

### **Coloring Outside the Lines: Creating CO-OP Without Boundaries**

Bestler-Wilcox, L. (2002, May). Coloring outside the lines: Creating CO-OP without boundaries. *Campus Activities Programming Magazine*, 35 (1), pp. 40-41.

When I was younger, I was told to color inside of the lines. Every so often though, I would draw something outside of those shapes, something unique that transformed the picture into something totally new! In effect, I created a paradigm shift with respect to how I'd been told by others to "stay within the lines."

Now that NACA has new regional boundaries, we need to consider "coloring outside the lines" when it comes to Cooperative Buying. In fact, our new regional structure should allow us to think of routing and CO-OP partnerships that previously were not available to us.

As most of us already know, when schools cooperatively buy acts/services together from our member associates they can save money --lots of money! Also, Cooperative Buying can happen throughout the year, anytime you and two or more schools that are located near you come together to book an act or service. Once you've agreed you all want the same act or service, you contact the associate member involved to negotiate a better price since you are Cooperatively Buying that act or service. However, you and the other schools involved in such a CO-OP endeavor don't necessarily have to be in the same region to save money. Hence, we coin the phrase "Continuous and Boundriless CO-OP."

A few years ago, I served as both a national and regional Cooperative Buying coordinator – I was able to see how much money schools were saving while networking at a regional conference or National Convention. I met many schools that were able to save enough money through CO-OP to send a few more students to an NACA regional conference or even to the NACA National Convention. Wouldn't it be great for your school to achieve the same level of savings?

However, don't let your CO-OP success stop there—take advantage of the changes in NACA's regional structure to build your Boundriless CO-OP Network, all the while looking past the lines that define geographical areas (states and regions) that you might otherwise think would limit your CO-OP decisions. In fact, develop your Boundriless CO-OP Buying Network to create your unique picture, "coloring outside the lines" as you go.

How can your school build its Boundriless CO-OP Network? Here are some simple ways to get started.

- **Make the Links:** Look at a map to learn which schools are within a safe driving distance from yours. Three-hour-drive distances are good, as is having an excellent nearby airport. Ask the associate member what would be reasonable with respect to distance and time for the act/service to travel in a day. If the act can fly part of the route – you may be able to get a great deal!
- **Map It:** Mark schools on a map—and calculate the mileage from one school to the next through an online map service. This will allow you to have valuable information on hand, making your life much easier when you are negotiating with each other and/or an associate member.
- **Work Out Day and Night/Night and Day Programming Schedules:** Check to see which schools near you offer daytime programming. If they host a performer during the day, you may be able to host that same performer at night, allowing him/her to drive to your campus, again helping to cut costs.

- **Compare Your Dates:** Find out what big events/programs other schools in your Boundriless CO-OP Network are putting on their calendars. This will help avoid schedule conflicts and facilitate programming choices.
- **Connect the Dots:** Compare information on acts/services in which other schools are interested to see if you have any connections or mutual programming needs or goals.
- **Get the Full Experience:** Work together to take advantage of the Regional Conferences. For example, if your school attends the NACA West Conference, and another school near yours attends the NACA Central Conference, compare notes beforehand to see if you have any mutual interests. That way, when either of you are attending your respective conferences, you can shop with each other in mind.
- **Bring New Ideas Forward:** Don't ever be afraid to discuss acts/services that you learned about through an associate with the other schools in your Boundriless CO-OP Network. You will be amazed what sorts of interests can be created or generated once you start talking with each other about an act or service. If the associate member involved has a web site – have your fellow network members check out available information on the act/service you are considering.
- **Spread the Word:** Check out the *NACA Membership Directory and Buyers Guide* that comes to your school early each fall. Call schools in your area, keeping in mind that you can look beyond just the schools in your state or specific NACA region. Use this publication to find out which schools are within reasonable travel distance from your school and then begin creating mutual interests. Also, be sure to check out the listing of associate members in the publication—it's comprehensive and will put you in touch with one of your most important programming resources.
- **Log On:** Go to the new “Online Tour Schedules” at [www.naca.org](http://www.naca.org) and see where the acts/services are in your area. Call your Boundriless CO-OP Network Schools and see if they would be interested in the same act/services as you.
- **Touch-tone It:** Associates are ready, willing and able to help you out with your programming needs, but don't wait for them to call you. Believe me—they would love to get your call!
- **Make Three Way Calls While You're At It:** Utilize conference calls so that you and other schools in your Boundriless CO-OP Network can all speak directly with an associate to work out performance dates together. Especially if you or one of your Boundriless CO-OP Network schools have worked with an associate before, call them to see what is available and in your area.
- **Do Lunch:** Programming board advisers can get together and “do lunch” or even breakfast to talk about what sorts of things are going on within your respective programming boards. Not only will you be able to network professionally, you can help save your school money in the process. In fact, you can expand on this concept by having neighboring programming boards gather for a joint retreat to discuss leadership issues, as well as develop mutual program calendars.

### **Get the Picture?**

Do you get the picture? Can you see the new ways in which your school can “color outside of the lines?” With higher education institutions everywhere counting the pennies, we all

need to do everything we can to save money in our programming budgets. So, don't be afraid to take that crayon and color outside of the lines—your creativity can generate savings!

### **About the Author**

**Laura Bestler-Wilcox** is assistant director of Student Activities at **Iowa State University**. Previously, she was director of Student Life at William Penn College (IA). In NACA, she currently serves on the Board of Directors. She has served as the National Cooperative Buying Coordinator, in addition to serving in that capacity for the former Upper Midwest Region. She also served as the Upper Midwest regional coordinator. In addition, she was a project manager for the Commission for Association Volunteer Development. She holds a bachelor's degree in broad area art from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and a master's degree in educational leadership from Grand Valley State University (MI).

\*\*\*outquotes follow\*\*\*

Now that NACA has new regional boundaries, we need to consider “coloring outside the lines” when it comes to Cooperative Buying.

Take advantage of the changes in NACA's regional structure to build your Boundriless CO-OP Network, looking past the lines that define geographical areas that you might otherwise think would limit your CO-OP decisions.