Dear PRSSA Member,

Student-run firms play an instrumental role in guiding our members professional development. As our Society advances with our evolving industry, student-run firms will serve as a key instrument to member success. Student-run firms will continue to supply our members with exceptional experience and our clients with innovative ideas.

This handbook will serve as a resource to ensure your student-run firm functions at its highest level and is comprised of suggestions for firm organization, workflow, client relations and more. Student-run firms come in many shapes and sizes, all bringing their unique ideas to our Society. This resource includes various templates and examples from firms across the country. Please refer to this handbook for ideas on how to establish and maintain your student-run firm achieve the professionalism, structure and communication that will help your firm to receive or maintain National Affiliation.

Nationally Affiliated firms represent the most distinguished and successful Student-run firms in the Society. Achieving this status will provide your firm access to PRSSA’s client referral system, the ability to apply for the Student-run Firm Awards and the potential to participate in new opportunities such as CreateATHon and Nationally Affiliated Firm connection programs. The ideas included will help elevate your firm to the national affiliation standards. I encourage every firm, no matter what size or background, to apply for National Affiliation and applaud those firms who have already accomplished this goal. The application for National Affiliation and information on Student-Run Firm Awards are on the PRSSA website.

If your Chapter would like additional copies of this manual, you may download it at www.prssa.prsa.org. If you prefer to have copies mailed to you, contact Executive Director, Jeneen Garcia at (212) 460-1474 or jeneen.garcia@prsa.org.

As vice president of professional development, I will serve to guide you and your student-run firm. We will work together to advance your student-run firm and elevate the level of experiences for your members. I hope to learn with you and capitalize on the successes. I would love to discuss how I can help your firm this year. Feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns that may pop up. I am excited to serve you this year!

Thank you for your commitment to PRSSA and student-run firms,

Joe Dunay

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2019–2020 Vice President of Professional Development
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What Is a Student-run Firm?

A PRSSA Student-run Firm is an operational public relations firm managed by PRSSA members. Firms allow you to gain hands-on experience with business-to-client relationships.

The advantages of participating in a firm include the following:
- Building client relationships and meeting professionals.
- Learning how to lead and work as a team.
- Creating résumé/portfolio material.
- Getting hands-on public relations experience.
- Developing PRSSA Chapter unity.
- Learning to balance tasks and handle numerous duties.
- Applying theories learned in the classroom.

Beginning a Student-run Firm may seem daunting, but remember every successful business had to grow and overcome obstacles to achieve success. Similarly, hard work and determination will guide your Student-run firm to excellence.

When launching a Student-run Firm, keep the following principles in mind:
- **Plan ahead.** Build governing documents and policy forms before launching a firm. You can always go back and edit these documents but planning out the structure ahead of time will set your firm up for success.
- **Start small.** While you might have plenty of interest in the firm, it is much easier to manage and learn from mistakes with a small group of clients and employees.
- **Research and choose your advisers carefully.** These advisers should serve as mentors and resources for your firm. They are there to help guide the firm to success but should not be responsible for leadership obligations. You are also allowed to renew your adviser, if needed.
- **When working with clients, confirm everything in writing.** Maintaining contracts is an important way to align the firm’s and client’s goals and expectations.
- **Be knowledgeable and share that knowledge.** Public relations isn’t necessarily putting up fliers, passing out coupons or making a Twitter account. Be strategic so your firm gets as much out of the relationship as your client does. Be creative in your planning and be sure to guide your client along the way.
- **Set a professional atmosphere.** It’s easier to maintain a professional setting than to try to regain one after it has been lost. Set expectations before the year begins and stick to the rules. Of course, rules are sometimes meant to be broken if it will benefit the good of the organization. Plan. Implement. Measure. Adjust.
- **Build relationships.** Your faculty members and your local PRSA Chapter are resources and partners for future opportunities. Set-up regular meetings to take full advantage of these relationships.

Build Your Team

When choosing executives, always pick committed individuals who will pull through in both the tough times and good. With these people, you can effectively manage a firm.

Though Student-run firms are organized within a PRSSA Chapter, they require their own student administrators to support their initiatives. Firms must have effective leaders to ensure stability and longevity. A small Student-run Firm may choose to have only a firm director, an assistant firm director and an account executive or two; whereas, a larger firm may have a full board of officers. The positions and titles should accommodate the needs and numbers of your firm staff. Remember to make sure your structure meets the standards set forth for National Affiliation if your firm wishes to apply for the designation (see section on National Affiliation).

PRSSA recommends the following positions:
- Firm Director
- Assistant Firm Director or Vice President
- Department Director
- Account Executive
- Public Relations Director
- Administrative Assistant
- Finance Director
- Staff Member
Depending on the size and structure of your firm, you may require more, fewer or a combination of these positions. National Affiliation standards recommend you have at least one firm director and two assistant directors. In addition, some firms might find it useful to have multiple members hold one or more of the positions listed above.

**Firm Director**
The firm director is responsible for managing the firm’s operations and serves on the Chapter’s PRSSA Executive Board to maintain communication between the firm and the Chapter. The firm director should have regularly scheduled meetings with staff and weekly meetings with officers. Be sure to include time for questions from the account executives. Duties may include the following:

- Select account executives with the help of the assistant firm director or vice president.
- Maintain on-going contact with the firm, Faculty and Professional Advisers.
- Conduct leadership and general firm meetings.
- Maintain files of all activities.
- Oversee and approve client recruitment.
- Evaluate and motivate firm members.
- Establish communication between the firm and the rest of the Chapter.
- Maintain contact with clients and account executives to ensure satisfactory progress.
- Offer commitment and professionalism to the firm and its activities.

