

IABC British Columbia: Mentoring

Introduction

Currently the third largest chapter in the world, IABC British Columbia serves the province of British Columbia. While a large percentage of our members live in and around the city of Vancouver, we have members scattered all over the lower mainland and further afield which gives us unique challenges with regards to engaging and providing value to all our members. We also have a very diverse membership in terms of industries, career levels and professional development needs, and we have a large percentage of senior and corporate members.

Our aim is to increase our membership base and nurture a sense of community while raising the profile of IABC/BC to its members, and position communications as a strategic function in every organization. We believe that we can do this by building relationships with current and prospective members, other organizations, businesses and post-secondary institutions, while providing engaging and meaningful professional development and networking opportunities which offer value and fulfilling experiences for our members, volunteers, sponsors, partners and communications professionals.

Mentoring in British Columbia

Mentoring programs have been operated in British Columbia for many years. We know that it can be a great way to engage members at different levels, create connections and develop careers. We have always had a large percentage of highly-skilled and experienced senior members, as well as a diverse membership which provides us with excellent opportunities for mentor/mentee activities. At a higher level, mentoring supports the three pillars of IABC; to advance the profession, create connection and develop strategic communicators.

In previous years we always offered more traditional mentorship programs, but we were finding that participation rates, and volunteer resources were declining. There is lots of competition with other associations in the lower mainland such as CPRS Vancouver, so generating interest, participation and ultimately engagement in mentoring programs was increasingly becoming a challenge. So, between 2015 and 2017 we started experimenting with our mentorship offerings by offering a new innovative program which merged the Gift of Communications with mentorship to provide non-profit organizations with communications support. Alongside this we offered speed mentoring events, which provided bite-size mentoring on focused topics while providing us with real time insights into what our members wanted from mentorship programming. In 2017-2018 we experimented further by offering a pilot skills-based mentorship program alongside some speed mentoring events. The skills-based mentoring was a lower commitment peer-to-peer mentorship opportunity that focused on skills-based exchange and allowed relationships to develop organically from there. Although we had received positive feedback on the concept of a longer-term skills-based mentorship commitment, we found that it was difficult to generate participation from members. It was clear that the speed mentoring, which was drawing an almost instant interest, was a more desirable format in British Columbia. The speed mentoring event was held in partnership with our student services portfolio where senior members and foundational career members, were able to meet and learn from one another and this was well received.

Goals and Objectives

Going into the 2018/2019 board year, our annual member survey told us that mentorship was one of the activities that we needed to focus on because it was important to our members and they scored us 3.5 out of 5 (mean satisfaction rating). So, with the chapter goals, historical activities, and member survey results in mind we developed our mentorship programming within the career development portfolio. We decided to focus on the two mentoring programs that have been the most successful in recent years, which were the Gift of Communications and Speed Mentoring and we set related goals and objectives based on these that would support the broader chapter strategic plan and IABC Pillars. See **Work Sample #1** for an expanded view of the career development strategic plan.

Goal #1: Gift of Communications - Carry out refreshed Gift of Communications program

Related Chapter Goal: Increase Community Engagement

SMART Objectives: Build relationships with 4-5 non-profits in the city
Recruit 20 participants

Goal #2: Mentorship - Enable members to grow their careers by facilitating opportunities to connect and learn from peers.

Related Chapter Goal: Provide engaging, relevant and valuable experiences to our members.

SMART Objectives: Run 3 Speed Mentorship events yearly

Foster new connections within our community

Closely aligned with our chapter strategic plan and alongside our other programming these two streams of mentoring would help us increase member engagement, create connections and provide relevant, valuable experiences to our members. With these programs we could leverage the expertise, knowledge, and connection of our chapters' members and bring them together. By providing high value and fulfilling experiences to our members, we could help them to grow their careers by developing their skills. Additionally, the Gift of Communications program would give members a chance to showcase their talents while also giving back. Plus, it was a meaningful way to raise the profile of IABCBC as a leader and innovator in the local communications and business community. These two mentoring programs also closely aligned to IABC's global standards and career roadmap by creating connections both within the chapter, and in the wider community.

