

Create an Educational Blueprint for Your Association



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Blueprints provide direction on plans we wish to execute. For learning programs, a content outline can serve as your blueprint, mapping the essential elements and desired outcomes of

professional development.

At the start of a road trip, you turn on the GPS to ensure you won't get lost. If you begin building a house, you draft a blueprint before picking up a hammer, nails, and wood. And in college, you receive a syllabus at the beginning of the semester that lays out the course ahead.

In each of these instances, a blueprint or plan is needed to make sure we get to where we need to be. But when thinking about educational content for an association, where do you find the blueprint?

Wouldn't it be nice if each association could turn to a manual for what education you should provide to members and when and how it should be delivered?

Whether it's for career paths, new skills, or planning in general, blueprints can provide direction and structure to professional development programs we wish to execute. In the PD field, blueprints are known as content outlines, and like a blueprint or roadmap, they help steer an association to where it wants to be by providing guidance on which topics are the most important to your membership.

But determining the educational programming that your members need can be difficult. At times there is an abundance of topics, speakers, and educational content; other times it may seem that educational resources are dried up or revisited one too many times.

A content outline identifies the main subject domains for the profession and breaks apart each subject into smaller topics and points. Using a content outline can help prioritize learning as it highlights the topics that are of the most importance to the profession, and it ensures the learning content has an impact on your members and is evenly distributed throughout the year.

Creating a Content Outline

For many associations that act as a certifying body, a content outline is created for the certification exam and is carefully developed and thoroughly reviewed by subject matter experts and association staff.

Even if your association is not a certifying body, a content outline can be developed and used to determine the necessary content and provide structure to your educational offerings. Here are a few tips for using a content outline to prioritize learning content:

- Identify the main subject domains of the profession you represent and break down these areas into specific topics and subtopics.
- Ensure that each subject area is representative of the profession as it currently stands
- Distinguish between core and advanced learning content in your outline.
- Build intentional and strategic priorities around the content that needs to be delivered.

- Listen to members, and when a request for a topic is suggested, use the outline as a decision-making tool for determining if the topic aligns.
- Use the subject in the outline to meta-tag information in your learning management system and categorize educational offerings by topic area.
- Use the outline to suggest topics to committees tasked with creating educational offerings for the association, this may spark new ideas for content.
- Continually review and update the outline to reflect changes in the industry or profession.

At a time when we all race to be the first to present a new idea or learning technique or react to something quickly, a content outline is a good reminder to think critically and carefully about how those changes will impact the domains identified in a content outline or how they fit into the overall plan for education for your association.

And the next time you need some direction with your association's PD offerings, first remember to review the content outline. You may receive inspiration for content that has not been covered recently or you will be able to reevaluate and add on to an educational program to ensure that your association's educational programs are well balanced and have a meaningful impact on your members.

Tags:

 **EDUCATION PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

 **E-LEARNING**

 **CONTENT MANAGEMENT**

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