Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Communications Guidelines

GULF OF MEXICO
Fishery Management Council

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Use of Council Products Guidelines

About these Guidelines

The following guidelines provide guidance to staff, Council members, and the public regarding the use of images, documents, creative works, and contracted products. Because the Council is federally funded, most products developed by the Council are public in nature and copyright-free. However, some restrictions do apply. In cases when permission must be sought to use a Council product, the Executive Director, Deputy Director, Administrative Officer, or Public Information may authorize use of Council products. The following is a list of exceptions to the opensource use of Council products:

Logo

The Council logo may not be used without permission to endorse products, ideas, campaigns, or the work of other organizations. However, use of Council products containing the logo is permitted as a way to credit the organization for its works.

Images/Video

Images produced by the Council itself are public in nature and copyright-free. However, not all images used by the Council are government work. For example, photographs that are purchased or shared by members of the public may not be used freely. In many cases, content may be protected intellectual property used by the Council with the rights holder's permission so, the public should contact the Council before using images or video published by the Council to ensure that they are Council property.[1]

Council Documents/Products

Documents and creative works produced by the Council itself are public in nature and copyright-free. Documents produced by the Council should be cited appropriately and incorporated in the list of references with a hyperlink to the Gulf Council website.

Contracted Products

Documents and deliverables prepared for the Council by independent contractors are Council property and should be cited as such. Every publication of material based on or developed by a contractor must contain specific verbiage as required by the terms of the Council's funding award and as stated within the work contract. In general, if publications occur after completed work, the contractor should provide a draft to the Executive Director and Council chair for review prior to publishing.

[1] DOC. 2020. Department of Commerce financial assistance standard terms and conditions. DOC, Washington D.C. 53 pp.

Data Citations

Publications that are based on data or products developed by, or funded by the Council, must cite the data using unambiguous labels. Additionally, data and products derived from such data that are used to support conclusions of a peer-reviewed publication must be made available in a form that permits verification and reproducibility of all results.[2]

[2] NOAA. 2019. Special award conditions, grant# NA20NMF4410007. NOAA, Silver Spring, Maryland. 3 pp.

Media Guidelines

About these Guidelines

The following guidelines provide guidance to staff and Council members who represent the Gulf Council when responding to media inquiries and coordinating other media relations efforts.

All Council members may freely represent their own interests on Council-related topics to the media but should make it clear that they are not representing the Council as a whole. Council members are not obligated to speak with the media and may refer questions to the Council's Public Information Officer (PIO). Under no circumstances, should staff express personal opinions on fishery issues to the media.

Responding to Media Inquiries

Media coverage is a primary means of building understanding and increasing awareness of Council efforts and processes. The PIO is primarily responsible for coordinating responses to inquiries, issuing agency statements, and providing information to external news media about the work, responsibilities, and activities of the Council.

All media inquiries received by Council Staff should be directed to the PIO for a coordinated response. In many cases, media responses require added expertise and perspective of the Council Executive Director, Deputy Director, and/or technical staff. The PIO will develop responses using their expertise and seek review and approval from leadership and/or the appropriate technical staff.

However, many media requests require a response on an immediate or very abbreviated timeline. In cases when an immediate response is necessary, the PIO, Executive Director, Deputy Director, Council Chairman, or Council Vice Chairman may respond as spokespersons on behalf of the Council without review. Other staff and Council members may temporarily serve as spokespersons with permission from the Council Chair, Executive Director, or PIO.

While representing the Council, it is imperative that the spokesperson ensure that messaging is both accurate and reflects the unified Council voice. With Council members representing varying interests and holding different perspectives or opinions on Council issues, it is especially important for Council-based messaging to be consistent and reflective of Council votes. For issues that have not yet been finalized, messaging should reflect the nuance of the multiple perspectives housed on the Council.

<u>Quotes</u>

News outlets frequently ask for direct quotes from appropriate representatives. The Council Chairman will serve as the primary source for Council-related quotes. The PIO and appropriate Council staff members are available to help develop quotes and responses on behalf of the Chairman. In cases where the Council Chair is unavailable to provide a quote, the appropriate Council Committee Chair, Executive Director or Deputy Director can be used as a substitute. Generally, staff should try to avoid being quoted.

<u>Photo/Video/Audio Recording</u>

Publicly noticed meetings such as Council and Advisory Panel meetings are, open to the public, and may be freely recorded and photographed if the method of recording is reasonable and non- disruptive to the orderly conduct of the meeting. People wishing to record a meeting, or parts of a meeting, should contact the Executive Director, Deputy Director, or Public Information Officer to explain the purpose of the work and to arrange appropriate accommodations to ensure that the meeting is not disrupted. Individuals or media doing the recording are responsible for obtaining the appropriate releases from participants at the meeting.

