

2018 Summary of Communication Protocol & Technology Tools

In February 2016, the Council Communications Group (CCG) met for their first in-person meeting of the committee to facilitate collaboration between agencies and Fishery Management Councils, provide ideas of how to better increase public participation in the Council process, and utilize existing technology and systems to continue to be transparent in the decision-making process. The [report](#) from that meeting is attached to the CCG's agenda.

At this meeting in May 2018, we will continue to share our best practices and collaborate on ideas for improving the fishery management council communications process by sharing valuable feedback on what's worked and what hasn't for each of the Councils. This can only stand to help each Council as they make decisions to refine their individual communication processes and priorities.

Prior to this meeting, each of the Councils' CCG members were sent a questionnaire regarding communication protocol types, as well as a spreadsheet to update details on electronics, media and broadcasting (aka Appendix 1 and Tech Update). All those documents are provided in the electronic Agenda and the results are summarized as follows:

Digital Platforms/Technology Tools

As was noted in 2016, all Councils have migrated to digital production, presentation, and distribution of information. The platforms and software vary and have likely changed some over the past couple years. Below is a tally of what the Councils are using; many use more than one app depending on their needs:

Email

- 4 Outlook
- 3 Thunderbird/Gmail
- 1 Yahoo

E-Distribution

- 3 Constant Contact
- 2 Mailchimp
- 1 Vertical Response
- 1 iContact

Calendar

- 5 Outlook (4 internal; 1 external)
- 4 Web Calendars (Basic Event)
- 3 Google (1 internal; 1 external; 1 both)
- 1 None

Media Outlets

- 6 n/a
- 2 Stove Boat, ENN World Wire

File Sharing

- 6 Dropbox
- 6 Google Docs; Google Drive
- 3 SharePoint; ShareFile
- 3 SecuriSync; OneDrive; Box.net
- 2 FTP

Website

- 5 WordPress
- 3 GoDaddy
- 3 Squarespace

Broadcasting

- 4 Gotomeeting
- 2 Adobe Connect
- 1 Webex
- 1 Google Hangout

Pre-Meeting

Meeting Announcements: All Councils use email marketing applications to announce Council meetings and agendas, and some send more than one (i.e. save the date, agenda, reminder). Several Councils also use Facebook and Twitter to get the word out. The Councils have email lists ranging from 800 (NPFMC) up to 4100 (GMFMC) recipients; and the NEFMC and MAFMC use regular mail in addition to email for 800-1500 recipients.

The GMFMC, NEFMC and MAFMC, also maintain mailing lists that are topic- or fishery-specific for Advisory body notices that are sent either electronic or regular mail.

Briefing Binders: NEFMC mails their briefing binder to all Council members the week before the meeting, and MAFMC mails them to about half their Council members. SAFMC, GMFMC, NPFMC and PFMC all provide their briefing binders ahead of the meeting online through varied platforms (e.g., website, FTP server, Dropbox, Google Docs, Granicus Agenda, etc.).

Document Distribution: All Councils use emails, weblinks, or shared drive systems to distribute documents with their Council members and the public, and some Councils also notify their members when these documents have been posted.

It appears that most Councils are actively working toward using less paper for meetings; PFMC and NPFMC discourage paper copies in general. However, all Councils have some handouts during the meeting (e.g., motions) and usually provide a reference copy of the briefing binder for the public. Some Councils have more concern about reaching the non tech-savvy stakeholders involved than other Councils.

Public Comment: All Councils have public comment deadlines varying from 3-6 days of the start of the meeting and allow public comment electronically. A few Councils allow public comment via regular and email. Councils have the public comments posted online before the meeting.

In-Meeting

While all Councils broadcast the Council meetings, the MAFMC also broadcasts the SSC, and the SAFMC broadcasts the AP. They are all listen-only mode. The majority use either GoToMeeting Webinar or Adobe Connect and at least three Councils use their own dedicated Ethernet line for broadcasting. ALL Councils use hotel wifi for the public attendees.

