

2016 Public Works Fellowship Capstone Report

Increasing Awareness and Value Provided Society by Municipal Public Works Departments through: Relationship Building, Audience Integration, And Tools for Promotion.

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2016 Public Works Fellows

Kristen Asher
Rich Burrows
Mark Erickson

Monica Heil
Dennis Luebbe
William Manchester

Chris Petree
Dan Ruiz
Dan Schluender

Wally Wysopal, Program Coordinator

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Background and Summary

The Minnesota Chapter of APWA in cooperation with the Center for Public Administration and Leadership at Hamline University created the Public Works Fellowship in response to the desire to further the leadership capacity of Public Works Professionals. The cohort consisted of nine Fellows and met over a seven month period.

The Fellows participated in a Capstone project to fulfill the program goal of ***making a contribution to the profession***. Two other program goals include ***self-reflection and organizational leadership***. The Capstone brings together the three areas of focus by requiring the Fellows to identify and then address a significant issue facing the Public Works profession.

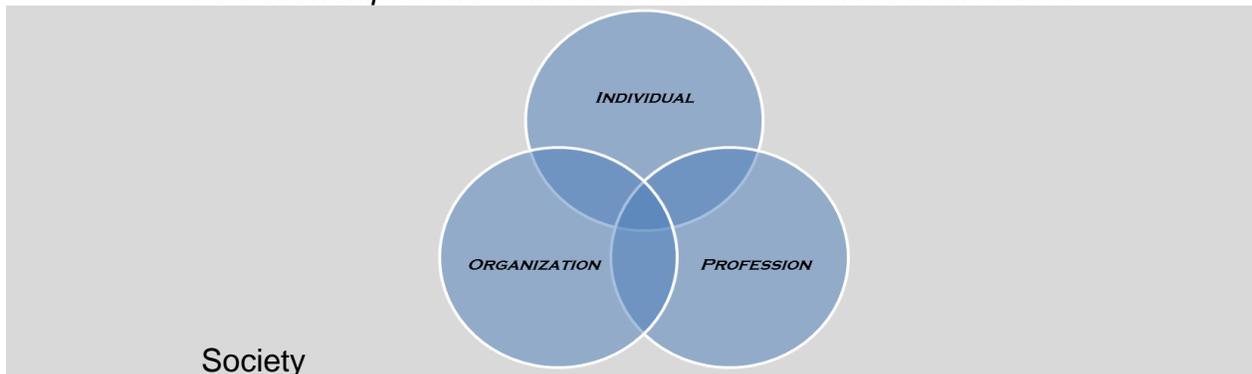
The Fellows chose the topic of ***increasing awareness and value provided society through municipal public works departments***. They formed work groups around three key areas of analysis which include:

1. Relationship Building
2. Tools for promotion
3. Audience Integration.

The Capstone provides a blueprint for further action by the Chapter. It is not intended to be a single solution. Instead of a silver bullet it provides a pathway intended to guide the Chapter towards a desired state. It serves as a seminal call to the profession for needed attention within the three key areas. It builds the case for *relationship building* outside the traditional avenues traveled by members. It frames the *audiences* important for future success and targets specific messages necessary to effectively reach them. Finally, it recommends *tools* needed to accomplish the job but moreover the tooling required of the members to competently meet the pending challenges.

It is the desire this Capstone will be used by Chapter Leadership to engage the entire membership in its cause. As such, the Fellows will have accomplished their goal of strengthening the profession they care for so much.

The Fellowship draws from three areas and resides in the middle



Statement of Problem

The lack of understanding of what Public Works does leads to a lack of appreciation for the Public Works function. The APWA attempts to define Public Works as *the combination of physical assets, management practices, policies, and personnel necessary for government to provide and sustain structures and services essential to the welfare and acceptable quality of life for its citizens (2016)*. As such, Public Works becomes the heartbeat of any city or county. What Public Works does becomes essential for the vitality of the local government. However, there is an apparent converse relationship between the importance of what Public Works does and societal awareness. The life-giving activities performed by Public Works seem to go unappreciated or at least unnoticed by the people served.

