



TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission

FROM: Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director

DATE: January 12, 2021

RE: IMPROVING “BEST PRACTICES” OF THE COMMISSION

Background:

One of the Gorge Commission’s ***Key Performance Measures (KPM)*** is the “Percentage of Best Practices Met by the Board/Commission.” Oregon has a list of 15 Best Practices, and each year Nancy, and now Connie, sends out a link mid-year to a survey for Commissioners to fill it out as an evaluation of how well the Commissioners and agency follow best practices for the previous calendar year. It is essentially the Commission’s “report card” of how well we are following state requirements for boards and commissions. Since we had to submit the Calendar Year (CY) 2019 results as part of our recent proposed 2021-2023 biennium budget documents, I reviewed them and also reviewed the scores for the past three years. The scores declined the past 2 years with more Commissioners feeling they have not been following best practices in Calendar Year (CY) 2019 and CY 2018 as compared to CY 2016 and CY 2017.

Connie provided the link to Survey Monkey on July 9, 2020 for CY 2019 so Commissioners could fill out the form. The purpose of using Survey Monkey is so that Commissioners can fill them out and their answers are anonymous/confidential. Some Commissioners preferred to fill out a scoresheet by hand, scan, and email it back directly to Connie. When Connie filed the 2019 responses in our KPM notebook, I read through them in order to prepare our Annual Report on KPM outcomes to the state.

I want to review these scores for the past 4 years with the Commission and find a way for you to get to more “yes” votes moving forward -- that the Commission is meeting all best practices in CY 2020. I envision this overview as the first step in being more intentional about discussing best practices and include these specific items on Commission agendas in 2021 as needed so we can be intentional about making sure we are following Commission best practices, and not just have it as a passive survey that is done once per year. It is important to improve the score for CY 2020 as a demonstration that that Commissioners and the agency are meeting our best practices obligations.

2016-2019 Scores

<u>Best Practices</u>	<u>Met</u>	<u>Not Met</u>
Calendar Year 2016		
All	98%	2%
Calendar Year 2017		
All	93%	7%
Calendar Year 2018		
All	89%	11%
Calendar Year 2019		
All	83%	17%

(the “no’s” included: no training, no review of audits or financials, no review of key communications, and budget POPs not aligned with agency mission and goals)

The fifteen best practices for Oregon are listed below and an approach for improving the CY 2020 scores is suggested for each for Commissioners to consider:

1. Executive Director’s performance expectations are current: *We need to review my position description to assure expectations are accurate.*
2. Executive Director receives annual performance feedback: *We conducted my performance review in December 2020 so this best practice should be a yes.*
3. Agency’s goals are current and applicable: *It is clear what the Commission’s mission/goals are and finishing Gorge 2020 Management Plan revision shows that we were deliberate about implementing our mission and goals. This best practice should be a yes for 2020. A strategic planning retreat in 2021 would be helpful to assure our strategic plan lines up with the Act and the Management Plan.*
4. Commission reviews Annual Performance Progress report: *This is an annual report of Key Performance Measures submitted to the states. We track Key Performance Measures approved by the states of OR and WA and report on them through an Annual Performance Progress Report that is part of our Oregon and WA budget process. Each year we prepare “scores” on how well we achieved those KPMs and then have to submit them. Best Practices is one of those KPMs as well as percentage of development reviews done on time, number of public presentations, etc. We have completed this report for CY 2019 as part of our budget submission documents. The CY 2020 report will be available in July 2021 so this best practice should be a yes in CY 2020.*
5. Commission is appropriately involved in agency’s key communications: *We should define what “key communications” are and a process for keeping the Commissioners informed, and how to assure this best practice is met and can be a yes for CY2020.*
6. Commission is involved in policy making: *This is Gorge 2020 and the entire Commission was involved in policy making in CY 2019 and CY 2020 so this best practice should be a yes for CY 2020.*

7. Policy Option Packages are aligned with mission and goals: *I reviewed the proposed budget with the Commission including the policy option package for the replacing the ACCESS database. I shared the “budget appeal” documents with the Chair in September 2020 and both state Governors have recommended the ACCESS Database project to move forward, so this best practice should be a yes in CY 2020.*
8. Commission reviews all budgets: *The Commission reviewed the proposed budget in spring 2020 that I planned to submit to OR and WA, but then I had to also submit budget reduction options to both states due to COVID-related reductions in the overall state budgets. The OR and WA Governor’s recommended budgets for 2021-2023 supported our proposed budget requests. The Commission was fully informed on both Governor’s recommended agency budgets so this best practice should be a yes for CY 2020.*
9. Commission reviews financial and audit findings: *For FY 2019 it was sent out in July 2020 for review before the best practices survey was sent out to Commissioners, yet 3 Commissioners did not see it and replied “no”. We need to make sure it is on the June 2021 agenda for CY 2020 so there is a report to the full Commission and acknowledgement of receipt. The FY 2020 was just completed and we had a clean audit with no findings. This information was shared with the Commission in December 2020 so this should be a yes for CY 2020.*
10. Commission is appropriately accounting for resources: *Need to better define what this means—what does the Commission need from the ED on this topic? Connie and I balance the budget every month and review the allotments with both OR CFO and WA OFM offices each month to make sure we are on target with planned spending. This should be a yes for CY 2020 unless there are any improvements the Commission needs to be better informed of our budget spending plan.*
11. Agency adheres to accounting rules and other relevant financial controls: *We have had clean audits every year but need to better describe at a Commission meeting how we implement our internal financial controls. The most recent audit confirmed we are adhering to best accounting principles so this answer should be yes in CY 2020.*
12. Commissioners act in accordance with their role as public representatives: *This needs to be better defined and Commissioners need to evaluate themselves for this best practice.*
13. The Commission coordinates with others where responsibilities and interests overlap: *This needs to be better defined and Commissioners need to evaluate themselves for this best practice.*
14. The Commission members identify and attend appropriate training sessions: *We need to poll Commissioners about their needs and then organize a retreat/training. New Commissioners receive orientation, but we can suggest a training on governance and a retreat on strategic planning and DEI in CY 2021. The answer will most likely be “no” for this best practice in CY 2020 because we did not have any opportunities for planning a formal training session.*
15. The Commission reviews its management practices to ensure best practices are utilized: *Since 4 Commissioners answered “no” to this one, that indicates we need to spend some time reviewing these best practices and to make presentations on best practices more intentional at Commission meetings.*

For purposes of review, we can also group these into 8 different categories of responsibilities:

1. Selecting, Reviewing and Supporting the Commission's Executive Director

- Best practices 1 & 2

2. Providing strategic guidance by setting vision, mission goals, strategic direction, and risk management

- Best practices 3

3. Governing the Commission by setting broad organizational policies

- Best practices 6 & 7

4. Monitoring and oversight of financial resources

- Best practices 8, 9, 10, 11

5. Monitoring Commission's performance and management practices

- Best practices 4, 11 & 15

6. Acquiring resources to ensure organizations ability to operate

- Best practices 7

7. Self assess, self-regulate & uphold fiduciary responsibilities

- Best practices 12 & 14

8. Exercising accountability to key stakeholders

- Best practices 5 & 13

NEXT STEPS: Commissioners should review these 15 best practices and provide some additional definition and understanding about how best to meet these. In July 2021, Connie will send out a Survey Monkey to Commissioners that covers Calendar Year 2020. It is important to raise the score through more intentional discussion about these best practices.