

ECONOMIC RESOURCE ALLIANCE (ERA)

April 12, 2021 9:30 a.m.

Via Zoom

Meeting Summary

Attendees: Jeff Holt (Sault EDC), Tracey Laitinen (Sault EDC), Jason Venema & Mari Schupp (Michigan Works), Allie Brawley (Cloverland), Tony Haller (Sault Chamber), Don Gerrie (USDA and Mayor SSM), Mariah Goos (EUP Regional Planning), Jake Brown (Cloverland Electric Cooperative), Chris Olson (President Chippewa Co. EDC), Vicki Schwab (MEDC), Tony Cutler (Senator Schmidt's Office), and LeAnne Kachmarsky (PTAC)

1. Call to order 9:30am

Holt welcomed attendees and proceeded with introductions

2. Review of past meeting summary

Please let Laitinen know if there are any corrections.

3. PTAC Presentation – LeAnne Kachmarsky

Kachmarsky gave a history of PTAC and how the organization can assist with government contracting. Please refer to the attached PowerPoint for more details. SAM registrations were discussed and Kachmarsky noted that you should never have to pay register and to reach out to PTAC for help at no cost. PTAC has several upcoming trainings listed here: <https://www.networksnorthwest.org/news-events/events/?select=event-category-id-7>. Brown inquired on the business locations to which Kachmarsky explained they are spread out all over the U.P. Gerrie inquired about the Soo Locks Project listings and Kachmarsky explained how she has alerts set up in Beta. SAM and emails them out to clients regularly.

4. Marketing Strategy Committee – Brown/Gerrie/Hoath/Haller/Schultz /Venema

Brown had included several pages of research in the packet including a SWOT analysis.

Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development and Marketing Brainstorm

Currently used marketing mediums:

- www.saultstemarie.com
 - o Contains great information such as things to do in the area, major events in Sault Ste. Marie, places to stay, and attractions.
- Pure Michigan Sault Ste. Marie Page
 - o Contains similar information as the .com website.
- City of Sault Ste. Marie Website
 - o Local facing website. Built for local tax payments and governmental information.
 - o Outdated look and feel.
- Downtown Sault website (DDA)
 - o Contains similar information to the Pure Michigan and .com websites.
 - o Information and calendar are outdated (2020 information present).
- Facebook Pages
 - o City of Sault Ste. Marie
 - Used predominately for city wide information spread. Lots of information about city meetings, job postings, and events happening in the city.

- Downtown Sault Ste. Marie
 - Mainly fundraising and sales as of late. Lots of posts about local fundraisers, as well as shirt sales and driving traffic to local businesses.
- Sault Ste. Marie EDC
 - Predominately information about local business opportunities and grant opportunities available.
- The Sault News
 - Of all the stories on their home page, 3 **total** stories are local. Predominately national and statewide information available.
- Local TV broadcasting
 - Very little “local” information. Stations based in Marquette and downstate meaning large amounts of information are geared towards those areas

Problem: Media coverage is very low in the area and general press and “information” is being obtained through Facebook via the “Sault Rants and Raves” Facebook Group. A large majority of this “Press” is negative and contains large amounts of misinformation. Press that is controlled through local entities is geared towards local fundraising and information on local events. There are very few “recaps” of how those events went, as well as applauding how the fundraising efforts went. There is a lot of “ask” and very little value provided showing the positives from those asks.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

- Outdoor events. The area has a large array of outdoor events going on at all times of the year. From snowmobiling, fishing (both ice and open water), hiking, watching the ships, going to beaches and parks, boating, hunting, and downtown street events
- Small community. There is a lot of connection within the community. Everyone knows everyone in this community and has a sense of connection and pride to the area that they grew up and live in. They know the doctors, nurses, fireman, policeman, business owners, and government officials in the community.

Weaknesses:

- Little press coverage. Due to the small size of the area and the limited “news”, media outlets tend to cover a wide variety of happenings across the entire region.
- Bad press on social platforms. Groups such as “Sault Rants and Raves” have a significant amount of negative press. The page, by nature, allows for trolls to have a place to vent bad experiences and mishaps in the community.
- Poverty in the community. 17% of the community lives below the poverty line (compared to 14% state average), 33% grow up in a single parent home. Median income is \$10,000 less than the state average. This creates a stressed community with limited disposable income.
- Feeling of a fractured community. While the community is small and overall does look out for their neighbors, the press coverage and social media presence would lead most to believe that the community is much more fractured than it potentially is in real life. In the sense of good marketing, real life does not matter. In 2021, perception on the internet is considered “real life” by more individuals than what is occurring in the community.

Opportunities:

- Technology and media in 2021 gives everyone the opportunity to control their own narrative. The City of Sault Ste. Marie has many different media outlets through their individual social media pages and websites. These pages can be leveraged to curate content and control the narrative in the area.
- There are many successful fundraisers and community events happening in the city. Very few of them are reported on during and after the fact. Much of the conversation on these events happens in the form of “asks” of the public. Simply adding a recap of each event could boost public perception and provide positive news for the area.
- Events are happening nearly every weekend of the year in the area. This gives plenty of content to report on and provide value for the citizens and visitors of Sault Ste. Marie.
- Sault Rants and Raves is a local page. With that said, conversations can be had with the moderators which may allow for certain forms of media to be featured on the page. It also may be beneficial to ask for a better moderation of certain false claims on the website.
- The community has numerous talented individuals who have experience with curating content and media. Leveraging their talents and asking for help will be crucial to gain enough positive content to distribute.