**Assistant Firm Director or Vice President**
The assistant firm director (or vice president) plays an important role in helping the director oversee the firm’s leadership and relationships. Duties may include the following:

- Assist director on all projects and activity planning.
- Supervise all accounts and maintain file of activities.
- Recruit and maintain clientele.
- Assist, advise and evaluate executives during meetings and report to firm director (or president).
- Perform director’s duties in his or her absence.

**Department Director**
A department director is responsible to ensure the quality level of all firm projects and oversee students in the department. If the agency is large, then it is wise to categorize students by the work they produce and then assign them to projects as they come, rather than assigning them to participate on a certain client team. Duties may include the following:

- Assign students to client projects based on experience and expertise.
- Provide constructive criticism and mentor students in the department.
- Maintain regular communication with Account Executives.
- Regular meet with students to review work.
- Provide final approval on projects prior to delivery to the client.

**Account Executive**
Account executives are often the main client contact. The account executive must be professional, responsible and ethical because he or she represents the firm. National Affiliation standards recommend a firm should have at least two account executives. Account executives should report consistently to the firm’s executive board through written and oral reports. This ensures that the client is well-served and that all associates are participating. Duties may include the following:

- Develop goals and objectives with his/her account members.
- Obtain client permission to implement tactics.
- Motivate account members with phone calls and email reminders.
- Maintain regular communication with the client.
- Complete a detailed weekly activities report.
- Maintain a continuous and complete file of activities and completed projects.

**Administrative Assistant**
An administrative assistant records the firm’s meeting minutes and assists with client relations, thank you letters and firm social events. Duties may include the following:

- Record attendance at all meetings.
- Create email list server for all members to receive minutes and other notifications.
- Assist officers with various firm activities.
Public Relations Director
The public relations director builds relationships and support for the firm among its key audiences. Duties may include the following:

- Create a publicity committee to promote the firm and motivate others to join.
- Develop fliers, letterhead, letters and newsletter for the firm.
- Disseminate news to local media about upcoming and successful client events.
- Assist president to creatively recognize achievements for firm members.
- Research and implement volunteer events and donation opportunities for the firm.

Finance Director
The finance director keeps accurate, updated expense records and ensures adequate funds are available for campaigns. They are strongly encouraged to work with an Adviser to reduce liability. Duties may include the following:

- Assist president in preparing annual plans, budgets, proposals and histories.
- Ensure appropriate resources are available for account executives.
- Research, design and implement fundraising.

Staff Members
Fill these positions with PRSSA members first, then solicit the service of student freelancers, consultants or accountants. Staff members are responsible for maximizing their own experience, under the direction of the account executives. Duties may include the following:

- Submit regular report forms to account executives.
- Actively participate in account activities.

Officer Training
You must train your team in the firm’s operations and procedures. This is best to do in the beginning of each term or rotation of firm leadership to maintain consistency. Training can be as simple as holding officer meetings, providing a handbook or hosting a retreat. Your Advisers may assist. This does not have to be limited to one meeting or event. Leaders should be actively considering predecessors and grooming potential candidates throughout the term. This will aid in a smooth transition. The firm should also send at least one individual to the PRSSA International Conference each year to attend the workshop specifically for Student-run firms, as well as professional development sessions and networking opportunities. Public relations skills that can be practiced in your firm include:

- Research — Focus groups, surveying, evaluation techniques, interviewing
- Business — Budgeting, proposals, presentations, management function
- Media relations — News releases, press kits, media pitching, radio and television spots
- Design — Publicity (newsletters, brochures), photography, special, desktop publishing
- Writing — Feature stories, op-ed pieces, speech writing, strategic plans
- Web development — Copy design, graphics design, forms handling
- Event planning — Fundraising, campaign planning, goal setting, multi-tasking
- Social Media — Analytics, content design, visual optimization, engagement

Best Practice Management Tactics
Management involves planning, setting goals and making decisions. Officers are responsible for the business and influence its success. Management encompasses the following:

- Planning — Setting the goals and strategies for your firm.
- Organizing — Deciding on tasks, delegating, scheduling, etc.
- Staffing — Hiring, training and terminating (if necessary) employees.
- Directing — Supervising and motivating employees.
- Controlling — Evaluating how you are achieving your goals and reacting accordingly.

Recruiting members
Seek publicity to recruit new members. Modes of publicizing include the following:

- Create a Firm newsletter or regular spot in the Chapter newsletter.
- Send a press release or pitch to the school newspaper.
- Develop fliers to post around campus or give out at special events.
- Start a publicity committee or offer the firm as a class for credit.
- Invite public relations, communications, marketing and students with other related focuses to an opening social, such as a barbecue, social or game night.
- Create awards for students who demonstrate an outstanding effort in the firm.
- Announce the firm in public relations and business classes.
- Feature a link to the firm website on the Chapter website.
- Utilize social media to spread the word to your university’s students.
- Generate lists of interested students to target via email marketing or social media.

**Items for a Portfolio**

A portfolio is a way to demonstrate and show off your professionalism and presentations skills. It will make you stand out. It is something tangible the firm director can review during the evaluation process. Your firm portfolio should include all the work of individual members on campaigns and projects. It can be customized according to the member’s strengths and job description. It should be presented in a simple and clean three ring binder. It does not have to be expensive. Information should be quality copies on solid color paper.

