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## Engagement within Division 19

### A Society Leadership Program Capstone Project

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At the 25 March 2023 Division 19 Executive Committee (EXCOM) Mid-Year-Meeting, attention was brought to the low response to an essay contest to receive a \$500 travel award to attend the American Psychological Association (APA) Convention in Washington, D.C. in August 2023. To receive travel awards, individuals had to write a 250-word paragraph describing why they should receive the award. For most, 250 words would take upwards of 1 hour to complete in order to receive funding that would cover a significant portion of someone's expenses for the entirety of the convention. Out of the hundreds of people that saw the opportunity via a Facebook post, only 3 people actually applied.

This response to the post led me to wonder why people would not apply to such an opportunity. In order to better understand the response to the travel essay opportunity and membership engagement levels, I decided to focus my Society Leadership Program (SLP) Capstone Project on developing a questionnaire to gather data and utilize that information to make recommendations for division leadership regarding member engagement.

#### Background

One of the primary engagement and networking opportunities offered to Division members (and potential members) is attendance at Division programming at the APA Convention. Travel awards for members are a significant benefit of membership and comprise approximately \$22,000 of the annual division budget (roughly 1/8th of the total annual expenses). Travel awards are considered a tool of member engagement and therefore travel awards could be considered a measure of member engagement.

#### Questionnaire

The questionnaire was initially constructed to identify self-reported reasons why individuals did not apply for the travel funding for APA. The questionnaire was a 10-question survey that started with multiple choice questions that were deemed as more-important to reduce burden to respondents. Later questions consisted of qualitative data to collect self-reported reasons why people did not apply for funding and why people did not engage with the post if they saw it.

Several factors informed the actual question development of the survey. For example, where are people receiving their announcements from? Are people engaging with said announcements? How can we increase engagement with announcements? These questions were designed to collect information on why people did not apply and to gather suggestions on what Division 19 can do better. Later, the

questionnaire would help shed light into engagement as a whole.

#### Results

Forty-eight people answered the questionnaire out of about 600 individuals who saw the initial announcement. Of the individuals who answered, 97.8% saw the announcement via the Listserv. About half (45.8%) of people were members, followed by fellows and then students. Interestingly, 50% of people said they had heard about travel funding but did not apply and would be interested in applying. Of those individuals who take part in a Division 19 committee, one third (33.3%) of people did not fully utilize their travel funding for APA.

Upon further investigation, of those that did not apply for funding, 25% did not think they would receive it, and 20.5% of people did not know the travel funding existed. However, going to APA, helping with financial burden, and networking with other psychologists are major draws to attending APA through utilization of the travel funding.

Members suggested various areas of improvement for Division 19 and its travel funding. For example, members reported that increased advertisement and communication would help spread awareness of the funding. Furthermore, highlighting the purpose of attending APA and its benefits is necessary to attract applicants. Members also suggested increased mentorship opportunities and that mentors could nominate mentees to receive the funding. Lastly, members reported increased time to apply to the funding is necessary.

#### Further Investigation

The results of the survey led me and my mentor to more questions regarding Division 19 engagement. For example, are people generally engaging in Division 19? Can we do anything to increase engagement? Why did people not apply if they knew about funding? Can Division 19 make its benefits more appealing to its members?

My mentor and I met with a prior membership chair to better understand Division 19 engagement and where, in her opinion, Division 19 can improve. She suggested many ideas. For example, Division 19 is a volunteer organization and not someone's primary job. The primary demographic of this organization is individuals who are currently serving and who have served in the military; the military is such a hierarchical environment, military structure tends to bleed into the volunteer component of Division 19 which may prevent individuals of lower

rank feeling comfortable to freely express their opinions to those in a higher rank. She suggested understanding the values of different benefits for different members of the organization. For example, those in their early career may have different values and what they want out of an organization to those in their mid- or late-career. Lastly, she discussed the idea of what a Military Psychologist truly is: is it someone in the military who is a psychologist? Is it a psychologist that serves active duty military members? Is it a clinical psychologist? Social psychologist? Research Psychologist? Defining what a military psychologist is allows for increased cohesion in both community and involvement in that community. Most importantly, are members of Division 19 actively being fulfilled by their position within the division?

This last question surprised both me and my mentor. The fulfillment within Division 19 is incredibly important in increasing engagement on the day-to-day within the division. How can Division 19 help with this increased fulfillment? To answer these questions, my mentor and I then met with members of the Division 19 EXCOM. (EXCOM). EXCOM members further brought up ideas, and these ideas overlapped with both the prior engagement chair and general members of Division 19. For example, EXCOM reported that communication needs to be better, increased networking and opportunities to decrease the barrier of the hierarchical nature of military status needs to occur, increased student involvement, increased mentorship, applied activities relevant to those in a particular position and for others to learn (i.e. organizational psychology, social psychology, clinical psychology, Department of De-

fense, and more). Lastly, they suggested, again, what a military psychologist truly is and further defining that.

### **Limitations**

Though my mentor and I received many valuable insights into increasing engagement within Division 19, there are several limitations that need to be addressed. First, only 48 people replied to the general questionnaire. The questionnaire focused only on travel funding and did not ask about Division 19 engagement more broadly. Thus, having an open forum where individuals can give ideas on how to increase engagement more broadly within the division is necessary to better understand how the division can improve its activities to make Military Psychology more fulfilling to the members.

### **Future Directions**

Upon investigation at the general membership, committee, and EXCOM levels, there are several future directions that Division 19 could go in. For example, the division could create specific funding for various stages of an individual's career (i.e. students, early-career, mid-career, late-career). It could also create different mentorship programs for students, early- and mid-career individuals. To answer the question regarding what a military psychologist is, there could be a panel highlighting the diversity of individuals' careers within the division. In a full circle, increasing student involvement and involvement in APA increases networking opportunities and decreases hierarchical barriers of the military within this volunteer organization.