



PRSSA Nationally Affiliated Student-run Firm Standards *"Credibility Through Unity"*

Though there are more than 100 student-run firms around the country operated by PRSSA Chapters, only those among the upper echelons are PRSSA Nationally Affiliated. Firms with this designation have successfully gone through an application process to ensure the firm is soundly based in three areas: a solid PRSSA/PRSA connection, a high level of professionalism and an effective structure.

Earning this recognition has many benefits, including the prestige of working for a firm that represents the best of the Society and inclusion in a future client referral system. Only Nationally Affiliated firms will be listed on the PRSSA National website for such requests. This type of referral system will provide greater opportunities for service and meaningful work for students. Lastly, only firms that have earned National Affiliation may apply for the PRSSA Student-run Firm Awards.

To become Nationally Affiliated, a firm must abide by the standards below. PRSSA Headquarters does not charge an Affiliation application fee or any sort commission or fees once a firm is Affiliated.

In September 2009, National Affiliation requirements were updated to reflect the increasing number of student-run firms appearing on the Chapter level. Current Affiliated firms do not need to re-apply before the end of their three-year affiliation.

Application Requirements

To be considered for National Affiliation, firms must submit the following:

- A client list with a brief description of each organization. The description should include what type of organization the client is, the services provided to the organization and how many staff members are working on the account.
- At least one case study detailing a public relations program implemented by the firm. Case studies should highlight the firm's best work and have four parts: research, planning, execution and results. Two pages or less per case study.
- A letter of support from the Chapter's Faculty or Professional Adviser. Two pages or less.
- A brief history of the firm describing when it was founded, how it has evolved and the mission of the firm. One page or less.
- A letter from the firm director. Four pages or less.

The Firm Director Letter

Describe situations or challenges the firm has faced and overcome, and explain how your firm demonstrates the following principles:

Connection

- How is the firm connected to PRSSA?
- How is the firm connected to PRSA?
- What support does the firm receive from professionals and professors?

Professionalism

- What is expected of staff members?
- How does the firm interact with clients?
- What are some recent examples of client results you are proud of?
- What emphasis does the firm place on ethics?

Structure

- What is the structure of the firm?
- How many staff members do you have at each level?
- Describe the billing process

National Affiliation certification lasts three years, after which the firm must re-apply. Previous National Affiliation does not guarantee future National Affiliation, though it will be taken into consideration. PRSSA Headquarters, the PRSSA National President, Immediate Past President and vice president of professional development will review the application and issue a decision within one month of receipt.

If you have questions, contact PRSSA Headquarters or the PRSSA vice president of professional development. To submit your application, please mail to PRSSA Headquarters at the address below or email your application to PRSSA Manager of Student Programs jessica.espinal@prsa.org. If you are sending your application via mail, we recommend sending an email to jessica.espinal@prsa.org so Headquarters is aware that it is coming.

PRSSA National Affiliation

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Definitions

The following is a set of terms that will be used throughout the document. Review them briefly to understand the standards listed below.

- Nationally Affiliated – Firms that have reached a new level of professionalism and status among PRSSA student-run firms by meeting specific, official standards.
- Core values – The three basic principles of PRSSA Student-run Firms: connection, professionalism and structure.
- Standards – A practical and measurable requirement a firm must meet to become a PRSSA Nationally Affiliated Student-run Firm. Each of the core values is broken into standards.
- Firm executive board – The firm director, two assistants and adviser.
- Firm adviser – A professional or faculty member who guides the practice and administration of the firm. He or she may be the current PRSSA Chapter Faculty Adviser of Professional Adviser; however, we highly recommended that the adviser be a separate public relations professional who will focus solely on the success of the firm.
- Active member of PRSA – To be an active member of PRSA, an individual must have current paid dues and periodically participate in PRSA activities. The number of times the firm adviser participates to be called “active” is a personal decision of the firm adviser.

Recommended Firm Standards

Although firms vary in size and scope, the standards below were designed to help each firm move toward greater professionalism and competency. These standards are minimum requirements; firms are encouraged to exceed them as they are able.

Below are listed the standards that make up each core value of National Affiliation, as well as examples of how a firm can meet these standards. To become Nationally Affiliated, a firm must show that it meets each standard, but it does not need to meet the specific examples listed here. For instance, a firm must show that it is PRSSA Centered to become Nationally Affiliated, but it does not specifically have to send one member to Conference each year.

