



2020 Chapter Management Awards – Work Plan

Chapter:	IABC London
Region:	Canada East
Division:	2 – Medium Chapter
Category:	Strategic Planning

INTRODUCTION

IABC London is a medium-sized chapter that serves more than 150 members and reaches a total audience of more than 500 communicators in London, Ontario and surrounding regions. Founded in 1979, the chapter is a community and resource committed to investing in members’ futures by supporting career growth and elevating the communications profession.

IABC London’s Virtuoso Awards is a mainstay of our chapter. Since 1995, Virtuoso has recognized outstanding communications and creative professionals from across the region. Modelled on IABC’s Gold Quill Awards, Virtuoso is southwestern Ontario’s only project-based awards program celebrating excellence in communications.

IABC London views awards programming as crucial to our chapter’s alignment to the #IABC1720 strategic framework. Project-based awards at the global, national and chapter levels have proven valuable in advancing the communications profession. They allow professionals to demonstrate their impact on organizations through evaluation against the global standard. With constructive feedback from evaluators, awards are also a powerful learning opportunity to develop strategic communicators. In addition, they foster connections through annual award celebrations and a community of excellence.

In 2018, IABC London faced a critical challenge with the Virtuoso Awards. Once a thriving local awards program, the number of Virtuoso entries had plummeted by 50 per cent in four years. In 2015, the chapter received 60 entries resulting in 31 awards. In 2018, we received 30 entries resulting in 15 awards. We also began hearing frustrations from stakeholders on how arduous they found the Virtuoso Awards submission process, how the judging was subjective, and how hard it was to win an award.

The IABC London Board knew that action was required and that the awards were not sustainable in their current state. With 2018-2019 marking our chapter’s 40th anniversary, the Board saw a unique opportunity. We decided to take a ‘purposeful pause’ on the Virtuoso Awards to conduct a strategic review of the program and ensure it was still meeting the needs of our stakeholders. To fill the gap created by the pause, IABC London planned a year-long celebration of our milestone anniversary. The strategy was in direct alignment to our 2018-2019 vision of ‘learn, connect and celebrate.’

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Goal: Conduct a thorough review of IABC London’s Virtuoso Awards program to inform future direction of the local project-based awards

Objectives:

1. To engage a diverse representation of 100+ London and area communicators in providing feedback on their needs and desires in a local project-based awards program
2. To engage all Canadian IABC chapters in a peer review of awards programming
3. To analyze the Virtuoso Awards’ 23-year history, including the judging processes and past communications strategies
4. To develop recommendations on the future direction of local awards by June 2019

BUDGET

With the need for dedicating resources to the chapter's 40th anniversary, the review was conducted on a low budget. Only \$120 was allocated for the provision of catering at Virtuoso Awards Review Committee meetings. We relied on talents of our Board for communications, marketing and design of our tactics.

After setting our budget, we decided to hold a Virtuoso Awards Think Tank to engage stakeholders in a facilitated discussion on awards programming. We worked with our professional development team to reallocate \$400.00 from their budget to this event but came under by spending only \$320.00. Therefore, we spent a total of \$440.00 on the review.

IMPLEMENTATION

The IABC London Board knew that transparency would be crucial in our decision to pause the Virtuoso Awards. From the beginning of the process, we informed our stakeholders about what was happening, why it was happening, and our intention to engage them for input into local awards programming.

To guide this review, we formed an ad-hoc committee with 12 local communications professionals in November 2018. We wanted the makeup of the committee to reflect the diverse communications professionals we represent. The Virtuoso Awards Review Committee therefore included representation from PR agencies, various professional sectors, IABC members and non-members, past Virtuoso winners, and communicators who had never submitted to Virtuoso. It was chaired by our Awards Director and an IABC London member experienced in IABC awards programs.

The Committee worked collectively to develop a strategy for the review which consisted of three pillars: i) stakeholder engagement and feedback, ii) a peer review and iii) a historical analysis.

Stakeholder Engagement & Feedback

IABC London's stakeholders are crucial to our awards program. Without their participation, our program cannot be successful. Stakeholder engagement was therefore identified as the backbone to our strategy. We needed to carefully listen to our audience to ensure our awards program was meeting their needs.

A multi-channel approach was taken to engage London and area's diverse population of communicators. A number of tactics were used to invite and encourage feedback on all elements of a local awards program. The Committee used an online survey which was marketed through e-blasts, social media and our monthly e-newsletter from February to March 2019. A shortened paper version was also made available at our chapter's PD events. We hosted a Virtuoso Awards Think Tank event in March 2019. While the Think Tank was open to all stakeholders, we used direct outreach to target communicators from across industries to provide feedback on local awards in the facilitated session. The Committee also conducted direct outreach interviews to further engage peers in a conversation on awards.

In particular, we were interested in learning what communications professionals want from an awards program in order to evaluate whether the Virtuoso Awards was meeting those needs. We also evaluated individuals' past history with the Virtuoso Awards, their feedback on the Virtuoso Awards and their history with other awards programs.

