

Excalibur Mythbusters Program: Tips from the Experts!

On January 29, public relations experts weighed in on what it takes to gain the recognition you deserve by submitting an award winning Excalibur entry! Discussion topics included writing, preparing, time management and planning ahead to capture all of the information needed for a great entry. And, if you're thinking about pursuing your Accreditation in Public Relations (APR), they gave tips on how your Excal entry can help build your APR portfolio.

The panelists will also share insights on the judging process and what they have looked for in a winning entry when judging other chapter's entries. Find their tips from the program below!

Jessica Christensen

Communications Specialist

Praxair Inc.

1. Take advantage of the website resources!
2. Go over the Call for Entries categories list provided on the website to be sure you choose the one that best fits your program or project
3. Judging form - Be sure to go over each section:
 - a. Research and Planning
 - i. In her experience as a judge, this is typically the weakest area in most entries
 - ii. Think "What did I do to get the plan I am completing?"
 - b. Execution
 - i. When prepping materials, submit the strong items that will support your campaign, including advertisements, photos, coverage you received, press releases, etc.
 - c. Results & Evaluation
 - i. Have objectives that are quantifiable: Our goal was X, and we received X
 - d. Technical Compliance
 - i. EDIT! Grammar matters, be concise; no typos
 - ii. Budget is often overlooked. Even if you had a limited budget – how did you maximize the funds?

Kate LaBrake

Director of Marketing Communications

St. Joseph Collegiate Institute

1. Great for professional development and employer to see accolades
2. Be as prepared as possible:
 - a. Pick a project. Ask yourself "What am I proud of?"
 - b. Which project(s) have all of the important objectives?
 - c. What materials can you use to support the award entry?
 - d. Pick the correct category! What would build your case better? Use Call for Entries resource as a guide.
 - e. Set the timeline for completing your entry on time:
 - i. Week One: Gather materials
 - ii. Week Two: Write the executive summary, write and proof. Use judging sheet as a guide
 - iii. Week Three: Complete entry. Go over minute details of submission
 - f. Tips for writing:
 - i. Write in a narrative tone
 - ii. Be ethical; keep to the facts of the project and process
 1. Maybe you didn't reach your objectives, but you had some unexpected wins

- iii. Give entry a catchy title
- iv. EDIT!

Kevin Manne, APR

Assistant Director of Communications

School of Management, University at Buffalo

1. If you can participate in reciprocal judging – then do it! You will learn what to do and not to do for your entries.
2. Selecting a project:
 - a. Not every project is a good fit for an entry
 - i. Take shortcomings from annual projects and make it part of your research for the following year
 - b. Find a category that matches your project or program
 - c. Pick one that had a big impact with measurable goals
 - d. Use resources appropriately. Jeff Paterson's Seven Steps to Excalibur Gold (website resource)
 - e. Executive Summary: Spend time on this!
 - i. Tell the story; get the audience on your side
 - ii. Explain problems you encountered, how you solved them, and how you succeeded
 - iii. Show how you changed perceptions, response rates, attendance at events – measureable ways to measure your success
 - f. APR: Writing an Excalibur entry is great preparation for the readiness review; brush up on the four-step process

Jacqueline Molik Ghosen, APR

Assistant Dean and Director of Communications

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1. Why you should submit awards:
 - a. Personal challenge to hold your work to a higher standard
 - b. Helps your organization and others that you work with by producing award-winning projects/programs
 - c. It helps you do your job better if you plan projects with goals/objectives/measurement in mind
 - d. External validation brings credibility to your work
 - e. It feels good to be recognized for good work and win something!
2. It's all about the write-up. Stay within the two pages, follow the four-step process. Tell a compelling story.
 - a. Pay particular attention to research. It doesn't have to be expensive. Use a Survey Monkey-like tool, run a focus group or use results from a past project as your research for the next.
 - b. Also set clear objectives and demonstrate measurable results. Objectives can be modest, but list what they are and how you will measure them, and then say at the end whether or not you achieved them. What were the obstacles, how did you overcome them?
 - c. All objectives should be tied to your measurable goals
 - d. Even if you weren't given a budget – put that detail in!
3. Prepare all year long. Keep notes in a separate Excal folder on each project/program.
4. Serve as a reciprocal judge. You will learn a lot.
5. Give credit where credit is due. In your write-up, list all the people who made your project a success.
6. Why go for your APR? You become a better practitioner. Not only about personal accolades, but about elevating your organization.