A refreshed Gift of Communications program

To ensure that we had enough resources to run this program successfully, we created a team of 4 volunteers with varying skill sets and experience levels to handle various aspects of the program delivery. This made a huge difference because this small team was able to own and run the program, while also offering support to the teams of participants. As a future learning we identified that a portfolio manager for this program is essential to ensure that there is someone overseeing everything without the Career Development director needing to be 'hands on'.

Once we had secured the non-profits and participants, we ran the program from Jan 2019 to June 2019. with 6 non-profits and 18 communicators participating. The communicators were put into small teams of 2-3 communicators and partnered with a non-profit. Once the non-profits had been chosen, and participants secured we held a kick off event in February, which was a low-key networking event to give all participants a chance to meet and mingle before beginning their projects. At the end of the program we also held a wrap up party to provide another opportunity to network as well as celebrate the past few weeks achievements. Support teams and check ins were also set up during the course of the program.

Marketing and communication campaigns

We leveraged our chapter's strong integrated marketing processes by running two marketing and communication campaigns for the Gift of Communications program. The first campaign was geared towards attracting non-profits to the program, and the second was to generate applications from members to participate in the program.

To generate interest from non-profits we ran an extensive outreach and promotional campaign that combined overarching promotional calls to non-profits with tightly targeted outreach to specific non-profits across the lower mainland. As a result of these extensive activities across all IABC/BC channels as well as ambassador personal channels we received **25 non-profit project applications**. We chose 6 of these for the program, and some of the other non-profits were later selected for the Gift of Communications event during World Conference in Vancouver in June.

The second marketing and communications campaign was focused on generating applications from members to participate in the program. Despite engaging and extensive promotional activities, we had less success with this campaign. Our objective was to get at least 20 applications and we received 18 in total.

Alongside the two marketing campaigns that we ran we also had a page on our website which provided information on the Gift of Communications program and its benefits. This was regularly updated as the program progressed to provide updates such as information on how to apply to participate in the program. We also created two case studies from previous years Gift of Communications programs to showcase projects that had been completed previously. See **Work Sample #2** for a Gift of Communications Case Study.

Budget for the program

For the **Gift of Communications** program, we held a kick off event and a wrap up party with very small budgets. We were

able to secure a venue for free, so we only needed to cover catering and courier expenses. For both events we set a budget of \$240 to cover expenses. These were free events for participants of the program so there was no projected revenues.

Speed Mentoring Series

These bite size mentoring sessions provided peer to peer learning and mentorship without requiring a longer-term commitment. For these events we targeted successful established communicators from local and global companies who would be able to provide mentorship to other members on key topics. Our goal was to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and mentorship within the Chapter and deepen the connections between members, while also fostering new connections in the Chapter. Vancouver is a unique and competitive job market for communicators, regardless of the stage of their career that they are in. So, our speed mentoring series in 2018/2019 focused on providing practical tips to give our members the edge to succeed. Between Nov 2018 and May 2019, we offered three events that covered themes of building your career, hard skills and soft skills.

Speed Mentoring 1: Lifting the lid on Communications Careers

Aimed at communicators of all levels, whether they were a student trying to break into the job market or a senior professional looking to attract new talent, this event focused on practical tips and tricks to boost careers. Topics covered included employer branding, positioning for growth and the hats we wear as communicators.

Speed Mentoring 2: Skill Up

This session focused on tangible how tos and tips to improve key skills needed to succeed in a communications career. Topics covered included perfecting presentations, fostering an online community and pitching to media.

Speed Mentoring 3: Interpersonal Skills

This session focused on developing the soft skills that are needed for a successful communications career including giving and receiving feedback, leadership essentials and handling conflict.

Marketing and communication campaigns

We leveraged our chapter's strong integrated marketing process to promote the speed mentoring events by taking a multi-channel approach to reach the broadest possible audiences with consistent messaging. Our goals were to drive registrations for these events. Our marketing and comms volunteers worked with the career development team to create on brand creatives, and tailored copy that were used in our Connect newsletter, event invites and social channels. For all three events, all of the promotional activities drove traffic to a website landing page which included a link to register. See **Work Sample #3** for a speed mentoring website event page

Budget

We had an overall budget of \$670 for our three **Speed Mentoring events** to cover the expenses of catering and couriers because we were able to secure a free venue through sponsorship. Our third speed mentoring event was cancelled so our budgeted expenses were adjusted to \$430. For revenue we set very modest targets for each event because our focus was on providing value to our members rather than generating revenue. Our registration fees for these events were kept low at \$15 for students, \$25 for regular members and \$35 for non-members because our objective with these events was to provide value to members rather than generate profit so we set a low revenue target of \$600 across the two events from 30 paying attendees.

