

AAPA

2019 Entry Category 1/Special Events

ENTRY SUMMARY

On December 12, 2018, the Ports of Indiana hosted a binational and multi-organizational event called the Great Lakes Seaway Partnership's Indiana State Capitol Day. Its goal was to introduce Great Lakes maritime leaders to Indiana's top business leaders and legislators to highlight the essential role of maritime commerce to the state's economy.

1. What are/were the entry's specific communications challenges or opportunities?

Locking in a date for Great Lakes Maritime partners to meet with the Governor of the State of Indiana, Eric Holcomb, was not determined until early November. The tyranny of time, then, was a bit of a challenge.

The Ports of Indiana had last hosted this kind of event three years prior and the directive was to make this 2018 assemblage more purposeful and successful.

Time management was paramount and support from event partners was critical. The Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) co-hosted the event in 2015. This organization quickly agreed to co-sign all invitations, provide space to host the morning meetings, have the Secretary of Commerce serve as a featured speaker at the luncheon and join the core group in a meeting with Governor Eric Holcomb. Additionally, we needed to find a centrally-located top-quality downtown Indianapolis restaurant for the luncheon within easy walking distance of the morning meetings *and* the Indiana Statehouse; offering a reasonable price *and* available for a mid-sized gathering - given this last-minute timeframe and given this was the time of year when companies book holiday luncheons throughout area restaurants and hotels. Fortunately, we did.

– Describe in specific and measurable terms the situation leading up to creation of this entry.

The Ports of Indiana had last hosted an event like this in 2015. The need for producing this event was predicated on the fact that there are many new legislators, a new governor, new state agency leaders, and a new CEO at the Ports of Indiana; all of whom should meet at one focused gathering to discuss issues of importance to the Great Lakes Seaway Partnership.

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1. What are/were the entry's specific communications challenges or opportunities?

– Briefly analyze the major internal and external factors that need to be addressed.

Happening (mostly) simultaneously:

- Setting goals and determining how we would identify success
- Drafting tight and meaningful agendas for each component of the event
- Identifying who would maintain contact with the governor's office
- Determining who should be invited and who needed to meet with whom and why
- Name tents or name tags and what kinds of banners/signage for which events
- Determining how to craft the invitation and from whom to issue it
- Managing rsvp's
- Setting a budget
- Locking down and advancing venues for dinner the night before, the next morning's meetings, the luncheon and the meeting with the governor
- Selecting what would be served at the luncheon and how to layout and dress the luncheon room, along with providing essential way-finding signage within the venue
- Finessing who would (and would not) be meeting with the governor
- Identifying and acquiring the technology for each program component
- How to manage handouts/takeaways at any point during this conference
- Finding parking in downtown Indianapolis
- Who approves tasks and decisions and is accountable for what and by when?
- Labor delegation
- Task timetable management
- Who develops and maintains a spreadsheet since, while not everyone was being invited to all events, some *were* invited to attend all events
- Who from the Ports of Indiana would attend these events
- Who would determine how to deprioritize other Ports other essential tasks since this had a contracted timetable for execution

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**2. How does the communication used in this entry complement the organization's overall mission?
– Explain the organization's overall mission and how it influenced creation of this entry.**

The mission of the Ports of Indiana is to develop and maintain a world-class port system that operates as an agile, strategically-driven, self-funded enterprise dedicated to growing Indiana's economy.

To accomplish this and to continue to function effectively as a multi-modal port authority, we must be able to have legislative understanding and support for creating, approving, funding and maintaining the infrastructure necessary to move the goods we all need for modern life.

Reaching state influencers and bringing them to the table to meet with maritime leaders to understand the role of maritime and logistics in the state's economy must be a priority. Developing and maintaining these relationships must be strategically handled and respectfully persistent.

Consequently, designing an event where information can be exchanged in a positive (non-crisis) environment is important in order to nurture friendly and honest conversations and create lasting relationships.

The Ports of Indiana is fortunate to have a positive association with government leaders who acknowledge our ports as economic engines. Despite having three very robust ports, two inland river ports on the Ohio and one on Lake Michigan, our ports remain something of a public mystery, partly because none are in generally visible areas.

Indiana has a citizen legislature which can turn over significantly with each election cycle, and being able to bring in influencers to meet with them in a friendly setting (it's the make-a-friend-before-you-need-a friend approach) has helped our ability to keep lawmakers and others apprised and accepting of maritime and logistics concerns, challenges, needs and wants.

It's vital to hear directly from those who can demystify our ports (and maritime in general). This is about making connections and conveying economic information via the approach of meeting people in small groups for non-crisis purposes; being able to have a cup of coffee or a nice meal with a maritime VIP or an influential lawmaker; and being able to shake hands with CEO's and share contact information. We believe not everything has to be a big 'splash'. Forward movement can be achieved through 'small wave' events like these.

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3. What were the communications planning and programming components used for this entry?

One primary planning component involved working closely with the Executive Director of the American Great Lakes Ports Association, who coordinated the schedules of the governor and the multiple Great Lakes attendees to determine best dates to meet with Indiana’s governor to ensure maximum attendance. Then we worked with the IEDC and conferred internally with Ports leadership on messaging in our invitations and for guidance on agenda development. Further, we worked directly with the governor’s Director of Communications to ensure clarity of purpose and maintained an open pipeline of communication during the event’s development, execution, and follow-up.