The Fellows acknowledged that in society there exists a general lack of appreciation for the services provided by Public Works until people suffer a breach of those services. This condition begins with a broad lack of understanding for what Public Works does. It was the unanimous agreement of the Fellows that people they serve don't know what public Works does until something goes wrong and they become inconvenienced by the fix. Street reconstruction delays commuters. A water main breaks and water is shut-off to businesses. The sewer backs up into a homeowner's basement. Traffic is snarled because of a downed signal. This conclusion is also supported by several large scale situations involving water supply (Flint, MI) and bridge failure (Minneapolis, MN).

The Profession is also culpable for it too cultivates a culture of non-appreciation by silently getting the job done. The Fellows described their departments as functioning this way for generations. It is not surprising then that the media does not follow Public Works very closely either. Stories of street reconstruction do not make the news as accomplishments but as problems to avoid. Finally the various ways cities and counties structure the Public Works function and the various intergovernmental responsibilities fuels this lack of clarity.

Statement of Purpose

To promote the positive value of municipal public works to society at large.

A key outcome for the fellows was to more fully integrate the profession into society. Therefore societal groups that derive benefit from the efforts of Public Works were identified. Anecdotally, the Fellows observed many of these groups (Suburban housewives, bikers, new urban dwellers, etc.) are unaware of the benefits derived by Public Works functions. It was also noted that other professions most notably Police and Fire possess strong cultural narratives which are missing in Public Works. The power of story and image are believed to be valuable aids for promoting the value of public works within society. The Fellows desire to construct such a narrative and to do so by focusing on specific societal groups. Key messages could be developed for a variety of groups such as Suburban moms, active semi retirees and teens. The overall effort would be supported by short universal messages. Buttressing the entire effort would be a membership possessing a heightened awareness to the need for increased

societal approval and willingness to go beyond simple slogans but to the higher-level of active engagement.

This approach provides significant value to the Profession particularly in the opportunities it presents for member participation. Other benefits arise from increased awareness include recruitment of new employees, increased public support of the profession, stronger support from elected officials and increased leverage for budgetary requests.

Statement of Findings

Building Relationships

The group responsible for identifying critical relationships for the Profession offers the following three categories for consideration. It is believed these three groups need to be called out by the Chapter for careful consideration as effective relationships with these groups will bear much fruit. The relationship with elected officials has always been important but is characterized by the Fellows as waning. The Fellows call for a revised relational approach that considers elected as partners and not limited to the approval process. The small but important group of disapprovers needs to be recognized as valuable contributors to the democratic process. They cannot be marginalized as discounted. The Business community needs to be acknowledged for their important role in the overall community and as significant revenue contributors and provider of jobs.

Elected Officials –

1. Provide Public Works hand out of general info to newly elected officials.
2. Develop relationships in professional and private setting.
3. Be available before/after meetings or for one-on-one meetings.
4. Build common ground/goals.
5. Understand their value system/what motivates them.
6. Build trust with honest/transparent communications.

Uncivil Minority-

1. Be available for onsite or office meeting, outreach required.
2. Set realistic expectations.
3. Take time to find out/listen if there is a hidden issue.
4. Seek to understand source of issue.
5. Provide facts, positivity rules.
6. Show empathy.
7. Treat fairly, be transparent.
8. Explain in layman's terms no engineering jargon.
9. Build trust with honest/transparent communications.

Business Community –

1. Periodically meet to find review their vision of community priorities.
2. See their perceived acceptable Level of Service.
3. Value added – existing investment made.
4. Review sustainability
5. Be involved outside of Engineering
6. Build trust with honest/transparent communications.

Tools for Promotion

The group responsible for identifying tools for promotion identified five outcomes for the tools. They are:

1. Unify the Voice of Public Works in Minnesota
2. Build the Work Force by attracting and developing Public Works Professionals
3. Get the word out on what Public Works does
4. Openness to what we do
5. Clarify which government agency does what.

