



Communications Managers/PIOs Peer Session November 1, 2018

Notes

Communications Manager/PIO Peer Session coordinators:

[Caitlin Fitzwater](#), Director of Public Affairs, California Arts Council

[Rebecca Moore](#), Senior Program Director, Marketing & Communications, North Carolina Arts Council

Introductions and Ice Breaker

Approximately 20 state arts agency PIOs and communications managers introduced themselves and shared an accomplishment and a struggle they've dealt with over the past year. It was a good way for PIOs to understand each others' successes and challenges.

Introduction to National Endowment for the Arts Director of Strategic Communications and Public Affairs, Helen Aguirre Ferré

Helen shared her background and current responsibilities and mentioned that the Arts Endowment is working on a new logo. She said that she is eager to work with state arts agencies.

Working with the Press

Victoria Hutter, assistant director – press, National Endowment for the Arts, provided an overview of strategies and tips for [working with the media](#).

Addressing Racial Equity in Public Communications

Caitlin Fitzwater, director of public affairs for the California Arts Council, shared tools and best practices for addressing equity in public communications, sourced from the California Arts Council's participation in the [Government Alliance on Race and Equity](#) (part of [Race Forward](#)).

Caitlin shared that many California agencies are in a year-long training on race equity. She listed several reasons to emphasize race equity, noting that it can't be addressed in communications if it is not being addressed in the agency as a whole.

She shared these three keys to fostering race equity in your agency's internal and external operations:

- Normalize
- Organize
- Operationalize

Caitlin offered [tools and links](#) that may be useful for organizations at any point in their racial equity work, starting with building humility and competency, then moving to access and connecting, and then to planning and assessment.

Communications Planning and Evaluation

Rebecca Moore, senior program director, Marketing, North Carolina Arts Council, shared techniques for effectively planning and evaluating communications efforts. She noted that her team plans every three months. This frequent planning:

- helps closely track how often they work on communications for various program areas (along with more major announcements),
- helps program staff to think ahead, and
- helps focus on things that matter the most.

She suggested digital tools to help with planning:

[Slack](#)—an open editing platform

[Adobe Spark](#)—to create graphics and visuals

[Grammarly](#)—a grammar checker

Rebecca asked about other PIOs' approach to planning:

- In Vermont, a production schedule shared at biweekly staff meetings lets staff know what is in the pipeline. Comms staff works out how to draft and distribute messages.
- The National Endowment for the Arts organizes comms by project. Other departments provide content in advance. Right-sizing each effort depends on the message and the audience.
- Multipart project plans are created in Washington, including, for example, pre-event messaging and event blasts.

A discussion about evaluating communications plans brought to the surface the tools [Meltwater](#) and [Coverage Book](#).

Rebecca encouraged PIOs to use NASAA's PIO listserv. To subscribe, send an e-mail to NASAA Communications Manager [Sue Struve](#). To post once subscribed, send an e-mail to NASAACOM@LISTS.NASAA-ARTS.ORG.

* * *

After the session, participant Charles Baldwin, program officer for Mass[achusetts] Cultural Council's Universal Participation Initiative, sent along a couple of resources that he had mentioned.

- Free video captioning software from the National Center for Accessible Media, from WGBH, "a great way to begin thinking about communications access (covered by a number of government agencies)": CADET at NCAM <http://ncamftp.wgbh.org/cadet/>
- A webinar that addresses alt text for photos (descriptive text that appears on a visually impaired website visitor's screen reader), "another great practice that is an effective means of access": <https://www.levelaccess.com/resources/quick-tips-writing-meaningful-alt-text-even-youre-not-writer/>