



COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING

Hilton Anatole, Dallas, TX

NOTE: You must have a name badge to attend any meetings, sessions and receptions.

TUESDAY | SEPTEMBER 9, 2025

MEETING ROOM: Monte Carlo, Tower Mezzanine

7:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. | **Breakfast | Trinity Pre-Function**

9:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. | **Agenda Overview, Ice Breaker, and Approval of Minutes**

Diane Watkins, Committee Chair, Director, Office of Public Affairs, DC Department of Employment Services

1. Overview of Agenda
2. Ice Breaker
3. Approve Minutes: [View June Meeting Notes](#)
 - Motion made by Chris Cannon (TN), seconded by Erin Turbitt (WY), approved by consent of the committee
4. Thank you to our 2024-2025 Committee Leadership Team!

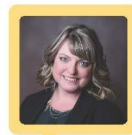
2025 Comms Leadership Team



Chair
Diane Watkins (DC)
diane.watkins@dc.gov



Vice Chair
Chris Barron (WA)
chris.barron@ed.wa.gov



Past Chair
Dawn Dovre (SD)
dawn.dovre@state.sd.us



Cher Haavind (CO)
Board Chair Delegate
cher.haavind@state.co.us

9:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. | **NASWA Updates**

- **Michelle Marshel**, Director of Communications & Events, NASWA
 - FY25 year in review: NASWA is navigating a tsunami of change, DOL funding shifts and reprioritizations, and is focusing on NASWA's continued sustainability
 - Looking ahead to FY26: NASWA is evaluating its service offerings, managing expenses (ROI) and emphasizing collaborations and partnerships
 - The 2025 State of the Workforce Report was launched during the SUMMIT. State profiles include innovations from each state and territory. Highlights include tailoring workforce development programs for critical industries, emphasis on apprenticeship, tech modernization, integration of AI into operations, new service delivery models and more

- Conversations in the Communications Committee Teams channel range from branded PowerPoint templates to layoff media coverage. Committee members interested in being added to the channel can email naswa@naswa.org.
- The outreach workgroup produces monthly social media campaigns on a variety of topics. Upcoming campaigns include:
 - October: Manufacturing Month, Disability Employment Awareness Month, National Customer Service Week
 - November: STEM Day, Veterans Day, International Fraud Awareness Week
 - December: Part-Time/Seasonal Help, Reasonable Assurance (Winter Break)

9:45 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. | Welcome to Texas! | TWC Showcase

- **Amy Landrum**, Creative & Campaigns Director, Texas Workforce Commission
 - [Presentation](#)
 - Texas Snapshot: Texas has 657,000 employers, 15.8 million in the labor force and 3.3 million small businesses
 - The Texas State Workforce System has 5 key divisions (workforce, vocational rehab, child care, unemployment insurance, civil rights) and 28 workforce boards
 - Texas Workforce Commission has a team of 17 in the office or communications and media, plus additional PIOs, partners, photographers, translators, print vendors and outreach vendors
 - Communications highlights: Internal communications - data storytelling and improving knowledge across teams. External communications - education outreach, briefing papers for legislators and apprenticeship testimonials

10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. | Beverage Break

10:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m. | Workgroup Updates

Workgroup & Resources Updates – Need Members!

- **Onboarding Workgroup: Lisa Fitz-Coy (NASWA)**
 - The outreach workgroup is actively working to welcome new members and keep current members engaged. Committee members interested in joining the workgroup can email lfitz-coy@naswa.org.
- **Outreach Workgroup: Erin Turbitt (WY) – Lead**
 - The outreach workgroup produces monthly social media campaigns on a variety of topics. Campaigns are shared in the Teams channel each month. Committee members interested in joining the workgroup can email gmette@naswa.org.
- **Resources Workgroup: Dawn Dove (SD) – Lead**
 - The Resources workgroup has finished auditing the resources available in the Teams channel and has reorganized existing resources. Committee members interested in being added to the channel can email naswa@naswa.org. Tips for navigating the Teams channel: Using the browser version of Teams is helpful, and in newer versions of Teams, you may be able to toggle between your state workforce profile and your communications committee profile.
- **AI Workgroup: Patrice Kendrick (TN) – Lead** (see 2:30p session)

- **Award Workgroup: Cher Haavind (CO)** – Lead (see next session)

10:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. | **Communications Award Proposal**

- **Cher Haavind**, Deputy Executive Director/Chief Communications Officer, Colorado Department of Labor and Employment

[This award](#) will be presented during the Winter Policy Forum Workforce Innovation Awards Ceremony each year, and all nominations, including the winner, will be collected and presented on the NASWA website as resources for all members. The winner will be highlighted each year in a press release announcement. The idea to develop this new award was approved at the February 2025 winter Communications Committee meeting.

