Registration is Open!

If you want to gain skills, network with colleagues from other states, see old friends and make new ones, join us at NCSL’s 2016 Legislative Summit in Chicago and LINCS’ 17th annual professional development seminar in Austin!

In addition to top-notch speakers and deep-dive policy sessions, this year’s Summit offers lots for legislative staff. Check out the Summit agenda and click on All Tracks/Legislative Staff.

- Gather for a welcoming Dutch treat dinner.
- Tour the Museum of Broadcast Communications courtesy of NCTA.
- Attend “Building Your Brand” LINCS-sponsored session.
- Attend “Seismic Demographic Shift: Generations and the Office” LINCS-sponsored session.
- Meet with the National Civic Trust (formerly NAPAN), the association for state public affairs networks.

**Austin**

Your hosts are planning a Texas-sized PDS in Austin. Join us for a thought-provoking and fun seminar. Learn from the experts and each other, share best practices, and network with a great group of professionals.

- Visit the esteemed LBJ Presidential Library.
- Spend a day at the Texas State Capitol, enjoy sessions, a tour and reception.
- Tour Time Warner Cable News’ studios, hosted by Capital Tonight anchor.
- Hear from the respected Texas Tribune’s Evan Smith and Ross Ramsey.

**We want to hear from you!**

We need your tips, photos or articles for the next newsletter. Please email your contribution to the newsletter editor by Friday, July 15, 2016 at 5 p.m. MT.

Late submissions will be considered for future issues.

**Newsletter Editor**
Jane Carroll Andrade
jane.andrade@ncsl.org

Please include Newsletter in the subject line.

**Correction**

In the winter 2016 newsletter we announced incorrect dates for the PDS.

The PDS will be held Sept. 26-28, but there will be a Dutch treat dinner for those arriving Sunday, Sept. 25.
Hello LINCSisters!

I just returned from the Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee (LSCC) spring meeting in Minneapolis. Attendees witnessed history in the making with the proposed staff section mergers of Legal Services Staff Section (LSSS) and Research and Committee Staff Section (RACSS), which will be voted on at the Legislative Summit this summer.

In addition, we previewed NCSL mobile app enhancements for year-round usage and upcoming e-learning revisions that will reduce current full-length webinars to shorter “TED Talk” style formats. Staff participated as a test group for product development of a possible training seminar for civil discourse. LINCS’ involvement at this level allows our staff section to have a voice with greater impact on the present and future of our members.

It was my personal mission to join forces with fellow staff section officers to facilitate new connections. How do we all fit within the puzzle of the Alphabet Soup called NCSL? The maze of acronyms inspired me to raise the question: How can we help new attendees identify their respective staff sections? How can we forge connections with our members and the larger population of Summit attendees? For more on this discussion, or to share your ideas, drop me an email and I’ll present them to the workgroup at our next meeting on Aug. 7.

Remember, we’re only as strong as our weakest “LINCS.”

NCSL constantly looks for effective ways to serve legislators and their staff. If you know someone who works in legislative communications not on the LINCS list, or you hire a new staffer, please let me know! We are here to help you succeed in your job, and to facilitate sharing best practices with your colleagues from other states. We continue to support each other through our listserv, Twitter account and webpage.

In the coming year we hope to conduct a 50-state survey of how legislatures issue media credentials and decide where media can be located in the capitol. It will be interesting to learn about different state processes.

We hope to see as many of you as possible at our upcoming meetings. If you are unable to travel, be on the lookout for news about stipends.

Last but not least, the deadline is drawing near for nominating an outstanding LINCSter for the Legislative Staff Achievement Award. Please send me an email by June 2.

Here’s to a fun and productive spring!

Cheers,

Jane
Shortly after joining the Louisiana Senate in 1993, Brenda Hodge decided to attend the NCSL's Annual Meeting, now known as the Legislative Summit. After arriving in San Diego, she had a hard time figuring out how she and her job fit in. At the time, there was no staff section specifically devoted to legislative communications and public information professionals.

The irony was hard to miss: hundreds of communications professionals working in the same field who had no formal means of communicating with each other. After meeting several colleagues from other states who felt the same way, Hodge and the group took action.

“I really felt that with the right support and coordination, professional communications and information staff could make a difference in a day and age when there was distrust of government and the people in it,” Hodge said at the time.

So began the efforts to launch a new NCSL section. Hodge and several staff from other legislatures began working with NCSL, particularly then-Communications Director Gene Rose, as well as Brian Weberg, who had been organizing periodic conferences for communications staff. They set out to create an accurate directory of legislative employees working in the areas of communications, media relations, or public information. They also started contacting their colleagues in other states and encouraging them to urge NCSL to focus on their needs.