– Describe the entry’s goals or desired results.

The event’s primary goal was to connect Great Lakes maritime leaders with influential state legislators and state business, environmental, transportation and agricultural leaders and bring them all to the table to meet with Great Lakes officials who could speak about the importance of maritime commerce to the state, regional and national economies. Additionally, the goal was to receive the promise of support or, at the very least, create an opportunity to continue discussing the myriad ways to keep our ports robust. The aim was to, generally, illustrate and illuminate the importance of maritime commerce; to encourage and inform legislators and the governor the importance of infrastructure maintenance and development; and educate policy makers about the importance of a massive new \$1 billion navigation infrastructure project called the “Soo Locks.” While this infrastructure is physically located in Michigan, it is absolutely essential to Indiana.

(According to the Economic Impacts of Maritime Shipping in the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence Region: The Soo Locks supported 123,172 jobs in the U.S. and Canada and \$22.6 billion (Cdn\$ 29.3 billion) in economic activity. Also, in this report, and to underscore the significance of shipping to Indiana’s economy, the Great Lakes shoreline spans more than 4,800 miles in the United States, with only 45 miles of that in Indiana. With less than 1% of the shoreline, Indiana accounts for over half of the U.S. economic activity related to shipping on the Great Lakes).

– Describe the entry’s objectives and list specific, measurable milestones needed to reach its goals.

Objectives:

- To be able to sit down for an uninterrupted period of time with the Governor of Indiana, state legislators and business leaders and allow those who represent Great Lakes maritime organizations to explain the importance of maritime infrastructure and answer questions. This kind of one-on-one setting inspired detailed discussions and provided an expedient pathway for continued communications.
- To encourage social media outreach from the primary influencer who has a very large social media following – the governor.

Mission accomplished.

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3. What were the communications planning and programming components used for this entry?

- Email invitations to all parties involve

While the media was not invited to attend the conference sessions or the meeting with the governor, it was agreed that social media and a post-event news release would be warranted, particularly after the governor issued the statewide proclamation (see below*). Given our staffing, we relied on our maritime partners to take pictures and Tweet, and we would R/T.

- <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1DMNnTacgGGOwD5xXWMTBOLXuPmFetpoY>
- Programming components included, on one day, two morning sessions, a luncheon, and a meeting with the governor.

– Identify the entry’s primary and secondary audiences in order of importance.

1. Primary - Governor of Indiana (who can speak to many additional significant influencers, like members of Congress and our own Vice President of the United States, who is a former governor of Indiana).
2. Secondary - State lawmakers, business leaders and their essential staffs.

4. What actions were taken and what communication outputs were employed in this entry?

– Explain what strategies were developed to achieve success and why these strategies were chosen?

Chief among our strategies was to keep all communication focused, brief and clear. The people with whom we were dealing are very busy professionals and are always ‘juggling chainsaws’. Mid-December is busy anyway, and legislatively, Indiana state lawmakers are gearing up for the session beginning in January, which includes crafting and passing a biennial budget. We had to be very clear about our event and why their involvement was essential so each invitee would have little clutter and maximum clarity.

– Specify the tactics used (i.e., actions used to carry out your strategies).

All communications and outreach were devoid of non-essential information. Agendas were concise; meetings were held to their intended timetables; thought was given to each presentation and handouts were presented to each attendee in an easy-to-handle and non-bulky folder.

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4. What actions were taken and what communication outputs were employed in this entry?

– Detail the entry’s implementation plan by including timeline, staffing and outsourcing used.

Notification was received on November 6, 2018, that a meeting date had been set with the Governor.

That meeting date was December 12.

We had just five weeks to put this together.

For the Director of Communications and Strategic Initiatives and the Director of Government Affairs and Planning, all other responsibilities were de-prioritized to enable this event to be their sole focus. These two worked closely and either daily or almost daily with the American Great Lakes Ports Association, the IEDC and venue contacts to ensure the event was executed flawlessly.

5. What were the communications outcomes from this entry and what evaluation methods were used to assess them?

Email and telephone (low-tech, high touch) communications were used for all components of this event.

A marker of success was to track how many people had questions about this event or how many people responded with any level of indifference, potentially signaling confusion over the purpose.

Nary a single person questioned the purpose of this event. Beyond this, we had invitees who had to decline attendance for varying reasons asking if they could send a delegate to ensure they remained part of this ‘inner circle.’

– Describe any formal/ informal surveys used, or anecdotal audience feedback received, that helped in evaluating the success of this entry.

Attendees at the luncheon expressed appreciation for being invited and several asked if this would be an annual event.

– If possible, explain how this entry influenced target audience opinions, behaviors, attitudes or actions.

(*)Expectations for this event were met (even exceeded) when the Governor of the State of Indiana, Eric Holcomb, issued a statewide proclamation, declaring December 12, 2018, ‘Great Lakes Maritime Day,’ and tweeted photos from his meeting with the core team from his inner office.

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