- *Motion to approve the award proposal was made by Dawn Dovre (SD), seconded by Jessica Smith (CO), and approved by consent of the committee.*
- *For the inaugural award, campaigns from the previous two years can be submitted. In future awards, only campaigns from the previous year will be eligible.*
- *Nomination information will be distributed in the fall.*

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. | **Creating Efficiency in Communications Teams**

A discussion on how small and large communications departments structure their teams and manage workloads efficiently. Share your org chart and take this [brief poll](#).

- **Chris Barron**, Communications Director, Washington State Employment Security Department
 - *Team Size(s):*
 - [Poll Results](#): 60% had teams of 1-5; 20% had teams of 5-10; 12% had teams of 15-20, and 8% had teams of 10-15
 - WA – has a [team](#) of 18 across multiple divisions
 - RI – has 4 team members, one generalist and several specialists; hard to delegate due to small team; they use Teams and have a project request form; interested in learning more about what other states are doing for professional development; they do a monthly data review
 - NC – Commerce has four; Employment Services has 3 perm, one temp who was an intern and is building their portfolio; Digital Media Manager, Comms and Outreach, Internal Comms; good collaboration with other divisions to show value and how they can support; working to build a better bridge with workforce solutions comms, their LMI group doesn't have a comms person
 - MA – team of three, digital comms director who also manages intranet, external manager (events), and Director; Director is spokesperson for all divisions within agency; comms team is looped in on everything; their comms team sits in Secretary's office
 - LA – they fall under the Secretary; just one person right now; they do internal comms as well; Dept of Health and Dept of Families merging with the agency in October as well
 - AL – 2 full-time; their career services sites have social media reps; their agency went through a reorganization; they can only talk to the media, no one else; they have dealt with several crisis comms situations; every other Tuesday they have standing calls with other divisions to add content to the editorial calendar; they used North Carolina's calendar template

- VT – 4 on team, one in the Commissioner's office; one in UI; one in workforce; they also use an editorial calendar
- CO – as a larger agency, they struggle to stay on top of everything that's happening; they have a communications council that helps
- NE – team of two; new internal newsletter (quarterly) helps with idea generation for external communications
- WY – team of five; external comms/PR; in Secretary's office; six divisions with comms liaisons; biweekly comms governance meetings; those liaisons have POCs in comms; comms has to review media requests; dealing with turnover, resistance to change and legislative challenges
- MS – in Executive Director's office; Head of External Relations, Comms Director, PIO, and a graphic designer; they also have a grant management director
- DC holds comms council meetings but also does quick 1:1s, which have been helpful; encouraging team members to be generalists and learn new skills; addressing burnout; thoughtful about allowing people to utilize their strengths; creating a positive work environment
- WI has four people; will be starting a comms committee workgroup; hard to get info from divisions, but hoping the workgroup will help
- 3 attendees are appointed staff – (UT), (WI), (MS)
- Tools:
 - WA uses Loomly, Canva, and Muckrack
 - SD and RI use Language Link for translation
 - WI uses Meltwater and Microsoft
 - MS uses Hootsuite, Meltwater and Smartsheet
- Impact Reports:
 - WA showcased their [quarterly report](#)
 - NC produces a monthly report
 - UT does monthly metrics
 - CO uses a Google form for project requests

12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. | **Hosted Lunch** | **Trinity Pre-Function**

1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. | **AI Workgroup Updates and Facilitated AI Use Discussion**

- **Patrice Kendrick**, Deputy Director of Communications and Events, Tennessee Department of Labor & Workforce Development
 - Patrice provided highlights of the [AI in Communications survey results](#)
 - WI discourages AI in communications products – not used statewide, can't use AI Photoshop functions
 - CO can use Gemini but not ChatGPT
 - VT has hired someone who works on AI – they have localized “ChatVT” for state use
 - NE uses Grammarly, and leadership embraces AI
 - IN presented on [plain language tool](#) developed with AI
 - ID is interested in AI staff policy – TX willing to share their policy
 - TX uses Gemini, interested in additional case studies, strategic priority for TX
 - Committee interested in more sessions on AI

- Committee discussed frustrations around staff needing training on fundamentals – AI not a replacement for good writing and critical thinking; the committee also discussed the use of disclaimers acknowledging AI use.

