



ASSOCIATION *of*
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

Engagement and Connections WORKING GROUP

Co-Chair: Ty Medlen

Co-Chair: Vacant

Wednesday, September 16, 2026

1:15pm – 3:15pm

116th AFWA Annual Meeting

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

AGENDA

- Call to order
- Introductions
 - Round robin introductions
- **WORKING GROUP CHANGES & CHARGE**
 - Open Chair/Co-Chair position
 - If you're interested in co-chairing; or if you're interested in being more involved; please reach out to Ty Medlen.
 - Working Group Charge and future direction
 - Retirement of David Buggs; leadership transition for this working group
 - Looking at overall needs to help steer the direction of this working group
 - WG Charge: focused on connecting and building relationships
 - Used the meeting to take a fresh look at current concerns, needs and future direction for the working group
 - Idea Filter
 - **Does it strengthen connection?**
 - With people communities, partners, or audiences
 - **Does it reduce a barrier?**
 - Participation, trust, access, or relevance
 - **Is this something states benefits from tackling together?**
 - Rather than one agency solving alone
 - DISCUSSION:
 - Texas is trying to make connections via social networks to send people to the appropriate groups to help further the R3 initiative; helping customers have a more positive experience.
 - Ohio- started a partner project portal → a partnership dashboard to better serve our constituents
 - Florida- FL Youth and Conservation Centers network → focus on youth connection; grew so fast that MyFWC is focusing more on

quality instead of quantity; looking at the strengths of our partners.

- Arkansas- relying on educators to replay the conservation message inside the classroom; have a designation to the schools that do this well and implement state agency approved programming (ex. NASP, hunter edu, etc.);
 - Arkansas- Generation Conservation Summit → a competition-based event; will help with future recruitment because they know who we are and what we are about.
 - Good to have the tools to know when to say yes and when to say no; stay on a pathway that is mission aligned.
 - What tools do we need to be able to properly evaluate if something is a success
 - Partnerships is a scenario where we need to evaluate
 - Look at what is working in other states, what challenges remain, and what solutions or tools could be shared across states.
- What are states not addressing that need to be addressed [DISCUSSION]
 - Explore where AI can be useful in our field while protecting trust and human connection.
 - The #1 of AI today is for therapy; there appears to be a loss of human/nature connections
 - The WG is about building relationships → what relationships are we missing [we need to identify]
 - We need to start building our bench; mass retirement is about to happen with a loss of institutional knowledge
 - Consider audience and workforce shifts so agencies can identify changes earlier and be more proactive than reactive.
 - The 3 A's: Awareness → Appreciation → Action
 - Teach current staff (biologists, law enforcement, etc) as to how to be better educators to the public within their job
 - Money and bandwidth are some of the biggest barriers within our agencies
 - Who is not hearing your voice that needs to within your agency:
 - Fiscal and financial decision makers - How do we demonstrate the importance and value of engagement and education positions/programs when budgets become tight?
 - Breaking down the internal silos; know what the other person is doing example: Law enforcement –public perception of fish and wildlife agencies, where everyone may be viewed as a 'game warden,' agencies may also need to work internally to better understand the roles and work of other programs
- Agency Needs
 - Increase relevancy = increased revenue - Need for funding streams beyond traditional license revenue

- Increasing revenue without pricing the public out of participation and opportunity
 - What are we missing- connecting with work in other committees?
 - We need to connect better to the One Health conversations
 - AFWA committees and working groups need stronger connections so similar discussions or objectives are not occurring independently in different rooms
- **CARRY-OVER WORK & PROJECT IDEAS**
 - Coffee Talks – peer learning & discussion
 - Did we find value in them? YES
 - What is the best delivery system? Previously zoom meetings; generally, once/month
 - SEAFWA is doing something similar → look to collaborating and joining resources; NEAFWA also does something similar
 - Dashboard – public Engagement in Action Examples & Resources
 - There are currently 16 people on the strategy team to develop this resource
 - Vision- an area to place relevant topics/case studies that may be helpful to other states
 - We have a very rough outline as to what the dashboard could look like and its possible functionality
 - Definitions/terms – language & framing
 - What was the ask? – help navigating terms, labels, and definitions
 - What are the challenges? – terminology & policy environments change; static list could become outdated quickly; language varies by region & audience
 - What problem are we trying to solve? – what would make your job easier?
 - Human Dimensions – connecting data to the story
 - How can we create a partnership between these two groups to meet mutual goals.
 - This may need to be moved to the large EE Committee, instead of a working group.
- **PRIORITIZATION OF THOUGHTS**
 - Prioritize potential work based on where the Working Group can have the largest impact and develop meaningful solutions.
 - Use the Working group charge and Idea Filter to help determine where the group should focus its efforts moving forward.
- **ADJOURN**