Fast-forward to the 1997 Public Information and Media Relations Seminar in Washington, D.C. Hodge and her colleague, Sheila McCant, attended. The two women drew up a handwritten petition, signed by many who attended the conference, requesting the creation of a new staff section for legislative communications professionals. Susan Swords and Penny Silletti (now Gardner), two public information staffers from the New Jersey Office of Legislative Services, were thinking along the same lines. After the seminar, the four kept in touch and began researching the NCSL requirements for starting a new staff section.

Criteria adopted in 1979 by the Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee (LSCC), required that to create a new legislative staff section:

- A request must be made by at least 20 legislatures.
- The request must be favorably reviewed by the LSCC, and a recommendation made to the NCSL Executive Committee.
- Bylaws shall be submitted after the initial screening.

Over the next several weeks, Silletti and Swords contacted every state in an effort to obtain a letter of support. Twenty-six letters had been gathered by the 1998 NCSL Annual Meeting in Las Vegas. By July, nearly 400 potential legislative staff had been identified, a formal request for the staff section was presented to the full LSCC in Las Vegas, and a task force to study the idea was formed.

It had taken nearly six years, but in January 1999, the task force recommended establishing the new staff section, and the LSCC, followed by the NCSL Executive Committee, both unanimously approved the 10th NCSL staff section. It was the first time a new staff section had been ratified since 1982, when the Legal Services Staff Section was formed.

The first official LINCS business meeting was held during the 1999 NCSL Annual Meeting in Indianapolis, followed by the first professional development seminar in New Orleans in October 1999. Feedback from nearly 100 LINCS attendees revealed a gratifying feeling of professional recognition that comes with a designated staff section.

“It is an amazing feeling to be part of a ground swell, when you feel as if you are really onto something important,” Gardner said. “I think this was sort of an example of democracy in action. It was a grass-roots campaign led by a group of professionals who needed some help from a larger authoritative body.”

And the rest, as they say, is history.
Brenda Hodge has served as Louisiana Senate communication officer since 1993. She came to the Senate after a brief stint as a communications director for a congressperson. Before that, Brenda spent 24 years in television news, covering state government and serving as managing editor for WBRZ-TV, the ABC affiliate in Baton Rouge, La. We can all thank her for having the foresight to help found LINCS.

You pioneered LINCS in the 1990s. How would you describe your vision for the staff section?

To provide an exchange of information among folks whose duty it was to provide communication services to individuals or to the body as a whole. At that point in time there was, much like it is now, a lot of disconnect between the public and the legislative bodies. So there was a real sense of a need to provide a better connection with what the legislative process was about to the folks back home.

What has been the catalyst for LINCS’ success? Passing the torch properly. Making sure that as the older folks leave, retire, move on, that we keep the younger staff members involved and enthusiastic about this. I make sure that new staff go to meetings and conferences so they can get involved, get their foot in the door, and get an idea of what services are offered by NCSL. And to learn how networking through LINCS can make a difference in the way they perform their jobs and services to our members.

Which innovations have caught you by surprise? How communications move. We used to marvel at the 24-hour news cycle when cable news started, but now it’s not just cable news—it’s a constant bombardment of blogs, tweets, posts and reddits. The media relations and communications aspect is 24/7, with information coming at you like a big Hurricane Katrina all the time. So I think that has been a real challenge. You’re constantly trying to keep on message—not just on a particular political message, but making sure that the information out there is right.

What advice do you have for legislative communicators? Don’t let the technology take over. You still need an understanding of the process and the people who make up the process. To be a good communications person on a legislative level, it’s not what goes on in front of you that matters. It’s what goes on around you that matters. If you don’t know that, then you cannot find a member’s voice. After all, if you’re going to communicate for a member, you must find their voice. If you can’t find their voice, then nothing you’re going to do is going to sound like them, act like them, feel like them, do like them. And if you can’t find a member’s voice, then you can’t find your institution’s voice. That does not change, no matter whether you’re typing it on the manual typewriter and putting it in the mail, or hitting the send email button.

How did you grow the membership when LINCS first started, and how should we be approaching outreach today? Initially it wasn’t hard to recruit members because they were happy to have a place to land. The problem that we faced in recent years is term limits, especially in your communications offices that are tied to leadership or minority leaders. So it is somewhat difficult. In order to get back to where we are a growing group, I think it’s important to focus our efforts on offices that are stable and staff members who are there no matter what. Those are basically your chief researchers and clerks and secretaries. We can say, ‘Okay, we need your help. We know you’ve got people like us. You’re involved in NCSL. Who in your organization can we call to invite to participate in LINCS?’

What do you love about LINCS? We obviously have different backgrounds. Some of us have been around a long time; some of us are new to the venue. We’re all sincere in trying to support and protect the institution of representative democracy. We’re all here for the right reasons regardless of a difference of opinion in politics, and I’m sure there are many. But we’re all professionals and we’re all really good people.