Press Release Guidelines

About these Guidelines

The following guidelines are created for Council staff and the public to outline Council procedures for writing, editing, publishing, and forwarding press releases. Press releases sent out through our Council listserv are an integral part of the Council's communication strategy and serve as the core method for communicating meeting notices, regulation updates, and other Council related business.

Press Release Types and Triggers

The Council produces and shares a variety of press releases. Some are triggered automatically and some are produced or shared at the discretion of Council staff. The following is an outline of the different types of press releases, including information on what triggers their production.

Meeting Notices

Public meetings held by the Council are subject to public meeting notice requirements and are published in a Federal Register Notice (FRN). Meeting notice press releases are triggered by the publication of the FRN for each meeting. Ideally, a meeting notice press release will be published the day the FRN publishes. Meeting notices should be reviewed by the technical staff member responsible for the meeting.

Council Meeting Summaries

Immediately following each Council Meeting, staff will produce and publish a press release summarizing the work completed during the meeting. Ideally, this summary will be published early in the week following a Council meeting. Each section of the Council meeting summary should be reviewed by the appropriate technical staff member. The entire release should be reviewed by the Executive Director, Deputy Director, and Lead Fishery Biologist. An administrative staff member should review the final draft before it's published.

Regulatory Changes

There are two types of regulatory changes that are published as press releases. First, when the Council takes final action on a fishery management issue, staff will issue a press release outlining the final decisions immediately. This final action press release should be reviewed by the relevant technical staff member and approved by either the Executive or Deputy Director. An administrative staff member should review the final draft before it's published. Second, NOAA Fisheries will publish notices when new regulations are implemented. Council staff will review and share those press releases across the Council communication network. Note, the Council does not share NOAA press releases on NOAA related comment periods. This has proven to be confusing to our constituency since notice of Final Action by the Council precedes these rule-making comment periods. The Council staff may, at their discretion, choose to send press release notices about scheduled fishery closures or openings.

Other Council Business
Something’s Fishy opportunities, Request for Proposals, Job Postings, Advisory Panel/Scientific and Statistical Committee solicitation and other press releases related to Council business are developed by the Public Information Officer with assistance from the appropriate staff member.

NOAA and Other Agency Press Releases
The Council automatically forwards NOAA Fisheries Bulletins that pertain to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council business and managed species. The Council can also forward other agency press releases when they are germane to Council business or impact Council stakeholders. In such cases, the Council Executive Director, Deputy Director, or the Public Information Officer should approve the forwarding of other agency press releases. When possible, the forwarded releases should contain the appropriate agency branding including headers, logos, and the general aesthetic of the original release. Each forwarded press release will contain a caveat indicating that the release is forwarded to the Council contacts as a courtesy.

Press Release Editing

Each press release written by Council staff should be reviewed by the appropriate technical staff member. Once the release is put in the listserv service (Constant Contact), one administrative staff member should review each release before it is published. Council Executive and/or Deputy Directors should review all Council Meeting Summary Press Releases and any other appropriate releases.

Press Release Publishing

Press releases should be published both through the Council’s listserv service (Constant Contact) and on the Council’s webpage under Hot Topics and the appropriate year.

Press Release Amplification

Press releases related to regulatory changes and Council meeting summaries should be amplified on social media immediately. Press releases related to other Council business should be amplified on social media and/or shared with Council Advisory Panel, Scientific and Statistical Committee, and Council meeting email lists at the discretion of the Public Information Officer and the Executive and Deputy Directors. Information contained in Council meeting notices should be shared on social media one week prior to each meeting.

Press Release Archiving

Each press release should be saved on the H drive. At the end of each year, press releases on the website should be archived in the appropriate year.

Public Comment Guidelines

About these Guidelines

The following guidelines are created for Council staff and the public to outline Council procedures for collecting, storing, and communicating public comments. Consideration of public comment is an integral part of the Council process; thus, staff is responsible for ensuring that public comments are handled properly. We strive to provide easy opportunities to provide public comment and prioritize the effective synthesis of comments for Council use in the decision-making process.

Written Comment Collection

Written public comment is welcome at any time and on any topic. In addition to gathering general comments, we endeavor to collect issue-specific comments throughout the development of amendments to our Fisheries Management Plans. We also collect targeted comments on additional issues including: fish stock status, Executive Orders and coral grant related activities. We ask commenters to submit their name, email address, location, and association with the fishery along with each comment so we can gain a better understanding of each perspective. However, those who wish to remain anonymous may do so by simply choosing not to fill in those data fields on the online comment forms or by requesting that comments sent via email remain anonymous.

General Comments

Written general comments can be submitted by email (to gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org), by written correspondence (to 4107 W. Spruce St. Suite 200, Tampa, FL 33607), or through our General Comment web form located on the Council website (www.gulfcouncil.org). Comments received via email or written correspondence will be uploaded to the appropriate comment repository. Comments received online will automatically populate in the comment repository. Comments submitted by Tuesday prior to each Council meeting will be included in the "other fisheries issues' portion of the public comment agenda item in the Council briefing materials.

