



Annual Report Summary for 2017

The Washington Coalition for Open Government, the statewide, non-profit, non-partisan transparency organization continued its mission to educate and assist citizens this past year in the ongoing quest to know what government is doing. Founded in 2002 by activists concerned with official actions eroding access to public records and meetings, the Coalition has grown to be the foremost advocate for government transparency in Washington State and includes hundreds of citizen activists, government officials, and representatives of business, media, law, labor, environmental, and public policy organizations. Our activities in our core mission areas continued at a brisk pace in 2017.

Education

- Coalition members participated in a variety of **public speaking appearances** that focused on educating organizations and individuals about the importance of government transparency and openness. Example of WCOG public appearances during 2017:
 - Frank Garred met with representatives from South Korea at the World Affairs Council in February
 - In October, Toby Nixon, George Erb, and Frank Garred represented WCOG at a meeting of the World Affairs Council's International Visitors Leadership Program for a one-hour briefing on the mission of WCOG. The meeting was also attended by eighteen representatives from countries around the globe and four World Affairs Council program coordinators.
 - Kathy George hosted a workshop on state public records laws during a News Tribune Conference in November in response to a Speaker's Bureau request.
 - Also in November, Nixon made a presentation regarding WCOG at the annual Bench-Bar-Press luncheon.
 - In December, Kathy George, Eric Stahl, and Michele Earl-Hubbard participated in a continuing legal education offering of the Washington Courts Historical Society, titled Keeping the People Informed: Open Government in Washington State, held at the Temple of Justice in Olympia.
- WCOG representatives performed **public outreach** by appearing on radio and television programs and podcasts, and were often quoted in newspaper articles. President Toby Nixon and other members made presentations at conferences of other organizations.
 - Throughout 2017 there was greater recognition from the media, as demonstrated by the increase in number of phone inquiries we received for quotes from reporters.
 - In January, Kathy George's comments appeared in the TNT.
 - Throughout 2017, WCOG President Toby Nixon was interviewed by numerous media outlets, including The Seattle Times, Whidbey News-Times, and The South Whidbey Record, among others, to flesh out their stories when open government was factor.

- As always, our staff **answered many requests** for assistance through our email, telephone help line, and website, www.washingtoncog.org. Assistance was provided by our help team in response to thirty-six Help Line requests.
- We continued expand our **social media** presence, increasing Twitter followers from 1,262 to 1,577, a 25% increase, during 2017.

Litigation

WCOG's **Legal Committee was active** during 2017 pursuing remedies in open government cases to improve case law.

- WCOG filed **amicus briefs** in various transparency lawsuits, including *West v. Vermillion*, *Kittitas County v. Sky Allphin*, *West v. Port of Tacoma*, *Michael Mockovak v. King County*, *Columbia Riverkeeper v. Port of Vancouver*, and others.
- WCOG's Executive Committee managed the **litigation** and settled an OPMA lawsuit with the University of Washington.
- WCOG **appealed** the dismissal of our lawsuit against Pierce County for violating the Public Records Act by unlawfully withholding records related to Mark Lindquist's handling of the *Nissen* case, which involved Lindquist's use of a private cell phone for public business and his refusal to make those records available to the public.

Legislation and Government

WCOG was at the forefront of efforts to stop further weakening of the state's OPMA/PRA again during the 2017 **legislative session**.

- WCOG's **Legislative Priorities** for 2017 included keeping committee meetings open to the public, establishing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for PRA and OPMA cases, requiring exemptions to the Public Records Act to be contained or referenced in RCW 42.56, and opposing further weakening of the Public Records Act.
- WCOG was successful in helping pass HB 1594, improving public records administration, and HB 1595, concerning costs associated with responding to public records requests. The passing of these bills decreased the demand for legislative reform, as evidenced by fewer bills being introduced in the 2018 legislative session.
- WCOG **expanded its assistance beyond state lines** by becoming involved in passing Oregon Senate Bill 2101, which created a Sunshine Committee similar to the Washington Public Records Exemption Accountability Committee, to review and assess Oregon's 550 exemptions to its Public Records Act.
- WCOG **participated in legislative hearings** and advocacy on many issues, including a hearing regarding the results of the PRA Stakeholders Group.

Other notable work:

- **Body Cam Task Force**- Eric Stahl represented WCOG on this task force at the invitation of the Speaker of the House and Lt. Governor.
- **AGO rules** - Bill Crittenden led extensive efforts to submit detailed comments on the Attorney General's proposed new model rules for the Public Records Act.
- **Website Portal Project** - Nixon was invited by the state archivist to serve on the stakeholder advisory group for the project to study a website "portal" for public records management by Washington agencies that was authorized in HB 1594, approved during the last legislative session.

- **KBTC Videos** - Toby Nixon, Brian Sonntag, and Sean Robinson were taped discussing the importance of Open Government on a Sunshine Week broadcast by KBTC.

Recognition

- The **Kenneth F. Bunting Award** was presented to KING5 Investigative Reporter, Susannah Frame, for a body of work and her dedication to the public's right to know.
- Longtime journalist, writer, and open government advocate, Kris Passey, was the recipient of the 2017 **James Madison Award** in recognition of his life-long dedication to open government issues and transparency.
- The **James Andersen Award**, given for extraordinary deeds to advance the Coalition was presented to William J. Crittenden for service in furthering the work of WCOG.
- The **2017 Ballard/Thompson Awards** will honor State Representative Joan McBride (D-48th District, Kirkland) and State Senator Mark Miloscia (R-30th District, Federal Way) for their efforts to improve public agency performance and accountability in their compliance with Washington's Public Records Act, as embodied in Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1594.
- **Key Awards** are presented throughout the year to people and organizations who made outstanding contributions to the cause of open government either through their work or their efforts to force transparency. Key Awards, in 2017, were presented to Seattle Times reporters Mike Baker and Justin Mayo for their work exposing a practice of placing profits above patient safety at Swedish Hospital-Cherry Hill, The Malheur Enterprise in Malheur, Oregon, for the editor's tenacity and persistence in procuring public records, Dayal Trusty, a public records officer for the Washington State Patrol recognized for her diligence and efficiency, Matthew Hayward, a state coordinator with the Freedom Foundation, for his part in urging Lincoln County Commissioners to unanimously decide to require open access to collective bargaining negotiations involving the county, and columnist Brittany Voie, reporter Natalie Johnson, & The Chronicle in Chehalis, for work exposing violations of the state's transparency laws by the Lewis County Commission.

Revenue and Sustainability

Since the National Freedom of Information Coalition stopped providing state organizations with sustainability grants, WCOG has struggled to locate other sources of ongoing, reliable, and sustainable funding. During 2017 we,

- Increased **Membership** from 181 to 205.
- Expanded our **Sustaining Partner** program.
- Drew \$28,733 in contributions during **GiveBIG**, the Seattle Foundation fundraising day.
- Submitted a **grant** application to the National Freedom of Information Coalition, for which we are awaiting results.
- Received a **grant** in the amount of \$500 from Best of The West.
- Mailed and emailed **contribution solicitations** throughout the year.