published by APA Pennsylvania and available to members through the website, helps Mindy with a specific need while also accounting for a secondary audience.

The chart on the following page illustrates how determining content ideas can be developed for APA Pennsylvania's key audiences. The chart shouldn't be rigidly applied but instead, serve as a framework to aid in planning future content.

Target Audience	General Topic Groups	Content Formats	Distribution
Municipal Planners	Emphasize policy & regulatory news, funding opportunities, land use, economic development, and public-private partnerships.	Blog articles, PDF Ebooks, Videos, Presentations, Webinars, Newsletters, Social media image video posts, Press Releases, and polls	Newsletter, LinkedIn posts, LinkedIn groups, Chapter website resource library, and blog
Professional Planners	Focus on industry trends, policy developments, case studies, training and certification assistance, and planning innovation.	Blog articles, Case studies PDFs, Presentations, Webinars, Newsletters, Social media images and video posts	Newsletter, LinkedIn posts, LinkedIn group, Chapter website resource library, and blog
Volunteer Planners	Highlight community engagement, success stories, training materials, planning basics, and the benefits of planning.	Orientation & help materials as PDFs, Video, Presentations, Social media images and video posts	Newsletters, Facebook / Instagram posts, LinkedIn/Facebook groups, Chapter website resource library, and blogs
Students & Young Professionals	Cover educational resources, career paths, success stories, and research in planning.	Study materials as PDFs, Videos, Presentations, Social media images, videos, and stories	Facebook / Instagram posts, LinkedIn groups, job posting sites, and Chapter website resource library.

> **"...technical courses/certifications, basic materials for explaining planning to your community, etc. would be nice to have." - Citizen Planner**

Content Tactical Recommendations

Membership Monthly Newsletter

To maximize the impact of its monthly chapter newsletter, the Communications Committee could adopt a multifaceted approach that focuses on providing value and engaging its readership by structuring editions with clear, concise sections. An example of this might be:

- **Featured Article:** An excerpt or summary of a topical featured article recently published on the website.
- **Planning Highlights:** A summary of recent planning achievements in PA.

- **Professional Development:** Tips, webinars, and resources for continuous learning.
- **Policy and Advocacy**: Updates on legislative changes affecting planning.
- **Member Spotlight**: Interviews or profiles of APA Pennsylvania members, especially students, young professionals, or volunteer planners.
- **Upcoming Events**: Information on conferences, workshops, and section meetups. This can include events from partner organizations as well.
- **Career Opportunities**: Job listings and internship opportunities in the planning field.

- **Calls to Action:** Multiple Calls to Action for events or reminders about resources should be included in every newsletter (see the image below from the National Trust email).

To keep the content dynamic, including multimedia elements like infographics or video messages can enhance the reading experience. Additionally, spotlighting member contributions and achievements could encourage more active participation and content sharing. Members should be encouraged to subscribe to APA Pennsylvania's newsletter using the form on the website. Reviewing analytics monthly to track which sections receive the most engagement can inform content adjustments, ensuring the newsletter remains a highly anticipated and valuable resource for members.

> **I chose to be an APA-PA member to keep tabs on emerging projects and areas of interest. - GIS Specialist**

Press Releases

Exposure from earned media through the use of press releases is an important strategy that offers wide reach for little to no cost and can create broader awareness of APA Pennsylvania's efforts. Press releases should be used to communicate significant announcements, such as the annual Great Places winners, changes in leadership, and conference speakers.

Press releases should originate or be routed through the Communications Committee for consistency and so the committee can maximize its reach through other channels. When relevant, the Chapter should make sure key members are notified in advance so they are prepared to address questions at their level once a news release is public.

Press releases are pre-planned and can be leveraged in several ways outlined here to maximize reach.

- **Content Calendar Coordination:** Schedule press releases to align with major chapter events, initiatives, and milestones. This helps in keeping messaging timely and relevant.
- **Website Integration:** Create a dedicated news or press section on the APA-PA website where press releases can be published, ensuring they are accessible to both the media and the membership.
- **Social Media Teasers:** Utilize social media platforms to share snippets or teasers of the press release content, which can drive traffic to the full release on the website.
- **Email Distribution:** Incorporate a brief overview or highlight from the most recent press release in the monthly newsletter, with a link to the full document for those interested in more details.
- **Media Outreach:** Build and maintain a media contact list, including local news outlets and industry-specific publications, and distribute press releases directly to them, encouraging wider dissemination.
- **Cross-Promotion with Blog Content:** Develop blog posts that expand on topics covered in press releases, offering a deeper dive into the subject matter for APA Pennsylvania's audience.
- **Member Engagement:** Encourage members to share the press release within their networks. This can be done by providing them with pre-written social media posts or email snippets that can be easily distributed.
- **Multimedia Elements:** Enhance press releases with images, infographics, or videos that can be shared across various platforms, increasing engagement and shareability.
- **Follow-up Content:** After major announcements, follow up with related content such as interviews, member reactions, or impact stories that showcase the real-world implications of the news.

By strategically using press releases within its content strategy, the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA can ensure that important news is communicated effectively to its members and the public while also providing content that can be leveraged across other channels for broader reach and engagement.

Handshake

To build awareness of APA Pennsylvania and planning as a profession, we recommend posting job opportunities and internships on Handshake. Handshake is a comprehensive platform designed primarily for college students to aid in their job search and career development. This platform is used by most schools and offers a number of features and its benefits:

- **Job and Internship Listings:** Handshake serves as an online career management system that provides job and internship listings, allowing students to explore various career options. It is particularly unique because the opportunities listed are specifically targeted at students, and employers are actively looking to recruit from educational institutions.
- **Access to Opportunities**: The platform's mission is to democratize access to job opportunities, ensuring that every student can find the right job regardless of their background. It connects students with employers hiring at their school, potentially increasing a student's chances of being noticed among a vast pool of applicants.
- **Networking with Employers**: With over 500,000 employer accounts, Handshake provides a network where students can connect with a large number of employers. This connection is fostered through Handshake's virtual career fairs and other networking features that allow students to engage with employers through group meetings or one-on-one sessions.
- **Career Development Tools**: Handshake offers a range of tools for career development, including the ability to register for career fairs and the option to schedule appointments with career advisors. It acts as a one-stop-shop for all aspects of career planning and application, which includes customizing your job search and career journey.
- **Ease of Use**: Handshake offers a user-friendly interface, which simplifies the process of finding jobs and internships, connecting with potential employers, and managing career development activities.

Handshake is tailored to help students navigate the often challenging terrain of job searching and career planning by providing targeted opportunities, valuable connections, and a suite of tools to manage their career search. Using Handshake to post job openings and internships, APA Pennsylvania can increase awareness of the planning profession among students while helping members find a broader pool of potential candidates.

I'd like to connect to more people in the profession to learn more about initiatives and learn where I might go as I advance in my career. - Student Member

Content Creation Efficiencies

While content creation requires considerable time, coordination, and other resources, there are efficiencies the Committee can take advantage of to help reduce these challenges.

Repackaging Content

Existing content can be repackaged into different formats and published on different platforms to reach wider audiences. Audio from a Webinar Wednesday can be transcribed and reformatted as a blog post, and the presentation slides can be adapted for images posted on social media.

New content should be planned with repackaging it in mind. For example, a series of blog posts on a specific topic can be reformatted as a downloadable guide or ebook on the website's resource library.

The content content creation and AI tools mentioned later in this section have functionality that allows users to repackage content quickly.

