American Planning Association
Texas Chapter

Creating Communications For Success
June 1, 2017
APA TX Snapshot

• 3rd - largest chapter in U.S. with 2,000 members
• Diverse geographic and demographic sections
• Successful programs include conferences, training
• Certification for career advancement (AICP)
APA TX Vision

APA Texas is a respected leader and partner whose members make great communities happen by providing expertise and innovation to shape livable and sustainable Texas communities.
Challenges

• Limited resources – time, staff, money
• Desire to create fresh content
• Creating engagement with sections and members
• Communicating to sections with diverse planning needs
• Difficulty getting information to members and non-members
• How to engage with related planning and partner organizations
• Increase membership
• Engaging student chapters
Target Audience

- APA TX members and potential members
- APA student chapters
- Affiliated professional groups (AIA, ULI)
- Elected officials and their employees
- Planning officials
- Partner organizations (i.e. TML)
- Development and business community
- Community groups
- Media
Communication Objectives

• Strengthen perception that APA TX is THE organization for planning professionals to advance their careers
• Create awareness of APA TX professional training programs among target audiences
• Position APA TX as advocate for statewide planning policy and initiatives
• Establish APA TX as the thought leader for planning practices and topics
Communication Goals

• Increase digital engagement among the target audience by 15% in 12 months. Measure newsletter opens and click-through rates and social media activity (follows, likes, shares, comments)

• Increase awareness of APA TX and its programs among target audience by producing relevant monthly content for newsletters, social media channels, website, news outlets and blogs

• Increase interest in APA TX programs and events over the next 24 months (measured by an increase in participation)
Communication Strategies

• Increase communication through monthly newsletters, more frequent social media posts and up-to-date website
• Conduct targeted outreach campaigns to city managers, elected officials, planning boards/commissions, etc.
• Recruit partner organizations to help with news distribution
• Identify section people to help with social media, web info
• Engage with state and local media sources to spread news
Design Quality Newsletters

• Issue newsletters monthly. Suggested topics:
  ➢ upcoming events and training, awards
  ➢ section activities
  ➢ job announcements
  ➢ relevant planning news
  ➢ legislative updates (state or federal)
  ➢ wrap up of past events
  ➢ feature a city/town or a planning professional of interest

• Share with planning and public officials, post on social media
• Post on website
Boost Social Media Engagement

- Focus on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn
- Facebook: Post 1-3 quality, relevant items weekly
- Twitter: Post 5-20 times a week
- LinkedIn: Post once a week
- Instagram: Post as needed
- If mentioning other entity, tag them in the post
- Use hashtags wisely and strategically
Key Themes/Hashtag Strategy

- Establish key themes and use with hashtags and keywords
- Good planning + great cities and APA TX develops great planners
- Use specific hashtags for events such as your conference #
- General hashtags may include:
  
  #planninggreatcommunities #plannerexpertise
  #planningmatters #plannertraining
  #whatplannersdo #plannercareers
  #planninggrowth #plannerlessons
  #planningsustainability #planning4TX
Grow Your Audience

Grow your audience by:

• Sharing relevant content (planning blogs, partner messages)
• Following related organizations, influencers, public officials, advocacy organizations, bloggers
• Repurposing your unique content and sharing/discussing it
• Showcasing section activities news
Enhance the Website

Make the website THE resource for planners for career information, training and resources

• Monthly review/cleanup - remove old pages/information
• Correct inaccurate information and add missing information
• Update weekly – use new information, especially training– related
• Post urgent info quickly – share on social media
• Compel sections to post content regularly
• Move social links to top of page, add Twitter feed
Partner With Key Influencers

Add to communication toolbox:

• Send relevant news to publications/blogs (Texas Tribune, Texas Monthly, NextCity, Planetizen)

• Leverage local media sources for news: Great Places of Texas and award winners

• Identify and engage key Texas influencers

• Recruit partners like TML and ULI to help distribute information

• Provide printed materials to elected and planning officials, commissions
For web, newsletters and social media, focus on:

- Attend or enter APA TX Awards, training, conferences, programs,
- Grow your career with APA TX
- Take advantage of these learning opportunities
- Section news – what’s happening around Texas?
- Legislative update (state or federal) – support, oppose, monitor key legislation
- Job news – link to jobs page on web
- Congratulate new FAICP and AICP members
Content Focus

• Learn about best planning practices at our conference
• Recognize Great Places in Texas
• Celebrate planning award winners
• What you can learn from the Big 6
• Planning stories and links to articles about paradigm shifts in planning (how will driverless cars affect cities, what’s new in citizen engagement)
• Links to interesting planning blogs or bloggers
• New skills required for planners
• Recognition of new or changing planning practices
• Here’s what planning does and here’s how it helps
Monthly Focus

- Ideas for your social media and newsletter posts by month. Will change as needed
- During legislative session, add advocacy posts
- Monthly highlights – use content suggestions to repeat and build upon key messages
June

• Reminder – chapter award submittals due in July: feature categories, post link to past award winners
• Look back at national conference – key takeaways
• With summer in Texas, focus on green initiatives, sustainability
• Best practices for creating/updating your general or comprehensive plan
• Grow your career with help from APA TX
• Section highlights/news
• Call for speaker proposals for November conference
July