PFMC and NPFMC have their own office near the hotel meeting room with copier/computer/printer not on internet. Other Councils use the hotel business center or have print/copy capability near their meeting room.

Of special note: PFMC is unique in that their *Secretariat office* has a server setup and tied to their staff only for mapping the printer, file access, dropbox, etc. Staff has their own hotspot. They also have a *Lobby PC* connected to 24" TV that broadcasts the meeting in the hall which is informative and cuts down on meeting disruptions. During breaks it displays a *Council Break Slide* with agenda status, updates and a ticker tape of "Go Green" and other meeting information (wifi, password; Twitter and Facebook accounts).

ALL Councils provide some paper copies of materials at for the Council and public; a couple Councils have been able to reduce the quantity as the public seems to be adjusting to “paperless” and there aren’t as many requests. NEFMC and SAFMC provide paper copies to all who request during the meeting and NEFMC and GMFMC also provide materials on jump drives.

There are a few Councils who post documents and decisions in real time, but the actual number was unclear from the responses. The PFMC and NPFMC post draft motions as they arise in real time.

Public Comment: Most of the Councils have a dedicated portion of the agenda for general public comment not associated with an agenda item. The PFMC and NPFMC have public comment periods for each agenda item. The MAFMC allows public comment on motions.

Post-Meeting

All Councils publish a summary of decisions a few days after the Council meeting in various forms; many prepare press releases, others put out newsletters, technical decision documents, story maps, and motions. The Councils use varied methods for distribution; website, Twitter, Facebook, email.

Motions: The NPFMC posts final motions as soon as the amendments and changes are incorporated, within a day or two following the end of the meeting.

Press releases: Most Councils regularly distribute press releases, though some only for specific major decisions. Distribution is wide via, blogposts, Facebook, Twitter, media email lists. The NPFMC does not do press releases.

Storage/Access: All Councils store meeting materials are on their servers which are accessible internally. Most Councils also have meeting materials available publicly through their websites, including audio files and index. NEFMC audio is available upon request. PFMC uses a searchable database called Document Locator which is replicated to their website for public access. The NPFMC uses Granicus database (also accessible to the public), prior to that it was all stored on our server with many items available through our website.

Minutes: All Councils require approval of minutes at the following meeting before publishing to their website. The PFMC produces a detailed “Meeting Record,” NPFMC produces the record of Council motions and amendments only, others have verbatim transcripts.

Of special interest: NPFMC has contracted development of a new Agenda Management System where all our meetings information will be stored on our own server and made publicly available and searchable. It will follow the structure of the new e-commenting portal which we developed and have used since February 2018.

PFMC and NPFMC have follow-up teleconference meetings within 3-5 days with NMFS staff to coordinate assignments from the meeting.

Areas to Improve

The prevailing theme of importance to the Councils is **outreach to their stakeholders** and the staff resources to manage that. How do the Councils provide quality outreach to inform and engage a wide variety of stakeholders, including the targeted audience, while also not leaving behind the non tech-savvy audience? We may wish to explore the effectiveness of varied ways to engage our interested parties:

- Ways to increase social media presence, and guidance on social media
- Maintaining effective email distribution lists
- Web/video conferencing, and taking public comment/questions via web conference
- Podcasts and educational videos
- Translating documents into plain English and Spanish
- Making public comment easier to submit and categorize
- Audio databases that are defined by agenda item and searchable by keyword
- Filesystems that are organized and intuitive

Other items of common interest are:

- Public comment – improve procedures for commenting (e-portal); electronic sign-up and eCommenting
- Electronic voting
- Minutes preparation – timely, accurate, succinct & reader friendly w/minimal demands on staff

Of special interest: MAFMC underwent major external review of their operations (awaiting final report). They are also creating a “best fishing practices” website to recommend practices that are scientifically proven.