Existing Member Content

Check with the committee and regional section chairs monthly for updates, news, events, photos, success stories, and other material that can be shared through the newsletter, social media, and website.

Ask members for permission to use their content and tools across the membership. For example, several county planning offices have created orientation materials for new planning commission board members that can be adapted and distributed by APA Pennsylvania. The Planning Toolkit also has a number of resources to draw from.

> **"Maybe like a Planning 101 or Intro to Planning set of videos or courses that would be easy to give the link to new members, and they could go through at their own speed."**
>
> **- Citizen Planner**

Members should also be solicited regularly for success stories and case studies the Chapter can use to contextualize the role of planning and promote a culture of planning. At the same time, APA Pennsylvania should inform the Communications Committee of content projects they are or plan to undertake such as the Student Engagement Committee's recruiting video. This will allow for resource sharing and ensure APA Pennsylvania's message and branding remain consistent.

Curating Content

Curating content from reputable sources works well for maintaining regular posting on social media channels with the need to develop original content. Citing and tagging the source of curated content is also an excellent way to build collaborative relationships with partner organizations.

Subscribing to newsletters published by government agencies, partner organizations, and industry groups is an effective resource for finding content to curate. Committee members can submit newsletter material at their monthly meeting and determine what to share.

Setting up a Google Alert on specific topics like "rural broadband in PA" or "Programs for Rural PA Communities" can yield news stories and other materials that can be curated. Alerts are sent directly to your inbox as they are indexed by Google and it reduces the time it would otherwise take to actively search for content.

Co-Branded Content

Other partner organizations suffer from the same challenges at APA Pennsylvania when it comes to capacity and content development. This can be overcome by collaborating with these organizations to create co-branded materials for use by both parties, and content can vary to include written materials, training, presentations, and video discussions.

Partners can add new perspectives to a topic they are collaborating with APA Pennsylvania to create material for. New perspectives may provide added value to members and broaden awareness of the Chapter with the partner organization's audiences.

The Committee can brainstorm several topic ideas and then approach a relevant partner organization with the concept as a tactic for developing relationships with these key partners.

APA Pennsylvania could also evaluate the opportunity to partner with universities or agencies to conduct studies and publish reports.

Tools for Content Management

The following section outlines tools the Committee can use to plan, manage, and create content.

Trello:

Trello is a user-friendly project management tool that can be used to manage the content creation process and content posting schedule.

Key Features:

- Customizable lists to break down projects or tasks into smaller parts.
- Multiple users, role assignments, and timelines are available in the free tier.
- Connection to user emails for cross-channel communication.

Starting Level Monthly Price: Free, with premium plans starting at $5 per user per month.

Canva:

Canva is a web-based graphic design tool that provides an array of customizable templates that can be used for both digital and print content.

Key Features:

- Templates allow users to quickly create visual content for most social media channels using standard sizes with consistently branded elements.
- Over 75 million premium stock photos, videos, and graphics, along with design resizing and unlimited storage in the Pro plan.
- Ability to post directly to your social media platforms in limited formats

Starting Level Monthly Price: Free, with Pro plan at $12.95 per month. (Pro features are free to qualifying nonprofit organizations.)

ChatGPT:

ChatGPT is an AI-powered chatbot that can help with a multitude of data-driven tasks, including writing blogs, documents, emails, press releases, and social media posts.

Key Features:

- Can create content in multiple forms, including images with DALL-E
- Read and summarize complex documents in multiple formats
- Repackage existing content into multiple other formats through plugins in ChatGPT Plus

Starting Level Monthly Price: Free, with ChatGPT Plus at $20 per month.

Perplexity.ai

[Perplexity AI](#) leverages OpenAI and Microsoft's Bing search engine to deliver accurate answers to complex questions, making it a reliable tool for research, creating expert articles, and finding content for posting on social posts.

Key Features:

- Research topics, understanding a topic, generating an outline, and obtaining citations, research, or sources
- Prompts for additional views and perspectives on a given topic
- Unlimited copilot usage, GPT-4 access, dedicated support, and updated information in the premium plan

Starting Level Monthly Price: Free, with Pro plan at $20 per month

Google for Nonprofits

[Google for Nonprofits](#) provides qualifying nonprofit organizations with free or discounted access to a suite of Google products and services, including Google Shared Workspace and Google Ad Grants for advertising.

Key Features:

- Access to Google Workspace with features like Gmail, Google Drive, Docs, Sheets, and Google Meet
- $10,000/month in free advertising through Google Ad Grants program the Chapter can use to promote events, membership, advocacy, and job postings
- Allow for shared document folders and easy collaboration across the Chapter for content creation while providing continuity of access to materials as roles change

Starting Level Monthly Price: Free, with discounted upgrades starting at $3 per user per month

Content Management and Workflow

This section offers a suggested monthly workflow to help guide the Communications Committee in adopting a process aligned to their capacity. The workflow provides an estimated effort for

each of the tasks, assigns responsibility, and how tools can be used in managing the process. The final process can be documented in the Committee's 2023 Guidelines for Content document.

The chart below represents a basic workflow for planning, creating, and publishing content in a monthly time frame. While only one month is represented, this workflow is meant to be continuous, meaning that in any given month, the Committee is reviewing that past month's performance, planning future content topics, creating content for the coming month, and publishing content written in the previous month.

Timeline	Tasks	Effort	Assign	Tools
Week 1-2	Review past month's performance	Pull & send analytics before committee mtg.	DRI, Committee	GA4, Social Media & email reports (see Obj. 6)
Week 1-2	Develop content titles for month after next	2024 Content Guidelines	Committee	Google shared doc, Content topics in Trello
Week 1-2	Review / coordinate for upcoming press releases	Review calendar in committee mtg.	Committee, DRI	Draft in Google Doc, assign tasks in Trello,
Week 1-2	Obtain updates/news from committees & sections to inform newsletter & social	Contact committees & sections before committee mtg.	Committee member	Add to a shared Google doc. Topics added to Trello
Week 1-2	Review jobs to post/remove in current month	Gather updates ahead of committee mtg.	DRI	Add to shared Google doc. Assign posting tasks in Trello.
Week 1-2	Outline next month's blog posts / Obtain current month's blog drafts.	Confirm in committee mtg.	Committee member	ChatGPT & Perplexity for topic outlines & drafts / Current blog on shared doc.
Week 2	Assign team roles and deadlines & update content calendar	At committee mtg.	Committee	Update Trello tasks and calendar accordingly
Week 2	Publish blogs & press releases assigned last month	Load to site & format. Share links w/committee	DRI	Drafted on shared Google doc. Edited in ChatGPT. Formatted on website
Week 2	Populate current month newsletter content	Load & format with media, & links	DRI	Organized & written in ChatGPT. Formatted in Constant Contact.

Week 2-3	Publish current month's newsletter	Send preview draft, test links, & audit email contacts list	DRI	Published in Constant Contact. Update status in Trello.
Week 2-3	Begin drafting press release for next month if applicable	Confirm details, ID media outlets, inform key members	DRI	Drafted in ChatGPT. Edited and formatted in shared Google doc.
Week 3	Draft social media for next month	Create images, confirm links, ID hashtags	DRI / Channel Manager	Set prompts & draft in ChatGPT. Edit in Google doc. Images in Canva.
Week 4	Schedule planned social media for next month	Load & schedule for W, Th, & Sa	DRI / Channel Manager	Schedule in HootSuite or Canva. Update in Trello.
Week 4	Distribute press releases	Email to media contacts list.	DRI	Update status in Trello
Ongoing Tasks	Monitor and respond on all social platforms	Spot check channels & groups daily & after posts go live	DRI / Channel Manager	Alerts sent from social channel to assigned channel manager.
Ongoing Tasks	Look for curated content sources on social channels & newsletters	Check key social channels & inbox headlines	Committee / Channel Manager / DRI	Add links / copy to shared doc or Trello. Post on social or in newsletter.
Ongoing Tasks	Connect with partner orgs on content projects	Prioritize & maintain partner list.	Committee member	Update projects in Trello.