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. | State Roundtable

- **Diane Watkins, Committee Chair**, Director, Office of Public Affairs, DC Department of Employment Services

A roundtable discussion involving updates from each state present (5-minute max). Please choose one of the following questions:

- What is a recent success your communications team has had?
- What's keeping you up at night?
 - CT: Finished a three-year migration of website; previous update was 2007; AI is a concern – legal issues with chatbot, could create issues with people contesting UI claims
 - ID: Equity grant – API – automated texts to UI claimants – 11,396 opted in since November, 36% of active claimants are receiving texts; Challenges are that the equity grant is finished, so can't take next steps; another challenge is helping staff to understand branding
 - TN: Using leftover money for the [tnworks.com grant program](#); Hospitality task force to talk about strategy for talent attraction, invited to present at workforce symposium; attending Hospitality Gov Con
 - NC: Equity grant – work search repository, claimants using it in prosperity zones; concerned about accessibility deadline by 2026, they have 3,000 documents in 10 languages that have to be audited; figuring out how to quantify the impact of plain language enhancements.
 - NM: Successful press conference and coverage; 120 million to local areas for housing projects and reducing homelessness; still working to stand up a website; implementing a status bar for UI; three people dedicated to chat for customer service claims inquiries
 - UT: Improved social media strategy and graphics strategy, embracing meme culture, improving engagement; a challenge is new SNAP requirements, audience is distrustful, questioning the message
 - NE: Messaging project with UI tax, did e-blasts that resulted in improved tax payments; challenge – staff not using plain language, using acronyms
 - CO: Two campaigns, apprenticeship and workers' rights campaign, both successful, radio and YouTube ads, launched compliance quarterly campaign, rebrand of statewide workforce system, workforce development month campaign; challenge getting staff to use toolkit correctly, another challenge is upcoming office move; also facing a state budget deficit, statewide hiring freeze, lobbying legislative agenda a challenge
 - AL: [Job Fair registration page](#) – comparing attendees to new hire list – to see effectiveness of job fairs, will be able to aggregate the data soon; challenge is negative media headlines and keeping calm under pressure

3:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. | Beverage Break

3:15 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. | State Roundtable (cont.)

- **Diane Watkins, Committee Chair**, Director, Office of Public Affairs, DC Department of Employment Services

A roundtable discussion involving updates from each state present (5-minute max). Please choose one of the following questions:

- What is a recent success your communications team has had?
- What's keeping you up at night?
 - LA: Success of rapid response communications related to a plant explosion, garnered media coverage, 84 people were helped; challenge is rebrand happening Oct. 1, they've hired a marketing firm, trying to get divisions on the same page
 - SD: Launching a new website and CMS, website last updated in 2016, they are hiring an outside firm, RFP was published but then had legal setbacks, new language included in RFP delaying launch, vendors will have to work on new proposals, LMI director doesn't want to transition into a CMS (they use Dreamweaver)
 - DC: Soft freeze on new hires, travel, etc. which then became a hard freeze, staff doing more work in-house, overtime cut, extra work leading to burnout, they've retained staff by trying to cultivate a positive work environment, they're working on quantifying the work they're producing to demonstrate value/ROI
 - WA: Successes include the launch of new website, effective LMI communications, partnered with NASWA BI to launch a new UI claimant handbook (down from 90 pages to 30); challenge is they are facing state budget deficit
 - VT: Job seekers asking UI questions in career centers, so they developed a hotline for career centers to call UI office to streamline response and cut through hold times. Other successes include a website redesign project (Drupal) and employer edge newsletter. A recent challenge is a One Stop Operator hosted a podcast with an AI-written script that wasn't vetted by communications: Job Talk Vermont.
 - IN: Indiana has a new governor and new cabinet secretaries, economic development and workforce development are merging, so Communications faces a learning curve on the economic development side; they're also working on updating their website; apprenticeship really successful (IN #3 in the nation); facing a reduction in grant funding; comms has a new team; received praise from Governor on social media; PowerUp Indiana - marketing initiative (outreach, no budget), incumbent worker training for upskilling, celebrating companies who participate.
 - KS: New to the agency – working to enhance relationships with staff and facing challenges on fixing graphics and presentations; the public is not interested in KDOL social media, trying to figure out how to improve engagement; also facing legislative challenges and lobbying efforts.
 - MS: They are also updating their website (Drupal) last updated in 2012, using IT vendor approved by state, performing a site audit, working on brand refresh, facelift of logos, sent out paper postcards to employers about updating profiles in labor exchange system that included a QR code to landing page, direct outreach through job fairs, purchased a mobile unit (cost 326K)
 - WY: Web governance is a challenge, wordy website transitioned from a Google site

