University of Minnesota Communicators Forum

Board retreat August 8, 2008

Present: Melanie Clarke, Tricia Conway, William Dana, Jessica Franken, Christopher James, Ingrid Nuttall, Kelly O’Brien, Lani Payette, Nicole Pilman (afternoon), Sara Specht, Robin White

Absent: Jen Keavy

UPDATES

The new EFS system, which started in July, has led to the Forum being unable to access its funds. We have been removed from under Financial Systems, and are currently mapped to University Relations, although neither of us feels that is a good fit.

- Tricia will lead the effort to pull together a proposal for OHR to accept us into their cluster.
- Karen Himle will write a “letter of recommendation” for us
- ASR has loaned us the funds to pay outstanding fees to two speakers until we have access to our funds.

Meeting with Karen Himle: Tricia and Christopher met with Karen for our annual check-in.

- She wants to do a printed materials inventory to show how much is printed University-wide.
- UR may want to sponsor a Forum program on communicating outside of print and Web.
- Ann Freeman’s internal communications group wants to work with us in some capacity.
- Karen sees the Forum as a think tank and wants us to elevate communications and communicators at the U.

MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS

This year, the M&P committee will focus on relationship management rather than straight promotion. They will develop targeted messages to non-members about programs that might interest them.

Melanie discussed her desire to make the LISTSERV into a searchable online database. Having a pool of shared knowledge would be beneficial to all.

How can we best store and share documentation?

Melanie passed out possibilities for the new wordmark that adheres more closely to U standards.
To support member retention, we should consider sending letters to members on milestone anniversaries, and/or recognizing them at events or in the newsletter. We should also recognize and celebrate new members in a similar fashion so they feel welcome.

CONFERENCE
Donna and Julie can no longer serve on the board. We need new conference chairs. Until that time, Ingrid will fill in.

We discussed what the differences are and should be between the conference and the monthly programs. Maybe it is the caliber of speaker: should we save our star attractions for the conference? There is also a feeling of community and festivity that is important to the conference. Perhaps the programs should be more big picture, and the conference focus more on concrete knowledge. That way, it will be easier to justify the cost to supervisors, because attendees will come away with skills/knowledge they can use right away.

Theme brainstorm: we discussed Feats of Strength/Comic books/Superheroes, DIY (Design on a Dime, etc.), Plugged In/Wired/The Source, and The Inner Circle. The Superheroes theme seems to have emerged as the favorite.

Should the conference be earlier or later? Last year it coincided with graduation week. Ingrid will poll members about whether May or June is better.

THE FORUM: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS
Strengths:

- Size
- Programs
- Use of Breeze
- Newsletter
- Networking
- Low dues
- Collective expertise
- Relationship with University Relations
- Awards
- Consistency of programs (events regularly throughout year)
- LISTSERV
- Originality (no other organizations like ours around)

Weaknesses:

- Size – how to be relevant to everyone?
- Channels of communication
- Finding new members in massive U infrastructure
- Programs: need to tailor our programs so designers feel they are relevant
- Budget: don’t have enough to be useful for everyone
- Coordinate campus relationships
Networking:
need more social hours, etc.

One way versus interactive programming

Volunteer driven: can't always be top priority

Opportunities:

Coordinate campuses

EFS: finding new home will force us to streamline our pitch

New members on board

LISTSERV

Networking

Past leadership resources for special projects

Better (or more creative) recruiting to committees

Overall lack of understanding (from decision makers) of work of communicators

Cliques (or perception of cliques)

Lack of Forum-wide participation

Share best practices, case studies, show & tell

Help with resource stewardship

Show how we add value, how we can help save money

Certification

Model excellence for internal and external communications (set standard)

Advocate for other institutions to start Forums

Use faculty resources

Threats:

Incestuous board (or perception thereof)

Fracture into interest groups

Other professional development organizations (AIGA, etc.): what do we offer that they don’t?

Relationship with University Relations: how involved should they be?

U speakers at programs preaching rather than instructing: threat of the Forum being seen as a mouthpiece for University Relations.

The economy, which affects both departments’ ability to support their employees’ involvement in the Forum and our resources to do great work

Election/politics/legislature

Demands on time

Keeping our group independent

Board turnover

Budget/finance issues

Adjusting to less/smarter print materials

PROGRAMS

List of potential programs passed out.
Other idea brought up: legislative relations. If you have additional ideas or suggestions, send them to Kelly.

The Program Committee hopes to address the issue of networking (members want more) by formalizing the networking before events. Also, board members need to remember to meet new people at events, as well as introduce people they know to others. The Program Committee may start programs with a short icebreaker, or at least introductions.

PROPOSAL FOR A COMMUNICATORS FORUM CAMPAIGN

Kelly passed out a proposal for a campaign to “make the case for the work of communicators across the University system.” The audience would be administrators and faculty. We had discussions around “how do we measure success?” and “how does our work support the University’s strategic goals?” We could do a campaign about what the world would be like without communicators. Next step: talking with Ann Freeman – is this a common goal with UR?

BUDGET

Nicole led us through the budget. We needed to make some cuts, and we found a few places to do so.

We used to have some carry over, but have eaten away at it in recent years.

TECHNOLOGY

The special project is complete. There may be $950 or so left to pay out; Lani will check.

We should have an ongoing budget for new technologies on our site, but maybe now is not the right time to initiate it.

Lani needs more members for the Tech Committee. Send ideas her way.

A bigger conversation is needed about the Web site: Can we get more control of it? Move it to a different server? What are our goals for the site? Who is responsible for it?

Goals and ideas for Tech Committee: develop member portal, develop resources section, make it possible for members to update their own information, find an alternative for archiving documents and records.

NEWSLETTER

Jessica handed out goals and action steps for year. Issues will be themed to complement programs. Will consider how to make the newsletter less one-way, more interactive.

AWARDS

Big goal for the year: get more submissions for the Green Award.

They had about as many entries as they could handle this year.
We discussed sending letters to winners’ supervisors or taking out an ad in the Daily to raise visibility.

**MyU MEMBER PORTAL**
Debby showed us the various features set up on our portal. There are three levels of permissions in the site: members, technology committee, and board.

Lani will put up a link on our site to a short online training on MyU.

If we want members to use this portal, we need to lead by example and keep sending people there to have discussions.

**OTHER BUSINESS**
The Forum board will meet the second Tuesday of every month from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. Christopher is checking on availability at the Weisman. Although the location will be consistent, we will rotate hosting duties.

Tricia handed out expectations for committee chairs. They will be expected to send updates to Tricia the week before each board meeting.

Submitted by Jessica Franken