



## 2020 National Meeting of the Great River Road

The September 2020 National Meeting of the Great River Road was a successful first venture into the world of virtual meetings. Between 85 and 95 people attended each of five sessions that were reflective of the work of the four MRPC committees and our recent submissions for All-American Road status. We also experimented with attracting Great River Road travelers to one session which had about 125 participants and a lively discussion with Eddy Harris. The national meeting enabled us to address several CMP recommendations, such as reaching out to state and federal agencies. We were able to hire additional help (\$8,490) for this first attempt which gave us greater internet reliability and programming structure. Unspent travel funds paid for the one-time assistance.

The national office spent over 350 hours engaged in planning and implementation of the two fall meetings. This included a variety of tasks to promote and organize the meetings in conjunction with the executive committee. Some of the tasks and responsibilities are listed below.

- Website design – created new microsite with completely different look to house the Annual Meeting content, created new pages (homepage, agenda page, speaker bios, donation form), coded custom fields to the WordPress admin area to allow for new page template updates, Wrote CSS styling for the new page looks and coded microsite to be responsive and mobile friendly
- E-newsletters – coded a new email template used for Annual Meeting communications, distributed 15 e-newsletters to segmented audiences promoting different aspects of the meeting and the survey
- Speakers – contacted, discussed, researched options, provided guidance/assistance and logistics support
- Agenda – created with proper flow, timing, and descriptions
- Production vendor – communicated, provided information, answered questions, followed up on details
- Promotion schedule – developed and implemented
- Zoom graphics/assets – developed background options consistent with the meeting design
- Distribution database – collected and researched different lists tailored to stakeholders of the river
- Marketing presentation – completed research, developed shell, created PowerPoint and talking points included in final presentation
- Registration – developed materials, monitored process, and provided updates
- Zoom – researched options appropriate for event needs
- Donation tool – researched, provided options, and implemented online donation capability
- Meeting communication – provided communication to registered attendees, speakers, production crew and board
- Bios – researched, wrote, and posted online
- Facilitated national business meeting, providing support and guidance to all involved
- Designed opening and closing visuals, PowerPoint and surveys
- Meetings – participated in more than 25 meetings with the executive committee, speakers, production crew, etc.
- Awards – ordered and mailed awards, located photos, and created recognition slides for honorees
- Collected and assisted states in slide development for reports, as needed
- Set up alternative options for speaker back ups and provided troubleshooting
- Assisted in drafting
- Survey – developed, executed and summarized results
- Recordings – collected, reviewed, edited, posted online and communicated location

- Screenshot collection – captured screenshots for future marketing use
- During meeting – facilitated a Q&A for the transportation session, served as point person for production crew and speakers, provided additional staff online during meetings to assist, as needed

The time and tasks above were in addition to the countless more hours spent by our leadership creating a vision for this meeting and leading us toward a productive completion.

We distributed surveys via email to all National Meeting registrants. The survey used a 1 through 5 rating with 5 as the highest score and 3 as average. About 25% of registrants completed the survey. Below are highlights.

- 100% of respondents indicated that the meeting was well organized.
- 91% thought components of the meeting would be helpful in their work.
- 85% were pleased with the length.
- More than 96% of respondents rated the marketing segment, Travel Along the Great River Road, above average. More than 87% thought our speaker was engaging and informative.
- The Culture and Heritage panel, Getting off the Road to the River, was informative to more than 89%, while 84% were engaged at an above-average level.
- Eddy Harris, author, filmmaker and traveler, engaged more than 95% of our audience.
- The ERA panel, The Clean Water Connection to Great River Road Travel, was also well received. About 80% of respondents indicated the session was informative and that the speakers were engaging.
- The transportation discussion on multi-modal travel was informative to more than 86% of participants.
- The National Scenic Byway Funding discussion was rated 82% above average in engagement and information.
- 100% of respondents indicated people would participate again.

For the future, we might consider:

- A software upgrade for better visual management?
- Whether to offer travel stories of the Great River Road for a fee or as a sponsorship option?
- Increased use of podcasts and videos to engage travelers?
- Whether to have one virtual national meeting and one in-person national meeting annually – or some variation – to increase participation?