



American Planning Association
California Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen

TO: APA California Board of Directors

FROM: Kimberly Brosseau, AICP
Vice President of Professional Development
Greg Konar, AICP
Distance Education Coordinator

DATE: August 17, 2018

SUBJECT: Review of Distance Education Program

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Review the assessment of the Distance Education Program prepared by the Distance Education Committee

Direct the Distance Education Committee to update the webinar program to meet current needs of the Chapter and Sections consistent with the 2018-2019 Chapter Strategic Plan

BACKGROUND:

A report on webinar and conference recording fees was provided at the June 2018 Executive Board meeting. A recommendation to charge fees for all distance education offerings with discretion given to the Vice President of Professional Development to reduce or waive fees for specific offerings on a case-by-case basis was approved by the Board. Based on comments received during discussion, the motion was expanded to include formation of a committee tasked with reporting back to the Board on the feasibility and/or advisability of implementing various refinements or enhancements to the distance education program.

The Distance Education Committee members are: Kimberly Brosseau, VP of Professional Development; Julia Lave Johnston, President-Elect; Sung Kwon, VP of Administration; Sharon Grewal, Northern Section Director; and Greg Konar, Distance Education Coordinator.

Following the June 2018 Chapter Board meeting, the Distance Education Committee met on August 5th. Comments and findings made during the meeting included the following:

- The shared experience that webinars provide is one of the best ways to connect with members in outlying areas.
- The current webinar program is in need of attention; to date no webinars have been offered for 2018.
- Updated revenue and cost projections for the distance education program are needed for the next Chapter budget.
- Any changes to the distance education program must support the goals of the Chapter 2018-2019 Strategic Plan.
- Future efforts of the Distance Education Committee should be rolled into the APA Learn Task Force.

Based on the Committee's assessment and a review of the 2014 Webinar Committee report it became apparent that the webinar program needs to be updated. The above recommendation would accomplish this objective while responding to the Board identified issues discussed in the following section.

DISCUSSION:

Alignment with 2018-2019 Strategic Plan -- The overall distance education program currently addresses a variety of Strategic Plan goals. Updating the webinar program provides an opportunity to enhance consistency with Strategic Plan goals including cost and revenue goals. Future work of the Distance Education Committee will be guided by the Strategic Plan.

Diversifying Chapter Revenue Sources -- The Distance Education Program could play a significant role in diversifying chapter revenue sources--one of the 2018-2019 Strategic Plan goals. The Chapter currently uses Constant Contact/Event Spot to collect fees upon registering for on-demand session recordings. The same service could be used for webinars and livestreamed events. Ample capacity exists to expand the number of distance education offerings without incurring additional service costs.

With 6,000 current APA California members the potential market is substantial. If half the Chapter membership engaged with a single distance education product at \$15, the Chapter would realize \$45,000 in additional yearly revenue.

Developing a reliable revenue stream across all distance education platforms requires an effective marketing program and a realistic fee structure. The fee structure for webinars will be studied further as part of the program restructuring. Free webinars may still be offered to meet key Strategic Plan goals but consideration will be given to restricting free offerings during the period between the end of the Chapter conference and April 30th of the following year (the CM credit reporting grace period deadline). This may be necessary to avoid competition with session recordings.

Marketing efforts can eventually extend beyond the Chapter, potentially reaching all APA members nationally. Currently, the Chapter's distance education products are competitively priced with similar offerings from APA national. Additional opportunities to market outside the state may arise as part of the APA Learn program.

Expanding CM Credit Opportunities for APA Members in Outlying Areas -- All distance education products are available to members in outlying areas, but live distance education products such as webinars and livestreaming uniquely provide a shared experience. As we develop our livestream capability, members in outlying areas may be able to participate in live Section events as well as Chapter conference events. The immediate need, however, is to strengthen the Chapter webinar program so that high quality live webinars are available on a fairly regular basis. In addition, members in outlying areas should be given a stronger voice in selecting session recording and webinar topics.

Differential CM Credit Pricing -- While CM credits have been used as a benchmark for pricing, it should be noted that the fee is for viewing, not CM credits. For live, in person, events it is customary for Sections to charge a non-APA member price, a member price, and a student price. As recommended by the 2014 Webinar Committee, all 90 minute session recordings are offered for \$15 (\$10 per CM credit) with a price reduction to \$10 for groups of 3 or more. The same pricing was recommended for webinars, but never implemented. The rationale for a single price point was that the distance education program was designed for APA members and unlikely to attract much interest outside the organization. Raising the price for non-members was not likely to increase revenues.

The pricing structure for distance education products will be reexamined by the Distance Education Committee in light of current Strategic Plan goals and an improved economy. It is noted that the Board action of June 2018 already gives the VP of Professional Development discretion in setting distance education pricing.

Sharing of Program Revenues and Costs -- The webinar program was intended to be a resource for both Chapter and Sections. Currently, the Chapter is bearing all of the costs while no revenue is being generated. Ideally, the webinar program will be self-supporting with respect to the Chapter budget while providing Sections ample incentive to initiate and host webinars. An equitable plan for sharing webinar revenues and costs will be developed by the Distance Education Committee and included in the revised program.

An option under consideration is to ask the Sections pay a modest fee to use the Chapter's GoToWebinar service in exchange for receiving all of the revenues generated for the Section hosted webinar. The balance of the Chapter's costs can likely be made up from Chapter hosted webinars in which the Chapter would receive all of the revenue generated.

Potential for Livestreaming – Livestreaming combines the quality of the Chapter's recorded conference sessions with the shared experience of live webinars. Conveniently, the current method of creating the session recordings also has a feature for livestreaming directly to Youtube and other platforms. The livestream can include multiple cameras, integrated PowerPoint presentations and high quality audio directly from the PA system. As the Chapter gains more experience with the recording process, livestreaming from the conference will be a next logical step. Costs are modest provided volunteers are used to run the equipment. If the Chapter takes the lead, the Sections are likely to follow.

The Distance Education Committee has expressed an interest in making available Chapter experience in recording and livestreaming to the Sections through some form of training or direct assistance.

CONCLUSION:

Adjustments to various aspects of the Distance Education Program are needed to ensure compliance with the Chapter Strategic Plan. Priority needs to be given to restructuring the webinar program as this will have an immediate positive effect on the Chapter budget. Future efforts will be coordinated with the APA Learn Task Force to enhance members benefits and expand marketing opportunities.