

Successfully Start and Grow Your Young Professionals Group or Employee Resource Group





### The Council of Companies (COC)

helps companies in Greater Omaha form and sustain internal young professional and employee resource groups. Formed in 2008, COC is a program of the Greater Omaha Chamber.



## Council of Companies MISSION

- > To help local companies launch successful Young Professional, Emerging Leader or New Employee Resource Groups
- > To provide a venue for these groups to share ideas and best practices, discuss common issues, and collaborate to overcome challenges
- > To provide social, networking, development and volunteer opportunities that supplement individual company programming
- > To facilitate and execute joint company events that build stronger connections across the community
- > To promote Omaha as a great city for young professionals to live, work and play

Council of Companies meetings, volunteers, Chamber staff, and company peers are additional resources to guide you through these stages.

## Council of Companies MEETINGS

- > Held at the UNO Community Engagement Center typically on the fourth Thursday of January, March, July and September from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m.
- > Open to any company or organization with an existing group or looking to start a group
- > At least one representative from each member company should attend COC meetings
- Sponsored by the University of Nebraska Lincoln Master of Business Administration

A COC Social is held twice a year in May and November.

#### Contact:

## The Purpose of this workbook

To pose a series of questions that will help you think strategically about your purpose, your resources, and what you want your young professional group to be. Addressing these questions from the start can help your young professional group more quickly and effectively become a respected entity in your organization and community.

This workbook will address six stages of growth that most young professional groups experience. As you learn about each stage, this resource suggests action items to advance your group's development.



We strongly recommend that you and your leadership team refer back to this workbook as your young professional group grows from one stage to another. It's common for young professional groups to "get stuck" from time to time. This workbook can help you get unstuck by providing you with action items, best practices and lessons learned from other organizations. In addition, utilizing the COC network will provide you and your employee resource group with ways to move through any challenge.

#### 6 STAGES OF GROWTH:

- -ENVISION
- -COMMIT + START-LIE
- -IAUNCH + DFIIVER
- -GROW + EVALUATE
- -SPECIALIZE + MANAGE GROWTH
- RENEW + REFUEL



### **Envision**

In this stage, founders gather to brainstorm what the young professional group might look like, what kind of programs could be offered, and the impact it can make in your community and company.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### CREATE a start up team

- What will your team look like?
- Who are 2 to 6 people that will spearhead efforts to develop a sustainable group?
- Choose a leader or point of contact that will be responsible for coordinating meetings and distributing information.
- Appoint a liaison from senior leadership.

## **IDENTIFY** the business case for your group

This may be vital to helping your group get established.

- Will senior management or executives help sponsor and support the group?
- Are funds available to help support and supplement programming?
- Map out why the company needs a young professional group and what it has to gain – and present these ideas to senior management. This may help your group achieve greater financial support.

## **DETERMINE** who will be eligible to participate

- Who are your target members? Young professionals (40 and younger)? New employees? Anybody young at heart?
- · How many people?
- How do people actively participate?

## BRAINSTORM & begin to draft the group's vision, values and goals

- First ask, "Why does your company need a young professional group and what benefits do you foresee from establishing a group at your company?"
- Identifying values will help you make decisions about membership, programming, sponsorship, etc. in the future.
- Values will help guide the vision, purpose, and direction of a successful group.
- Map out measurable long- and short-term goals around your group's objectives, make sure they are clearly expressed so you can share them with stakeholders, members and the community at large.

## **DEFINE** your purpose and identity

- Create a mission statement built around the purpose of your group.
- Remember the mission statement can be as broad or defined as is necessary for your organization. It all depends on your company.
- You should cross-reference the mission statement with your company's mission statement. Do they align?

#### SAMPLE mission statements

 "To attract, develop, and retain emerging professionals at XX Company through engagement in the company and community."

- "To offer an outlet for professional development, best practice sharing and niche networking in a social setting for professionals at XX Company."
- "To educate and develop young professionals by providing networking, career development and volunteer opportunities."
- "To provide a channel by which professionals can add value to XX Company through their personal professional development by means of technical training, mentoring, marketing, experience, networking resources and communication skills."

#### CREATE your pillars

- What would your potential audiences and other constituencies in your organization like to see from such a group?
- · Is there a need for:
- Networking
- Community engagement or volunteering
- Education: professional/career development
- Social outlet
- Retention
- Any other need (These can be broad or more defined i.e. proactively engage senior leadership on matters affecting new employees)

#### What's in a name?

Some young professional groups choose not to call themselves "young professionals organizations" because the words "young" and "professional" cause confusion or problems. If your group is getting hung up on these terms, you might consider choosing a name that's completely neutral such as a name related to the field or industry in which your company operates.

Examples: Catalyst, Current, Emerging Leaders, etc.



# Commit + Start-up

This stage builds on the previous stage and paves the way for a key event – your professional group's formal launch. In this stage, your vision begins to take shape as programming ideas are identified, and the launch event details are confirmed.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

## **DEVELOP** a formation plan and timeline

• What is your timeframe to have the group up and running?