By following a structured workflow, the APA-PA Chapter can better ensure that its content is well-coordinated, high-quality, and aligned with its strategic goals, ultimately enhancing the organization's value to its members and stakeholders.

Objective 4: Reorganize APA Pennsylvania's Website

Addressing APA Pennsylvania's website is a major initiative and a critical component of the proposed communications strategy. While reorganizing the existing website might appear as a cost-effective pathway to improvement, the analysis of the website reveals that such an approach falls short of addressing some fundamental concerns. The committee's efforts to outline fixes to the current site proved to be a valuable exercise, but these fixes have yet to be addressed. Even so, reorganization alone will not resolve the underlying technical inefficiencies, enhance the user experience to meet contemporary expectations or revitalize the website's aesthetic to reflect the modernity and professionalism of APA Pennsylvania.

We recommend APA Pennsylvania look beyond mere rearrangement of content and, instead, consider the importance of a holistic redevelopment of the site that includes key functionality,

features, and ongoing maintenance so it fully serves members' needs and the organization's mission.

Importance

A modern-looking website with easy navigation and accurate, relevant information is crucial for a member-based organization like the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association for several reasons:

- **Professional Image:** The website is often the first point of contact for anyone interested in the organization. A modern website reflects a professional image and can help establish credibility and legitimacy in the field of planning.
- **User Experience:** Easy navigation ensures that members and visitors can find the information they need without frustration. This positive user experience is key to keeping members engaged and encouraging new memberships.
- **Accessibility of Information:** Accurate and relevant content helps members stay informed about industry standards, best practices, events, policy changes, and other critical updates, facilitating their professional development and decision-making processes.
- **Resource Efficiency:** A well-organized website allows members to self-serve information, reducing the need for staff to answer basic inquiries and freeing up resources for more strategic activities.
- **Membership Growth**: A modern website that clearly acknowledges the four key target audiences can attract new members by showcasing the value of membership for each audience and making the sign-up process straightforward.
- **Community Engagement**: The website can serve as a hub for members to connect, share ideas, and collaborate, thus fostering a sense of community and belonging.
- **Advocacy**: Having a strong online presence is key for advocacy efforts, allowing APA Pennsylvania to effectively disseminate its positions and mobilize its membership on important issues.
- **Education and Events**: The website is a platform for announcing and managing events and educational opportunities, which are central to the organization's mission of professional development.
- **Funding and Sponsorship**: A modern website can better support fundraising efforts, displaying information about sponsorship opportunities and facilitating the sponsorship process.

- **Adaptability:** In a rapidly changing digital landscape, a modern website is often designed to be adaptable to future needs and technologies, ensuring that the organization remains at the forefront of digital engagement.

In essence, for the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA, a modern and functional website is not just a tool for communication; it is an essential asset for the execution of its mission, the support of its members, and the expansion of its influence in the wider community. The goal should be to have a site that members positively respond to, and they share it with others as a credible resource that helps foster a culture of planning in Pennsylvania.

Key Functionality

For a member-based organization like the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association, a website should be rich in features and functionality that cater to the needs of its members, as well as the organization's operational goals. Aside from standard website elements such as security, mobile responsiveness, ADA compliance, etc. additional key features and functionalities should be considered:

- **Content Management System (CMS):** The CMS should enable easy updating and management of the website content by staff without needing technical expertise.
- **User-Friendly Navigation:** Clear menus and logical hierarchy make it easy for users to find information quickly. Navigation should be built around the user and each of the four target audiences.
- **Search Functionality:** A robust search feature helps users quickly find the information they need on the site. Tags and categories should be employed to facilitate finding topical information quickly.
- **Membership Management:** A member portal allows new membership applications, existing members to renew their memberships, and provides access to members-only content and resources. (Allowing members to update their information was a highly requested feature in interviews.)
- **Event Calendar and Registration:** Displays upcoming events, workshops, and conferences and allows members to register and even pay for events online. Allowing members to submit events through a portal for admin approval will create workflow efficiencies.
- **Blog/News Section**: Regularly updated with articles, interviews, and news relevant to the members and the planning community.
- **Social Media Integration**: Allows for easy sharing of content and helps increase engagement on social media platforms.

- **Resource Library:** A repository for sharing important documents, studies, reports, and multimedia resources relevant to the planning field, and a directory linking to interactive maps, tools, and planning-related data.
- **FAQ Section**: Helps to quickly answer common questions, reducing the number of inquiries to staff.
- **Job Board or Career Resources**: Provides members with a place to find job postings and career development resources relevant to the planning industry. Allowing members to post jobs on their own with admin approval will also create workflow efficiencies.
- **Volunteer/Committee/Regional Section Information**: Details about how to get involved with the organization's committees or other volunteer opportunities.
- **Surveys and Feedback Mechanisms:** Allows the organization to collect valuable feedback from members and visitors.
- **Emergency Alerts or Updates:** A system to quickly disseminate urgent information or updates to members.
- **Online Forums or Networking Spaces:** Encourages member interaction and peer-to-peer support, or interested members could be directed to forums hosted on LinkedIn or Facebook.
- **Contact Information and Forms:** Easy to locate contact details and forms for inquiries, feedback, or further information. Linking forms to marketing automation tools (i.e., Constant Contact) will reduce manual work.
- **Email Subscription and Newsletter Sign-Up**: Keeps members and interested visitors informed about news, events, and updates.
- **Analytics and Reporting:** Integrates tools like Google Analytics 4 (GA4) and HotJar to monitor website performance and user behavior.

Incorporating these features in a balanced and thoughtful way can greatly enhance the value the website provides to both the organization and its members. It's also important that the website aligns with the organization's branding and messaging to maintain consistency across all platforms and points of contact.

The approach to building a new website should be considered too. It's not always necessary to build an entire website all at once. Instead, content, features, and functionality can be prioritized so a new site can be launched with the minimum viable elements first and the remaining elements added over time. This is often a more cost-effective approach that also allows for a better functioning site overall.