• Promote state conference registration – early bird pricing
• Deadline for chapter awards
• Continued call for speakers/topics at November conference
• Use July 4th timing to discuss how planning is related to the growth of our cities and country
• Mid-year successes and challenges for APA TX
August

- Promote state conference registration – here’s what you can learn
- Highlight keynote speaker and topics of upcoming state conference
- Join APA TX – enjoy member rate at conference
- Highlight other training/workshops planned around the state
- Encourage students starting or returning to college and thinking about a career to join student chapters – looks good on resumes, etc.
September

- Final push for state conference registration
- Feature host location
- Call for student volunteers – get student chapters involved
- Feature sessions and training opportunities at conference
- What new tools can planners view at the conference (new GIS technology, etc.)?
October

• October is National Planning Month
• What do planners do?
• How do planners make a difference?
• How can elected officials learn more about planning practices and requirements?
• What best planning practices can your town adopt?
• How does planning promote community sustainability, growth and economic development?
November

- Conference focus – maximize social media posts with photos, videos, tag speakers and keynote, attendee interviews, awards information and great moments
- Keep this going throughout the month until the Thanksgiving break – give thanks for being a planner and helping make great communities
- Announce the application process is open for Great Places of Texas
December

- Wrap-up report for conference
- Make a push for Great Places of Texas applications
- End of year successes and challenges for coming year
- Highlight any significant section successes
- Anticipate what the new year may bring in the planning industry
- Have fun and wish everyone happy holidays and happy new year

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January

• New year, new focus on career and job training
• What skills will you need this year?
• How can APA TX help you advance, take the AICP?
• Promote Great Cities application process
• For student chapters’ graduating seniors – what can you do between now and graduation to prepare yourself for a career in planning?
• Regional news/highlights
February

- Submit your Great Places applications
- Feature last year’s Great Places’ winners
- Focus on planning healthy communities (Feb. is heart - healthy month)
- Regional news or highlight of a region
- Feature a town or planner using innovative planning strategies
- If there is a Big 6 conference, start promoting it
March

• If Big 6 occurs, then promote heavily and share live comments, photos, and video from the event
• Tease the Great Places announcement
• Do you know we train elected and other public officials on planning practices/policies?
• Feature an elected official who is not a planner and is implementing good planning policy
• What innovative infrastructure techniques can help cities?
April

- Showcase the Great Places of TX award winners - focus on each one and the group as a whole (get as much mileage as you can out of this)
- What effective planning practices were incorporated by Great Places winners?
- Get the recognition you deserve – enter the chapter awards competition
- Top planning practices for community engagement
- Regional news/highlights
- Membership drive – highlight membership benefits ahead of national conference
May

• Recognize planning graduates – use APA as a resource for your career, resume writing help
• What type of planning careers are hot right now?
• Promote national conference and TX activities/reception (promote before, during and after)
• Celebrate TX award winners – write features on their entry (why did they win, what planning topic was highlighted or what problem did they solve?)
• What sections attended the conference (who had the most attendees?)
APPENDIX – SOCIAL MEDIA STATS
APA TX Social Media Stats

**Twitter**
317 followers, following 98, 151 Tweets, 61 Likes
Tweets focused on the conference or Great Places of Texas

**Facebook**
741 page follows, 754 total page likes
Average of 4 posts a month except for October and November – leading up to the conference and the conference itself
Social Media Comparisons

TX chapter compared with a few other chapters

Twitter Followers

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Followers</th>
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<td>Texas</td>
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<td>Colorado</td>
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<td>Michigan</td>
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Social Media Comparisons

Facebook Page Follows

Linked Followers

- Michigan
- Colorado
- California
- Florida
- Texas
Facebook Notes

• Keep it conversational, ask questions
• Best time to post on Facebook: 3 p.m. Wednesday
• Other optimal times: 12 – 1 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays, 1 - 4 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays
• Engagement rates are 18% higher on Thursdays and Fridays, and weekdays from 1 - 4 p.m. tend to see the highest click through rates
• On Fridays, Facebook use spikes by 10%
• Friday is a good day for humorous posts
• The worst times to post on Facebook: weekends before 8 a.m. and after 8 p.m.
Twitter Notes

Follow elected officials, area planning organizations, national planning organizations, and relevant influencers

- Twitter is quickest method to distribute message and grow audience
- The best times to post on Twitter are weekdays 12 – 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.
- Data suggests posting up to 5 times/day
- Use hashtags effectively, but no more than one or two per post
• LinkedIn is used heavily for professional use. Post career tips, job announcement and training information here.

• The best time to post on LinkedIn is midweek from 5 - 6 p.m. Other optimal times include Tuesdays from 10 – 11 a.m., Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 7:30–8:30 a.m., at 12 p.m., and from 5 – 6 p.m.
Instagram Notes

- Use Instagram to showcase visually compelling content
- Great Places of Texas
- Conferences and Awards
- BONUS: Facebook and Instagram are linked for easy content sharing
- Less frequent posts
- Lots of hashtags drive people to posts
- The best times to post are Mondays and Thursdays anytime