

PARANORMAL RESEARCH



ASSOCIATION OF BOSTON

Starting a Paranormal Research Team

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Article by: *Ian Murphy, Paranormal Research Association of Boston*

If you're reading this article, I can take it that you have seen the TV shows, read up on paranormal research and have decided that you want to do more research into this field.

In my time I have set up two teams; The Paranormal Research Association of Ireland (PRAI – www.praofi.org) and more recently The Paranormal Research Association of Boston (PRAB – www.praofb.org). Setting up a team is a lot more work than you are expecting, so I decided to write this document to give people who are thinking of setting up their own team an idea of what is involved in the process.

Teams pop up all the time; however a high percentage of them fail within their first year. This is generally due to bad planning, inability to manage the team and resources and inability to gain clients / their clients trust.

It is my hope that this document is used by those looking to start their own team, or even those that wish to re-structure their existing team to maximize their potential.

Section 1: Planning

An old adage is “Fail to plan, plan to fail”. And it is very true in this field. If you are looking to create a professional association, then you need to plan every step. This, of course, takes a lot of time, but the more time you spend planning, the fewer problems you will initially have to resolve. A well planned association will start smoothly and run smoothly.

Section 1.1: State your direction

There are three main ways a team can function. They are Scientific Based, Psychic / Spiritualist Based and a combination of both.

Both the PRAI and the PRAB are scientific based associations. This is the only system I have real experience in, and therefore the rest of this document will deal with this system. If you want to create a Psychic / Spiritualist based system, this is not the document for you as we only touch on the subject. For those looking to create a combination association, this document may help you in the scientific section

Section 1.2: Research

There are numerous websites out there that can give you good information about current trends and theories in paranormal research. Don't fall into the trap of reading just one source. Read articles from multiple sections. Both the PRAI and PRAB have educational resources on their sites. Another fantastic resource is International Paranormal Investigators (<http://www.international-paranormal-investigators.net/>)

Section 1.3: Take your time

Remember this is no rush in starting your team. You may be very excited to start up, but try to avoid the trap of diving in headfirst. There will still be phenomena to investigate in a few months time when you are ready to start up.

Section 1.4: How to work

Before you take on team members, you have to know what your team is about first. A good way to do this is to write down your primary protocols. This document will be the guide by which your association is run. It should have your best practice approach to gathering and analyzing evidence. It should include other documents such as your privacy practice and other guidelines you see fit. Remember, your association will raise or fold by your adherence to your own guidelines. A good tip is to publish your guidelines on your website, so that clients can read them. This will give them assurance that you are a trustworthy association.

Section 2: Setting up your infrastructure

Without a well planned infrastructure, your team will not be able to collect, analyze or store their data efficiently. There are a number of ways to do this, but I recommend the centralised approach. I will go into this in greater detail later in this section.

Section 2.1: Maintaining Records

When you are serving your clients, you need to have documents that your team will be able to use to efficiently maintain records of your investigations. These should minimally include:

Section 2.1: Record of Investigation Request

This is the document that your client fills out or you take verbally from them. It should minimally include items such as their name, address, phenomena reported, ages and number of residences, directions, frequency of the occurrences and history of the location. This can be electronic or on paper

Section 2.2: Record of Investigation Readings

This is the document that keeps track of the readings you take while on your active investigation. It should include time, EMF, temperature, relative humidity and any other readings you take on the night. It should also have a field for comments and the investigator who took the readings. This can be electronic or on paper.

Section 2.3: Report of Investigation

This is the report of the investigation that you completed. It should hold the readings, analysis of sound and video whether there were anomalies or not. This report should be printed and given to the client when you report to them on your findings. If you are debunking an occurrence, it should have the steps you took to replicate or explain it. It should be a detailed report to show your clients what is happening and why. Remember they called you in looking for help. This can be electronic for your records and on paper for your clients.

Section 2.2: Storing Data

The most important part of data gathering is the ability to store and access it. This is usually achieved electronically; however a filing cabinet may also be used. Using a computer based approach is definitely preferable as although the initial cost is higher than paper, it's long term costs are relatively low and the benefits are insurmountable.

For example, in the PRAB we gather the data on site in our Video Collection and Data Storage Center. Usually onsite, data is burnt to DVD and distributed to the team members so they can analyse the data at home. Once the VCDSC returns home, the data is uploaded to the PRAB's Storage Area Network for archival purposes. This keeps an un-edited copy for referral at a later date.