One challenge for the Committee was engaging local communications professionals not associated with IABC. While IABC London has a strong membership and an even larger audience, there are hundreds more London and area communicators who are not engaged with our chapter. To address this challenge,

the Committee utilized professional connections to build a robust database of an additional 346 communicators for direct outreach.

Peer Review

Another pillar of the Committee's strategy was a peer review to examine best practices, trends and challenges for awards programs being offered by other IABC chapters.

We developed a peer survey which was made available to chapters around the world through *The Hub*. We also specifically targeted our 13 peer Canadian chapters through direct outreach and additional research. We wanted to understand all chapter awards programs being offered across Canada.

In addition, we examined best practices and trends for the national Silver Leaf Awards and global Gold Quill Awards. This was accomplished through online research and direct outreach to Award Chairs.

Historical Analysis

The third pillar of the review was an analysis of the Virtuoso Awards' 23-year history. The Committee conducted research by examining past files to examine trends in award submissions and winners; judging processes; communication and marketing of the awards program; and the celebration event.

Unfortunately, files from past years were limited. While we uncovered some historical files from 1995 to 2000, we lost data on the awards from 2001 to 2010. We were only able to find the number of winners for 2011 to 2013. We had access to all files from 2013 to present through our chapter's Google Drive.

To fill gaps and enrich our data, the Committee engaged past Awards Directors for their perspectives on the program. We also reached out to past judges for feedback on the evaluation process.

Despite the challenges, we were able to trace a rough history in award submission numbers, evaluation processes, event marketing and winner recognition practices.

Developing Recommendations

Following implementation of all tactics, the Committee convened to analyze and discuss findings. We used our research to develop a Virtuoso Awards Review Report which included recommendations for the future direction of the awards program. These recommendations were presented to the IABC London Board in June 2019 where a vote was passed to endorse their implementation in 2019-2020. The Virtuoso Awards Review Report was then shared publicly with our stakeholders in fall 2019.

MEASUREMENT

The success of our review was measured in the engagement and feedback from our stakeholders and peers, and in the development of recommendations for the future direction of the Virtuoso Awards. A number of important findings were uncovered from all pillars of the strategy.

We engaged a total of 71 communicators who expressed a strong appetite for project-based awards, but a desire for changes and enhancements. While we did not meet our target of engaging 100 communicators, we did engage a diverse representation of professionals. This included IABC members and non-members, professionals from all industry types, those who had submitted to Virtuoso in the past, those who had never submitted to Virtuoso, and even those who are not engaged with our chapter. We realize in retrospect that our target number may have been unrealistically high, considering we had only 30 award submissions in 2018 and 60 in 2015. If we were to do this project again, we would lower that expectation, place even more focus on direct outreach to stakeholders and add budget for promoted social media posts to share our digital survey and Think Tank registration.



We also engaged eight chapters from around the world in a peer survey and conducted additional outreach with all 13 chapters in Canada. Through this work, we identified three trends in awards programs being offered at peer IABC chapters across Canada: project-based awards (four chapters), people-based awards (one chapter), and focused promotion and support of Silver Leaf and Gold Quill (nine chapters). We uncovered important findings by exploring best practices with our peers, such as how our chapter’s scoring was out of line with recommendations from IABC International.

Our historical analysis also provided important insights, such as a need to reinforce agency engagement, strengthen marketing of the program and better recognize our award winners.

The combined feedback and historical analysis suggested that the Virtuoso Awards should continue, but with changes to the program. Our Committee analyzed all findings to develop a number of important recommendations and enhancements that promise to strengthen our program, creating sustainability while upholding our chapter’s alignment to the #IABC1720 strategic framework. In particular, we will be making enhancements to the program’s marketing communications, submission process, evaluation process (including scoring) and recognition of award winners.

RESULTS

Objective	Results
To engage a diverse representation of 100+ London and area communicators in providing feedback on their needs and desires in a local project-based awards program	We engaged a total of 71 communications professionals who provided valuable insights. While we did not meet our target number, we did engage a large sample with diverse representation.
To engage all Canadian IABC chapters in a peer review of awards programming	We engaged eight chapters from around the world in a peer survey. In addition, we engaged all 13 peer Canadian chapters through discussion and research into awards programs being offered. Our peers provided valuable insights into ways we can enhance our program.
To analyze the Virtuoso Awards’ 23-year history, including the judging processes and past communications strategies	We conducted a historical analysis of the Virtuoso Awards from files available to us. In addition, we engaged previous chapter leaders and awards judges for insights into the awards program, its history and future potential. This analysis highlighted the program’s trajectory over the years which provided insights into ways the program can be strengthened.
To develop recommendations on the future direction of local awards by June 2019	Our Committee leveraged the success of our review to analyze findings and develop recommendations for the future direction of awards programming at IABC London. The Committee recommended that the Virtuoso Awards should continue with a number of changes and enhancements. These are now being implemented for 2019-2020 as our chapter relaunches the Virtuoso Awards. The relaunched awards are an integral part of IABC London’s 2019-2020 Strategic Plan with professional development activities planned around inspiring and supporting award submissions.