> **"...the courses mentioned say 'see the calendar,' but the calendar has no dates on it; the training page just links out to other organizations' info, not PA APA's own info and I know some of those cost money..."**
>
> **- Planning Commission Board Member**

Management

Effectively maintaining a website requires ongoing attention to several high-level, basic considerations. These considerations ensure that the website remains secure, functional, and relevant to its users, and an easy-to-follow maintenance plan or checklist should be developed in conjunction with a new site. Below are some fundamental areas the Chapter's website manager should address in the plan:

- **Content Updates**: Regularly update the website with fresh content to keep it relevant and engaging for visitors. This includes blog posts, news, event information, and resource updates.
- **Technical Maintenance**: Ensure that the website's infrastructure, including server and CMS, is regularly updated with the latest software versions to prevent security vulnerabilities and improve functionality.
- **Backups**: Implement a regular backup schedule to prevent data loss in the event of hardware failure, hacking, or other unforeseen problems.
- **Security**: Regularly scan for malware and vulnerabilities and keep security plugins or tools updated to protect against new threats.
- **Performance Monitoring**: Use tools to monitor the website's performance, such as loading times and downtime, to ensure that it's operating efficiently and effectively.
- **SEO Review**: Continuously monitor and update SEO practices to comply with the latest search engine algorithms, which helps maintain and improve search engine rankings.
- **Link and Functionality Checks**: Regularly check for broken links and ensure that all forms, buttons, and interactive elements are working properly.
- **Hosting and Domain**: Keep track of hosting and domain registration renewals to prevent service interruptions.
- **Budgeting**: Allocate a budget for website maintenance tasks, including software subscriptions, professional services for design, development, compliance, and search engine optimization (SEO).
- **Emergency Response Plan**: Have a plan for dealing with security breaches or website outages to ensure a rapid response to minimize impact.

Objective 5: Develop a Social Media Posting Schedule

While the Committee's stated objective here focuses specifically on posting to social media, a more holistic approach encompassing the various features and best practices for each channel has been included in this section. Managing social media channels has become increasingly more complex and time-consuming, and understanding each channel's capabilities will help inform the Committee's plan for maintaining APA Pennsylvania's social channels.

Social Media Tactical Recommended

It is understood that the Committee's time is limited; thus, maintaining multiple social media channels to their full capabilities may not be feasible. The Committee can prioritize which channel(s), content, and features to focus on and employ recommended processes and tools to help scale these efforts. The Committee may also want to consider using members outside of the committee to help manage different social channels and monitor engagement.

Posting frequency is subjective. The Committee should first focus on quality content that drives engagement and consistency in their posting. Content that earns high engagement will improve APA Pennsylvania's visibility in social channels, and regular posting will help maintain that organic visibility with followers. As a general rule, however, the Committee should plan to post content in various formats on its social channels at least three times per week, targeting Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays for pre-planned content.

To help create opportunities with partner organizations, APA Pennsylvania should follow the social channels used by these organizations and engage directly (like, comment, share) as much as possible. Similarly, the Committee should follow members who actively use social channels to share planning-related content. APA Pennsylvania can increase its followership with regular calls to action, inviting members to follow its social media profiles.

LinkedIn:

LinkedIn has become a more versatile platform in recent years, and we recommend that the Chapter prioritize it as its primary social media channel. As such, we have included more detailed information on how APA Pennsylvania can use LinkedIn. A LinkedIn company page provides various opportunities for organizations to engage with their followers, showcase their culture, products, services, and updates, and attract new members. The Communications Committee should work to leverage LinkedIn's full range of content formats and capabilities.

The forms of content LinkedIn allows for include:

- **Updates and Posts:** Share insights, thought leadership, company news, and industry articles, as well as posts that highlight company culture, achievements (Great Places Awards), and events (the Chapter Conference).
- **Images and Videos:** Upload high-quality images and videos that showcase people (students, volunteers), services (training and prep materials), or company events (section meetings).
- **Articles:** Write and publish LinkedIn articles through the platform's publishing tool, leveraging the Chapter's thought leaders.
- **Newsletter:** The Chapter can increase the reach of its monthly newsletter by publishing the same copy using LinkedIn's newsletter feature.
- **Infographics and Visuals:** Share infographics or visual summaries that are informative and easily digestible from past slide presentations or data charts.
- **Event Announcements:** Create and promote upcoming events at the Section level, announce Webinar Wednesdays, or the annual conference.
- **Polls:** APA Pennsylvania can engage audiences through polls to gather opinions and insights on planning-related topics or to assess membership needs.
- **Job Postings:** This is a prime channel for APA Pennsylvania to share planning vacancies and internship opportunities submitted by its members. (Posting details about these opportunities individually rather than just linking to the website's job page will get more visibility in the feed.)
- **PDFs and Documents:** APA Pennsylvania can share e-books, white papers, case studies, or other documents like the Planning Brochure directly through their page.

The Committee should outline how it can further utilize LinkedIn's functionality listed below.

- **Page Customization:** Ensure the page is properly branded with a logo, banner, and description that conveys APA Pennsylvania's purpose and brand promise.
- **Analytics:** Review LinkedIn analytics monthly to track engagement on posts, follower growth, and page traffic.
- **Showcase Pages:** Create specific pages linked to your main page to highlight various aspects of the Chapter, such as each Regional Section or each committee.
- **LinkedIn Live:** Broadcast live video content, such as Conference Keynote addresses, to engage followers in real time (subject to LinkedIn approval).
- **Sponsored Content:** Pay to promote your content to a wider or more targeted audience on LinkedIn.

- **Product Pages:** While APA Pennsylvania offers no products per se, the Product Page feature could be used to highlight certification prep materials or the various membership levels and benefits.
- **Community Hashtags:** APA Pennsylvania can better position itself and be discovered through relevant hashtags such as #planningmatter, #urbanplanning, etc. (Look at other related pages like the national APA's profile for hashtag ideas.)
- **Employee Advocacy**: Encourage others to include their membership in APA Pennsylvania among their career positions on their personal profile. This will allow APA Pennsylvania's LinkedIn admin to notify "employees" of new Chapter posts while also creating opportunities for the admin to share content posted by members. Leveraging member's networks will lead to increased reach, awareness, and potential new members.
- **Page Followers Feature:** View and engage with followers and target content to specific audience segments.
- **Content Suggestions:** Get suggestions for trending content related to planning, policy developments, funding opportunities, etc., that can then be shared with your audience based on their interests and behaviors.
- **Invite to Follow**: Regularly ask Chapter members to invite their personal connections to follow the Chapter's LinkedIn page.
- **Comments, Replies, and Direct Messaging:** Engaging with users through comments, replies, and direct messaging is a critical best practice for APA Pennsylvania to foster an active online community. Seeing high two-way engagement is a positive signal and demonstrates APA Pennsylvania's value. The Communications Committee should identify several admins and outline duties for monitoring the page and fostering engagement.
- **LinkedIn Groups:** LinkedIn's group feature is actually created by an individual user, not an organization's page. Groups can be public or private and can be organized by topics (Planning Advocacy in PA), geography (Chapter Regional Sections), or roles (PA County Planning Directors Forum). Groups can be a powerful online tool for building stronger communities across the membership; however, the success of groups is contingent upon defining a clear purpose for the group, fostering consistent engagement, and designating a community manager(s) to maintain the group's viability.

Regularly updating the LinkedIn page with a mix of these content types and leveraging the available functionalities can help APA Pennsylvania maintain a dynamic presence, grow its audience, and enhance its value to members and potential members.

Facebook:

Facebook has more users than LinkedIn, and APA Pennsylvania can effectively use its page to engage with different segments of its audience, distribute content, and foster a community around planning in Pennsylvania. Below are some suggested Facebook features to capitalize on.

