

## **As Time Goes By: The Art of Pre and Post Tour Communications**

**9:45 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.**

**Regis Room**

**Facilitators: Robert Fure, Director of Special Programs, Washington & Lee University  
Lea Ann Quirk, Director of Alumni Programs, University of Oklahoma**

We began the session with Rob and Lea Ann introducing themselves, giving a brief overview of their travel programs, how they incorporate pre and post tour communications and the benefits of doing so. The session was then opened up to discussion among all participants to confer about best practices and raise questions for the facilitators and attendees about the subject matter. Some of the questions raised were as follows, along with highlights the group discussion produced in answer to each question:

What if you don't have a host on a trip to help with pre and post communications and instill the affinity factor within the tour?

- Contact the tour operator guide that will be on the ground with your travelers....have a conversation about expectations and any specific needs or details you want addressed.
- Utilize travelers you may know well to help transport gifts or a school flag and also help take photos or notes of the journey.
- Have previous travelers who have taken the same tour write an account of the tour for future travelers (what to expect, what they enjoyed, tips, etc.).
- Set up a Flickr or DropBox account for travelers to access when they return from the tour to help share photos.
- During the tour have participants each write a journal entry on a different day to try and create a continuing storyline for the tour that can then be compiled by university/organization staff and distributed to all travelers. (Tips would be using a notepad app or having an ipad on the tour) This idea would be strictly on a volunteer basis.

How much is too much pre-communication?

- Keep in mind that communication before a tour keeps travelers engaged, excited and anticipating.
- Check with the tour operators to find out what they will be sending out and when so you're your correspondence can complement theirs and not overlap too much.
- Most travelers would like more information rather than less.

Pre-tour receptions: What are the pros and cons?

- It can be a great tool for your university/organization to meet your travelers in person and say thank you.
- Show off your campus or location by bringing travelers to you.
- Create comradery within the group before tour departs.
- Risk of creating a group within a group.
- Those that cannot attend feel left out – this is where a host can really be effective on tour by making sure to include those that could not come to the pre-tour reception.
- Timing is everything – be cautious about planning a reception too far out from departure date.

What are some other ways to communicate and interact with travelers before a tour begins while further deepen affinity and your organization's brand/mission?

- Build in an overnight stay in the departure city before the tour begins so travelers and host can get together - icebreaker activities, info about the tour, university or organization update, etc.
- Send out bio books before the tour (ask travelers to submit information beforehand).
- Have an info sheet with highlights about what's happening at your university/organization or an info sheet about what's happening in the country/countries about to be visited in relation to your university/organization (i.e., If the trip is going to Italy, share how many alumni you have living there, how many study-abroad programs are going on there, faculty research projects, etc.). This is a great opportunity to work with other departments on campus as well!
- Generate pre-tour reading lists for your travelers – Longitude Books, have tour operator provide theirs, faculty suggested reading materials, etc.

Snail mail vs. E-mail for communications with travelers

- Always adhere to individual university/organization privacy issues or policies
- As travelers get more tech-savvy, email is becoming more acceptable and effective in the travel industry
- Know your travelers and ask how they prefer to receive communications
- Set up email discussions list beforehand (perhaps use ListServe)
- Ask for biographical information through email
- Have faculty hosts email travelers after a tour to keep the conversation going

The problem travelers – examples and how do you communicate with them?

- If someone asks for a list of passengers before signing up for a tour, don't give it to them but you can offer demographics like age, degrees, hometowns, etc.
- If a travelers repeatedly causes issues on multiple tours, university/organization leadership may have to step in and have hard conversations with that person.
- Work with tour operators to determine course of action (do you deny them access to the tour?).
- If someone is "banned" from traveling with your university/organization – limit communication with that person, remove them from lists that will receive information about future tours, be honest and direct, etc.

Rob and Lea Ann ended the session by thanking everyone who attended and observed that many one-on-one conversations about the session subject matter continued to take place.