Comments Specific to a Council Action

Upon initiation of an amendment or framework action, staff will create a unique comment form and link it to the "Amendments Under Development" webpage. The simplest way to do this is to copy another Google Form in the Gulf Council Google Drive folder: Amendments - Implemented, Under Dev, On Hold, Gen Comments > Under Development. The title will need to be updated with the appropriate document name and a new spreadsheet will need to be created to capture responses. These links will then need to be added to the appropriate "Submit Comment" and "Read

Comments" on the "Amendments Under Development" page. Staff will search comments in the general comment repository from the year prior to initiation of the action and add those legacy comments to the newly created issue-specific comment repository. Issue specific comments can still be submitted via email and written correspondence and staff will sort them into the appropriate issue-specific comment repository. Issue-specific comments will be collected until 5:00 PM eastern time on the Tuesday before the Council meeting when final action on the issue is scheduled to take place. Staff will summarize all comments received, add the summary and full text comments to the Council briefing materials, and present them to the appropriate Council Committee before final action is taken. After final action is taken on a document, staff will disable the comment form and the comments will be added to the document itself.

.pdf Comments and Comments Received on Multiple Issues
If a letter/PDF document comes through, it is saved in Google Drive > Public Comment PDF Letters. Then the link that is created is added as the "comment" in the appropriate comment sheet. If it covers multiple issues the comment/link is entered multiple times over the appropriate comment forms.

Comment Campaigns/Form Letters
When form letters or comment campaigns with identical comments are received, staff will upload one copy of the letter to the appropriate comment repository and keep a running list of the name, location, and affiliation of each person who submitted a letter.

Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Comments
Written comments received in reference to SSC agenda items will be added to the SSC meeting materials under the public testimony agenda item. They are also added to the 'General Comment' repository.

Solicitation of Comments

Written comments on fishery issues are welcome at any time and can be submitted by mail, email, or using our online comment forms. Oral testimony is also welcome during virtual and in-person scoping, public hearing, AP, SSC, Technical Committee, and Council meetings. When the Council initiates scoping or public hearing for an action, it will also provide guidance to staff on how to solicit comments. Typically, formal scoping is bypassed for framework actions and comments are solicited on the public hearing draft of a framework using all written comment mechanisms and through the production of a tutorial video. Full plan amendments can undergo formal scoping, but it is not a requirement. During public hearing for an amendment, staff typically prepares a tutorial video and solicits comments through a virtual hearing, in-person hearing, or a combination of both. Additionally, the Council may choose to solicit comments during scoping or public hearings in other ways. Below is an outline of each method used to solicit comment:

Video
A short video tutorial explaining proposed management changes and the actions and alternatives available. Videos should contain information on how to submit written comments. Videos will be posted on the Council website and on social media (primarily YouTube).

Webinars
Hearings conducted by webinar should begin with a presentation on the proposed management changes and the actions and alternatives available. A question and answer session should follow before public testimony is taken. A combination of communication staff, technical staff, Council members, and supporting administrative staff should be present. A staff member will write a summary report of each meeting for inclusion in Council meeting briefing materials before final action. Webinar hearings should be announced via FRN, press release, and on social media.

In-Person Meetings
In-person hearings can be held across the Gulf or in select geographic areas. Council members and staff will work together to choose appropriate locations. In-person hearings should begin with a presentation on the proposed management changes and the actions and alternatives available. A question and answer session should follow before public testimony is taken. A combination of communication staff, technical staff, Council members, and supporting administrative staff should be present. A staff member will write a summary report of each meeting for inclusion in Council meeting briefing materials before final action. In-person hearings should be announced via FRN, press release, and on social media. Public comment is also taken during Council meetings, SSC meetings, Technical Committee meetings, and AP meetings.

Blog Posts
A *Council Meeting Preview* blog article is published in advance of each Council meeting. This article explains any final action items on the agenda and provides educational materials and mechanisms for submitting public comment. When few or no final action items are scheduled, the blog article will focus on highlighting some of the other important issues that will be addressed. When appropriate, links to educational materials and comment forms for those issues are provided.

Social Media
The Council uses social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube) to cross promote opportunities to submit public comment. When

a press release, video, blog article, or public meeting is available, it is advertised using the appropriate social media channels.

Press Release
The Council will publish a press release to solicit public comment when an FRN publishes to announce meetings. Press releases are also used to solicit comment for non-traditional comment solicitation efforts (e.g. solicitation of comments on an Executive Order or a Fisherman's Feedback effort).

Website
All amendment-specific public comment opportunities and a general comment form are available on the "Amendments Under Development" webpage. Additionally, issues approved for public hearings are published on the Council homepage. Public hearing meetings, scoping meetings, and all other public meetings that collect public comment are posted on the online calendar and on the appropriate meeting webpage.