The group then identified four action steps for consideration and implementation.

Action Items:

1. Utilize APWA Resources

- a. *Shaping the World of Public Works* (Toolkit)
 - i. Great for career fairs, STEM Events, etc.
 - ii. Acquire a sample toolkit
 - iii. Create a APWA-MN Chapter Policy for distributing toolkit
 - iv. Contact National to inquire about less expensive means by which to reproduce some of the toolkit materials

2. Use 2016 PWX as a Platform for Promotion

- a. Press Release
- b. Build relationships with local media
- c. Become a “go to” resource for the media

3. Focus on National Public Works Week

- a. Create easily accessible APWA-MN Chapter Toolkit
 - i. Toolkit to include: Sample Proclamations, Media, Activities, etc.

4. Public Service Announcements

- a. Social Media
 - i. Look to create a “presence” that currently does not exist

Audience Integration

The group responsible for identifying the appropriate audiences took a fresh approach to the challenge. In addition to the typical groups specific user groups were identified. The groups were then analyzed based on the message that needs to be communicated, the location of it taking place, and the reason for the communication. Lastly, a message is suggested. The group also specifies the need for a branding message to be created that can be universally applied. This message would be supported by specific talking points or elevator speeches as the occasion calls for. Focus groups are also recommended to help develop the content.

The following chart integrates the audiences across the various methodologies.

Audience Integration

Who	What	Where/When	Why	What do we tell them?
Future PW Staff - Youth	Raise interest and awareness and importance of PW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Colleges, counselors, high schools - Social media - Summer is most active – target audience w/ physical examples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competitive market for future employees - To maintain quality of life and safety - To develop innovative ways to manage infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why PW is important - Benefits of a career in PW - New ideas and methods improve quality of life
Public Officials	Building relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LMC conferences - Take them on tours within your jurisdiction/agency - Facetime orientation with new elected officials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote/showcase PW more - Build relationships - Help them understand PW and consequences - Regain public trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PW 101 - What are the needs/trade offs - What are the hurdles - Where we want to be
Chamber/Businesses Tourism	*focus groups	Events – webcasts Reliability of services, water, sewer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To find out what is important to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “who knew” what PW did
Suburban Moms/Parents	Raising awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECFE - Grocery stores - Health clubs - TV - PTO - Facebook Community Pages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educate the masses - Regain public trust - Promote safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PW 101 - How Public Works keeps their family safe - Increasing the ‘efficiency/effectiveness’ of essential services so they don’t need to worry.
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building relationships - Explaining need 	As opportunities arise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raise public awareness - Build relationships - Regain public trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negotiate stories - Effectively communicate
Senior Citizens	Raise interest and awareness and importance of PW	Senior Centers High-rises Public works academy	-Develop supporters	- Value of product

Who	What	Where/When	Why	What do we tell them?
Other City Departments Other Public Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build relationships - Idea sharing - Partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PW conferences - Annual meetings - As opportunities arise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cross-pollinate ideas - Compare/contrast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benefits of collaborative effort
Non-Profits	Relationships/support	Case by case	Network/branding	Emphasize minimal impact and maximum efficiency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers • Churches • Volunteer groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We are resources 	Social media	-Builds community	-Include us in your plans

Conclusions

The Capstone identifies a pathway for improving the image of Public Works and in turn increases the potential for citizen appreciation for what it does. The five specific outcomes that will benefit the Profession include:

1. Unify the Voice of Public Works in Minnesota
2. Build the Work Force by attracting and developing Public Works Professionals
3. Get the word out on what Public Works does
4. Openness to what we do
5. Clarify which government agency does what.

In order to successfully implement the Capstone the Chapter will need to organize itself around the outcome. It is suggested the Chapter leadership utilize its existing Committee structure to accomplish the implementation effort where evident and create a task force for those areas where it is not.

Recommendation

It is recommended the Chapter Leadership accept the Capstone report for consideration of implementation.

