



Oregon Advocacy Commissions Office

Advocating for Equity and Diversity throughout Oregon

Response to Representative Gomberg's Question on the Day-to-Day Functions of OACO Staff

Chair Patterson, Chair Smith, Rep. Gomberg, and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on General Government, to supplement the oral response to Rep. Gomberg's question:

The Commissions activities go far beyond the bi-monthly meetings that the OACO facilitates. The OACO has an extensive workload supporting the work of the Commissions between their bi-monthly meetings. Much of the work of the staff is behind the scenes. In order to produce work that looks seamless requires significant staff effort and time.

A great analogy is a theatrical production, except multiplied by four. What the audience sees is a 90-minute play, but in order to get to that point, there is an immense amount of work in front and behind the scenes, before and after the event. From the composition to set design, to training, to production, so much is done without the audience being aware.

In a theatrical production, there is an army of support; for the four Advocacy Commissions they have four permanent staff as support for four independent Advocacy Commissions. Each Commission in itself is not monolithic. Each Commission is comprised of many different communities with many different perspectives. Each Commission takes unique directions and have different priorities.


Below is a listing of some of the work that the Agency does to support the Commissions, but it is not exhaustive:

The Agency work can be divided between:

- Project Management (Planning and Coordination)
- Meeting Facilitation
- Legislative and Policy Research
- Writing and Editing
- Community Outreach
- Compliance and Administration
- Training
- Cheerleading
- Emotional Labor



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During Legislative Session, our team


- huddle daily to track and provide information on the bills that the Commissions may want to weigh in on
- provide civic engagement training and guide them in understanding how to use OLIS
- conduct research on the bills and provide summaries to the Commissions
- edit the drafts of testimony that Commissioners write
- format the testimony
- submit it on behalf of individual Commissioners or Commissions at large
- flags testimony where all four Commissions have an interest and coordinate their efforts to compile joint testimony
- provide weekly updates on legislation
- help build up the confidence of Commissioners to provide their perspectives
- encourages Commissioners to reach out to the community to also discuss and share their perspectives on legislation

Throughout the year, our team

- coordinate and plan the hosting of individual and partnered events of the Commissions
 - annual and novel events
 - some are planned well in advance on a project schedule
 - others require immediate and reactive planning
 - coordinate partnered events with external groups
- produce annual proclamation events are coordinated with the Governor's team
 - Black History Month Proclamation (February)
 - Women's History Month Proclamation (March)
 - Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (May)
 - Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 – October 15)
- schedule and facilitate subcommittee meetings and coalition meetings some outside business hours
 - Staff work long hours throughout the day, evenings, and weekends.
 - Example: The week of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, staff worked the holiday and the next five days, Monday (Holiday) through Saturday, in order to properly support the Commissions and their activities
 - Unfortunately, with a skeleton team, there isn't backup for comp time
 - Staff burnout is a concern as they work with the very real impacts of racism and sexism on a daily basis, coupled with over extension
- each Commission produces action items for staff to work on, requiring
 - Research
 - Review



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- Edits
- Facilitation and Coordination
- develop and compose legislative and leadership training
- stand ready as backup for Commissioners as they engage the community
- represent and support Commissions at external events
- engage in other community and governmental listening sessions
- prep Commissioners for external engagements
- review and edit speeches and writings for Commissioners
- plan future hybrid meetings and events

As a small State Agency, the OACO also has significant compliance and business operations that must be executed. While some of this is supplemented by services provided by the Department of Administrative Services, there remains an inequity due to the need for scale. Oftentimes, larger agencies have dedicated folks to handle specialized tasks and compliance. The OACO does not have the same economies of scale, so every agency task takes longer and takes away from efforts to support the Commissions. Due to the Agency's size, it is a zero-sum game. Staff manage the priorities knowing that there is not sufficient capacity to accomplish all. Often times the loudest priority gets the attention at the expense of other priorities.


In all the work that Staff does, there is an underlying set of emotional labor. The Commissions work on Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. This work means experiencing and seeing the real and present dangers of racism, sexism, and ableism. A majority of the staff hail from underrepresented communities, and as they are called upon to address issues raised by community and commissioners or hear about atrocities and impacts across the state, it takes a personal toll on staff.


The impacts are real. Staff who have come to this Agency come to help the State correct injustices, address the harms, and support community, but it comes with a hidden cost. This is uncompensated emotional labor that each staff member takes on. Staff work to build each other up and support each other during tough times and they continue to cheerlead for the Commissioners. Those attracted to this work have a real stake.

The OACO is small but mighty and has dedicated staff doing all that they can to support the four independent commissions.



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