

# Developing Your IABC Accreditation Portfolio

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Presented by:  
Nick Durutta, ABC, and Michelle Gurney, ABC

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**IABC** INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATORS

# Co-presenters



Nick Durutta, ABC



Michelle Gurney, ABC

## Why become accredited?

- Global standard of communication excellence
- Professional recognition/validation
- Proven value in professional advancement
- Part of growing global community of top communicators
- Personal challenge



A 3D rendering of a dark grey puzzle. The background is a vast field of interlocking puzzle pieces, receding into the distance. In the foreground, one piece is missing, creating a gap. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, emphasizing the three-dimensional nature of the pieces.

**Accreditation**

# The accreditation process

- Candidate sends portfolio of two work projects
- Gold Quill Award-winning entry within past year automatically qualifies as approved project (limit to one)
- Once portfolio is approved, candidate takes written and oral exam

# New portfolio deadlines

- **5 April**

- Portfolio deadline for those who applied and were accepted to the program between July and January

- **15 September**

- Portfolio deadline for those who applied and were accepted to the program between February and June

# What we'll cover today

- The purpose of your portfolio
- What to include in your accreditation portfolio
- What makes an ideal portfolio project
- How to write an excellent work plan
- Common pitfalls
- What happens next

## What's required in portfolio

- Two projects for which you were the principal communicator/decision-maker
- Your work plan/sample is similar to a Gold Quill entry only a more in-depth format
- Not limited to a specific number of pages or hard-copy binder

## Why a portfolio?

- Showcases highlights of your work experience
- Indicates a range of skills
- Demonstrates your strategic thinking as a senior communicator, then your skills at implementing plan
- Shows IABC that you are ready to take the exam

# An Ideal Portfolio

- **Portfolio projects should be:**
  - Diverse
    - Try not to include two media campaigns or two annual reports
  - Strategic
    - Projects should focus on addressing organizational needs (vs. creating “product”)
  - Finite
    - Projects should have definite beginning and end dates
  - Timely
    - There’s no time restriction, but try to include recent projects (within last five years)

# Portfolio projects

- **Each should contain:**
  - A work plan
  - Relevant work samples

# Project Work Plan

- **Most important part of your portfolio**
- **Rules of thumb:**
  - Use assigned headings
  - Structure your work plan to be a minimum of four pages
    - Average length: seven pages or longer
  - Use the space to fully explain your approach
  - Do not write it as an awards entry; it is acceptable to talk about what went wrong and what you would have done differently

# Work plan elements

- Background of organization and communication function
- Communication problem/opportunity
- Communication solution/plan
- How solution/plan was sold to management
- Implementation of solution/plan
- Evaluation of solution/plan

# Background of organization and your communication function

- **Include:**

- What your company/client does
- Relevant history
- Location, size, number of employees
- Earnings/assets

# Background of organization and communications function

- **Include:**

- Communication budget
- Where the communication function fits
- Your role within communication function

# Identifying business problem/opportunity

- Must be clearly stated
- Must show impact/relevance to organization's business and mission
- Include any research/feedback conducted, how it was pertinent and effective

# Identifying business problem/opportunity

- **Describe target audience(s) in detail**
  - Who they are (internal, external, etc.)
  - Important details (size, location, language issues, relationship to business)
  - Concerns or opinions that influence communication

# Developing the solution/plan

- **Must include:**
  - Defined and measurable goals and objectives
  - Media appropriate to audience(s)
  - Budget, timeline for execution and related factors
  - Evidence of advance planning

# Developing the solution/plan

- **What is a goal?**
  - Primary result you want to accomplish
  - Should relate to organization's business and mission

# Developing the solution/plan

- **What is a goal?**
  - High-level statement of desired result:
    - Greater market share for product
    - Successful launch of new product or service
    - Higher productivity or contributions from workforce
    - Ability for nonprofit to service more of target clientele

# Developing the solution/plan

- **What is an objective?**
  - Supports your goal
  - Must be defined and measurable

# Developing the solution/plan

- **Objectives must be:**
  - Specific
    - Quantifiable: Percentage or numerical change or increase

# Developing the solution/plan

- **Objectives must be:**

- Specific

- Quantifiable: Percentage or numerical change or increase
  - *Increase* in products sold
  - *Decrease* in complaints received
  - *Increase* in favorable audience opinions
  - *Decrease* in employee turnover

# Developing the solution/plan

- **Objectives must be:**

- Specific

- Quantifiable: Percentage or numerical change or increase or realization of specific outcome
      - Passage or defeat of key legislation or regulation
      - Election of a candidate
      - Approval of a contract or bill

# Developing the solution/plan

- **Objectives must be:**

- Specific

- Measurable

- Must be able to determine change or increase from start of project to finish
- Must be able to realistically accomplish within boundaries of project (schedule, budget, resources, etc.)

