Forum Meeting Support

<div align="right">April 26, 2024</div>

The following is an update to an August 2015 document, revised March 2023, that listed all Forum processes in which I am involved. The goal was to show how the variety of things I do could be unwound and distributed to more people if there were such people to take ownership of those tasks. Example from 2015: hospitality (preparing coffee, cleaning up, buying supplies, accounting for all donations and expenses). Tasks on the list below are generally more difficult to separate because they involve processing the same basket of video and words and then posting them in different format for website, e-blast and archival formats. Time ranges are estimates./steve johnston 704-408-3348 sjohnston@tuesdayforumcharlotte.org

FRIDAY THROUGH TUESDAY (4-12 hours)

Make a copy of previous Tuesday's e-blast, clear it of material specific to the previous Tuesday, then in the announcements section delete items that will be over by the following Tuesday and eliminate the newsletters etc. at the bottom.

Receive and summarize announcements sent in by e-mail, adding summaries to the e-blast for the following Tuesday.

Search Web for details omitted by announcer (time, place, day of week, contact or website, etc.) and verify the rest if possible.

(Preparing announcements from incoming e-mail continues through Monday night to clear decks for Tuesday work. But lots of groups know that the Forum announcements are compiled and sent Tuesday night, so occasionally a third of the incoming announcements arrive during the day Tuesday.)

As details of upcoming presenters come in from facilitators, add them to Upcoming Spearkers on website.

SATURDAY (1-2 hours)

Make a copy of the entire folder marked Recently, moving it to desktop. Rename to Tuesday's date all files for use Tuesday, including Recently1, Recently2 and Recently3. Recently1 goes to website front on Saturday to promote Tuesday's presenters. Find on web pictures of the speakers and place them in the Recently folder on the desktop. (Finding pictures of presenters on the Internet is often really time-consuming!) As necessary, edit those pictures in Photos or other software to brighten or to add definition. Place edited pictures at full size in Recently under a new name.

Open Recently1, adjust picture boxes to the number of speakers, bring in edited pictures, write headline that begins "Tuesday:" Do not jam second line. Export as JPG to Recently folder. Then in Photos, import Recently1.jpg and export as a JPEG at custom width 434 pixels. Place export in desktop folder of material going to website (usually named, e.g., "ToWeb 24-04") Go to website and add Recently1 to library, copy URL, then put that URL in the coding kept in the Recently folder named DATEURLs that you earlier renamed by the Tuesday date. Copy that full

coding, go back to website, click Appearance/Widgets, and place in Box 1 after removing the earlier coding. Scroll to the bottom of the page to save; call up the website on the Internet and confirm that the new Recently1 is on the page. Click on it to confirm that the click transfers viewer to the Upcoming Speakers where there is more information about Tuesday's speakers.

While you have Recently1 handy, copy all the content and open Recently2. Delete its content, then copy Recently1 content. Rework the headline to say "Live Now: etc.) and process a Recently2.Jjpeg to the website library. The library will produce a URL. Save it in the DA-TEURLs file under the coding marked "live now coding" and save.

SUNDAY (1 hour)

Copy previous Sunday's e-blast, eliminate outdated material, add name of upcoming speaker, replace the previous Tuesday's Recently1 file with the new one. Send to two lists: Joi-nUs, and Peltzer (List named Peltzer was a workaround for some addresses, thinned out by pandemic deaths, that never received e-blasts when part of JoinUs.)

Find the Welcome PowerPoint in the Recently Folder, update the presenters' names and replace the previous week' Recently1 file with the current week's Recently. If you have created this file on one computer, be sure to move a copy to a PC laptop with an HDMI plug on the side. The Webex Room Kit does not respond well to Macs, so it must be on a PC laptop. Do not bring this file on a flashdrive. City staff have passwords into the Room Kit and can use a keyboard on or in the audio cabinet at the front of the room to open the PowerPoint directly on the wall screens after the flashdrive is inserted into the Dell behind the right wall screen. City IT Dept. will not allow non-employees such access, but they can connect a PC laptop into the Room Kit using an HDMI cord plugged into a wall outlet marked "GUEST HDMI" near the sudio cabinet.