Connection

Standard: PRSSA Centered

Examples of how a firm demonstrates this standard:

- All members of the firm's leadership are PRSSA members.
- It is highly recommended that the staff members should be involved with the PRSSA Chapter; however, it is not required.
- The firm sends at least one individual to the PRSSA National Conference each year.
- Every three years, the firm must re-apply to be a PRSSA Nationally Affiliated Student-run Firm by completing the "PRSSA Student-run Firm Progress Report" and sending it to PRSSA Headquarters.

Standard: PRSA Connected

Examples of how a firm demonstrates this standard:

- The firm adviser is an active PRSA member.
- The firm adviser meets with each individual firm member at least once a year to provide direction and counsel regarding the student's professional goals.
- The firm's executive board meets with it's a PRSA Chapter executive board annually to report on the firm's work. This meeting, in-person or through conferencing, should be attended by a PRSA Chapter executive board member and at least two other PRSA members, as well as a member of the firm's executive board and at least two other account executives. The most important part of the meeting occurs as PRSA provides feedback to the firm.

Standard: Professional and Faculty Support

Examples of how a firm demonstrates this standard:

- Public relations practitioners and faculty members actively support the firm by counseling the firm's management, reviewing the firm's work or providing clients to work with.

Professionalism

Standard: Accountable

Examples of how a firm demonstrates this standard:

- Account executives report consistently to the firm's executive board through written and oral reports. The nature and design of these reports may vary according to each firm's needs. However, the key is to report consistently. This ensures that the client is well served and that all associates are participating (see more under "Outcome-driven").
- Once a year, the firm adviser should conduct at least one three-minute interview with each member. This interview does not have to be long and extensive, but it should be similar to an annual review process conducted in business with employees. While some firms may want their account executives to conduct these interviews, it is important for the firm members to have at least one short interview—even if it is three-minutes—with the firm director.
- The firm requests that all clients complete some type of questionnaire and return it to the firm at the end of the semester. Each firm may create their own questionnaire that will provide them with the information they need to improve. This will provide feedback to the firm and an opportunity to showcase to future clients those things the firm did well.

Standard: Outcome-driven

Examples of how a firm demonstrates this standard:

- In all written and oral reports, the focus is on the impact made with the client. As time passes, technology will advance causing the means of communication to continually change. For that reason, the review process is designed to measure results rather than methods, strategies or tactics. Students must know how they are affecting real change.
- Program planning systematically uses the research, action, communication and evaluation (RACE) model, or a similar system, in meeting the clients' needs.

Standard: Ethically-based

Examples of how a firm demonstrates this standard:

- The firm has a written commitment to follow the PRSA Code of Ethics.
- All members receive basic instruction and sign a commitment to follow the code and behave ethically at all times.
- Any member who is found to be dishonest in his or her reporting to supervisors or clients will be dismissed from the firm.

Standard: Geared toward professional practice

Examples of how a firm demonstrates this standard:

- The firm's executive board provides clear, written expectations and deadlines for the account associates at the beginning of each school semester or term.
- Account associates sign the written expectations at the beginning of each semester or term, certifying their understanding of the firm's expectations.
- The account executives communicate the deadlines they set with their clients to the firm's executive board each semester or term.
- The executive board maintains records of all the account deadlines and projects. This way, the board can serve the accounts in helping them keep their commitments to the clients.
- Professional conduct dominates the firm's atmosphere; this includes being on time for all meetings with clients and professionals.

Structure

Standard: Organized and structured

Examples of how a firm demonstrates this standard:

- The firm has a documented mission statement to guide all organizational activities.
- The firm has a well-organized and written structure similar to a professional agency (i.e. account executives, account associates, etc.).
- The structure includes, at the minimum, a firm director and two assistant directors. Other positions may include treasurer, public relations director or any other position as needed by the individual firm.
- The firm serves at least three clients, with three students working together to meet each client's needs. This is a minimum standard, but the firm must ensure that at least three students are assigned to each client.
- The firm uses a set of contracts and a defined system of billing for all clients.
- The written structure of the organization has been approved in writing by the adviser and included in the PRSSA three-year review process.