How would your staff describe you? Probably too hard on them. I try to let them be self-motivated and they probably wish I would give them better direction, but I think you only learn by doing. When I see them kind of drowning, I say, ‘Okay, how can I help?’ But I really like for them to figure it out. They would probably describe me as hands-off and probably should be more hands-on.

What life lessons do you learn working in a legislature? That it’s easy to become cynical, but obviously you can become cynical in any occupation. You have to be professional, you have to be fair, you have to be thick-skinned, you need to have a very good work ethic. Don’t tell me why you can’t do it, tell me how you’re going to get it done.

How do you destress from your job? I’m not sure I do. My husband is a good sounding board for me as he listens and lets me vent. Then when he’s had enough he says, ‘Okay, leave it behind.’ He forces me to put it in perspective. I like to go out, sit on my back porch, look at the birds and watch things go by.

What would surprise people most to learn about you? That I’m not as thick-skinned as they probably think I am. I have a softer side when it comes to my grandkids. One of my favorite pastimes of all times and when I’m really at peace is when I’m waterskiing. And that’s slalom—no two skis!

Any final words you’d like to share? I encourage all of our LINCS members to just stay there, stay strong, and help us grow.

Jane Carroll Andrade conducted this interview, which has been edited for length. Photo courtesy of Damien Heard, Louisiana Senate
Maryland Creating a Pilot Program on Closed Captioning for Video Streaming

Annapolis - On April 9, 2016, with the passage of House Bill 413, The Maryland General Assembly established a pilot program on closed-captioning for video streaming.

The purpose of the pilot program is to determine an efficient and cost-effective process for providing the public with closed captioning for live and archived video streaming on the Maryland General Assembly website.

The program takes effect on July 1, 2016 and results of the program are due to be reported to the General Assembly on or before Oct. 1, 2017.

For more on the pilot program, click here.

Does your state stream or record legislative proceedings?

Tell us on Twitter! @NCSLLINCS

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TAMN's ever-growing online collection includes home movies, amateur films, advertisements, local television, industrial and corporate productions, as well as Hollywood and internationally produced moving images of Texas. By partnering with institutions and individuals across the state, TAM1 digitizes and provides web access to thousands of moving images that offer insight into Texas' history and culture.

TAMI partners with the Texas Film Commission to administer the Texas Film Round-Up. The Round-Up provides free digitization for Texas-related films and videos, online access to a selection of the contributed films, statewide public programming, and educator resources encouraging the use of Texas films in the classroom.

TAMI’s educational programs include Teach Texas to promote the sharing of Texas moving images via screenings, demonstrations, and lectures at venues across the state. TAMI’s collection of online educator resources includes lesson plans and activities that target a vast range of topics. Learn about the oil industry, politics, commerce, geography, and culture.

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Use PowerPoint to enhance your message rather than make it. Reveal only critical points on the screen rather than parrot a lot of text word for word.

Minimize use of acronyms. When using an acronym, begin by stating the full name first before switching to its acronym form.

To create a PowerPoint project, choose Page Set Up and size slides to match the display screen. Conventional choices are 4:3 and 16:9.

Incorporate Photoshop images or embed video whenever possible. To fit within your PowerPoint parameters, create your image or video to match the resolution of your project: 4:3 (10 x 7.5 inches) and 16:9 (10 x 5.63 inches).

Check the Slide Show resolution setting “Use Current Resolution” when projecting to a screen.

THE FUTURE OF WI-FI

It’s in your laptop, it’s in your smartphone, it’s in your watch, it’s everywhere. It’s Wi-Fi and even though it’s barely 15 years old, it’s already become the glue binding our digital lifestyles. But if you’ve ever tried getting a good Wi-Fi signal in a coffee shop, on the street, or in a busy airport, you know that Wi-Fi has limitations. When too many people are using the same connection, Wi-Fi quickly overloads and becomes sluggish.

Most Wi-Fi is everywhere because it runs over unlicensed spectrum, which isn’t reserved for any specific user or technology. But the future is cloudy - some new technologies could begin to interfere with Wi-Fi and its popularity means we need more spectrum to let it grow. There is a solution. We can solve this Wi-Fi crunch by freeing up more spectrum for unlicensed use and ensuring that new technologies work politely.
This is the newsletter of the Legislative Information and Communications Staff (LINCS), a staff section of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

In the next issue of The Voice...
• Legislative Summit: Chicago
• LSS/LINCS PDS: Austin
• Call to Serve: Join the Executive Team

Save the Date

June 2, 2016
Legislative Staff Achievement Award Nomination Deadline

July 15, 2016
Summer Issue Content Submission Deadline

Aug. 8-11, 2016
NCSL Annual Summit | Chicago

Sept. 2, 2016
Austin PDS Early Bird Registration Deadline

Sept. 26-28, 2016
LSS/LINCS Annual Professional Development Seminar | Austin