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**Canal
Corporation**

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Date: October 20, 2021

To: Karen Persichilli Keogh, Secretary to the Governor

Elizabeth Fine, Counsel to the Governor

From: Brian Stratton, Director

Subject: Government Transparency Initiative

The New York State Canal Corporation (NYS Canals) appreciates the opportunity to share information on our current transparency practices and identify additional ways to improve upon them and to add new transparency initiatives. NYS Canals serves canalside communities, businesses who operate on canal waterways, and tourists who enjoy the canals for recreation.

Existing transparency efforts

NYS Canals communicates with a wide range of customers through varied channels and platforms. Through the electronic [Notices to Mariners system](#), NYS Canals is able to communicate important information in real time with vessel operators regarding boating conditions, planned maintenance, emergency repairs, inclement weather, lock closures, awareness of events, etc. For Canalway Trail alerts, NYS Canals shares information via their [trail website](#), social media and via the [Empire State Trail website](#).

The [NYS Canals website](#) is used for communications related to seasonal recreational opportunities as well as for sharing public information on key initiatives like the Earthen Embankment Integrity Program and work at the DeRuyter Dam Project. Information is updated regularly, including NYS Canals policies and procedures for vessel operators and businesses.

NYS Canals uses its social media channels not only to share updates and alerts but to educate the public about operation of the Canal System. Through photos and videos and posts in easy-to-understand language, NYS Canals has built a following of canal enthusiasts who look to social media to understand things like the movable dams, maintenance programs, water levels, and the operation of locks and other iconic and historic equipment.

Community engagement

The Public and Government Relations team is responsible for communications on behalf of NYS Canals. They are always available to field inquiries from the media, elected officials, businesses, and members of the public about water levels, maintenance practices, recreational programs, and any other questions that may arise. They also routinely hold public information sessions on local and regional, whether under the official SEQR process or at the general request of community leaders. They work cross-functionally with NYPA's Community & Government Affairs group as well as NYPA's Environmental Justice group to ensure that NYS Canals is accessible to communities.

The Marketing group exhibits at local and statewide events to connect with residents. In addition to their popular booth at the Great New York State Fair, they have also supported adaptive recreation events, fishing derbies, and education programs.

Special programming

The 2020 Staycations program and 2021 On the Canals initiative offered free excursions all along the canal. Activities were developed and delivered in partnership with local vendors and included cycling, kayaking, canoeing, bird watching, fishing, and more. This fall and winter, new excursions will be introduced and may include rock climbing, snow shoeing, and ice skating. Participants complete a post-excursion survey to share their thoughts on what went well and what can be improved in the future.

Grants

Several small grant programs are funded by NYS Canals and are focused on support for local initiatives in canalside communities. Examples of funded activities include trailway and trailhead improvements, installation of boat launches, adaptive equipment for cyclists and paddlers, amenities for boaters, and LED lighting.

Partnerships and Membership Organizations

NYS Canals partners with the [Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor](#) and [Parks and Trails New York](#) to implement a wide variety of public-facing programs including the Canalway Challenge, issuance of maps and guidebooks, exhibiting at events, paddling events, boater safety presentations, volunteer maintenance and ambassador groups, and other value-add activities.

NYS Canals representatives regularly participate in meetings of key membership organizations including, but not limited to, the following: The Canal Society, Canal NY, Tour Boat Operators Association, Boat Owners of the United States, NYS Tourism Industry Association, and more.

Additional commitments to transparency

The NYS Canal Corporation commits to the following actions to improve the transparency of our work:

1. Further leverage social media channels to give the public a view into the expertise and tradesmanship that go into the stewardship of the Canal System (i.e., including photos and video of capital projects with straightforward language describing the work in context)
2. Design and develop a new corporate website that provides timely information and resources through a modernized customer interface
3. Update the existing Canal Corporation website with more information on frequent topics like fishing programs, agricultural use of canal water for irrigation, water levels on reservoir dams in flood-prone communities, and maps and diagrams depicting canal assets that may have planned maintenance
4. Develop campaign webpages that provide clear and objective information on programs and projects that affect canalside communities and the public (i.e., this [dedicated page](#) for the Earthen Embankment Integrity Program that takes complex regulatory information and makes it more accessible for concerned citizens through contextualized case studies, photos, and presentations – currently in draft)
5. Leverage geotargeted paid media to inform customers in a specific geographic area of opportunities (i.e., letting people know if there is a free cycling or paddling event coming up near them)

6. Pilot ways to improve our Notices to Mariners by testing Application Program Interface (API)-based communications that can geo-target messaging to vessel operators that is most relevant to them
7. Along with NYPA, NYS Canals is adopting the Integrated Reporting (<IR>) framework and will issue our first <IR> report in 2023. The framework identifies a broad base of capitals, or resources, from which companies create value, ranging from financial, intellectual, and manufactured, to human, social and relationship, and natural. By mapping inputs and outcomes to these capitals and tying investments to impacts across ESG, <IR> provides a more comprehensive view of value creation that will be available to the public.