



# Port of Vancouver USA

AAPA 2019 COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS PROGRAM

## ***Port of Vancouver 2018 Public Tours Program***

Classification: Community/Educational Outreach

Category 2



## **Summary**

As a member of the greater Vancouver, Washington, community for over 100 years, the Port of Vancouver USA is committed to creating opportunity and connections right here at home.

One of the more fun, informative and engaging ways we fulfill this commitment is through our public tour program. For more than 15 years, we have welcomed the public to the port for free, guided bus tours, during which we provide a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the history and day-to-day-operations of the port.

The port operates five marine terminals, four of which are within a secure area that require a Transportation Worker Identification Credential to access. Because of this requirement by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Coast Guard, the only way for the general public to see the port in action is through our guided tours.

Beginning in April and ending in August each year, the port offers ten public tours. Our tours are enthusiastically embraced by the community and they fill up quickly. In 2018, more than 400 community and port district residents toured our marine, rail and industrial operations.

The port tours are one of the most popular offerings at the port, with the most frequent comment being, "I had no idea how much was happening at the Port of Vancouver!"

### **1. Specific communications challenges or opportunities**

#### **Challenges:**

As mentioned earlier, the port is a secured facility, so the important work taking place on our rail lines, berths and terminals is not readily visible to the general public. Most people attending the tours (by a show of hands) do not even know where the port is located. Most attendees cannot name imports/exports handled by the port and do not know what commodities are flowing up and down the Columbia Snake River System. The sheer size of the port makes it difficult to explain its myriad operations at a neighborhood meeting. The best and most effective way to explain the port is to have people come tour it with a knowledgeable guide.

Given limited staff time and the fact that the Port of Vancouver collects moderate property taxes, the tours focus on adult residents of the port district rather than school children, for example. This allows us to show district taxpayers the importance of the port and why the port is a good investment of their tax dollars.

Most tour guests are willing to give us 90 minutes of their time for a tour. Given that the Port of Vancouver is located along four miles of riverfront, seeing the entire port is not possible in that time frame, especially since a good portion of the tour includes viewing a PowerPoint presentation. Therefore, we concentrate on terminals 2 through 5, where the group is most likely to see ships and work in progress. In the PowerPoint presentation before each tour, we do discuss plans underway to transform Terminal 1 into a unique waterfront destination over the next five to twenty years.

The port does not charge to attend the tours. The External Affairs department budgets each year for the refreshments and tour buses needed for the program.

## Opportunities:

The public tour program allows us to directly impact 400 taxpayers a year (40 people on each of the ten tours) who get to see the port in person and ask questions of the port tour guide. A port commissioner also attends almost every tour, allowing an opportunity for attendees to ask them questions and learn the important role their commissioners play in port operations.

A presentation given before each tour touches on port history and leadership, imports and exports, the importance of the Columbia-Snake River System, the port's investment in critical rail infrastructure, where the port receives its revenue, jobs at the port, world trading partners, introduction to port tenants, environmental initiatives at the port and future plans.

The public tour program is one of the most effective ways to educate residents about the importance of the port and its 3,200 direct jobs, and explain why they should continue to support the port.



## **2. How does the communication used in this entry complement the organization's overall mission?**

The mission of the Port of Vancouver USA is to *provide economic benefit to our community through leadership, stewardship and partnership in marine, industrial and waterfront development*. In 2018, the port concluded an extensive process to update its Strategic Plan. The updated plan includes six operational values, one of which is community involvement. The plan further drills down to specific goals, one of which is "community." The community goal specifies staff should focus on: 1) strengthening community outreach and communication, and 2) building partnerships to advance and communicate shared goals.

The port has a five-person External Affairs department with one FTE overseeing community relations. The public tour program is a substantial part of the Community Relations Specialist's job. Port leadership supports the tours as an integral piece of educating the public about the importance of the port and the international trade and jobs associated with its operations. The public tours are one of the most effective ways the port can share its day-to-day operations with the public and demonstrate why they should care about the port and support it as one of the most important economic development engines

in Southwest Washington. The public tour program is one of the most important ways we can deliver on the community goals set forth in our Strategic Plan.