- **Sharing Blog Content:** Regularly post links to blog articles with engaging captions that prompt readers to click through and read more. Use eye-catching images or graphics to accompany these posts.
- **Events:** Create and promote events for conferences, workshops, and community meetings. Utilize Facebook's RSVP feature to gauge attendance and build excitement.
- **Live Videos:** Host Facebook Live sessions to cover live events, conduct interviews with planning experts, or hold Q&A sessions, allowing for real-time engagement with followers.
- **Discussion Groups:** Create a Facebook Group linked to the main page to facilitate deeper discussions on specific planning topics or local community projects.
- **Interactive Posts**: Engage followers with polls, surveys, and discussion prompts to solicit their opinions on urban planning issues, such as new developments or transportation initiatives.
- **Multimedia Content:** Share photos and videos from successful planning projects, member spotlights, or educational content to engage visually with the audience.
- **Facebook Stories**: Use Stories for short, timely updates and to highlight key moments from events or daily operations, which can be more informal and personal.
- **User-Generated Content:** Encourage members to share their own planning-related stories or photos, creating a sense of community and showcasing diverse perspectives.
- **Messenger Bots**: Implement a chatbot to provide instant responses to common inquiries, improving engagement and customer service.
- **Social Proof:** Share testimonials from members and communities that have benefited from the APA-PA's work, leveraging social proof to build trust and credibility.
- **Partnership Highlights**: Feature collaborations with local governments, educational institutions, or related organizations to show unity and reach within the planning community.
- **Reputation Management**: Monitor and respond to comments and messages promptly, addressing member concerns and fostering a positive community atmosphere.
- **Calls-to-Action:** Include clear CTAs in posts and About sections, whether encouraging members to register for an event, join the association, or participate in a planning initiative.

- **Analytics and Feedback:** Regularly review Facebook Insights monthly or quarterly to understand post performance, audience demographics, and engagement patterns and adjust the content strategy accordingly.

By strategically using these features and types of content, the APA-PA can maintain an engaging, informative, and active Facebook presence that supports its goals and serves its community.

Instagram:

APA Pennsylvania has no Instagram channel currently, but there's considerable value in using this visually oriented platform to showcase the impact of good planning practices and the beauty of well-designed urban spaces, which will be especially appealing to younger members. Instagram offers a handful of features and formats for sharing this visual content.

- **Visual Storytelling**: Post high-quality images and videos of local planning projects, before-and-after transformations, community events, and behind-the-scenes looks at planning processes to tell the story of urban development and community planning visually.
- **Instagram Stories and Reels**: Utilize Stories to share quick updates, glimpses into events, or to highlight member stories. Reels can be used for short, engaging clips that show the vibrancy of community life or quick tips related to urban planning, possibly in a fun and educational format.
- **IGTV**: For longer-form content, IGTV can host interviews with planners, deep dives into specific planning topics, or virtual tours of notable planning projects.
- **Hashtags:** Use and create branded hashtags to encourage sharing and visibility. Hashtags could relate to ongoing campaigns, specific planning topics, or local issues.
- Interactive Features: Employ polls, quizzes, and Q&A features on Stories to engage followers and gather their opinions on planning topics or upcoming projects.
- **Highlights**: Curate Stories into Highlights on the profile for long-term visibility, categorized by themes such as "Community Planning," "Events," "Tips," and "Success Stories."
- **Influencer Collaborations:** Partner with local influencers or notable figures in the planning field to share content or takeovers, reaching a broader audience and adding credibility.
- **User-Generated Content**: Encourage members and local citizens to share their own photos and experiences with planning in their communities, using a specific hashtag or by tagging the Chapter's profile to build community and engagement.

- **Visual Data Sharing**: Share infographics and data visualizations that communicate planning statistics, success metrics, or educational material in a visually appealing manner that is easily digestible for the average user.
- **Consistent Branding**: Maintain a cohesive aesthetic and brand voice that aligns with the Chapter's identity and values, making their content instantly recognizable.

By utilizing these content strategies and features, the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA can build a strong community on Instagram that not only engages but also educates its audience on the importance and impact of thoughtful planning. The Committee might want to designate one or several members to manage the Chapter's Instagram account as a focal point for sharing content and maintaining engagement.

X (Twitter):

Twitter, now X, has undergone extensive changes in recent years and is considering going to a paid-use model. As such, and given the Committee's limited time, X may not be a valuable channel to invest in. However, APA Pennsylvania does have a current X profile, which can be used with minimal effort in a few ways.

- **Content Distribution**: Share links to blog posts, articles, press releases, and other educational materials. Twitter cards can enhance the presentation of this content within the Twitter feed.
- **Curating Content and Headlines**: Using the channels Lists feature, APA Pennsylvania can create segmented lists of agencies, planning-related sites, journalists, and topical hashtags to mine news headlines and industry content to share on its other social platforms.

As with the other social channels, we recommend designating an admin for monitoring the channel and identifying opportunities for curated content.

Objective 6: Increase Usage and Engagement on All Platforms

By consistently employing the processes and recommendations outlined within Objectives 2 through 5, the Committee should see a steady rise in user engagement commensurate to their efforts. The Committee can also employ tactics that directly encourage audience engagement. Such tactics include but are not limited to:

- **Q&A Sessions**: Host regular Q&A sessions with industry experts or association leaders using the Live features on LinkedIn and Facebook.
- **Polls & Surveys**: Engage followers by posting polls and surveys on relevant topics.
- **Comments & Messages:** Ensure timely responses to comments and direct messages. Engage in conversations and encourage discussions on posts.
- **Online Events**: Organize more online networking events, webinars, and workshops using Zoom or social media groups.

Analytics & Measurement

The Communications Committee can access several tools and reports to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts and the level of member engagement on APA Pennsylvania's digital channels and properties. By collectively leveraging analytics from their website, email automation systems, and various social media profiles on a monthly basis, the Committee can establish a baseline of performance that will allow them to begin recognizing trends and benchmarking improvement.

However, the amount of analytics these channels provide can be overwhelming to the point they are ignored altogether. To help avoid this, a list of engagement-related analytics has been included for each digital platform.

Website

As a membership-based organization, monitoring website analytics is crucial for understanding and enhancing member engagement. The below metrics can be found in Google Analytics 4 (GA4) and used to evaluate engagement with the Chapter's website.

- **Unique Visitors:** This metric shows the number of distinct individuals visiting your site within a given period. It helps understand your site's reach. A positive benchmark varies widely based on your organization's size and industry, but seeing consistent growth or stability in this number is generally good.
- **Pageviews:** This indicates the total number of pages viewed. High pageviews can signify engaging content, but it's important to differentiate between high pageviews due to

engaging content and high pageviews due to navigation issues. A benchmark is industry-specific, but an increase in pageviews over time is typically positive.

- **Average Session Duration:** This shows how long visitors stay on your site. Longer sessions can indicate more engaging content. A typical positive benchmark is 2-3 minutes or more, but this can vary.
- **Traffic Sources:** This tells you where your visitors are coming from (e.g., direct, search engines, social media). Diverse sources of traffic are good, with a healthy mix of organic, direct, and referral traffic indicating a strong online presence.
- **Conversion Rate:** For a membership site, this could be the percentage of visitors who become members or take a desired action (e.g., sign up for a newsletter). A good conversion rate varies but is typically in the range of 2-5%.
- **Content Engagement:** Metrics like comments, shares, and time spent on specific articles or pages. High engagement rates suggest that the content is resonating with your audience.
- **Mobile vs. Desktop Traffic**: Understanding what devices your visitors use can guide your design and content strategy. A good balance between mobile and desktop traffic is ideal, with increasing importance on mobile-friendliness.
- **Exit Pages:** The last pages visited before leaving. This can highlight potential issues with specific content or the user experience.
- **Geographic Distribution:** Knowing where your visitors come from can help tailor content to specific regions or understand your global reach.
- **New vs. Returning Visitors**: A healthy balance between new and returning visitors indicates both growth and loyalty.