Section 2.2.1: Non-Centralized Approach

Using the non-centralised approach, the data is usually held on word and excel files, and distributed to the team mainly by e-mail. This system is generally used when you do not have the option of a centralised database. The pitfall of this method is that several versions of the cases can be throughout your team, meaning you are not sure if your entire team is using the most up to date information.

Section 2.2.2: Centralized Approach

The centralized approach uses an online database program to store your data. This approach is favoured by teams as all members have the most up to date information. Information can also be added by members not on site, such as reports on uploaded data and everyone sees the data live.

There are several ways to do this, but my favoured approach is using software called PCMS, the Paranormal Client Management System. This software is free to non-profit associations and can be downloaded from the PRAI in Europe and the PRAB in the US. You can read more information on it on either website.

Section 2.3: Contacting your Association

If your team cannot be contacted, then you will not get any clients. There are a number of ways in which you can be contacted. Be it E-Filing, phone, fax or E-mail.

Section 2.3.1: E-Filing

E-Filing, meaning Electronic Filing, is a hassle free way to send your investigation request to us here in the Paranormal Research Association of Boston. It is an initiative that has been used and proven by many businesses and government agencies in an attempt to save the client time and hassle in receiving the services they require.

Section 2.3.2: Phone or Fax

Many people are more comfortable with sending their request through the phone or by fax. This is very simple to achieve. Either put your phone /fax number on your website / business cards or if you wish you can use a service that provides a phone or fax line. This method means you are contactable 24 hours a day. When you set up your phone number with an on-line service, then you are e-mailed a copy of your fax or voice message for you to respond to.

Section 2.3.3: E-mail

This is pretty self explanatory: One tip is to use your domain (more on this later) for your e-mail. A client will feel more comfortable sending an e-mail to, for example, ian@proafb.org (there proafb.org is your domain) than ian5588@hotmail.com or any other free e-mail account. Remember, the image you present is key. Also setting up an auto reply on your investigation request address to let clients know you received the request is helpful.

Section 3: Your online presence

Having a professional website is key in these technological times. It provides your clients a chance to “meet you” before they actually do. It also give the clients a conduit to contact you and to display your protocols, work and research.

Section 3.1: Your Domain

Your domain name is very important. It should be memorable and professional. When you are choosing hosting providers, you should do your research on them thoroughly. Try to find one with unlimited bandwidth and storage space. Also one that provides SQL databases and other server side features is a bonus.

Section 3.2: Look and Feel

Your website should look clean, crisp and professional. It is generally the first interaction your client has with your association. When you think about it, every day when you make a choice on who to order products off, where to go and what to do when you see their websites.

You do not need to know how to write in HTML / FLASH etc make a good website. There are many content management programs available that will write your website for you, leaving you more time to serve your clients.

Section 3.3: Social Networking Sites

Facebook, MySpace, Twitter etc are good ways to keep in touch with the community. With these sites you can keep your followers etc up to date on your research and any announcements you wish to make.

These are good promotional tools, however you should not use them as your primary website. As mentioned in sections 3.1 and 3.2 they do not convey the professional image that you may want.

Section 3.4: Filing an Investigation Request

The website should have details on how to file an investigation request and how to get in contact with you.

Section 3.5: Resources

Your website should have a number of resources available to your clients. Theses should include your protocols, any public investigations and any other general information you want to communicate to your clients. This can and should include any research or documents you have written along with Client Information Sheets.

Section 4: Equipment

Once you have decided to go down the scientific route, you will need to gather your equipment. You are best to write a list of when you need and try to budget this into your spending for the start-up. Remember, you can have the best equipment, but it is no use if you do not know how to use it or why to use it. Before purchasing equipment, research it's use, the reason it's used and theories on how to best use it.

Section 4.1: Some Good Equipment to Purchase



Eyes and Ears

Paranormal researchers have more tools and equipment at their disposal than ever before but perhaps the most useful and important tools are our senses. Eyes, Ears and gut instinct are our primary instruments far more sensitive than the best microphone, higher resolution than the most elaborate camera. Of course like everything there are limits and deficiencies which is where our technology helps us but if you are serious about paranormal investigation these are your most important tools.