Direct Mailing
The Council can send direct mailings soliciting comments to federal commercial and/or charter/headboat permit holders using the address data provided by the federal permit database.

Fish Rules Push
The Council can use the Fish Rules platform to engage anglers by creating a banner advertisement and/or adding a pop-up advertisement. Such adds can target an audience in the recreational app based on species or fishing location. In the commercial app, adds can target users based on permit.

Comment Deadlines

Generally, comments should be submitted no later than 5:00 PM eastern time on the Tuesday preceding each Council meeting. This allows staff time to sort and summarize comments for inclusion into Council briefing materials. Comments submitted after the Council meeting deadline and before final action is taken will still be included in the direct comment links for the Council to view; however, they will not be summarized and presented directly to the Council during its meeting. Comments that are submitted on a specific document after the Council takes final action will be included in the general comment repository.

Written comments submitted for AP, Technical Committee, SSC, and other relevant meetings will be added to the meeting materials as they're received. Since such comments are not summarized, there are no deadlines for inclusion as long as comments are submitted before the conclusion of the relevant meeting.

Relaying Written Comments to the Council

All written comments received, including comments submitted through online comment forms, are collected in the appropriate comment repository and publicly displayed on www.gulfcouncil.org in-real-time. Public comments received via email are added to the appropriate comment repository. Staff does not distribute public comment directly to Council members through email. Staff does not quantify the number of comments received in support or against an action.

General Comment

General public comments received between each Council meeting (and no later than 5:00 PM eastern time on the Tuesday before each Council meeting begins) are included under the public testimony section of the Council briefing materials.

Amendment Specific Comment

All Amendment specific comments for actions scheduled for final action, received before 5:00 PM eastern time on the Tuesday before each Council meeting, are summarized, included in the Council meeting briefing materials, and presented to the appropriate Council Committee before final action is taken. Comments received on framework action items are included in the Council Meeting briefing materials as full text comments.

Public Testimony

Public testimony is taken during most meetings of the Council and Council advisory bodies. In-person testimony is always taken and virtual testimony will be taken at the discretion of the Council Chairman. Each commenter is allowed to testify once during each public testimony session. Commenters must be present during the testimony session to present their own testimony. Written comment can be submitted if an individual is unable to testify on their own behalf. At the discretion of the chair, each commenter will be given a specified time interval to speak (usually three-minutes) and additional time may not be yielded to other speakers. Dignitaries who wish to give testimony will be given priority and are not subject to time limits.

Council meetings

In-Person

Commenters must register to give testimony at the kiosk near the meeting room entrance on the day of public testimony. Staff is available to assist with registration. A list of commenters will be projected in the meeting room.

Virtual

Virtual commenters must register to give virtual testimony on the link provided on the meetings materials webpage. Registration to provide virtual testimony must be completed one hour prior to the start of the public testimony session. Virtual commenters must log-in to the webinar under the same name used to register to provide comment.

Public hearing and scoping meetings

In-Person
Commenters must register to give testimony upon arrival to the meeting. Staff is available to assist with registration. Testimony will be taken in the order of sign-up.

Virtual
Virtual public hearing and scoping meetings will be held separately from in-person meetings. During virtual meetings, commenters will be prompted to 'raise their hand' to indicate their desire to testify. Staff will call-on each commenter, unmute their line, and allow them to provide testimony.

Relaying public hearing and scoping meetings to Council
Each individual comment received a during public hearing or scoping meetings is summarized in a public hearing summary along with a summary of written comments received on the issue. The public hearing summary is included in the Council's briefing materials and presented to the Council before final action is taken on the issue.

Advisory Panel, Scientific and Statistical Committee, Technical Committee and other meetings

In -Person
Upon the initiation of public comment, members of the audience will be asked to raise their hand to indicate their desire to speak. The meeting Chairman will call on each commenter to provide testimony.

Virtual
Commenters will be prompted to 'raise their hand' to indicate their desire to comment. The meeting Chairman will call on each commenter and allow them to provide testimony.

Relaying other meeting comment to Council
Comments given during Advisory Panel, Scientific and Statistical Committee, Technical Committee and other meetings will be shared with the Council.

Record Keeping

Archiving
At the end of the calendar year, that year's general comments will be moved off the general comments sheet and into its own sheet. Amendments - Implemented, Under Dev, On Hold, Gen > General > Year.

When a document becomes final, staff will create a PDF of the final list of comments and save it in the transmittal folder on the H drive for that document. The "Submit Comments" link is removed from the website and the "Read Comments" link stays on the implemented page. In Google Drive, the Form is deleted (as no further comments need to be captured) and the Sheet is moved from Amendments - Implemented, Under Dev, On Hold, Gen Comments > Under Dev to Implemented under the appropriate species.