Constant Contact

Evaluating engagement with your monthly newsletter published via Constant Contact involves analyzing specific metrics that provide insights into how your audience interacts with your content. Here's a breakdown of key analytics, their meanings, and typical benchmarks for each:

- **Open Rate**: This measures the percentage of recipients who opened your newsletter. It indicates how compelling your subject line and sender name are. A good open rate varies by industry, but typically, a rate of 20-30% is considered healthy.
- **Click-Through Rate (CTR)**: This is the percentage of readers who clicked on one or more links in your newsletter. It reflects the relevance and quality of your content and calls to action. An average CTR is around 7-10%, but this can vary.

- **Click-to-Open Rate (CTOR)**: This metric compares the number of clicks to the number of opens, providing insight into how engaging your content is to those who opened the email. A CTOR of around 20-30% is generally good.
- **Bounce Rate:** This tracks the percentage of emails that couldn't be delivered. A high bounce rate could indicate outdated or incorrect email addresses in your list. Aim for a bounce rate lower than 2%.
- **Unsubscribe Rate:** The rate at which people opt out of your mailing list after receiving your newsletter. A rate below 0.5% is typically acceptable. A higher rate may indicate issues with content relevance or frequency.
- **Forward Rate/Share Rate**: This measures how often your newsletter is forwarded or shared, which can indicate the value or interest level of your content. While there's no standard benchmark, higher rates are always positive.
- **Engagement Over Time**: Track when your recipients are opening and interacting with your emails. This helps in optimizing the send time for future newsletters.
- **List Growth Rate**: This indicates how your mailing list is growing. A positive growth rate is ideal, but the benchmark varies widely.
- **Spam Complaints**: Keep track of how many recipients mark your email as spam. A rate as low as 0.1% is considered acceptable.
- **Device Open Rate**: This shows what devices (mobile, desktop) your recipients are using to view your newsletter, which is important for optimizing format and design.
- **Geographic Data**: Understanding where your readers are located can help tailor your content and send times.
- **Conversion Rate:** If APA Pennsylvania's newsletter includes calls-to-action (like event sign-ups), tracking how many people take these actions is crucial.

Social Media

Using LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram to reach members involves monitoring various engagement metrics to understand how your audience interacts with the Chapter's content. Below is a breakdown of key metrics for each platform.

- **Impressions**: The number of times your content is displayed. High impressions indicate good visibility.
- **Reach**: The number of unique users who saw your post. A high reach is beneficial but should be evaluated alongside engagement metrics.
- **Clicks**: Total clicks on your content, company name, or logo. This shows interest in your content or brand.

- **Engagement Rate**: Calculated as interactions plus clicks and followers acquired, divided by impressions. An average engagement rate is around 0.35-1%.
- **Likes, Comments, Shares**: These actions indicate how interactive and appealing your content is.
- **Followers Growth:** Tracks the increase in your followers over time. Steady growth is a positive indicator.
- **Video Views**: If you post videos, tracking views is crucial. Look for longer view durations as a positive sign.
- **Story Views**: If using Instagram Stories, track how many views each story gets.

Execution Roadmap

The Execution Roadmap for the communication's strategy was retooled to meet APA Pennsylvania's needs as a volunteer organization. Rather than structuring the roadmap to be time-based (i.e. 30, 60, 90-day or short, near, long-range), the roadmap for this strategy is built around the level of skill and complexity associated with recommended tasks.

In every case, the Communications and Membership Committee should focus first on "Fundamental" tasks as these are foundational to successfully implementing Entry, Intermediate, and Advanced initiatives. The intent of this structure is for the Committee to then implement "Entry" category tasks and then adopt initiatives requiring more skill, complexity, and resources at a realistic pace.

A large portion of the outlined efforts can be managed by volunteers. Other tasks may be managed by current in-house staff or through contractors. A smaller portion of tasks may require specialized expertise to accomplish.

The Execution Roadmap addresses six major categories - Logistics and Procedures, Content Development, Social Media Management, Website Management, Student Outreach, and Building Partnerships. The tasks associated with each of these categories are recommendations meant to make the overall communications strategy actionable.

The outlined tasks are not exhaustive and should not be rigidly interpreted. The Roadmap is simply a framework for APA Pennsylvania and the Committee to use and implement as seen fit.

Logistics and Procedures

	Fundamental	Entry	Intermediate	Advanced
Define and assign committee roles for strategy action items	X			
Update committee agenda to include status updates and analytics	X			
Review recommended digital tools and set up user account(s)	X			
Identify functionality to be used for each digital tool	X			
Document how tools and features will fit into content workflow	X			
Setup Chapter brand standards in Canva		X		
Apply for Google for Nonprofits program		X		
Structure file folders within Google for Nonprofits business tools		X		
Apply for Google AdWords Grant ($10K /month of free text ads)			X	
Determine AdWords keyword to use in paid search campaigns			X	
Setup AdWords campaigns and reporting in AdWords Manager				X

Content Development

	Fundamental	Entry	Intermediate	Advanced
Use Personas to develop monthly themes and content topics	X			
Determine content forms for topics aligned to personas	X			
Update monthly editorial calendar and submission guidelines	X			
Create content calendar in PM tool (i.e. Trello) and input topics		X		
Update newsletter format and design		X		
Subscribe to relevant newsletters, blogs, etc. for curated content		X		
Find existing content from members and adapt for Chapter use			X	
Setup Google Alerts on relevant topics to share on content channels			X	
Identify existing Chapter content to be repackaged in other forms			X	
Incorporate Press Releases into monthly content as relevant			X	
Build a list of media outlets to share press releases with			X	
Cross-publish press releases on social channels and newsletters			X	
Add press releases to website's newsroom section			X	
Solicit key members for thought-leader content monthly			X	
Expand content to include visual formats like video and infographics				X

Social Media Management

	Fundamental	Entry	Intermediate	Advanced
Incorporate social media postings into monthly content calendar	X			
Assign management, publishing, and engagement rolls for channels	X			
Review channel analytics in monthly meetings	X			
Ensure all social channels are consistently branded	X			
Setup Instagram account and connect with Facebook page		X		
Develop a glossary of hashtags to use in relevant social posts		X		
Follow social channels for all Chapter section and relevant partners		X		
Reshare content from partners and Chapter sections		X		
Invite personal network to follow the Chapter's channels		X		
Include Calls to Action in newsletter to follow the Chapter		X		
Use Canva to create visual content for social posts		X		
Incorporate use of Stories on Facebook and Instagram		X		
Update LinkedIn profile using strategy recommendations		X		
Add key events into LinkedIn and Facebook events functionality		X		
Post job openings directly in Facebook and LinkedIn's career section		X		
Organize Twitter following profiles into segmented lists			X	
Setup messenger bot on Facebook page			X	
Republish Chapter newsletter using LinkedIn's newsletter feature			X	

Website Management*

	Fundamental	Entry	Intermediate	Advanced
Add website updates to monthly meeting agenda	X			
Add review of monthly Google analytics to agenda	X			
Add review of new / old job postings to add/remove from site	X			
Group website punch list items in batches and set milestone dates	X			
Prioritize batches by ease and critical need for accuracy	X			
Ensure Google Analytics 4 and Tag Manager are installed properly	X			
ID site functionality to add/keep per strategy recommendations		X		
Add UX tracking tool (i.e. HotJar) to track user site navigation data			X	
Determine how to manage onsite SEO and technical updates			X	
Outline workflow for making regular updates (i.e. member info)			X	
Setup marketing automation tools (i.e. newsletter signup forms)				X

*It is assumed APA Pennsylvania will explore developing a new website in the future, and as such some tasks were omitted because a new site will address them (i.e. updating the content management system or CMS to a current version.)