Sample topics can include:
- Published articles
- Broadcast writing
- Internet writing
- Press releases
- Case studies
- Publications
- Promotional material
- Plans and presentations
- Media relations
- Internal communications
- Websites

You may also choose to compile your portfolio online rather than a hard copy. Be aware of how things appear and print differently on different computers (i.e. black backgrounds with white text frames). Members should have a printable version available during the evaluation.

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**Structure**

**Organization Chart**

Firms should have a documented structure similar to a professional firm’s to guide all organizational activities. The structure should accommodate each firm’s resources and circumstances. The following is a sample organization chart for a student-run firm.

**A student who provides short-term specialty advice on a campaign or project.**
Name
Whether you choose a name that is simple, urbane or associated with your college, make sure it will grow with your firm. Involve all firm members in brainstorming and choosing. A good firm name is easy to remember, distinctive, professional and indicates your business.

Logo and Tagline
The logo and tagline should be carefully developed symbols of the business. See examples from Brigham Young University, University of Oregon, Louisiana State University, University of Alabama and Universidad de San Martín de Porres.

Mission Statement
A mission statement clarifies the firm’s goals, sets expectations for members and shows clients you are organized and focused. Good mission statements are brief and memorable.

The following is an example mission statement from Edelman:
- “To provide public relations counsel and strategic communications services that enables our clients to build strong relationships and to influence attitudes and behaviors in a complex world.
- “We undertake our mission through convergence by integrating specialist knowledge of practices and industries, local market understanding, proprietary methodology and breakthrough creativity.”
- “We are dedicated to building long-term, rewarding partnerships that add value to our clients and our people.”
- “Our clients are leaders in their fields who are initiating change and seeking new solutions.”

Vision
One of your first and most important decisions is when responsibility for the firm will transition to new leaders. To make this decision, firm leaders should review the National Affiliation standards and envision how the firm will operate after it has met each standard. Set semester and year-long goals and let the goals dictate when leadership changes.

Goals
Have an organized strategic plan with research, action, communication and evaluation sections (see RACE, p. 11). Periodically re-evaluate goals with your Faculty and Professional Advisers. Goals help indicate if your firm is valuable to staff and clients. They provide a focus for officers, whose goals and projects should complement. The following are example goals:
- Increase firm [membership or clients] by [quantity] during [semester, year, etc.].
- Create a firm portfolio or sample press kit by [date].
- Increase awareness of our firm by [percent] compared to last year’s awareness survey.
- Gain National Affiliation by [semester, year, etc.].

Objectives
Objectives for a new firm may include establishing strong leadership, obtaining clients, developing a strong network and increasing membership. When setting objectives, consider the demands on the firm and how the firm can benefit current and future members.

Policies
Specific policies are necessary for crisis and problem resolution. All members should receive a copy of the firm policies. Consider including the following:
- Conduct
- Behavior policy and dress code
- Customer relations policy
- Conflicts of interest policy
- Confidentiality policy
- Personnel Responsibilities
- Employment agreements
- Orientation and training
- Hiring and firing policy
- Personnel records policy
- PRSA/PRSSA Code of Ethics
- Dispute resolution policy
- Travel and automobile usage policy
- Community participation policy
- Social media policy
- Pay and reimbursement policies
- Equal Employment Opportunity policy
- Suggestion policy
- Employee relations policy
- Social media policy

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 and 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 International Conference each year.
- Every three years, the firm re-applies to be a PRSSA Nationally Affiliated Student-run Firm by completing the application 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 members 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 are actively supporting the firm through counseling the firm’s management, reviewing the firm’s work or providing clients to work with.

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 adviser to the firm 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 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 a database 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.

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**Firm Operations**

**Firm Activities**
• Officers should conduct regular meetings with all staff.
• Account executives should meet regularly with account staff.
• Hold workshops to help members learn about topics not discussed in classes.
• Hold regularly scheduled client meetings or calls and distribute minutes.
• Complete all client services as promised and submit regular client reports.
• Allow clients to evaluate the firm annually.
As The Firm Grows
- Grow your brand as a professional organization through social media.
- Visualize your work for potential clients through case studies.
- Connect with local businesses through social media, printed marketing material or face-to-face conversations.
- Develop and practice a services pitch and presentation to give to potential clients.
- Establish billing rates and methods. (Pro Tip: Don’t undervalue your skills, ask your firms faculty adviser, PRSA connections or PRSSA VP of Professional Development for advice.)
- Apply for National Affiliation when requirements are met to expand your firms reach and benefit for your members.

Interviewing Potential Firm Members
- Sincerely welcome every applicant. Be enthusiastic and friendly.
- Share your commitment to the firm and the benefits of participating.
- Ask about the applicants’ experience, expectations and commitments.
- Ask for a professional portfolio of work before the first interview. (Pro Tip: Many internships require this before hiring.

Business Pitfalls
You can avoid many of the following pitfalls by planning ahead and seeking help:
- Incomplete records
- No marketing strategy
- Poor management
- Miscommunication
- Hiring the wrong people
- Poor customer service
- Unwilling to ask for help
- Client dissatisfaction

Proper Records
Records are the most important management tool you possess and ensure future members’ success. Keep your records simple. Track the following information:
- Inventory
- Client contacts
- Petty cash and payroll
- Suppliers
- Employee data
- Mileage
- Telephone calls
- Accounts payable and invoices

Recruiting Clients
Research possible clients that need the type of work you want to do. If your campus is not near a large community, look within your school for possible clients.
- Visit campus organizations.
- Promote at campus events.
- Distribute brochures and fliers.
- Contact new local businesses.
- Announce the firm at a PRSA meeting.
- Contact previous employers.
- Advertise in a PRSA Chapter newsletter.
- Volunteer or fund raise for a nonprofit

Once you have a list of potential clients, send a personalized letter to each introducing the firm. Follow up with a call to arrange a meeting to present a proposal and contract.