# Developing the solution/plan

- **Objectives must be:**
  - Specific
  - Measurable
  - Time-related:
    - Must have defined beginning and end date

# Developing the solution/plan

- **Goals describe overall desired result**
  - Example:
    - Ensure that as many employees as possible are adequately preparing for retirement
- **Objectives describe defined and measurable supporting results**
  - Example:
    - Encourage 80 percent of employees to enroll in retirement plan by 15 October
- **Tactics are those actions taken to achieve objectives**
  - Example:
    - Create information kit explaining benefits of retirement plan to employees

# Selling the solution/plan to management/client

- **How did you gain internal support or approval for your solution/plan?**
- **Please describe:**
  - How you presented your plan
  - How you demonstrated the influence you had in putting your ideas forward
  - How you responded to questions, objections or suggested changes

# Implementing the solution/plan

- Here's where you explain what you *did* as opposed to planning and strategizing
- Show that the work was executed logically and professionally
- Include explanations for changes to the plan (media, budget, timeline, etc.)
- Focus on corporate and project objective(s) or message(s) remains clear

# Evaluating the solution/plan

- **Did your solution/plan accomplish what you wanted?**
- **Describe both formal and informal measurement used**
  - Formal:
    - Sales reports, surveys, focus groups, registered sign-ups, quantified responses...
  - Informal:
    - Word of mouth, anecdotal comments or reports, unsolicited feedback...

# Evaluating the solution/plan

- **Did your solution/plan accomplish what you wanted?**
  - Link evaluation to original objectives
  - Clearly indicate whether the project was successful
  - Describe what you would have done differently

# Evaluating the solution/plan

## **Goal:**

Increase customer satisfaction by shifting communication engagement from passive and generic to active and personal.

## **Evaluation:**

Measure shift in customer satisfaction through before-and-after surveys and other feedback mechanisms.

# Evaluating the solution/plan

## **Goal:**

Decrease employee turnover by more effectively communicating benefits provided by the organization.

## **Evaluation:**

Measure turnover before and after; track comments in exit interviews; conduct attitude survey among current employees.

## Before you finish

- Spell check *and* proofread – consistent issues with spelling/grammar will affect your score
- Check to ensure you followed the headings – they make it easy for the reviewer to find what they're looking for
- Ensure you showcased your strategic thinking. That's critical!

# The work sample

- Does it reflect your work plan?
- Is it appropriate for your audiences (e.g., not 8-point type for seniors or a web-based tool for those without computer access)?
- Does it reflect your project's objectives?
- Does it demonstrate quality and professionalism?

# The Work Sample

- **How to provide**

- If possible, include photos or files on disc or in e-mail attachments
- Unless necessary, only include representative pieces – be mindful of the reviewers' time demands
- If possible, summarize volumes of information
  - e.g. research, media clippings

## What NOT to send

- Work for which you were not the lead communicator
- Someone else's work – unless you managed, supervised or directed the process and can prove it (make sure your role is clear)
- Consultants must get client's written approval

# Most common pitfalls

- Objectives are not measurable
- No objectives included
- Objectives not tied to department or corporate goals/objectives
- Failure to provide appropriate context for the organization or the project
- Lack of detail in audience description
- Focus on implementation/tactical vs. strategic
- Focus on trying to impress (awards focus) vs. demonstrating competence (accreditation focus)

# Scoring

- Portfolio scored on 7-point scale
- Passing score = “4”
- Reviewers start from 4 and go up or down from there
- You must receive a passing score to write the exam
- You will receive the reviewers’ written comments when your portfolio passes

## If You Don't Pass . . .

- Portfolio goes to the Director of Portfolios for review
- You may be asked to re-write one or more sections
- It's rare to have to re-submit the entire portfolio
- You have up to one year from the time your portfolio feedback is sent to pass and move on to the exam

**Reminder:** The purpose of the portfolio is to determine if you are ready to write the exam

# Where to Get Help

- **Accreditation Completion Program (ACP)**
  - some chapters have, some are doing by distance
- **Accredited members in your chapter – they have been through it, too!**
- **Or request a portfolio mentor through**  
<http://www.iabc.com/abc/mentor/request.htm>

# Questions? Comments?

**Cathleen Wolf, ABC**

Director of Portfolio Review

+1 858.674.6139

[cw@communicatwrite.com](mailto:cw@communicatwrite.com)

IABC World Headquarters

+1 415.544.4700

[recognition@iabc.com](mailto:recognition@iabc.com)

<http://www.iabc.com/abc/>