Student Outreach

	Fundamental	Entry	Intermediate	Advanced
Setup Handshake account and assign manager	X			
Identify key schools to connect to through Handshake	X			
Coordinate with Student Outreach Committee to ID needs	X			
ID and create collateral outreach materials for outreach	X			
Outline workflow with Student Outreach for posting to Handshake	X			
Make outreach materials available to members through website		X		
Include job openings and internships on newsletter		X		
Add updates from Student Outreach Committee in newsletter		X		
Outline workflow for posting openings on Facebook Careers			X	
Outline workflow for posting openings to LinkedIn Careers			X	

Building Partnerships

	Fundamental	Entry	Intermediate	Advanced
Define criteria for designating high-value partners on current list	X			
Outline procedure for outreach to high-value partners	X			
Create an inventory of potential content project collaborations	X			
Contact high-value partners and pitch collaboration concepts		X		
Follow and engage with high-value partners on social media		X		
Invite partners to section meetings at regional level			X	
Feature partners in monthly newsletter			X	
Explore potential for joint programming with high-value partners				X

Conclusion

In conclusion, this recommended communication strategy for APA Pennsylvania charts a course for increasing organizational interaction and reach while increasing value to members in the process. The strategy addresses current challenges while identifying opportunities for growth and impact. Key initiatives like revamping the website, refining content strategies, and embracing new technologies are pivotal for engaging more effectively with diverse needs of members across urban and rural regions. This roadmap not only provides an actionable path for improving the Chapter's communication capabilities, but it also sets the stage for a more dynamic and inclusive future in serving Pennsylvania's planning community

Appendix of Materials

The following sections contain additional materials that were used to inform various aspects of the overall strategy and tactical recommendations. This includes a broad overview of the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA's organizational structure, a detailed SWOT, and Bull Moose Marketing's approach to building this strategy. The appendix also lists materials provided by the committee, along with the results of analytics reports, interviews, and benchmarking information conducted by Bull Moose Marketing.

Organizational Overview

The Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association operates as a neutral, nonprofit entity dedicated to advancing planning initiatives and supporting professional planners and planning officials within the Commonwealth. As one of 47 distinct Chapters under the broader American Planning Association (APA) umbrella, APA Pennsylvania boasts a membership of roughly 2,300 individuals. This includes 1,500 professional planners, with 620 holding AICP memberships. APA Pennsylvania actively champions planning across the Commonwealth by offering training sessions, hosting an annual conference, monitoring legislative developments, and spearheading public awareness campaigns while collaborating with various regional and statewide groups that align with the organization's mission and objectives.

Structure and Personnel

The Pennsylvania Chapter of APA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. [DRI handles administrative duties](#) and APA Pennsylvania employs part-time personnel specifically for conference coordination. APA Pennsylvania's governance is structured to ensure efficient operations and member engagement. The Board of Directors convenes approximately every other month, supplemented by regular meetings of the Executive Committee, Standing/AdHoc Committees, and Section Councils.

Regional Sections

APA Pennsylvania's organizational structure is geographically segmented into six regions: Central, Lehigh Valley/Berks, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest. Each section is to provide localized services to its members and the broader community. These services range from program meetings and local workshops to newsletters and announcements. Activity and participation vary by section.

Key Committees

Beyond this regional framework, APA Pennsylvania boasts several committees, each with a distinct mission. The Legislative Committee advocates for planning issues at various governmental levels and monitors legislative actions. The Professional Development Committee focuses on fostering professional growth opportunities throughout the Commonwealth. The Planning Officials Development Committee bridges local planning officials and APA Pennsylvania, ensuring cohesive planning strategies. The Student Engagement Committee supports aspiring planners and promotes planning education. The Awards Committee annually recognizes outstanding individuals and projects in Pennsylvania's planning arena. The Great Places in Pennsylvania Committee identifies and celebrates exemplary locales that serve as models for other communities. Lastly, the Communications and Membership Committee has the dual purpose of both promoting effective communication with members and expanding APA Pennsylvania's membership base.

Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Education Institute (PMPEI)

In its commitment to enhancing planning education in Pennsylvania, the Chapter has established the Pennsylvania Municipal Planning Education Institute (PMPEI). This institute represents a collaborative effort between the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association and the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs. The primary objective of PMPEI is to elevate the quality of planning across the state through targeted educational initiatives. Through such collaborations and its robust organizational structure, the Pennsylvania Chapter of APA continues to champion the cause of comprehensive and sustainable planning in the Commonwealth.

Communications Committee SWOT Analysis

Strengths

The Communications Committee of APA Pennsylvania has identified several strengths of the organization:

- Resourceful Staffing: The blend of paid full-time staff and DRI resources significantly reduces the burden on volunteer committee members.
- Dedicated Volunteers: The C&M Committee boasts a dedicated group of volunteers, ensuring its effective functioning.
- Informative Website: APA Pennsylvania's website is rich in content, providing a plethora of information to its users.

- Esteemed Conference Experience: APA Pennsylvania's conference is highly valued, presenting content that is especially relevant to Pennsylvania planners. Additionally, it is cost-efficient due to minimal travel expenses.
- Strong Section Structure: The organization has a solid section framework, even though the performance of individual sections may fluctuate.
- Popular Webinars: "Webinar Wednesdays" are popular among members, offering free access to members and a nominal fee for non-members.
- Affordable Membership: The availability of a Chapter-only membership option makes joining APA Pennsylvania more affordable.
- Diverse Board: The APA Pennsylvania Board is characterized by its diversity, with members contributing a wide array of experiences.

Weaknesses

APA Pennsylvania has identified several weaknesses in their SWOT analysis:

- Budgetary Constraints: The organization's budget is strained due to rising conference and general costs.
- Resource Limitations: There are insufficient resources to hire additional paid support for communication tasks or any new initiatives proposed by committees or the board.
- DRI's Core Competencies: DRI's primary skills and expertise are not directly related to Pennsylvania or the planning sector.
- C&M Committee Size: The core group of the C&M Committee is notably small, making it susceptible to disruptions from member changeovers. This instability can impact other committees as well.
- Underutilization of LinkedIn: The organization is not maximizing the potential of LinkedIn as a professional networking platform.
- Website Issues: The website appears outdated and can be confusing for users. It hasn't undergone a redesign in over a decade.
- Membership Understanding: There's a limited grasp of the membership's composition, hindering targeted outreach. The organization struggles to categorize members into specific groups like new members or student members.
- Section Challenges: Some sections lack a substantial active membership, making it challenging, especially when such sections are tasked with conference planning.
- Membership Costs: The cumulative fees from APA dues, APA Pennsylvania dues, and AICP dues can be prohibitively expensive. This poses a barrier for individual members and organizations that might otherwise subsidize these costs for their employees.

- **Lack of Diversity:** Both the planning profession at large and the APA Pennsylvania specifically lack diversity across various dimensions.
- **Fundraising Difficulties:** Efforts to expand fundraising for scholarship funds have seen limited success. The current method of attaching donations to event registrations can be cumbersome, especially when employers cover these costs.