- *RI: They are working on improving plain language, working with other divisions, created a language access workgroup, they are also working on website updates and held a focus group with community based organizations who gave feedback on website, launched new landing pages, working on improving readability score, working with LMI and data team to get more data on website; front lobby person big win – their team addressing in-person customer service questions which is challenging, tensions are high, divisions are understaffed so customers are unhappy, team morale suffering*
- *MA: They received a Federal grant for an early childhood educators apprenticeship program, comms campaign resulted in 40% increase in community college enrollment which is good for talent pipeline (Community College is free in MA); they also launched an ESOL platform and strategy to give training for English Language Learners; Secretary did a statewide tour of career centers; Challenges: Challenge with changing plain language on a BLS numbers press release, getting questions about it; delays in payments for DUA, closed call centers on Fridays to try to get caught up (three month pilot that started in August), 25% decrease in open work items, at a plateau now, possibly due to a new system launched in May.*
- *TX: Funding for campaigns around child care services, shortages with early learning professionals, they support 150,000 kids, so parents can go back to work or train, there is a waitlist for the program, targeting young adults in high school, treating them as essential workers, and retirees who want to reenter the workforce.*
- *WI: New to the agency, working on internal process updates, internal style guide was just published, wrangling media approval process, enhancing relationship with divisions, facing a legislative standstill and impactful supreme court cases and figuring out how to respond to them; discussed how to change staff perspectives on communications.*

4:30 p.m. – 4:45 p.m. | Election of Vice Chair and Vice Chair-Nominee

1. The **Vice Chair** position will serve on the Communications Leadership Team for two years, serving in this position for one year, then moving to Chair. The Leadership Team meets monthly and is charged with oversight and planning for the committee. Candidates:
 - Jessica Smith (CO)-elected
 - Laura Leonard (NC)
2. The **Vice Chair-Nominee** position serves on the Communications Leadership Team for four years, serving in this position for one year, then moving to Vice Chair, Chair, and Past Chair. Each position is for a one-year term. The Leadership Team meets monthly and is charged with oversight and planning for the committee. Candidates:
 - Jonathan McNair (AL)-elected
 - Erin Turbitt (WY)
3. Interested candidates, please send your self-nomination, including your statement of interest and experience, to Lisa Fitz-Coy: lfitz-coy@naswa.org
 - We will also take self-nominations during the meeting.

4:45 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. | **Introduction of 2025-2026 Committee Leadership Team & Looking Forward**

- **Chris Barron**, 2025-2026 Chair, and Communications Director, Washington Employment Security Department
 - *Thank you to the 2024-2025 Communications Committee Leadership team for your service. The next in-person meeting will be in February 2026.*
 - **2025-2026 Committee Leadership Team:**
 - *Chris Barron (WA) – Chair*
 - *Jessica Smith (CO) – Vice Chair (elect)*
 - *Diane Watkins (DC) – Past Chair*
 - *Jonathan McNair (AL) – Vice Chair Nominee*

5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. | **SUMMIT Welcome Reception** | Trinity Exhibit Hall

Upcoming Association Year 2026 Meetings

Winter Meeting

February 26, 2026
Gaylord National,
Maryland

Winter Policy Forum: Feb 25

Fall Meeting

September 15, 2026
Milwaukee, WI

SUMMIT Dates: Sep 16-17