Managing Contracts and Campaigns
Contracts
Contracts are vital to your Student-run firm. A contract aligns your expectations and abilities with those of the client and provides documentation of the conditions of your work. See the sample contract at the end of this handbook. Your contract should include the following:
- Client’s list of anticipated projects including priorities and tentative schedule.
- Conditions of accepting new projects not listed on original contract.
- Times like finals and holiday breaks that will affect productivity of firm members.
- Minimum amount of work or projects to deter inactive clients (when necessary).
- Billing information and conditions, including out-of-pocket expenses.
• Conditions for termination and canceled projects.
• Conditions of keeping samples of printed or published work as portfolio samples.

**Campaigns**
A successful public relations campaign starts with understanding your client’s needs. Campaign planning includes the following:
• Research your client, the opportunity or problem and your audiences.
• Determine objectives with a focus on impact and output.
• Plan your theme, actions, media targets and what constitutes effective communication.
• Evaluate the impact and output of your objectives.

**First Client Meeting**
Prepare for client meetings by writing an agenda. Be sure to ask the following:
• What are the client’s needs?
• What are the client’s goals?
• What are our goals?
• What do their competitors offer?
• What is their budget?
• Do their needs match your services?
• What have they done in the past?
• Does the client understand the contract?
• Who is the client contact?
• What is the timeframe?

Discuss and agree upon your evaluation of “good public relations.” How do you want to evaluate the outcome? Manage the client’s expectations up front, before any work begins.

**Brainstorming**
Brainstorming is a creative group problem-solving technique. Members may suggest any solution to a problem. The following tips will help you run a group brainstorming session:
• Define your problem clearly.
• Define the criteria of success.
• Stay focused.
• Don’t stay on any idea too long.
• Encourage everyone to contribute.
• Let people have fun brainstorming.
• Do not allow criticism. It stifles creativity.
• Appoint one person to take notes

**RACE Formula**
When planning a campaign, you should systematically use the Research, Action, Communication and Evaluation model, or a similar system, to meet the clients’ needs. The RACE model has the following 10 defined components:
• Objectives and goals
• Strategy
• Activity
• Evaluation
• Executive timeline
• Problem or opportunity statement
• Situation Analysis and Primary Focus
• Budget

### Developing a Business Network
Effective business networking provides you and your firm with relationships that could become business. Remember that networking should be based in a genuine interest in helping others. Friends and supporters are just as important in business as they are in your personal life. They will educate and guide you. Your network should include the following people:
• Community leaders
• Business owners
• Campus administration
• PRSSA alumni and PRSA members
• Champions for PRSSA
• College/University faculty and staff

**Pro-Bono Professional Development**
When starting your firm, finding clients willing to pay for your services may be difficult. Pro-bono work is a great way to build your firm portfolio and attract larger clients. Additionally, pro-bono work unites firm members around a meaningful cause and assists your firm’s reputation. Even if your firm is well-established, pro-bono work is a great way to implement new campaigns, explore another sector of public relations and discover causes you are passionate about.
Pro-bono work is done for free. You may consider working for local nonprofits. By presenting strategies to increase their donor or volunteer base, you will add to your portfolio, execute a successful campaign and earn an invaluable client recommendation. Before you begin pro-bono work, be sure the client understands that your work extends beyond casual volunteer duties.

When choosing a client to assist, consider what you want to accomplish. Perform a strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) analysis for the organization to guide your campaign planning. If you are already familiar with the organization’s needs, they will be more confident in your counsel. Discuss your ideas for them and if they consent, you have your first client.

Use the guidelines found in this handbook for your pro-bono client, as for any other client. Remember that your initial clients are your best advocates when securing new business.

**Strong Support System**

Every firm needs a strong support system so secure advisers as soon as possible. National Affiliation requires firms to have at minimum a Faculty Adviser and Professional Adviser. Other advisers may include the following:

- Community leaders
- Other business professionals
- Alumni
- Champions for PRSSA
- PRSA Chapter members
- Other faculty

While advisers’ first responsibility is to uphold the firm’s quality, they should attend meetings and counsel the firm leaders on clients, recruitment, projects, finances, contracts and evaluations. The adviser should be familiar with clients and staff.

**Connecting with Your Chapter**

While a student-run firm and a PRSSA Chapter are separate operations, a strong and mutually beneficial connection should be maintained between both groups. Ideally, an overlap should exist between Chapter members and firm members. To improve your firm’s connection with your local PRSSA Chapter, consider implementing the following:

- Invite all Chapter members to attend a firm status meeting or workshop.
- Provide firm updates and announcements at E-Board meetings.
- Foster collaboration on National initiatives.
- Encourage Chapter members to support the firm by sharing its goals, such as gaining National Affiliation.
- Encourage/require firm’s attendance at PRSSA meetings/events.
- Schedule a retreat or bonding experience.

These are not required of the firm but will help to ensure a successful relationship. This relationship will also be reviewed in any application for National-Affiliation, so it is crucial to foster a good connection early on.