#### **BOARD** and governance

- How will your group be governed? Will you have an elected board?
- Often, a Council/Board will be made up of professionals who are responsible for carrying out the group's mission.

## **EXPLORE** options for organizational structure

 What will the culture and structure of your young professional group be?

- Will it be loosely net band of volunteers, who collaborate primarily through online tools like email, blogs and project management systems?
- Will it be a more formal group that meets weekly or biweekly to discuss ideas and make decisions?
- If formally structured, leadership roles may include: President, President- Elect, Treasurer, and communications chair.
- Based upon the specific objectives of your group, designate other employees to lead committees formed from time to time to achieve the objectives/pillars mapped out in Stage I.
- Committees may be ad hoc or standing for specific purposes, such as: Networking, Membership, Events, Technology, Liaisons (for companies operating in several locations or a Council of Companies liaison), Community involvement, and environment. 1

#### **CREATE** Bylaws

- Regardless of your governance/ organizational structure, create clear bylaws outlining specific responsibilities and other operating relationships and standards.
- Bylaws should define the purpose of your organization, how often you will conduct meetings, how the meetings will be conducted, the terms of the board members, elections, what constitutes a quorum, how to handle vacancies, finances, and how to amend the bylaws.

#### **PROGRAMMING**

- What type of programs do people in our members and organization value?
- What type of programming do we need to execute to meet our desired community impact and vision?
- When, where and how often will we have programs or events?
- Is this programming in line with our young professional group's values?

- Should the programming be diverse or focused?
- Who has the final decision on which events happen?
- Who will plan and execute the events?
- How will we publish the schedule?

## The most common programs offered by young professional groups fall into one of these categories:

#### Social/ Networking

- Happy hours
- Speed networking
- Baseball games with tailgates
- Cornhusker football tailgate on company campus

## Professional/business/leadership development

- Mentoring programs where senior leaders are matched with group members
- "Lunch and Learn" sessions with senior leaders covering current developments
- Etiquette classes
- Sessions on career development
- Sessions on personal finance (how to manage investments for the future)

## Civic engagement/community involvement

- Park cleanups
- Pancake breakfasts
- Golf tournaments
- Walks or parades

#### Philanthropic/charitable

- Hosting an event where all proceeds go to charity
- Silent auctions
- Serving meals
- Invite a non-profit organization to help recruit volunteers within



## Launch + Deliver

You're ready for launch!
At this stage, you've
begun to formalize your
young professional
group board structure
and identify leadership
roles for key positions.
Planning focuses
on programming,
marketing, and resource
development.



#### ACTION ITEMS

## Develop a one-to-two year STRATEGIC PLAN

- Your Strategic Plan may include a staffing/management plan, a marketing plan and a resource development plan.
- It is important that the plan be flexible. Many professional groups go through numerous revisions to their strategic plan in their first couple of years.

## Develop a MARKETING PLAN

- How will you communicate the launch of your young professionals group?
- How will the young professional group communicate with its members?
- Intranet or company page
- Facebook page
- Email
- LinkedIn

#### Create a formal BUDGET

- Do you create a formal budget, or request funding as needed?
- What does your budget look like for events for events?
- Will you charge membership dues (if applicable)?
- Be sure to measure and report the expenditures' impact.



As your young professional group grows its visibility and reputation, more resources and members will flow your way.
At this point, you should reevaluate your programming, resource needs, and staffing needs.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### Do an ONLINE SURVEY of:

- Current members
- What do they most value about your programming and benefits?
- Non-members
- Ask what value they would like to receive from membership.

## Other questions to consider in survey:

- Is your target market the same as you anticipated during step two? How has it changed, if at all?
- What value are you offering your target market?
- What type of additional programming do you need?
- Is your programming in line with your group's values?
- What is your most successful event in your least successful? What can we learn from each experience?
- What type of additional programming you need to execute to achieve your desired Community impact and vision? Do you need to diversify your programming, test new programs, or get more focus in a single programming area?





### STAGE 5

# Specialize + Manage Growth

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### Create a PERFORMANCE/MEASUREMENT to show proof of outcome

- How do you measure success and the group's impact?
- Annual review of events
- What is the succession plan for leadership roles?
- When the founders move on, who's in queue to help lead?
- Possible options could be nominating and voting on next leader, or any other diplomatic way to ensure the organization moves forward.

This stage brings
demand for
measurements and
proof of outcomes.
Sustainability,
operations, and the
group's financial
base need continued
direction, decisions, and
resolution.



#### STAGE 6

### Renew + Refuel



In this stage, you will notice external and internal forces begin to change. For example, your founding team of young professionals may become burned-out or another employee resource group may have started in your company. These changes are natural, and should propel your group to take stock of its performance and conduct a major review to renew itself.

This is the time for new strategic ideas, new financial plans, new systems and often, new people and roles. It's a time of rebirth as the group prepares itself for a new cycle of development.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

## REVISIT capacities and adjust your strategic plan as needed, considering:

- Community Impact & Measurement
- Values
- Board & Governance
- Planning and Strategic Direction
- Programming
- Resource Development
- Marketing and Communication