Opportunities

The Communication Committee of APA Pennsylvania has identified several opportunities in their SWOT analysis:

- **Remote Capabilities:** Post-pandemic, there's potential to further develop remote learning and networking opportunities, capitalizing on the shift towards digital platforms.
- **Virtual Engagement:** The reduced barriers of virtual meetings offer a chance for volunteers and committees to expand membership and operate in innovative ways.
- **Student Engagement:** APA Pennsylvania's policy of providing free memberships to students presents an opportunity to engage with this demographic, fostering their transition to young professional members.
- **LinkedIn Outreach:** There's potential for increased engagement on LinkedIn. By using the APA PA membership list, volunteers can invite existing members to follow the APA PA's LinkedIn page, enhancing professional networking.
- **Support for Volunteer Planners:** There's room to provide more support for volunteer planners involved in local planning commissions, zoning boards, and similar entities, enhancing the planning process at the grassroots level.
- **Allied Organizations:** While some connections with allied organizations are robust, there's potential to strengthen ties with many others, fostering collaboration and shared growth.
- **IIJA Federal Funds:** The allocation of more federal funds for infrastructure projects through the IIJA presents an opportunity, even though Pennsylvania faces challenges in securing matching funds.

Threats

APA Pennsylvania has identified several threats in their SWOT analysis:

- **Changing Networking Preferences:** Newer members and planners are veering away from traditional networking avenues like conferences and section events. Recent low attendance at events, such as the SE Section Happy Hour, exemplifies this shift.

- Rising Competition: APA Pennsylvania faces competition from a plethora of organizations offering web resources, such as Planetizen. The proliferation of blogs, podcasts, and other platforms means APA Pennsylvania is no longer the sole or dominant voice promoting planning.

- Urban-Centric Focus: The planning profession is often criticized for its disproportionate emphasis on urban and big city issues, potentially alienating rural or suburban planners.

- Membership Challenges: Many active professionals in the planning field opt not to join APA or its chapters.

- Complexity of the Profession: The multifaceted nature of planning makes it challenging to explain to those outside the profession, leading to a lack of instinctive understanding among the general public.

- State's Municipalities Planning Code: While this code urgently requires revisions, any attempt to modify it could lead to unintended consequences if legislators overreach or make uninformed changes.

- Volunteer Turnover: Volunteer planners, appointed officials, and students have set terms or periods of engagement, making it a constant challenge to connect with and onboard new individuals.

- Political Challenges: The planning profession is influenced by politics at various levels, which can impact its direction and public perception.

- Inconsistent Local Rules: The variability in rules, policies, and ordinances across municipalities makes it difficult to establish transferable models or universally applicable professional knowledge.

- Municipal Pressures: Elected municipal officials sometimes exert undue pressure on planning processes or lack a comprehensive understanding of the legislative context of planning.

- Political Opinion Swings: Fluctuations in public opinion regarding the size and role of government can influence perceptions of planning and its efficacy.

Agency Approach and Methodology

To develop this communication strategy, Bull Moose Marketing outlined a three-phased approach, each with associated methodologies and deliverables.

Phase 1: Feedback and Assessment

This phase consisted of stakeholder workshops, meetings, and group assignments with the Communications Committee. This also included interviews and a discussion with county planning directors at their quarterly meeting in August. This also included two surveys - one to

determine communication channels used by members and another to assess members' perceptions of the Chapter's value. Components of this phase included:

Internal Assessment: Gathering of input from APA Pennsylvania's primary stakeholders (Board, officers, committee chairs, etc) concerning the present performance and future direction of the organization to include strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Resources and Processes Assessment: Reviewing current communications channels, processes, structure, staffing, responsibilities, available tools, constraints, and methods for measuring success.

External Assessment: Gaining an understanding of how external and interagency stakeholders (chapter members, professionals, planners, community volunteers, legislators, students, etc.) view and interact with APA Pennsylvania.

Key Issues Inventory: Using information gathered from the earlier assessments to build a summary of key issues to be addressed in the final communications plan.

Phase 2: Analysis and Development

In this phase Bull Moose Marketing organized the information gathered in the previous phase as well as analytical data from the organization's current digital assets to inform the development of the proposed communications plan. The components of phase 2 included:

Channel Assessment: Reviewing current channels (i.e., social media, website, email, etc.), how they are being employed tactically, channel optimization, organization of information, user experience, and overall audience engagement.

Benchmarking: Research trends, programs, models, and how similar organizations have addressed the outlined key issues.

Plan Development: Outlining of the proposed plan and incorporating the findings, feedback, and analysis gathered to date.

Execution Roadmap: Building the timeline, milestones, assignments, measurability, and communication plan to complete objectives associated with each goal.

Execution Assessment: Structuring a process mechanism to ensure the successful execution of the communications plan to include staffing needs, tactical and technical recommendations, and budgeting.

Phase 3: Delivery and Presentation

The final phase of this engagement encompassed delivery of the proposed communication strategy that included the following elements:

Purpose and Objectives: Summary of APA Pennsylvania's objectives and how the communication plan will aid in achieving them.

Target Audiences: Profiles of target audiences, their pain points, needs, motivations, and perceived value.

Messaging: Outline of messaging that best resonates with target audiences that should be conveyed consistently across relevant channels while reflecting the organization's mission and value to those audiences.

Channels: Tactical recommendations for the most impactful communication channels to use to reach target audiences.

Content Cadence: A timeline and content calendar designating the forms of content, publication schedule, and publishing frequency per channel.

Metrics and Evaluation: Outline of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and reporting to gauge the effectiveness of the plan and its organizational impact

Roles and Responsibilities: Assignment of roles and responsibilities for the implementation of the communication plan. Designation of content sources, channel management, and reporting.

Resources: Outline of required resources, including staffing, funding, tools, and required for implementing & sustaining the recommended plan. This includes an execution roadmap for putting the plan in place.

Strategy Source Material

Committee Materials

- [2023 - 2026 Chapter Strategic Plan](#)
- [Survey of Strategic Plan 2023 to 2026](#)
- [PA APA Engagement Metrics 7/10/23](#)
- [Suggested New Member Protocols](#)
- [Communications and Membership Meeting 7/11/2023](#)
- [2018 Strategic Plan Survey Results](#)
- [Better Communication APA PA Strategy Planning Spillout](#)
- [APA PA Website Audit Notes](#)
- [APA PA Partnership Organizations](#)
- [APA PA C&M Comm - 2023 Guidelines for Content](#)

Agency Materials

- [Strategy Worksheet](#)
- [Member Communication Channel Survey](#)
- [Member Value Survey](#)
- [Website Audit Report](#) (SEMRush)

Interviews

- Planning Officials Development Committee (Charlie Guttenplan, Troy Truax - 8/11/23)
- County Planning Directors Quarterly Meeting (Various - 8/18/23)
- PA Chapter Conference (Various - 10/16 - 10/17/23)
- Student Engagement Committee (David Hunter, Trajan Jones - 11/2/23)
- Volunteer Planner Email Interviews (Various - 11/23)

Benchmarking and Other Sources

- American Planning Association website and social media channels
- Ohio Chapter of the American Planning Association website, social media channels, content formats
  - https://www.ohioplanning.org/aws/APAOH/pt/sp/home_page
  - https://www.linkedin.com/company/apa-ohio/
  - https://www.facebook.com/APAOhio/
- APA Student Recruiting Video https://www.planning.org/students/

- Temple University - Temple Student Planning Organization
- West Chester University - Geography and Planning Society
- Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- https://www.iedconline.org/