**Finances**

A firm’s finances can be handled internally or by a financial manager but either way, recordkeeping is vital. Records to maintain include the following:

- Inventory Log
- Accounts Receivable and Payable
- Payroll Log
- Telephone Log
- Mileage, Travel & Entertainment Log
- Weekly Income/Sales Journal
- Weekly Income/Sales Journal

A paper record keeping system may work for a small firm but eventually you may need computer software. A large firm may need to hire a fiscal manager to handle invoices, receipts, time cards and taxes. To avoid ethical problems, require signatures from your firm director and Faculty Adviser and release funds to only one designated person.
Billing
Determine if and how much you are going to charge clients. Many Student-run firms don’t charge until they gain experience. Check if your school’s campus regulations allow you to charge. Clients will pay for quality work. Your fees may vary if the client is a nonprofit or depending on the experience of firm members. You may want to base your hourly rate on what local interns earn. The firm officers, counseled by advisers, should make billing decisions.

To gain experience with billing, consider “fake billing.” Prepare an invoice clearly marked “NO CHARGE.” Include all information that would be listed on an actual invoice.

All fees must be stated in the contract. When setting prices, consider your operation costs, what the competition is charging and research into market standards. The following are three common methods of charging clients for firm services:
- Retainer Fee — A fixed fee for unlimited services over a period of time.
- Special Project Fee — A fee charged per service or product provided.
- Hourly Billing — A fee charged per hour worked. Your contract should include a predetermined monthly minimum and maximum. The firm is responsible to deliver its services within that range. Include a list of accomplished tasks in the invoice.

The financial manager is responsible for keeping an accurate budget and financial record. You also need to determine how firm income will be used. Often, it should be used to expand and improve the firm, rather than being directed for general Chapter use.

Proposal
The firm and client should agree on a proposal before any work is performed. The proposal should list the services you’ll provide, the supplies needed, reimbursable costs and client fees. If additional services are requested, draft a separate contract to prevent misunderstandings.

Corporate Sponsorship
Many times, companies looking to benefit their communities will donate funds to hire you for a nonprofit. Be sure to examine the criteria and terms when applying for these grants.

Transitioning from Pro-Bono to Billing System
As mentioned previously, Pro-Bono clients provide some of the best opportunities for your firm. However, these clients may not want to transition into a billing system. To ease this process, make sure that your firm is providing quality and competitive work. Ask your advisers, alumni, PRSSA Chapter to review portfolios for your clients. Another great way to pitch a billing system is to evaluate the client’s portfolio and compare your service fees with local agencies.

If your firm has multiple clients that have agreed to pay for services, do not be afraid to release a Pro-Bono client. If your firm is not as developed, work with the client on other possible payments such as in-kind donations or sponsorships until both parties are ready for that transition.

Evaluation
An effective evaluation process measures the firm’s performance and identifies areas of improvement. The evaluation should answer the firm’s goals and provide insight for future firm members. Maintaining thorough, accurate records of evaluations is vital. Each firm member should keep a portfolio of all projects for use as an evaluation and employment tool. Clients should complete an evaluation at the end of each semester or project. This feedback will show how the firm could improve and can be used in recruiting future clients.

The Faculty Adviser or firm director should conduct a three-minute interview with each member yearly, though a firm may benefit from having account executives conduct more frequent reviews. This interview should not be extensive but should mimic a professional annual review, focusing on client benefits and results, rather than methods or tactics.
Reports should accommodate the firm’s needs. Consistency is vital to ensure the client is well served and all associates are participating. The following are suggested reports a firm should maintain, and samples can be found at the end of this handbook:

- Account Executive Sign-off and Weekly Activity Reports
- General Membership Application, Staff Evaluation and Portfolio
- Client Pitch Letter, Proposal and Contract
- Client Final Report and Evaluation Questionnaire

Your annual report should include a brief description of the year’s projects and may include as an addendum, copies of the firm’s products. The PRSSA National Annual Report, on www.prssa.org, can be used as a sample.

**Conclusion**

**Recognition and Evaluation**

As the academic year comes to a close, recognize and evaluate the individuals who contributed to your firm’s success. Hold a final meeting or social to review the firm’s accomplishments. Spotlight each account or project and display some of the work. Give awards such as outstanding account coordinator, team or new member. Consider giving all participants a certificate. This motivates members and shows their contribution is valued.

Apply for Student-run Firm Award for “Best Campaign” or “Best Tactic,” or enter PRSSA’s Dr. F.H. Teahan Chapter Awards Program in the “Chapter Firm” category, which adds to your credentials and validates your firm’s excellence to clients, potential employers and peers.

**Appreciation**

Thank the clients that provided you work opportunities and the Advisers who helped the firm grow. Send letters of appreciation or consider having a client appreciation social plan. Maintain contact with clients over the summer months (summer conditions may be part of the contract). Clients need to know when vacations or finals will terminate or temporarily delay work on their projects. Include these dates and times in your firm-client contract.

**Questions and Answers**

**What is a good way for new firms to find new clients?** This is a great place to utilize your Chapter’s relationship with your sponsor PRSA Chapter. They can help with networking for potential clients or may even use your firm themselves. You can also search for opportunities within your school with other departments, clubs or organizations. Also, don’t be afraid to go to local fairs, markets or events. You never know what you could find.

**What if an account group is struggling to communicate with its client?** This can be avoided by having your client sign a communications agreement that outlines points of contact, especially in case of emergency. Choose one point person for the account, usually the account executive, to contact the client and execute this. If the client is difficult to reach by email, proceed to directly calling the client, respectfully. If this is not successful, try to mail a physical letter to the client. If this does not work, assess if it would be appropriate to meet the client in person to schedule a future point of contact. Also, reach out to your advisers throughout this process to assess what actions to take.