Results

Goal #1: Gift of Communications - Carry out refreshed Gift of Communications program

SMART Objectives: Build relationships with 4-5 non-profits in the city
Recruit 20 participants

We met our overall goal of successfully carrying out a refreshed Gift of Communications program, which we are very proud of. With 25 applications, and 6 non-profits selected we exceeded our objective to build relationships with 4-5 non-profits. We were also able to further build relationships with local non-profits at the IABC World Conference.

We fell short of our member participation objective though, and we found that it challenging to recruit 20 participants. We received 18 applications, and two had to withdraw due to personal circumstances changing. Our Gift of Communication volunteers stepped in to provide additional resources to the non-profits.

An existing sponsor relationship provided us with a free venue for both the kick off and wrap up party events that we held so we only had to cover catering and courier expenses. Our actual expenses for the Gift of Communications program were \$353.37 so we came in \$123.63 (26%) under budget for these events.

Goal #2: Mentorship – Enable members to grow their careers by facilitating opportunities to connect and learn from peers

SMART Objectives: Run 3 Speed Mentorship events yearly

Foster new connections within our community

We met our goal, and related objectives by hosting two out of the three speed mentoring sessions during the Chapter year with solid attendance, and some positive feedback which we used to inform our programming. We scheduled the third event, recruited strong mentors and thoroughly promoted it but we had to make a difficult decision to cancel the event due to low attendance close to the event date. This was extremely disappointing, and we think that this was could have been due to a combination of event fatigue, timing or world conference.

We had projected that we would have 15 paying attendees at each speed mentoring event, in addition to mentors and other volunteers and this projection was almost spot on because we had 13 at one event and 17 at the other. The biggest success of these events however was that many of our speed mentoring attendees were brand new to IABC and these events were their first experience with the Chapter. We saw many of them come to both speed mentoring events or other events that we held so we successfully fostered new connections within our community with these events as well.

Financially, the mentoring programs were also a success overall. Our actual expenses were \$245.05 against a budget of \$480 to cover the expenses so we came in 43% below budget. We generated \$883.25 from registration fees which was 47% higher than our \$600 projection from 30 fee paying attendees

To get some member feedback on our mentoring series, we sent out an **event survey** after both events. The survey was sent out on the day following each event, and both surveys featured the same questions so that we could effectively compare the two events to see what members liked and didn't like. Our challenge with event surveys is simply getting members to complete the surveys that we send out. Disappointingly, we only received 6 responses to the 'Lifting the lid on Communications Careers' survey and received no responses to the 'Skill Up' survey. The feedback received from the 6 respondents was mixed. Only 33% of respondents said that they were likely to recommend an IABC/BC Speed Mentoring event to a friend or colleague but 83% said that the topics were very relevant for their careers and 66% said that the event was extremely valuable.

See **Work Sample #4** for a sample of the Lifting the Lid event survey

Overall, we met the majority of our goals and objectives, received positive member feedback and the programs were delivered on time and under budget. We also successfully re-introduced the Gift of Communications program in our chapter and helped 6 non-profits. On the negative side our satisfaction rating for mentoring went down to 3.4 in 2019 versus 3.5 in 2018 and we also faced challenges such as having to cancel one of our events. Key learnings from the year are that teams of volunteers are critical to successfully deliver mentoring programs and having a busy calendar of events does come with a risk of event fatigue especially if multiple events for similar audiences are offered within a short time frame. For the Gift of Communications program it would also be beneficial to carry out survey activities to get feedback from participants.

Work Samples

#1 – Career Development Strategic Plan

#2 – GOC Case Study

#3 – Speed Mentorship Event Page

#4 – Lifting the Lid event survey sample (summary data)