

Building, Guiding, and Sustaining Regional Networks For Psychology Teachers

Professional development opportunities for high school psychology teachers have traditionally been hard to come by. In the past, the only significant opportunities to see presentations on best practices in the teaching of high school psychology were limited to [APA/Clark University Workshop for High School Teachers](#), the annual [APA Convention](#), the [National Council for the Social Studies \(NCSS\) annual conference](#) or the [Advanced Placement Annual Conference](#). All are outstanding opportunities for professional growth, but typically require significant travel and the latter three require expensive conference fees.

In recent years, the APA Committee of Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (TOPSS), thanks to financial support from the [American Psychological Foundation](#), has made a concerted effort to expand opportunities for teachers around the country to network and share best practices through encouraging the development of regional networks. This document is designed to help psychology teachers develop and sustain regional networks that are accessible and cost-effective, yet still provide quality professional development opportunities for instructors of psychology.

Benefits of Regional Networks

- Provide an opportunity to engage in low-cost, high-quality professional development.
- Allow psychology instructors who are often the only individuals teaching the course at their school to network with other instructors to share resources and teaching ideas.
- Allow for specific professional development opportunities for psychology instructors who do not often have district or school-wide professional development geared toward their discipline.
- Provide an opportunity to create vertical articulations between high school instructors and 2- and 4-year college and university professors.
- Provide resources for psychology instructors that can be used immediately with their students.
- Allow teachers to continue their own professional growth and continue to sustain their enthusiasm for psychology which will benefit their students.
- Provide teachers with an opportunity to strengthen their professional identities as psychology teachers.

RELATED ARTICLES

Here are three articles that provide additional background on regional networks:

[*How Regional High School Teacher Networks Will Take Your Game to the Next Level*](#) (Hamilton, 2016)

[*Are you Interested in Connecting with Other Local Psychology Teachers?*](#) (Ramponi, 2014)

[*The Indiana High School Psychology Teachers Association Conference*](#) (Appleby & Harmon, 2015)

Regional Networks Starter Kit

Here is a “how to” guide for teachers on starting a regional network.

Using the TOPSS name

When choosing a name for your network, you may wish to use the name Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (TOPSS). The American Psychological Association (APA) requires that you agree to the [guidelines linked here](#) in order to use the TOPSS name.

Recruiting and Finding Teachers to Invite

- Search the [APA Directory for TOPSS members](#) in your state. If you log into your APA account, you can search the directory by selecting “Membership” and scrolling to the middle of the page with the heading “Connect.” From there you can search the directory by typing in your state and checking the box to search “high school teachers.” You can also email topss@apa.org to send a message to the TOPSS listserv.
- Post to the [AP Psychology Teachers Facebook Page](#)¹: This page connects nearly 3,000 teachers of psychology who share ideas, resources and activities and information regarding upcoming conferences.
- Search the [College Board AP Course Audit](#): This searchable database allows users to find high schools that have an audit-approved AP Psychology course. Once you know which schools offer AP Psychology, you can look at individual school websites and invite psychology teachers.
- Contact the NCSS Psychology Community: Upon request, leadership team member [Jen Schlicht](#) will send the names of any NCSSPC members in your area.
- Contact school principals in your state or region: Letters or emails could be sent to school principals asking them to forward information to the psychology teacher at their school.
- You may also want to contact local teacher preparation programs to invite pre-service teachers interested in teaching psychology to your conference.

Once you have found contact information for teachers to invite, create a contact list either in a spreadsheet or as an email group.

Location and Timeline

When finding a location to host your workshop or conference², consider factors such as parking, ease of transportation, security issues if you are hosting at a school, dining space, technology equipment, hotel suggestions, and other logistical issues that may correspond with hosting a few or many instructors.

Consider surveying potential attendees to determine if the conference should take place on a weekday, weekend or in the evening. Here is a timeline for planning your conference:

- Six months or more prior to event: Select your date
- Four months or more prior to event: Send a Save the Date and create a firm deadline for registration submission
- Two months prior to event: Send the invitations
- Two weeks prior to event: Registration is due; prepare materials for participants

Publishers

Publishing companies may make donations of books, send a representative, or even provide funding for snacks or meals. It will be necessary to find your local or regional sales representative in order to request materials and assistance. The links below represent a sample of publishers that have titles in psychology, but the list is not exhaustive:

- [Cengage](#)
- [McGraw Hill](#)
- [W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.](#)
- [Worth Publishers](#)

Potential Funding Options to Help Defray Costs

APF High School Psychology Outreach Grants

The American Psychological Foundation (APF) and APA Education Directorate provide opportunities for funding to support innovative programs that may be used for networking, professional development and educational outreach opportunities for high school psychology teachers and students. These grants support regional networks for psychology teachers.

STP Partnerships Small Grant Program

The Society for the Teaching of Psychology (APA Division 2) offers a program of small grants to promote communication and collaboration between psychology teachers. Specifically, this program is intended to bring together individuals to engage in planned activities targeted at promoting the teaching of psychology or who desire to work together to think about the ways in which the teaching of psychology can be improved.

1. Please note that teachers are always encouraged to reach out to and invite on-level (introductory), International Baccalaureate, and other non-AP psychology teachers to participate in regional networks, in addition to AP psychology teachers.

2. Workshops and conferences generally refer to the same type of professional development event; this document uses the term conferences.