**3. What were the communications planning and programming components used for this entry? Describe the entry's goals or desired results; objectives and measurable milestones; primary and secondary audiences in order of importance**

**Goals**

The overarching goal of the port's public tour program is two-fold:

- To provide an up-close and personal look at the Port of Vancouver to those living and paying taxes in the port district, and;
- To create a sense of community, connection and goodwill among those attending a tour, with each participant leaving with a better understanding of the port and the important role it plays in job creation and economic development. Every person on the tour bus should feel that supporting the port is a good use of their tax dollars and understand that the region gets an excellent return on this investment through jobs, salaries, additional taxes generated, environmental initiatives, public amenities and more.

**Planning and Programming**

From the beginning of the tour program until 2015, the port conducted four public tours each summer. In 2013, the port hired a new Community Relations Specialist and in 2015 a new Chief of External Affairs. Both these staff members recognized the importance of the tours and saw how quickly the tour dates filled. In 2016 the number of tours was increased to eight, with many citizens still turned away or added to a wait list. In 2017, the number of tours was increased to ten, where it stands today.

It should be noted that various groups and organizations request tours from the port each year in addition to the public tours. Additional tours are conducted for groups ranging from Leadership Clark County to various senior living facilities, rail advocates, business associations and groups like Rotary.

One of the first things the new Community Relations Specialist did was to update and refresh the tour presentation to include information about the Columbia-Snake River System, a critical piece of Pacific Northwest marine infrastructure. Further revisions added port history, more information on imports and exports and a section on future projects, including the port's Terminal 1 waterfront redevelopment. The presentation is now updated annually to ensure the content is fresh and accurate.

**Objectives and Measurable Milestones**

We measure success of the tours in several ways:

- **Seats filled:** Having each tour filled to capacity with 40 participants. This was the case in 2018; every tour was full and we had a number of wait lists. In 2018 we scheduled an extra evening tour at the end of the tour season for those left on wait lists.
- **Positive feedback:** Each participant is given a comment card and they are asked to fill out the cards indicating what they liked about the tour or suggestions for improvement. The cards are

designed so they can also be mailed back to the port. In 2018 we received 26 comments and two that indicated they wanted to be added to port mailing lists. (A copy of each comment is attached to this entry.)

### **Audiences**

The primary audience for port tours is groups and individuals living in the port's taxing district (111 square miles with a population of about 313,000) who have never toured the port. By a show of hands at each tour, this is overwhelmingly the case. The tours do attract individuals who have toured in the past, but most come back hoping to see something new happening (autos being unloaded, grain ship loading) that was not taking place on the previous tour they attended. Secondary audiences are those who hear a good report about the tours from someone who did attend and subsequently call the port to sign up themselves.

- 4. What actions were taken and what communication outputs were employed? Explain strategies, specify tactics used, and detail implementation including timelines, staffing and any outsourcing used.**

### **Date/Times for Tours**

Tours are offered on various weekdays, times of the day, and weekends to offer something for everyone. Attendees can choose from noon hour (three tours), evening (four tours) and Saturday tours (three tours). Each tour is approximately 90 minutes long and includes a presentation and bus tour of port properties. For safety and efficiency, attendees remain on the bus for the port property tour.

### **Tour Schedule**

Tours are conducted according to the following schedule, which has worked extremely well:

- Tour guests meet at the port's main administrative office, where parking is free and we utilize our largest room – the commission meeting conference room – which also has necessary audio/visual equipment. Guests are greeted and directed to tables and chairs in the conference room where each person receives a port brochure, a comment card and a port pen.
- Guests help themselves to sandwiches, chips, cookies and a beverage.
- Samples of port commodities are passed around the room, including wood pulp, metal shred, a jar of copper concentrate and river dredge material (sand).
- When everyone is present, fed and seated, the presentation starts. It includes a video segment from Oregon Public Broadcasting on the challenges of crossing the Columbia River Bar, where the river meets the Pacific Ocean.
- After the presentation, guests board a school bus for a tour of terminals 2 through 5 with the guide and a port commissioner. In the months of July and August the port pays for touring buses with air conditioning because it can be very uncomfortable in a metal school bus in high heat.
- Upon arriving back at the port after the tour, guests are encouraged to fill out the comment card and hand it in or mail it back to the port. The card asks them what they liked or did not like about the tour and includes boxes they can check to be added to mailing lists for port publications.
- Guests are thanked by the tour guide and port commissioner for taking time to come learn more about the port.