EMF Meters

Electro Magnetic Field Meters also called Gauss meters are designed to detect and display a reading of the EMF in the area. The standard normal reading is about 1.0 milligauss, however these meters are extremely sensitive to interference from electrical equipment and items such as cell phones so caution must be used when taking readings with an EMF meter. Some believe that a paranormal entity may affect the ambient EMF in an area either by causing a change in the reading as a manifestation is attempted or by emitting an EMF field of it's own.

Our use of EMF meters are to detect fluctuations in the normal EMF field to attempt to theorize EMF being a reason for the perceived disturbances.



Hand Held Imaging Systems

In our investigations we capture many images using a variety of different cameras these include still images shot in both digital and 35 mm film cameras using standard, low light and infrared sensitive film. We have found that digital cameras are far more likely to pick up photographic anomalies and there is much debate as to whether these are side effects of the CCD technology or evidence that CCD technology is more sensitive to paranormal anomalies. We also shoot a lot of video in an attempt to capture a paranormal occurrence and also to document our work. We use digital and Hi8 Camcorders and also static night vision cameras connected to digital video recorders



Audio Recorders

Audio Recording is fairly standard kit for paranormal investigators as is the technique of attempting to capture E.V.P or Electronic Voice Phenomena. We use standard analogue Dictaphones and tapes in addition digital audio recorders which generate audio files which can be easily downloaded onto a computer and analyzed. The E.V.P Phenomena is believed to be the voices or sounds of spirit entities collected by electronic recorders.



Night Vision

Traditionally, spirits are usually seen in the dark. Theories in this range in them being so faint we cannot see them in normal light, to them being on a different resonance field to what we can normally see. To aid us see as much as we can in real time, we use night vision systems to view a dark area in near perfect light



Multi System Detectors

These detectors are used to locate high ranges of EMF, high A/C current and metal. We look for these readings as they could be increasing the output of EMF, and contributing to the phenomena.



Environmental Indicators

We employ a range of fairly standard handheld instruments to measure temperature, humidity, barometric pressure and air ion counts like EMF it is believed that these measurements can be affected by an entity drawing energy from the area in order to affect the physical environment or to otherwise manifest itself



Wireless Infra-Red Camera System

As we cannot be in every area at once, we deploy up to 4 static wireless cameras to areas with suspected activity. These wireless cameras send their image back for real-time monitoring and recording to the PRAB's Video Collection and Data Storage Center. Each are equipped with a parabolic microphone and can be quickly deployed to the areas with AC power or DC batteries to power them.



Video Collection and Data Storage Center

This is the central data collection and storage center for PRAB investigations. The VCSDC collects the data from all digital cameras, digital voice recorders, hand-held and wireless cameras that are active on the investigation site. It also records all four cameras in real-time and is also able to monitor the cameras. The cameras feed is time stamped for both efficient data analysis and to preserve the data's integrity.

Section 4.2: Where to Purchase

There is a very simple answer for this. Wherever you can! Whenever I am looking to add equipment, I look through on-line ads, local hardware stores and online auction sites to get the equipment I require for the association.

In a word, eBay is your new best friend!

Section 5: Getting Team Members

Now you see how far into the process you are before you are even looking for team members for your new association. At this stage, you may have been in the planning process for several months. But this is good, because you are properly planning your association before getting it up and running. Remember, you will be working closely with these team members and you want the best of the best for your association.

By this stage, you should have a domain ready to go, be knowledgeable of your equipment and the theories behind paranormal research. You don't know everything yet. In this field you learn every day. Ask any investigator that.

Section 5.1: Gathering Interested Parties

It is now time to add members to your association. You can do this in a number of ways. At this stage, you will be deciding how large your team is to be. We will go into this in more detail in section 5.3.

Section 5.1.1: People You Already Know

This is a great way to start an association. Starting with a group of friends is easier to manage initially and get your team up and running.

Section 5.1.2: Advertising Openings

Your first place to advertise your openings is through your domain and website, also through social networking sites. Now you see why this step is after you have everything in place. Other good places to look are online forums and sites similar to Craigslist.

Section 5.2: The Interview Process

Section 5.2.1: Reading The Applications

Once you have gathered your potential members, you should carefully examine the forms they have sent you. Look through what they think are their best qualities and think to yourself “what could they bring to my association”. From this, create a short-list of applicants who you wish to interview.

