

## 2020-2021 WACAC Executive Board



## A NEW WAY TO WORK

Partnerships, engaged members, and in-depth planning helped Western ACAC come out of the pandemic stronger than ever.

By Phil Moreno,  
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**L**ike most NACAC affiliates, the Western Association for College Admission Counseling (WACAC) earns most of its revenue from a trifecta of professional development events: Share, Learn, Connect (SLC) sessions, college fairs, and an annual conference. Last summer when the WACAC executive board met, we knew that we couldn't hold our events in-person and therefore, our budget would once again be severely impacted. A year later, WACAC ended the most unprecedented year in its' 53-year history by approving free membership for community-based organizations—a valued segment of our professional community whose commitment and engagement garnered more than \$250,000 in revenue for our virtual events—and approving a proposed balanced budget that brings us back to pre-pandemic levels. By leveraging key business partnerships, the WACAC board committed to serving our membership even if it meant trying something new (i.e., a virtual annual conference) and harnessing the collective work of our members. Ultimately, WACAC survived the global pandemic stronger, more relevant, and necessary than ever.

When the board met virtually last summer for our annual retreat, we took the time to check in with one another, talk over a virtual campfire, and clearly outline expectations for the year. Collectively we were aware of Zoom fatigue, the need for self-care, and the fact that sometimes we may not know an answer to things we had spent our whole careers knowing. Therefore, the No. 1 charge as a volunteer board was to be considerate of the affiliate's resources and of our own capacities, especially since our full-time paying jobs had also become more demanding in the age of COVID.

In looking back and dissecting what went right, it's clear we stood on the shoulders of giants whose planning and forethought allowed us to begin the year in a place of privilege. WACAC has spent the better part of the past decade creating a reserve fund totaling more than 70 percent of our annual budget and intentionally growing the association by offering free membership to public school counselors. Of course, our affiliate's size and level of engagement also raises expectations that WACAC's role should extend beyond college fairs and the annual conference.

phone calls, and texts—and, in some cases, we would not know what our plans were until December.

### TO ZOOM OR NOT TO ZOOM—THAT WAS THE QUESTION

To think that a year ago WACAC did not have a Zoom license is a sign of the times, as we come out of the pandemic tunnel. Last summer, Conference Committee Co-chair Keith Sanpei and Board Member Jeremiah Rakowski asked folks who had planned to present at the in-person conference

Past Presidents Esther Hugo, Katy Murphy, and Peggy Hock met with partners from the College Board to plan a fall series of WACAC Wednesdays specifically for our public school counselors.

Professional Development Chair Marie Bury Loew reached out and asked for volunteers within our affiliate who would be interested in offering virtual sessions to members throughout the fall. The response yielded sessions that met our members where they were: at home, in the middle of a pandemic, longing to learn and hear what others were doing and how they could better support students and each other. It also led to the creation of the "I Am WACAC" YouTube Channel and the association utilizing our Google Workspace to better communicate with each other and our members.

## We asked ourselves, alone in our physical spaces but together via Zoom: What virtual events should we intentionally consider for the upcoming academic year?

Therefore, we asked ourselves, alone in our physical spaces but together via Zoom: What virtual events should we intentionally consider for the upcoming academic year? Was our membership willing to attend our mini-professional development events, SLC, online? Would students in California and Nevada attend a virtual college fair? Would our members go for a virtual annual conference? And, of course, who would step up to run these events if we said yes.

Most years we would have left the retreat with a complete calendar of events, communication calendar and timeline, and everyone on the same page regarding what we hoped to accomplish. Last summer we left those meetings knowing that most of our work was going to take place after the retreat via Zoom, emails,

whether they were interested in recording or presenting via Zoom sometime in July or August. The overwhelming positive response from presenters allowed the association to justify the cost of a Zoom license. We launched WACAC Wednesdays (WW), borrowing the theme from the canceled conference "I Am WACAC." From these five summer virtual sessions we learned that not only would members show up (more than 300 registered), but they would also find time later to view them if we simulcast and shared via Facebook (more than 900 views were amassed for those sessions).

Emboldened with this knowledge, our board got to work. Public School Counselor Ad Hoc Committee Chair Margaret Isied, Inter-Association Committee Chair Catalina Cifuentes, and

### THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS OVER-COMMUNICATING

Years ago at a WACAC conference, I attended a session on communication that resonates to this day. One of the takeaways, and I paraphrase broadly here, was that our ability to communicate directly impacts the quality of our lives. You can also add that a NACAC affiliate's ability to communicate its virtual professional development opportunities to members has a direct impact on the financial health of that association. Every virtual event WACAC offered necessitated a communication plan, including content, logos, and a timeline of deployment. The job of coordinating and delivering all of these messages via our email client, Cvent, and social media channels was led by Communications Committee Chair David Mills and Chair-elect Noor Haddad.