**How do firm members become familiar with the client?** Staff should research the client and prepare questions for the first meeting. Visit the company if appropriate and if it is a nonprofit, volunteer to help. You may also consider inviting the client to a reception held by the firm.

**What should we do if our firm has too many or too few members?** If there are too many members, try to secure more clients or set higher participation criteria. If there are too few members, reduce your number of accounts/projects by not renewing contracts. Recruit new members by pitching your firm to introductory courses in your department. Also, reach out to new departments that could be beneficial in supplying members such as a Business or Financial department. Another possibility is to establish the firm as a class for students to commit at least for one semester.
What if our members lose interest in our Student-run firm? Try securing an account that offers a unique and exciting experience. Remind students that they can expand their portfolio, gain leadership experience and earn awards. Obtain feedback through surveys and talk to your advisers. To avoid this problem in the first place, ensure that you are utilizing all members of your firm. Don’t use the same people repeatedly while leaving others out. If you have a member that is particularly good at something, pair them with a less experienced member for a project as a way to facilitate a relationship and encourage participation.

How can we increase attendance at firm meetings? Avoid this by sending out a survey before the start of the semester to secure the most beneficial time to host a meeting. Then incorporate something fun like a quiz or prizes at all general meetings. Consider making this an on-going competition that will require members’ attendance and participation. Increase efforts to build relationships with younger/newer members to build inclusiveness.

If you are starting a firm at a commuter school, explore virtual meetings via teleconferences, Skype, Facebook Live, etc. Work with the resources you have to make an effective experience.

How can we increase membership? Recruiting is usually easiest at the beginning of the semester. Set up an information table at events or talk to communications professors about the firm. Pitch your firm to introductory courses within your department or partner with a faculty member to offer extra-credit opportunities. However, size does not indicate success; members in a small firm may have more ownership and take on more projects.

How do we raise awareness of the firm? You must know how to market your firm before you can market clients. If awareness is a problem, take on fewer projects and spend more time on building the firm’s name and image. Create a website or promotional materials on social media. Further, try to combine your promotional efforts with those of your PRSSA Chapter. Speak to incoming freshmen, share information during related classes and place bookmarks in textbooks prior to the start of the semester in order to keep your firm at the top of students’ minds. Visualize your brand through recognizing successes or even members on social media.

Recommended Reading

The following list suggests reading that may assist you in your business dealings. To suggest an addition, contact the Vice President of Professional Development.

- “The Personal Touch” by Terrie Williams
- “The One Minute Manager” by Spencer Johnson, MD and Kenneth Blanchard, Ph.D.
- “Who Moved my Cheese?” by Spencer Johnson, MD
- “The Ultimate Question” by Fred Reichheld
- “The New Rules of Marketing and Public Relations” by David Meerman Scott
- “Pitch, Tweet or Engage on the Street” by Kara Alaimo
- “The Non-Designers Design Book” by Robin Williams
- “Declutter Your Mind: How to Stop Worrying, Relieve Anxiety, and Eliminate Negative Thinking” by S. J. Scott
- “Grit” by Angela Duckworth
- “The 10 Steps of Crisis Communication” by Jonathan Bernstein
- “Sticky Branding” by Jeremy Miller
- “Good to Great” by Jim Collins
- “Spin Sucks: Communication and Reputation Management in the Digital Age” by Gini Dietrich

Sample Documents

The following pages contain several sample documents that may be used in your firm. Keep in mind – these are suggestions for your Student-run firm. Although we recommend using these documents as a guide, PRSSA or PRSA in no way requires that you use them.
**Weekly Activity Reports.** This report helps officers measure the successes and failures of their account projects. They also can tell officers if the account executives and individual members are doing their jobs. To fill out the report accurately, an account executive may have their account members report on a weekly basis. The University of Northern Iowa submitted this sample.

**General Membership Application.** All staff should receive this form when they join the firm. The form helps with creating account teams with balanced experience. It also allows members to rank projects they would like to work on and consider this when assigning staff and leadership positions in the firm. The University of Texas at Austin and Rowan University submitted these samples.

**Staff Evaluation Report.** Account executives complete this report to turn in to the executive board to assist in recognizing, helping or evaluating staff members on their contributions to the firm. The evaluation is for account executives. The University of Texas at Austin submitted this sample.

**Portfolio.** Each member of the firm should keep a portfolio of all the campaign and projects they work on. This can serve a dual purpose. It can be a method to evaluate work performed as well as provide that person a portfolio to use for future employment.

**Client Evaluation.** Clients complete this report to turn into the firm. This document will help the firm evaluate the services provided to clients throughout the year. The University of Florida submitted this sample.

**Client Contract.** This or a similar contract should be read and signed by the client and the firm director, as well as the assigned account executive before any firm/client project begins. Any legal questions or concerns should be addressed before a client is accepted. Make sure both parties have a copy of the contract. The University of Northern Iowa submitted this sample.

**Pitch Letter.** This is a sample pitch letter that could be given out to prospective or existing clients. The letter explains the services and capabilities of the firm. An alternative to the pitch letter may be a promotional brochure of your firm. This sample is from California State University Fullerton.
Weekly Activity Report  
(University of Northern Iowa)

Tracking projects and progress is an essential part of working with clients. When entering your work into this log be specific about the tasks performed and the amount of time spent on each task.