Section 5.2.2: Interviewing Applicants

Once you have selected the people you wish to meet from the short-list of applicants, arrange a time that is convenient to both you and the applicant. Choose a location such as a coffee shop where you can talk to them. Give them a chance to ask questions, and answer them to the best of your ability.

The interview should be for both you and the applicant. You should tell them exactly what the association does, how you achieve this, and why. You should make sure the applicant will fit into your association and that it is the right choice for both parties.

Avoid making any rash decisions. When the interview is over, thank the applicant for their time and effort, and tell them that you will contact them shortly with the results.

Section 5.3: Big Team or Small Team

Before you accept everyone that applies, you want to know how large your team is to be. When you are doing this, you want to take into account the two viewpoints.

Section 5.3.1: Small Team

Advantages: A smaller team is easier to manage. It is easier to train and keep in constant contact with. You get to know your team better, and you generally become close with your team.

Disadvantages: You may not have enough members with availability to cover a client request.

Section 5.3.2: Large Team

Advantages: A larger team means you have a larger pool of personnel to pull from if you require them for an investigation.

Disadvantages: The members may feel neglected if others are asked to an investigation ahead of them; The team is harder to manage and train.

Section 5.4: Team Structure

Your team should have a structure to it. It should take into account training and accountability. Teams with a set structure generally work well, as everybody knows what to do and what is expected of them. I will go more into the structure in 5.5.

Section 5.4: Training

You should have a concise training schedule for your team. They should be fully trained before attending an investigation with a client, and should be versed in the use of the equipment. You should also have on-going training and continuous education where you and your team can get together and discuss new techniques and theories.

Section 5.5: Advancement

Just like in your day job, the ability to advance in the association is very important to your team members and should be important to you. You should have a structured advancement program, with goals and requirements. This gives your team members a goal to reach.

The structure of the PRAB and requirements are:

Level 1 Trainee

- An ability and willingness to learn
- Analytical mindset
- Rational / Critical thinking ability
- Some working knowledge of paranormal terms and definitions
- Excellent people skills An ability to take on new tasks and work under direction of the core team

Level 2 Trainee (usually after 3 months)

- Competency with paranormal research equipment use and why we use them
- Developing leadership skills while still working under core team guidance
- A good working knowledge of paranormal terms and definitions
- Demonstrated good rational / critical thinking ability
- Good communication within the team, answering e-mails etc.
- Good public speaking skills
- Ability to set up and break down kit
- Ability to analyse data in a timely manner and provide reports
- Showing competency in research skills

Level 3 Trainee (Usually 6-9 months)

- Excellent public speaking skills
- Ability to set up and break down kit
- Ability to analyse data in a timely manner and provide reports
- Excellent knowledge of equipment use and reasons we use it
- Has led a small team
- May have started a research project / submitted an article
- Excellent team communication and mixing with the team
- Still showing a good interest in paranormal investigation
- Demonstrated ability to interview clients effectively
- Adhered to all PRAI Protocols with no major disciplinary action on file

Core Team Member (12-18 months)

- Ability to train others
- Usually assigned to or leading an organisational unit (Research, Technical, AV etc)
- Mixed well with the group and continues to develop that relationship
- Excellent debunking skills
- Ability to set up and break down equipment efficiently
- Ability to analyse data in a timely manner and provide reports
- Keeps up to date with equipment and theories
- Can take ownership of a client's case

Organisational Unit Leaders

- Assigned by a joint vote of the Lead Investigator and Deputy Lead Investigator.
- These OU leads can be AV Analysis, Technical Management, PR, Legal etc. Only core team members with an established track record can be put forward for OU Lead.

Deputy Lead and Lead Investigators

Deputy Lead Investigator is picked solely by the Lead Investigator. Also the Lead Investigator must choose his own replacement when stepping down.

Keeps abreast of new techniques and theories and decimates to the team Keeps the team up to date Micro-manages the OU Leads and reads and replies to reports from the OU Leads Usually has published documents on paranormal theory and are the public face of the PRAB Researches and finds new locations to investigate Arranges all team meetings

Section 6: Conclusion

In conclusion, I hope this document gave you some helpful information and will aid you in the set up of your own association.

If there is a request of it, in the future I may write a document on how to run the team. Remember, this document is just a short introduction to setting up your own association, however I think if you follow the examples above, you should make a strong team.

If you require and further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me on:

ian@proafb.org

Ian Murphy,
Lead Investigator
Paranormal Research Association of Boston
www.proafb.org