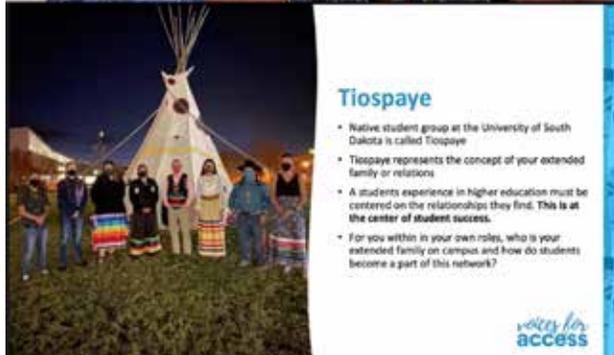
A helpful tool that came out of the uncertainty of the year was the creation of a master communication calendar for all WACAC messaging. We listed every date of our newsletter (the WACACConnection), every social media post, including planned content like the newly launched Feature Friday's, and planned communication for events like college fairs and the virtual conference. Importing this list into Google Calendar; creating, sharing, and editing content via Google Drive; and making it all accessible in a Google Drive executive board folder meant the board could access these resources as they launched programming throughout the year.

Therefore, when the Government Relations Committee, led by Jessica Greene, announced our first-ever advocacy day in Nevada and that it would be virtual, we were able to plan communication that did not overlap with messages about the opening of session proposals for our virtual conference and the launch of registration for our two virtual Share, Learn, Connect sessions.

## PARTNERSHIPS, PARTNERSHIPS, PARTNERSHIPS

Another key reason WACAC weathered the global pandemic so well was our acknowledgment that we couldn't do it all on our own. Specifically, we identified vendor partnerships that bore most of the work related to virtual hosting.

Western's partnership with StriveScan existed prior to the pandemic, as they served as our vendor for student scanning at in-person college fairs. Herbie Walker, our College Fairs Committee



WACAC conference keynote speaker Megan Red Shirt-Shaw

chair, was aware of the explosion in online platforms for virtual fairs and the wide range of costs associated with them. Ultimately, our partnership with StriveScan created a synergy of human resources (they helped provide a promotional toolkit for marketing) and technical know-how (the use of Zoom webinar and the 6x6 format), allowing Western to host

Revolution Prep. WACAC is traditionally one of the largest affiliates in the nation. Therefore, hosting our large professional development events and annual conference required a business partner that had experience hosting large virtual affiliate conferences. Board Members Marie Bury, Breanne Boyle, and Keith Sanpei simultaneously connected with RevPrep to see if they would be a good match for both our

SLCs and annual conference. Their work with other affiliates for virtual events at the outset of the pandemic meant they had learned the nuances of how to host a successful affiliate event. That, coupled with the fact that their compensation was set as being the primary sponsor at our annual conference, made it a no-brainer.

*With the technical side covered, the committee worked days, nights, and weekends to execute what many of the more than 1,000 attendees considered one of the best WACAC conferences ever.*

both fall and spring college fairs to great success. In fact, even with a revenue-sharing model, Western was able to set college registration costs that were sensitive to the global pandemic and still generated more than \$60,000 in revenue in a year with no projected revenue from in-person fairs.

Another critical partnership was between our board and

As we hosted two incredibly successful SLC events in February and March, our conference team was hard at work. With the technical side covered, the committee worked days, nights, and weekends to execute what many of the more than 1,000 attendees considered one of the best WACAC conferences ever. Certainly, the



WACAC Cafecito con Colegios

committee’s tireless work—from session selection to scheduling and identifying keynote speaker—Megan Red Shirt-Shaw—was the reason for that positive feedback, but the fact that it generally went off without a hitch or Zoom glitch meant folks could focus on the content of our speakers and not technical issues.

It’s July 2021 and it’s amazing to think that we’ll soon be able to hug each other at in-person fairs and conferences without masks. And there are also lessons to be learned from this year, a year which many would prefer to forget. For WACAC, it’s that the work we do every year needs to be sustainable, thoughtful, and make the association better for the next generation when they take charge. Admitting we are human, unpaid volunteers, with demanding full-time jobs means we will have to say no and limit what we can take on. However, acknowledging our capacities and harnessing the relationships we have with one another can invariably allow us to accomplish incredible things, even in a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic. 📍

**Phil Moreno, Breanne Boyle, and Lauren Cook** served the Western ACAC as president, president-elect, and past president for the 2020-21 academic year. Learn more about WACAC at [wacac.org](http://wacac.org).



WACAC conference testing session



WACAC conference student panel