## Promotion

No paid advertising is used to fill port tours. They are promoted by the following methods:

- Notices are emailed to approximately 2,200 people who have previously signed up for port notices and information. External Affairs maintains this contact information in various Mail Chimp lists.
- A news release is issued by External Affairs that is picked up by our local paper, *The Columbian*. The news release is also posted to the port's website.
- Information about the tours and dates/times is posted to the "Community" section of the port's website.
- External Affairs utilizes its social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) to announce tour dates and link back to more information on our website.
- Tour information is given to the City of Vancouver's Office of Neighborhoods. The Office of Neighborhoods produces a *Weekly Update* e-newsletter that goes out to 1,000 people, including neighborhood leaders, city staff and interested community members. It is also posted citywide through NextDoor to approximately 35,000 residents.
- Port commission meetings are broadcast live on local cable television. Each meeting contains information about port and neighborhood events and the tours are promoted at each meeting.

Those interested in taking a tour can sign up by email or by calling the port's main phone line. Administrative personnel record the names and numbers in each party into an Excel spreadsheet that is maintained in SharePoint. Once a tour is full, they will record names on a wait list which can be tapped if there are cancellations. Each person signing up receives a confirming email with information about where to show up for the tour, length of the tour, rules about photography (none is allowed) and reminder that photo ID is required to get on the port's terminal per U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Coast Guard rules.

## Staffing and budget

Two staff members from External Affairs are present at each tour. The Community Relations Specialist is present for each tour from beginning to end. Colleagues in External Affairs provide rotating assistance by serving as greeters, checking names off the sign-up sheet and cleaning the conference room after the tour group departs on the bus.

The Community Relations Specialist coordinates each tour with port Security so that an officer is present at each tour to check photo ID before guests are allowed to board the bus. The Community Relations Specialist also arranges the buses and coordinates food purchases with port administrative staff.

No overtime is used for any staff members or Security personnel.

## Budget

Six school buses and four coaches with air conditioning	\$3,450
Food and beverages for 10 tours	\$1,200
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$4,650</b>

Dividing the total by 400 guests shows that the port spends approximately \$12 per person. We feel this is money well spent in connecting with each citizen, introducing them to a port commissioner, and educating them about the port's value to them and our community.

**5. What were the communications outcomes from this entry and what evaluation methods were used to assess them? Describe any surveys or anecdotal audience feedback received. If possible, describe how this entry influenced target audience opinion, behaviors, attitudes or actions.**

As mentioned under "measurable milestones," we receive feedback about the tours through comment cards that we receive from tour attendees. We also receive verbal feedback from nearly all tour participants. Over and over they tell us how much they enjoy and appreciate the tours, how much knowledge they gain about the river system and how things move by river, road and rail. Many have never been so close to a grain ship, seen a grain car unloading or watched a giant mobile harbor crane in action. They marvel at the thousands of Subaru vehicles waiting to be transported east and have never seen what wood pulp looks like or driven next to wind blades that are 184 feet long.

Port tours remain one of the most impactful, engaging and rewarding ways we can reach residents in our port district. The port is strongly committed to the annual tour program and dedicates staff and resources to make sure each attendee has a memorable and meaningful experience. It would be hard to imagine the Port of Vancouver USA without a public tour program. The program has been so successful that it's been emulated in other ports across our region.

It is harder to quantify how the tours influence opinions, behaviors or attitudes about the port. It can only be said that nearly every person leaving a tour indicates they learned something new, and that they are very thankful for this free and informative look at the Port of Vancouver USA. Perhaps this tour attendee summed it up best in her comment: "We learned so much and saw a side to our community that was new to us." To the Port of Vancouver, that spells success.

Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\*

FIRST, I REALLY APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR THE PRESENTATION, MEET A COMMISSIONER, AND SEE THE OPERATIONS

SECOND, THE PRESENTER WAS INFORMED, WELL SPOKEN, PATIENT AND ENGAGING. THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

\*The port may use your comment(s) or photo for marketing purposes.

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Port of Vancouver USA

Tour 4/11

Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\*

This was my first port tour, Julie was wonderful, articulate, personable, organized, knowledgeable, engaged learning about the water filtration system, the flocking wetlands, the GREATIX and the Columbia mitigation bank. ~~It~~ It was fun to see all of it

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Port of Vancouver USA

Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\*

Best Tour I've been on!