Fishing Regulations Hosting Guidelines

About These Guidelines

The following guidelines provide guidance to staff who are responsible for communicating federal fishing regulations in the Gulf of Mexico. These guidelines also provide Council members and the public with information about the Councils process and rationale for hosting regulations.

The Council chooses to host regulations on a variety of different platforms because it is an effective way to foster understanding, educate, enhance compliance, and build goodwill among stakeholders. Additionally, the Council process itself relies upon a clear understanding of the current regulations. This allows the Council to monitor the efficacy of current fishery management measures and ensure that proposed changes build upon current regulations.

Regulations summaries drive a majority of stakeholder engagement. The regulations pages of the Council website have continuously been the most visited pages on the site. Additionally, the Fish Rules applications account for more constituent contacts than any other Council communication vehicle, by an order of magnitude.

The official, legal regulations are housed in the Codified Federal Register, but they are hard to navigate and are not displayed in a user-friendly, plain language format. While Council communications have no legal force or effect, it is imperative that Council-hosted regulations are both timely and accurate. As the most popular means of bringing constituents to Council communications related material, hosting regulations represents many people’s first and/or only impression of the Council. So, regulations products must be precise and professional because they reflect upon the organization itself.

Maintaining Regulations

Council hosted regulations summaries should be easily accessible and understandable. In the absence of any other comprehensive summary of federal regulations in the Gulf of Mexico, this is essential to educating and promoting compliance across the fisheries. Since, hosting accurate regulations is vital, the Council staff works in conjunction with state and federal partners to ensure that federal regulations summary products are accurately representative of the law. As such, the Council’s Public Information Officer (PIO) serves as the primary person responsible for cooperating with partner agencies and maintaining regulations across platforms. The Outreach Specialist and Communications Assistant serve as back up when the PIO is unavailable.

Annual Updates

Some regulations need to be reset or updated in the new year. For example, many catch limits change annually or seasons must be reset for a fishery subject to in-season quota closure in a given year. The PIO will set aside time in the last week of each calendar year to ensure that regulations are reset for the new year across platforms.

À La Carte Updates

Regulations change throughout the year as fishery management measures are implemented or quota closures go into effect. Regulation change notices almost exclusively publish in the Federal Register and via the NOAA Fishery Bulletin. The PIO is responsible for tracking Federal Register Notices (FRNs) and Fishery Bulletins and making regulation updates across Council platforms as soon as practicable. The Communications Assistant and Outreach Specialist serve as backups to make regulations updates in absence of the PIO.

Hosting Platforms

The Council currently hosts regulations on its website and on third-party mobile applications. Apart from creating print materials, considerations for hosting regulations on new platforms must first be approved by the Council.

Council Website

The Council website regulations pages are consistently the most visited pages on the site. The PIO is responsible for maintaining regulations on the website with the Communications Assistant serving as backup. Regulations are hosted in three different ways on the website:

- Regulations Tables
- Species Specific Pages
- Recreational Season Calendar

Fish Rules

The Council is in a contractual relationship with Fish Rules to host regulations on the Fish Rules recreational and commercial applications. The PIO is responsible for maintaining regulations on Fish Rules apps with the Outreach Specialist serving as a backup.

Print Materials

While the Council does not produce regular regulation brochures, it has printed regulations in different forms (i.e. water-proof pocket guides) for targeted outreach purposes. Any such efforts should be approved by the Council Executive Director and guided by the PIO.

Regulations Interpretations

While fishing regulations and products developed to explain them aim to be precise, it is not uncommon for regulations to be ambiguous and leave room for interpretation. In such cases, when stakeholders contact the Council staff for clarification on federal regulations, staff should contact NOAA General Counsel for guidance before responding. When stakeholders contact Council staff for clarification on state regulations, staff should contact the state's Council representative for guidance before responding. Staff should always avoid sharing their personal understanding and should instead rely on official interpretations.

Social Media Guidelines

About these Guidelines

The following guidelines are created for staff who represent the Gulf Council on social media. Social media is a function of the communications staff, thus all communications that occur on Gulf Council social media accounts should be representative of the Council and should reflect the unified voice and supporting rationale that is conveyed by the Council as a whole. Social media posts and comments should not reflect personal opinions of staff or individual Council members.

Starting Accounts

Social media is a tool that can be used to enhance the Council's broader communication strategy and should be used to push content to constituents in an effort to inform and engage them in the Council process.
While active use of social media platforms should be considered strategically, the Council staff should start place-holder accounts on all relevant social media platforms to preempt the development of imposter accounts. Such accounts may not be actively used and a list of all accounts with login information should be stored on the shared internal database.

The following considerations should be made before a new account is actively used:

- Who is the primary user of this platform? Is the intended audience appropriate?
- What is the anticipated return on investment for this platform?
- Is content creation burdensome?
- Do you have the resources and commitment necessary to run the account well?