Threats:

- Sault Rants and Raves will constantly be a threat to good press. The very nature of the page allows for individuals who wouldn't normally have a platform the ability to have such a platform. This will inherently allow for negative news to be spread, particularly from at risk individuals who may be unemployed and are at home with nothing better to do than complain.
- Time is very limited. It is unknown how many individuals have the bandwidth to take on ownership of this content and it will be a time commitment to consistently curate content.
- Backlash on posts. There will always be negative individuals in any community. Consistent monitoring of any media will be needed in order to hide and delete comments which may violate terms and conditions.

Recommendations:

1. Begin to focus on presenting recaps of the positive events and fundraisers that happen in the community. Communicating the success of the events and fundraisers in the area will build a FOMO (fear of missing out) effect that will influence future events around the city. This will also give participants a sense of pride in what they did and create opportunities for organic reach through shares and comments.
2. Produce organic content through articles and media released directly from the source. Instead of waiting for a news station to cover the event, present the news outlets with the content that they should be covering. This will allow them to see the happenings in the area, as well as pull quotes from the events that are controlled rather than potential interviews with individuals who may not present factual information.
3. Coordinate, organize, and merge web pages. There are currently numerous sources for information regarding the city for both visitors and citizens. This complicates the user experience, particularly because certain outlets do not have up-to-date information.
4. Reach out to local business on a regular basis and ask if they have anything that they would like to share through group social media pages. Through this work to generate the content, they can also be notified of opportunities to update their own Facebook or web pages with up to date content and information. Many businesses in our area do not have easily accessible pages for travelers with even the simplest information such as hours of operation.

Brawley supported the need for a unified calendar and explained how things can seem fractured to an outsider. Brawley gave an example of how Cloverland communicates in several different ways for those that may not

have internet. Schupp asked about other social media outlets and suggested Twitter. Brawley suggested Trish at Parks and Rec siting her winter events that were popular and Ken at Birdseye. Gerrie recapped a recent City of SSM and Sault Tribe meeting and will be talking to EDOs to discuss a potential regional plan funded by federal and state funds. Goos gave some history on a joint calendar that was created at the CVB, work hours, and eventual failure due to lack of input. Having a regional tagline was discussed. Schwab shared her knowledge of chambers that have community calendars include the Delta County Chamber of Commerce <https://www.deltami.org/calendar> and Keweenaw Chamber of Commerce <https://business.keweenaw.org/events/calendar>.

The group will meet again in May and review what Linda Hoath is working on regarding hotels and Soo Today. A joint calendar and coordination of Facebook and webpages will be discussed.

5. UP Ambassadors

No update at this time.

6 & 7. Events/Training/Workforce Development/Individual Sharing

Venema shared the upcoming Apprenticeship job fair in partnership with the Mackinac Economic Alliance taking place on April 16th: <https://upmichiganworks.org/news-events/>

Holt gave an update on the Return North UP Wide virtual employment event coming May 20th in partnership with other UP Smartzones. <https://return-north.com/>

Holt shared an upcoming Lunch & Learn event focused on MILEAP and Talent Innovation to be held April 16th – see attached flyer.

Holt recapped a recent presentation by LSSU's Public Relations class where they were able to evaluate EUP Regional Planning and give them a fresh perspective on their elevator speech and other ways to reach out to the community. Goos remarked on their helpfulness and that they will be getting ad campaign materials and more from the students.

Brawley gave an update on the Cloverland Cares scholarships noting that the amount was increased from \$1500 to \$2000/student and that 3 individuals will be receiving awards this round. All awardees are LSSU students, 1 in nursing and 2 in elementary education. Brawley thanked Haller for his help in revamping the program.

Schwab gave an update on the following:

Pure Michigan regional advertising campaign launches, signaling warm weather is up on us

The regional and in-state Pure Michigan warm weather broadcast and connected TV advertising campaign will run in key markets through July 4, 2021. The campaign will include a brand new television commercial, "Catch Up," inviting travelers to catch up on lost time this summer in a place where time is not measured in minutes, but moments encourages travelers to make up for lost time, get outside and enjoy summer safely,

Additional commercials featured include 14 Clubs, Along the Way, Perfect Summer, and Wish You Were Here.

Still Pure Michigan campaign continues to encourage businesses, tourists and communities alike to follow and promote COVID-19 safety guidelines to help ensure the best experiences during the warm weather travel season

UPCDC Purest of Pure Michigan Video

The MEDC marketing team freshened up a UP Video that was created a few years ago for the UP Collaborative Development Council. It is now posted on the MEDC website and we are free to share.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yy6g_AhGb1k

Michigan Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

The Michigan SBDC offers small business COVID-19 specific assistance and resources, including counseling services, webinars, and guidance on critically, and commonly asked questions. The Michigan Small Business Development Center exists to help businesses start and grow in Michigan. How they can help you: <https://sbdcmichigan.org/our-services/> . How to get started with no-cost, confidential, one-on-one business consulting: <https://sbdcmichigan.org/request-for-business-counseling/> .

Small businesses in all 15 counties of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan will benefit from expanded support services offered through the Michigan Small Business Development Center (SBDC), thanks to CARES Act Funding. New services include: 3 additional business consultants to meet the increase in demand for one-on-one consulting support and new partnerships with service providers (website development, marketing, accounting, etc.) who can help businesses weather the effects of COVID-19 and thrive in the future.

Nick Kibble is the local consultant based in Sault Ste. Marie and can be reached at nkibble@mtu.edu , 734-377-3058

8. The next meeting will be **May 10th via Zoom**.
9. The meeting ended at approx. 10:45 a.m.

TGL