Julie was very knowledgeable and enthusiastic! I learned so much and how the various aspects of the industry works together. I am also excited about the soon to open <sup>park + restaurant!</sup>

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*Sherry*

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Port of Vancouver USA

7.26.18

Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\*

Julie Rawls is awesome! Her tour of THE Port was fun, informative and left us with much more knowledge about the impact the Port has on our community.

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Port of Vancouver USA



**Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\***

*Thank you for a great breakfast  
and tour,  
Ann Stewart*

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*your 4/11*

**Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\***

*INFORMATIVE AND INSIGHTFUL  
PRESENTATIONS AND TOURS! THANKS  
TO JACIE FOR HER DECISION*

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**Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\***

*We were very impressed with the  
body that conducted the talk in the  
office and also the outdoor tour. She  
was "transparent" beyond all informed.*

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**Port of Vancouver USA  
3103 NW Lower River Road, Vancouver, WA 98660**

**Connect with us.**

If you'd like a response to your question or comment, or if you'd like to sign up to receive any of the port's electronic communications, please check all that apply and provide your contact information below. Thank you for your interest in the Port of Vancouver USA.

- Port Point of View (1x/mo.)
- Community Report (1x/yr.)
- Solsite (2x/yr.)
- Public Tour Notification (6x/yr.)

Please print clearly.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Place stamp here

*Please put an  
address on  
your building!  
Thanks!*

**Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\***

I HAVE A 4' OAK TREE IN A POST THAT  
I CAN DONATE TO THE MITIGATION BACK  
IF ACCEPTED. THE SQUARES PLANTED  
17 3-4 YR AGO !!

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Port of Vancouver USA

**Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\***

Do not have any questions as you  
covered it all  
my water a great job. See you  
again in about 2 years.  
Keep going

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**Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\***

Excellent event. Thanks for  
all the info.

*Jan E. Stearns*

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**Do you have a question or comment for us?  
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It is always exciting to learn how  
the Port is growing. The staff are  
always just wonderful & welcoming  
and job — many thanks.

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RECEIVED

05 2018



Port of Vancouver USA

**Do you have a question or comment for us?**  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\*

Great foll. lots of good information. we're better off having a touring port.

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**Do you have a question or comment for us?**  
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Great info! Great beer guides!  
Very well put together!

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**Do you have a question or comment for us?**

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EXCELLENT PRESENTATION  
GIVEN BY JULIE ON 7/11/18.  
Tomy P. Williams

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**Do you have a question or comment for us?**

PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\*

Thank you so much for opening to  
tour. We're very informative & so  
willing to share the great things  
happening at the Port. It was a  
great event.

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Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\*

Our tour guide Julie did a fabulous job. We learned so much and saw a side to our community that was new to us. Thank you! Mrs. Jolie

P.S. Our four teens liked too!

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Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\*

my friend, nice to attend the Port of Vancouver tour on Wednesday, June 1. The female speaker was excellent, just what I needed. She was knowledgeable, but she had a moderate tone & was expert about where she worked. The slide presentation was good overall. The room was also informative. The bus was very friendly & we were per- the bus was very friendly & we were per- the port may use your comment(s) or photo for marketing purposes.

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Do you have a question or comment for us?  
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Great tour!  
You were excellent!  
Great job.

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Do you have a question or comment for us?  
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It was VERY interesting!  
Thank you! to all involved.

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Tour 6/30

Do you have a question or comment for us?  
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Excellent tour, Learned so much, will  
recommend to others. Phil is an  
excellent tour guide!

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Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\*

Great!!

Keep up the positive

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Do you have a question or comment for us?  
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Great experience!  
Thank you!  
Holly & Mark

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Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS BELOW.\*

Thank you - very informative  
and interesting. Maybe try  
to get ~~longer~~ bus w/ longer seats  
for longer legs.

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Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS.

Very nice tour and very instructive. Helps us appreciate our local environment. Very personable tour leader. Thanks.

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 Port of Vancouver USA

Do you have a question or comment for us?  
PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS.

Took the tour with Julie 7/11/18  
Julie was great both informative with personal  
fun facts. Thanks so much

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