Once you've determined that using another social media platform is appropriate, contact leadership staff for approval.

Posting Content

Social media is often a first opportunity to engage constituents. Its broad reach, relatively unintimidating format, and increasing popularity allows for primary contact to stakeholders who might not otherwise engage in the Council process. With this in mind, content should be as simple and engaging as possible. Posts should contain an appropriate photo or related visually appealing content.

Examples of appropriate posts include:

- Positive educational content (Fish Fact Friday, Marine Map Monday)
- Meeting notices (including links to meeting materials or webinar registrations)

- Informational content (meeting summaries, meeting previews, regulatory changes, fishing season notifications, blog articles, and solicitations for public comment)

Photo Practices
Use of photographic content to engage social media users is a cornerstone of social media success. Any photographs used should be property of the Gulf Council, open source, or posted with the owner's permission. Appropriate photo credits should be given. They can be given in the comment section if adding photo credit in the original post would detract from the message. When possible, photos with smiling faces are more engaging than photos without human subjects. However, staff should avoid attaching a person's image to a potentially controversial topic. In such cases, photos of fish in situ are more appropriate.

Think Before You Post
Things can go viral very quickly. It's important to ensure that all content and photographs are accurate before posting. Credibility can easily be lost, and mistakes can reflect poorly on the organization as a whole. Always double check yourself and never hesitate to ask other staff to review content before it goes live. Due to time constraints associated with the instantaneous nature of social media or if the subject matter is benign, it is not always feasible or necessary to have a secondary proof-reader. However, in cases when there is time and/or the potential for controversy, the Public Information Officer should review posts before they're live. If the Public Information Officer is unavailable, or the one in need of review, the Outreach Specialist should review posts. It is also important to be sensitive to the surrounding atmosphere. If you schedule posts in advance or simply have content to push, ensure that there are not any other news issues occurring that deserve deferred posting from the Gulf Council. For example, on the day of a national tragedy, it would be insensitive to post "Happy Fish Fact Friday".

Deleting posts
Deleting a post after it has been published is not usually an option. If a mistake is posted, there is a high likelihood that someone will screenshot and use it against the agency. Instead, there is usually a way to gracefully apologize for the mistake. If you are considering deleting a post, contact the Public Information Officer for approval and guidance on how to do so. If it is determined that deleting a post is most appropriate, then a record, including a screenshot and rationale for deletion, should be kept.

Monitoring Accounts

Social media accounts should be monitored regularly. The nature of interaction on social media is more immediate than that of traditional forms of communication. When posting content, staff should recognize the need to monitor responses and should make an effort to reply to comments as soon as practicable. However, staff should also be mindful of personal time and is expected to respond during regular business hours, but should put social media responsibilities aside, within reason, after work hours, holidays, and on weekends. Responding to social media is often a quick endeavor, but staff is not expected to do so at all hours of the night and weekends. Ideally, staff should attempt to respond to a post or comment within the same day.

Handling Negativity

As a regulatory agency, we can expect that constituents will have negative reactions to some of our content. Users who engage on our social media platforms can often be individuals with whom we haven't developed relationships. It's important to remember that even these negative reactions provide a learning opportunity. Staff engaging with negative commenters should remain factual and courteous in all exchanges.

Responding to Negative Comments

Staff will be expected to use personal judgement when determining whether to respond, and how to respond, to negative comments. If there is an opportunity to provide information that contradicts negativity or false information, staff can present the facts in a polite, courteous manner. In some cases, it's better to ignore than it is to engage with a negative commenter. If the negative comment does not receive recognition from other constituents, staff has discretion to decide whether or not to respond. The following is a list of the types of negative comments that may require further intervention:

- Comments that contain direct personal attacks or threats – These comments should be hidden or deleted. Staff should also directly respond to such comments explaining why the comment was removed.
- Comments that contain blatantly false information/accusations – The comments may remain at the discretion of staff, but truthful information contradicting the misinformation should be posted.
- Comments that contain profanity – These comments should be deleted and the commenter should be reminded that the Council's social media space should remain 'family friendly.'

Documenting Negative Comments

If a comment contains any of the violations above, and staff determines that it should be deleted, the comment should first be documented (screenshotted) and saved, along with a brief explanation of the incident.

Banning Users
If a user becomes abusive, forms a pattern of negative behavior, or egregiously attacks the Council or its staff, it may become necessary to ban the user. In such a case, Council staff should document each incident. When possible, staff should give warning and allow opportunities for the user to correct their behavior. However, a user can be banned immediately if the interaction is negative enough to earn immediate repercussions. Regardless, the comments and responses should be documented. If a user wants to be reinstated after being banned, they can contact the Public Information Officer and ask for permission to be reinstated 90 days after being banned.