Name:  
Account group:  
Client:  
Week of:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total Hours: ____________

Comments/ Concerns: (all comments and concerns are kept confidential)
2019 GrandPR Staff Application
(Grand Valley State University)

The latest: Applications to be a part of our staff are now open. Questions? Email our current CEO at gv.grandpr@gmail.com.

Name*
First Name:
Last Name:

GVSU Email Address*

Phone *
(###)###-####

Major(s) *

Minor(s) or Emphasis Area *

Graduation Date *
Ex: April 2016

What position are you interested in? For position descriptions, visit https://www.grand-pr.org/position-descriptions *

CEO
Vice President of Operations (VPO)

Media Director
Firm Editor

Programming Director
Creative Director

Account Executive
Design Associate

Account Associate

List any relevant courses you have taken or are currently enrolled in. *
Please include the course numbers and names. Example: CAP 220: Fundamentals of PR

GrandPR requires a minimum commitment of 5 hours/week between client work, team meetings, general assembly and PRSSA meetings.

How many hours will you be able to contribute to the firm? *

5-9
10-14
15+

Identify any special interests/skills you have. *
Check all that apply

Primary Research
Secondary Research
Evaluation

Writing
Media Relations
Photoshop

InDesign
Illustrator
Social Media Management

Presenting
Promotions
Design

Web Development
Photography
Event Planning

Project Management
Video Production

From the special interests/skills you chose, please identify the strongest and explain why. *

GrandPR staff members are required to be members of Grand Valley State University's chapter of PRSSA. *

These bi-weekly meetings are mandatory and require your presence on Wednesdays at 9pm, along with the payment of yearly organizational dues. If you are a member, how long have you been a member?

If you haven’t yet joined, will joining be a problem? *
List any related experience such as internships or jobs that you have held and briefly explain what you did. *

What other commitments will you have next semester? Where will GrandPR rank among those? *

Please list any jobs, clubs, organizations, sororities/fraternities, or family commitments. *

What do you hope to gain from this experience? *

How will you be of benefit to the firm? What will you contribute? *

*If you should have any questions about the application or application and hiring process, feel free to contact our current CEO at gv.grandpr@gmail.com.*
Staff Evaluation Report
(University of Texas at Austin)

Name:
Position:
Account:
Date:

Please write the number that corresponds to how you feel.
(1 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Strongly Disagree)

How well does this member understand the requirement and responsibilities of the job?
How well does members's work meet the requirements of an assigned project?
How consistent is this member in the quantity and quality of performance?
How well does this member accept assigned responsibilities?
How well does this member begin and assignment with minimal or no direction?
How effectively does this member work with co-workers and supervisors?
How well does this member balance multiple account duties?
How well does this member contribute to the overall quality of the firm?
How well does this member interact with the client and/or clients?
How well does this member evaluate his or her own work?
Client Evaluation Form  
(University of Florida)

The following information is used by Alpha PRoductions to measure success and to make improvements to increase productivity and satisfaction in the future for clients and students. Please complete the questionnaire as accurately and honestly as possible. We thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Client Name: ____________________________________________

How long have you worked with Alpha PRoductions: ________

Please write the number that corresponds to how you feel.
(1=Strongly Agree, 3=Neutral, 5=Strongly Disagree)

I have received the anticipated assistance from Alpha PRoductions. ____
My team has completed all assigned work by the established deadline. ____
I feel I have an open channel of communications with my Account Executive. ____
I feel all members of the team put in an equal amount of time. ____
Alpha PRoductions members have conducted themselves in a professional manner. ____
I am happy with the work Alpha PRoductions has performed for me. ____
I would continue to work with Alpha PRoductions if there was a charge. ____
I feel I am assisting students with excellent hands-on experience. ____
I hope to continue with Alpha PRoductions next semester. ____
I would recommend Alpha PRoductions to other businesses. ____

Additional Comments:
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your help. Please give this form to your Account Executive so we can make Alpha PRoductions the best experience possible for all involved.
Client Contract

It is important to note that this contract is merely a sample. Therefore, when compiling a contract for your PRSSA Chapters’ student-run firm it is important to check the validity and legality of the contract with your Faculty Adviser.

This agreement made and entered into this _____ day of _____, 201_., by and between __________, an organization organized and existing under the laws of the State of __________ (hereinafter called “Agency”) and __________, a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of __________, with its principal place of business at ______ (hereinafter called “Client”).

I. Appointment. The client hereby appoints the Agency as a public relations consultant, handling the Client’s __________. Agency accepts the appointment and agrees to perform the services specified hereunder according to the terms of this agreement.

II. Agency Services. Below is a sample client contract that the firm should present for their agreement and signature before work begins. Fees and all foreseen client expectations and arrangements should be included.

   a. Study and Analysis. The Agency will study Client’s products, packets, policies and objectives. Based on this knowledge and its experience, Agency will communicate opportunities for public relations or publicity programs to Client.

   b. Planning and Execution. At the client’s request, the Agency will plan, develop and execute public relations and publicity tactics with the understanding that before the release of any materials whatsoever, Agency will submit materials to Client for specific prior approval.