Possible Expenses

The cost of holding a regional network varies between networks and conferences. Costs may include the following:

- Copies of flyers, agendas and activities
- Name tags
- Postage if you mail invitations
- An honorarium for your speaker (if required)
- Catering
- Event space (if required)
- Door prizes (if desired)
- Insurance (check with venue)
- Custodial fees (check with venue)

Securing Speakers and Sending Invitations

Write a formal invitation to invite keynote speaker(s) to present at your conference. Describe the nature of the audience, goals of the conference, and specifically identify what you are asking the speaker to accomplish.

Sample Speaker Invitation Letter

Create an invitation for the conference that describes the objectives, format of the day and a call for participant volunteers to present best lessons, projects and/or assessments.

Sample Invitation and Registration forms

After the Registration Deadline Has Closed

In creating a conference, incorporate the following items:

- Create name tags for all participants and presenters.
- Make a list of all participants that includes their emails so that they can stay in contact after the conference.
- Create a shared Google drive or document in which presenters can share materials and presentations electronically.
- Print an agenda that outlines the plan for the day's professional development and make copies for each participant.
- Before you end the conference ask participants to give you feedback about how the day went and how it might be improved in the future. *Sample Evaluation Form*
- If your budget allows, you may want to facilitate a drawing for prizes/resources to raffle off at the end of the day.
- Check-in with any teacher presenters to be sure that all

equipment has been ordered and they have sent along their materials for copying or they have agreed to bring copies themselves. Be sure to let all presenters know how many participants will be in attendance.

- Confirm with the individuals at the host site that things are taken care of, such as parking, catering, room set-up, security, and technology needs.
- Create signs to help participants navigate to the area in which the conference will be held, the dining area, restrooms, etc.
- Recruit students or other volunteers who can help with registration, copying, organizing folders and helping with any other issues that might come up during the conference.

Follow-Up after the Conference

Be sure to update the list of instructors who attended the conference or who could not attend but would like to in the future. If you are just starting to meet as a group, ask the participants if they know other teachers who might like to attend. Having an updated list will save the trouble of identifying local psychology instructors each year.

Be sure to thoroughly reflect on how the conference went and how it could be improved next year. The evaluation form completed by participants will be valuable in making these decisions.

Consider creating an online platform (e.g., Facebook, web-page) prior to the start of the conference to give individuals in the group an opportunity to keep in contact with one another after the conference ends and to share information regarding future meetings. This can be the same document in which presenters share their materials.

Write thank you notes/e-mails to anyone who helped with the conference:

- Guest Speakers
- Student Volunteers
- Source of any grants or outside funding (STP, APF, etc.)
- Textbook companies that provided books or other resources
- Anyone from the conference site that provided security, parking, catering, etc.

Grants may require documentation or a final report.

Model Formats for Hosting a Regional Conference

Below are three sample formats for organizing a potential regional conference. Some existing conferences change formats, while others use a consistent structure each year. Although the samples below are examples of more formal conferences, keep in mind that many regional networks start as small, informal conversations and develop into more formal networks. If developing a formal conference seems daunting, contact a few teachers in your area and meet for coffee or after school to share ideas. These are simply models as you organize your conference; you may find that another option or some combination of the below options works better for the network you are looking to develop.

Chicago area Teacher of Psychology in Secondary Schools (CHITOPSS)

This conference features presentations of lessons, activities, and demonstrations from volunteer teacher participants. The conference rotates between schools each year and the date is determined by the host institution.

2015 Agenda

New England Teachers of Psychology (NETOP)

This conference features presentations from university professors in the Boston area to help build participants' content knowledge. The conference also involves teaching and learning sessions which provide demonstrations and activities for participants to enhance their classroom instruction. To date the conference has been held at one high school.

2017 Agenda

Minnesota Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (MNTOPSS)

This regional network partners with a university that hosts and has faculty-led sessions based on their area of specialization. Teachers spend most of the day rotating through sessions and have the opportunity to see the university's research facilities.

2017 Agenda

Suggestions for Overcoming Obstacles

- One of the most significant challenges in building a new regional network is finding other psychology teachers in your area. After using the resources from this Starter Kit to contact psychology teachers, you'll have a contact list and it becomes much easier to organize the conference in future years. The focus then becomes maintaining the database of contact information.
- If you live in a rural area or a state with a large rural population, holding in-person meetings may be difficult to coordinate. Teachers may want to hold virtual meetings if meeting in person is difficult to schedule. Google Hangouts is one example of a virtual platform teachers can use to create an online meeting place.
- The priority is to create high quality professional development at a low cost. However, it is helpful to build up reserve funds for future keynote speakers, prizes, etc.
- In planning your conference you want to do all you can to ensure that the activities presented by volunteers are of a high quality. Ask participants ahead of time what their presentation is about and maybe even preview it if possible. As a general rule of thumb, ask for volunteer teacher presentations to be around 10-15 minutes in duration.
- Many universities are looking for outreach opportunities to partner with area high schools. The authors of this kit recommend contacting psychology department chairs at nearby universities to see if they are interested in hosting the conference, financially supporting the conference or sending faculty to present at the conference. You can also search the APA member database for Division 2 members who might be willing to help build a high school psychology teacher network. Follow the directions above for searching within your APA account, but check "Division 2" rather than "high school teacher."
- It is strongly recommended that a leadership team be created to help in the set-up of a new conference. It can be very challenging to create a conference if only one person takes on every element of the planning. A partner, committee, or leadership team will greatly alleviate the burden and help with organizing logistics. Dividing up responsibilities will help make an annual conference more sustainable.
- After the regional network is established, consider rotating the conference to various locations for variety and to attract new attendees. Rotating the venue will also make it more equitable for the distance attendees have to travel each year.

Contacts

The following people are available to contact if there are questions or assistance is needed to set up a new conference or network.

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