Reporting Comments to Law Enforcement
If a comment contains a direct threat, staff should screenshot the comment, screenshot the user's personal information and report the user to Facebook before banning them. Next, staff should send the comment and information on the commenter to NOAA Office of Law Enforcement.

Record Keeping

Comments on social media do not constitute a public record. The social media profiles should make this clear whenever possible. At this point, there are no federal standards or policies in place for social media/web 2.0 retention practices performed by the Councils. Until such a time, we will keep our own records (as mentioned above) in instances when we delete our own posts, when we delete posts from commenters, and/or when we ban users.

Analytics

Quarterly analytics for each social media platform will be kept and reported to the Outreach and Education Technical Committee and the Council on an annual basis.

Communication Analytics Guidelines

About these Guidelines

The following guidelines provide guidance to staff and Council members regarding the monitoring and reporting of Council communication analytics. The Council serves as an advisory body to NOAA Fisheries and functions as an intermediary between the stakeholders and the federal regulatory process. The Council process is public in its nature and successful Council communications help drive the Council process by ensuring local level expertise is incorporated into the fishery management decision-making process. As such, Council communications endeavors should be tracked across platforms and their effectiveness should be evaluated regularly. This helps ensure that continuing communications are based on proven tactics and helps to gauge the effectiveness of new communications endeavors.

Analytics Tracking

Analytics for regular communications platforms should be tracked and recorded on a quarterly basis. The following is a synopsis of the platforms and metrics that should be tracked:

Facebook/Instagram

Likes, Engagements, and Impressions should be tracked. Likes are the number of people who have "liked" you page. Those people are prioritized by the Facebook algorithm to receive Council postings on their timeline. Engagements are the number of times people interacted with Council posts including likes, comments, and shares. Impressions is the number of times Gulf Council content was seen by users.

Gulf Currents Blog

Page views, post views, and number of posts should be tracked. The number of page views tallies the number of people that visit the Gulf Currents Blog landing page on our website. The number of post views is the cumulative number of views to the individual blog articles that were posted in a time period. The number of posts is simply the number of blog articles that were published in a time period.

YouTube

Total video views, individual video views, and number videos should be tracked. The total video views are views of all videos across the Gulf Council channel and individual video views are only a reflection of individual views for videos that were published in a time period. Videos is the number of videos produced in a time period.

Listserv
Subscribers, open rate, and number of publications should be tracked. Subscribers are the number of people who have signed up to receive Gulf Council email updates. The open rate is the percent of subscribers that receive an open the emails. Number of publications is simply, the number of email campaigns sent out over a period of time.

Website
Sessions, page views, users, and website use by page should be tracked. Sessions are the number of times people came to the website. Page views is the cumulative number of times individual pages were visited on the site. Most sessions would result in multiple page views. Users is the number of unique IP addresses that visited the site. Website use by page ranks the most popular pages on the site.

Fish Rules Apps
Regulations views for the Gulf Federal region should be tracked. Additionally, the number of clicks and impressions should be tracked each time the Council specifically places a comment opportunity or other advertisement on the platform.

In-Person Outreach Efforts
Interactions and listserv sign-ups should be tracked. Interactions is a count of how many people interacted with Staff during and event. During tabling events, staff will encourage appropriate audience members to sign-up for the Council listserv and those sign-ups should also be tracked.

Extra Communication Efforts
Anytime the Council tries a new communication effort, it should define and track the most appropriate analytics metric.

Analytics Reporting

Council communication staff should report Council communications analytics to the Outreach and Education Technical Committee and to the Council on an annual basis. The analytics presentation should serve as a measure of effectiveness of Council communications endeavors and should inform each year’s Communications Improvement Plan.

Fisherman Feedback Guidelines

About these Guidelines

The following guidelines are created for Council staff and the public to outline Council procedures for soliciting responses, analyzing, and communicating results of the Fisherman Feedback Tool. The Fisherman Feedback Tool solicits feedback from people who are actively participating in the fishery to enhance contemporary understanding of each fish stock with on-the-water expertise. The information provided through the tool helps inform both scientists and managers as they formulate understanding of fish stocks.

Soliciting Responses

The Council gathers information on each fish stock proceeding each stock assessment. An online tool is used to gather the following information from each respondent:

1. Personal Information including: name, e-mail, association with the fishery
2. A certification that the information provided is accurate
3. An open-ended response regarding observations of the appropriate fish stock
4. General location of the area where the observation is made (Respondents are asked to select the appropriate area from a grid map provided.)
5. Willingness to be contacted regarding their submission

Responses are gathered before each stock assessment is conducted and submissions are accepted for approximately one month. Once the tool is available, it is advertised via press release, social media, on the Council's website, and it is pushed to partner agencies for amplification.