III. Agency Cost and Compensation

   a. Fee. Agency will be compensated for its services herein stated by billing Client at the Agency’s (monthly or hourly) billing rates, plus such other charges as hereinafter stated.

   b. Outside purchases. Outside supplier costs, finished art, mechanical production, photography, printing, display materials, premiums, rights, talents and services purchased outside of the Agency, outside production costs and all other components of a public relations program will be billed at net cost to the Agency, plus the standard 17.65 percent commission. Sales tax levied by outside suppliers or purchases made by Agency for Client will be billed net.

   c. Out-of-Pocket Expenses. Postage, packing, express and other charges incurred by Agency in the shipping of copy, orders, prints and other material will be billed net. Telegraphic and teletype charges and costs of telephone service incurred for Client, and duplicating and other out-of-pocket expenses occurred for client will be billed net. Traveling and living expenses of Agency personnel servicing Client’s account will be billed net.

   d. Canceled projects. Client reserves the right to cancel or reject the plans or schedules after they have been approved, but, in such an event, agrees to assume Agency’s liability for expenses or costs involved in the preparation of such canceled projects, but only on plans or schedules which have prior client approval.

   e. Service Charge. Payment is due at Agency on the following date stated on the invoice. Should the invoice remain unpaid by the end of the month, following the expiration of thirty (30) days from the date of the invoice, a service charge of one and one-half percent (1.5%) per month shall be billed for each month the invoice remains unpaid.

IV. Indemnification

   a. Material Furnished to Client by Agency. Agency agrees to assume sole legal responsibility for, and to hold Client harmless from, any damage claims asserted against Client resulting from the negligence or willful actions of Agency involving copyright infringement, violations of personal rights of privacy, misappropriation of ideas or rights, and literary piracy or plagiarism, excepting claims arising from matters from respect to which Agency has advised Client of the legal risks involved and Client, by its specific approval, has assumed the risks thereof. Client agrees to give Agency prompt notice of such claims thereof. However, Client reserves the right to participate in the defense of any such claim through its own counsel and its own expense.
b. Material Furnished to Agency by Client. Client agrees to assume sole responsibility for, and to hold Agency harmless from, any advertising or promotional materials, or commercial data, including product claims, furnished to Agency by Client, as a result of which claims or suits involving deceptive advertising, unfair competition or product disparagement may be made against the Agency. Client further agrees to indemnify Agency with respect to claims which arise from the use of consumption of Client’s products in market testing or general public usage.

V. Termination. This agreement shall continue until terminated by either party upon ninety (90) days written notice. During such 90-day period, the rights, duties and responsibilities of Agency shall continue. Upon such termination, Client agrees to relieve Agency of all previously authorized contractual obligations and to compensate Agency for all work performed but not otherwise compensated.

VI. Failure of Supplier to perform. Agency will endeavor, to the best of its knowledge and ability, to guard against any loss to Client through failure of suppliers to properly excuse their commitments, but Agency shall not be responsible for any such failure.

VII. Construction. This agreement shall be construed in accordance with the laws of the State of __________.

VIII. Waiver. No waiver by either party of the breach of any provision of this agreement shall be deemed to be a waiver or any preceding or succeeding breach of the same nature.

IX. All notices hereunder shall be in writing and shall be served by registered mail, duly addressed as follows:
If to Agency: __________________________________________________________
If to Client: __________________________________________________________

X. Costs and attorney fees. If any action is necessary to enforce any of the terms and conditions of this agreement, the prevailing party shall be entitled to receive from the other party all costs and fees, including reasonable attorney’s fees and prevailing legal interest rate on all debts from the date of default.

XI. Claims, Disputes, and Other Matters. All claims, disputes, and other matters in question arising out of or relating to this agreement or the breach thereof (accepting claims under paragraph IV) shall be decided by arbitration in __________, in accordance with the rules of the American Arbitration Association then obtaining unless the parties mutually agree otherwise. This agreement to arbitrate shall be specifically enforceable under the prevailing arbitration law. The award rendered by the Arbitrator shall be final and judgment may be entered thereon in accordance with applicable law in any court having jurisdiction thereof. Notice of the demand for arbitration shall be filed in writing with the other party to the agreement and with the American Arbitration Association. The demand for arbitration shall be made within two years after the claim, dispute, or other matter in question has arisen.

This agreement constitutes the entire understanding between the parties. All previous representations and undertakings, whether oral or written, have been merged herein. Witness, the due execution hereof the day and year first above mentioned.

Attest: ________________________________________________________________ Agency Name By: __________________________________________________________

Attest: ________________________________________________________________ Client Name By: __________________________________________________________
Pitch Letter
(California State University, Fullerton)

TITAN PR Group
800 N. State College Blvd.
Fullerton, CA 92831-3599

Date:

[Staff Members Name]
[Organization]
[Organizations Address]

Dear [Organizations Representative],
My name is Aria Fadakar and I am a student at California State University, Fullerton and the Director of Titan PR Group. I am reaching out to you because Titan PR Group is looking for new clients to assist with their public relations needs.

Titan PR Group, a division of the Public Relations Student Society of America at CSUF, is a student-run public relations firm. We understand that with a troubled economy, finding a team to coordinate your public relations needs may not only be challenging, but costly. We at Titan PR Group offer our clients services free of charge; your only expense would include such things as printing and copying fees that take place during the projects execution.

Our services include, but are not limited to:
- Writing news/press releases
- Internal Communications
- Developing flyers/brochures
- Coordinating special events
- Organizing promotions

Our goal is to serve our clients while offering students a chance to gain real life public relations experience. We currently maintain [#] executives and [#] staff members who are ready to work for you.

May we set up an interview to see if our services would fit your needs? You may reach us anytime at TitanPRGroup@gmail.com or you may also call my cell phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for your time.

XX
Director
Titan PR Group
References

PRSA Member Code of Ethics – prsa.org
National Affiliation Application – prssa.prsa.org
Student-run Firm Awards – prssa.prsa.org/scholarship-and-awards