



NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION OF MPOs PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

August 22, 2024

Virtual

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

MEETING NOTES

Participating

- BMTS - Leigh McCullen
- DCTC - Emily Dozier
- DCTC – Tara Grogan
- DCTC - Mark Debald
- GBNRTC – Angelica Gonzalez
- GTC – Lori Maher
- NYMTC - Stephanie Brooks
- NYMTC – Rossana Weitekamp
- WJCTC – Jennifer Docteur
- Planning4Places – Kathy Ember

1. Introductions

Lori Maher summarized the agenda for today’s meeting. Meeting notes were approved for the June 17, 2024 meeting with a typo correction.

2. Presentation: Mastering the Media Interview

- Rossana Weitekamp started her presentation with an overview of media relations. She recommended having a well-curated media contact list and stressed the importance of knowing reporters and keeping in regular contact with them. Rossana recommended searching for new contacts (including podcasts) and using Google Alerts for keywords to find out reporters who are covering your area. She recommended using media database resources if budget is available such as Cision and Muckrack.com. Cision has a database of reporters which is broken down by geographic locations, key words, circulation numbers for their stories, links to their social media pages, etc. Rossana recommended following comments on their stories and on social media.
- She recommended tailoring your pitch to reporters – keeping it simple and using plain language. The pitch should be easy to skim and no more than a page. She also recommended suggesting the headline for the article.
- For the pitch, you can offer an expert interview, and she advised not sending pitches late in the day or on Friday. You can follow-up via phone call. Pitches can be tailored to a recent story by the reporter.
- Lori Maher asked about the pitch terminology and is used to using the press release. Rossana Weitekamp stated that a pitch letter is different than a press release – it is more geared towards landing an interview.
- Rossana notes nothing is off the record since they hear the information. She stressed that saying “no comment” implies hiding information. She suggests giving a response about why you can’t comment. For preparation, she recommends anticipating controversial questions, writing out a response, and practicing the delivery. Another tip

is standing up during phone interviews. Also, it is important to keep it positive (avoiding bad mouthing).

- For TV interviews, Rossana recommends wearing solid colors, lean forward towards the camera, look at the interviewer, and smile. Key messages should be bullet pointed and ready. She noted that you control the interview, and you should circle back to key messages you bullet pointed.
- Rossana discussed targeted and curveball interviews. One strategy is to transition from a subject that you would rather not focus on and circling back to the topic you would like to discuss.
- Crisis communications include the 5 "C"s – Concern, Commitment, Competency, Clarity, and Confidence. It's important for key stakeholders to stay informed. Strategies include having the legal team review external communication, using real-time alerts, summaries, and ways to get feedback. There should be a post-crisis review process.
- Rossana will share the presentation with the group.
- Lori Maher has used a strategy where she writes up the top 3 points and sometimes hands them to the reporter. She commented that it seems like reporters are just emailing now – can you talk about that? Her experience with eclipse planning was mostly via email. Rossana noted that emailing allows you to get your message out but you don't get the human contact and know what they are thinking so she recommended phone conversations.
- Angelica Gonzalez asked about setting up relationships with the reporter – what is the best way to develop those relationships? Rossana Weitekamp suggested taking a look at recent stories and comment on them and saw something like, "we can offer information about this... if you would like to speak to our Executive Director, we would be happy to help." She also suggests following the reporters on social media.
- Stephanie Brooks asked that this may be different per agent what about talking to reporters on social media. Rossana Weitekamp stated that reporter questions should be sent to Public Information Officer, and they typically coordinate with the Executive Director.
- Lori Maher asked about whether MPOs share their accomplishments - do other MPOs focus on generating media coverage? Rossana Weitekamp stated that NYMTC does so many studies that it is important to promote and to receive public input.
- Emily Dozier noted that because DCTC is hosted through county planning, our stories have to go through County Executive's office, so we do not always get a lot of messages out and they can't use social media. Rossana Weitekamp suggested pitch letters, which may not have to get approved (unlike press releases). She suggested writing a pitch letter and then point to information you are trying to get out. Emily noted that they don't have any established newspaper. Mostly online news that is localized.

3. MPO Public Notices Brainstorm

Lori Maher asked about MPO Public Notices. Stephanie Brooks noted that NYMTC is moving to an online visual platform to broaden reach beyond quarterly newsletters sent via email. Stephanie can report on this at a later meeting.

4. Plain Language: Make it Clear Examples

Lori Maher shared an example, and the group provided thoughts on how to rephrase to make the language clearer.

5. Other Topics

- Training
 - Kathy Ember shared that the RFQ submissions were just received, and 4 consultant firms submitted proposals. A review Committee made up of the Co-Chairs and members of the Executive Committee will be reviewing proposals next week.

6. High Five/Share a Tip

- Lori Maher asked if anyone has some High Fives/Share a Tip. Emily Dozier has some change in administrations in the area and DCTC met with some of the new administrators. It has been helpful to have face time and explain what the MPOs do.
- Lori Maher shared there were no AV issues at the Board meeting.
- Lori Maher also shared that Susan Charland published "Public Engagement Made Easy." Lori recommends this book.

7. Next Steps

- Lori Maher asked for topics for the next meeting. Emily Dozier shared that DCTC is putting an RFP for their coordinated plan. DCTC is looking for consultant support for outreach – they are trying to get a deeper understanding of underserved transit needs. Emily Dozier can report back at another meeting. DCTC is also starting a Safety Action Plan and will have fair amount of public outreach including pop-ups, stakeholder interviews, workshops.
- The next meeting will be held on October 24th on Zoom.
- Lori Maher encouraged the Working Group to share ideas with the group.