Analyzing Responses

Sentiment is conducted by two independent readers and overall comment sentiment is broadly characterized as positive, neutral, or negative. Readers also determine whether comments are related to the condition, health, or abundance of the stock. Those comments are than analyzed a second time, and classified based on whether they indicated that the stock is in good, negative, or neutral health. Readers then compare characterizations and resolve any disagreements in interpretation so that both readers agree. Comments that are unrelated to the fish are dropped from both manual and automated analysis.

Automated sentiment analysis characterizes each response using the 'tidytext' package in R to identify the most common words associated with a positive and negative sentiment. For this analysis, the words in each comment are compared to a revised version of the 'Bing' lexicon library, which is continuously amended with characterizations for words commonly used in reporting fishery information. The library categorizes words into positive, negative, or neutral sentiment and scores every word in each comment accordingly. The analysis then averages word scores across each entire comment and determines the degree to which each comment is positive, negative, or neutral overall.

Communicating Results

The results of each Fisherman Feedback effort are analyzed and presented in a full report which includes the following analyses:

- number of responses by sector
- number of responses by location
- a classification overall comment sentiment (positive, negative, neutral)
- overall comment sentiment by sector
- overall comment sentiment by location
- a classification of sentiment of comments related to stock condition
- stock condition sentiment by sector
- stock condition sentiment by location

Each report is submitted to the appropriate stock assessment analysts as a stock assessment is developed for each species. When possible, Council staff will present the results during the SEDAR data workshop for the associated species. Staff also strives to present results of each effort to the Scientific and Statistical Committee, appropriate Advisory Panel, and to the Council when the results of each stock assessment are reviewed.

Additionally, the final report for each Fisherman Feedback effort is posted publicly on the fisheries science page of the Council website. Respondents to each tool are also sent a follow-up email after the Council reviews each assessment and begins work on management measures.

Data Sharing

The Council is committed to transparency. Raw responses gathered for each tool are available upon request. Responses will be scrubbed of personally identifiable information to ensure the privacy of contributors. The Council is also willing to provide the R scripts, including the modified ‘Bing’ lexicon library, upon request.

In-Person Outreach Event Guidelines

About these Guidelines

The following guidelines are created for Council staff, Council members, and the public to outline Council procedures for in-person outreach events. In-person events vary greatly in their audience, format, and scope. They each provide the opportunity to interface directly with the general public and stakeholders. They also allow us to reach people that may be completely unfamiliar with the Council and its purpose.

In-Person Outreach Purpose

Council staff endeavors to attend a variety of events across the Gulf annually, that engage each sector of the fishery: private recreational, for-hire, and commercial. The primary goal of these efforts is to engage members of these sectors that are not already engaged or have been less engaged in the Council process. We also strive to maintain relationships with those who are already engaged in the Council process but desire to become more involved and/or keep up-to-date on the most recent management changes. Choosing to return to certain events when possible helps maintain stakeholder engagement. Outreach events can also be useful ways to collaborate with, and show support for other agencies and organizations. Attendance at in-person outreach events brings awareness to the Council's existence, can enlighten stakeholders about the Council process, and demonstrates good-will by showing the investment of the Council in engaging the public.

In-Person Engagements

If possible, at least one staff member and one Council member will attend each event. Ideally, the Council member should represent the sector or state where the event is held. The presence of a Council member gives the public an opportunity to directly ask questions of policy makers and promotes understanding of the management process that could increase the Council's reach and stakeholder participation in the process. Council staff begins structuring an in-person outreach event plan at the end of each year for the following year so that an outline can be presented to the Outreach and Education Technical Committee and then the Council at its first meeting of the year. Based on the feedback received, staff attempts to formalize the outline and schedule events with the understanding that Council staff will work to fulfill each commitment. However, some events may be canceled, the Council could be declined from the event, or the event could be unable to accommodate Council attendance. When planning engagements, staff will coordinate the logistics of attendance with event organizers. Depending on the type of engagement and guidance on topics, Council staff will prepare and bring the appropriate outreach materials for the type of event and estimated number of attendees.

In-Person Engagement Analytics

Analytics will be collected during each in-person outreach effort and reported to the Outreach and Education Technical Committee and the Council on an annual basis. Analytics will be collected by the staff members attending the event and recorded for future use and presentation to committees and Council members.

Direct engagements
The number of direct conversations or engagements had by staff/Council members during each event or the number of attendees present during a speaking opportunity.

Listserv sign-ups
If appropriate, the number of listserv sign-ups will be tracked for each event. When the goal of an event is to increase the number of engaged stakeholders, encouraging people to sign-up to receive our emails serves as a proxy for getting people more engaged in the process.

The analytics collected at each event will help inform future outreach event plans. Each year, Council outreach staff can discuss potential outreach events, based on various metrics, to determine the best events to attend, method of communication for the target audience, and provide the most useful outreach materials and/or discussion topic for that specific event.