MONDAY (1-4 hours)

Workload for announcements varies both by day of week and by time of year. Spring is busy. December is quiet. But be prepared for surprises. As more people at event-sponsoring in-stitutions have made use of the Forum announcements, there have been more announcements arriving by e-mail on Mondays and Tuesdays. Preparing all announcements received by Mon-day evening can make Tuesdays go better.

TUESDAY (11-14 hours, not including the afternoon nap you may need)

Room and hospitality:

Arrive at Belmont Center at 7:20 with laptops, accessories, any coffee table supplies and two containers of coffee grounds. Adjust table and chair setup as necessary; many groups use the room, and considerable moving of tables and chairs may be necessary. Be sure presenter table is right-sized for the number of presenters.

Haul out plastic containers from "stuff room" to two tables at back of room, under wall clock. In the containers you will find a 50-foot cord to lay down from coffee table, behind chairs and tables, to wall outlet midway down left wall. (Cord became necessary for coffee urns when flat-screens were added to foyer and circuit breakers began flipping off immediately. Each re-ceptacle in conference room is on a separate circuit.)

Set up coffee condiments, add $4 to the donation box, brew the coffee. Larger urn takes about 40 minutes to brew, so get it going by 7:40. Place the empty coffee ground containers in bag to take home for refilling. Write down the number of coffee cups set out for use.

Microphones

In the audio cabinet are four Shure wireless mics. Turn each on in turn to check volume and battery health. Place two on the facilitators' table, the other two to be shared by presenters.

The Webex Room Kit was designed for passive use during COVID when attendees would be 6 feet apart and microphones could not be passed. The quad cameras above the front wall screens were to automatically refocus on the person speaking, and the microphones in the plexiglas installation on the ceiling above the presenters would pick up the speaker's voice. In practice, the quad cameras do not reliably refocus on the speaker, and the mics in the plexiglas installation could not hear the presenters below and behind the plexiglas. During Forum meetings, mics not in use must be turned off to avoid feedback and tabletop noise. Those holding the live mic often have to be reminded to bring the mic closer to their mouth. A hand signal to the facilitator often engages the facilitator in delivering that reminder via her mic.

Welcome screen to wall:

Using the PowerPoint file (Sunday, paragraph 2), power up the PC and put the PowerPoint on loop and on full screen. Insert into the PC the HDMI cord leading to the wall outlet or directly to the Dell behind the left wall screen. If the left wall screen behind presenters table does not show the PPT, unplug the HDMI cable, cycle the left wall screen off and back on using the on-off switch on the bottom of the screen, about 5 inches from the right edge, and reconnect HDMI cable to the PC. If wall screen is unresponsive, message Terry Bradley; happens all the time.

The PPT on wall does two important things: It lets attendees entering the room after 8 a.m. the identiies of those presenting; and it is an early warning of Room Kit problems that might be fixable before 8:30.

Livestream:

The following is a truncated list of directions because the directions change frequently. Best learned by doing.

Basic controls of the Webex meeting (starting, stopping, recording, livestreaming) are on the laptop used to start the meeting. All camera video and sound is controlled via a tablet tethered to the table adjacent to the audio cabinet. This tablet connects to the Room Kit Dells that hang behind the front wall screens via a 10-Base T cable. One would expect a longer cord would allow the tablet to move to the back of the room to get the tech out of sight, but the tablet crashes the Room Kit when the 10-Base T gets longer. Terry Bradley has a key to the tablet's security cable.

Start Webex meeting using personal Webex account; start recording in cloud; start livestreaming to website, Facebook and YouTube. (Webex includes one destination in its annual fee; to send it three directions where the Forum's different audiences are requires a second service like Restream.)

Throughout the livestream, there is a roughly 16-second delay between real-time speech in Belmont Center and that audio-video feed coming back to a smartphone or other screen in the Belmont Center. To check that the livestreams are working, be sure to wait that 16 seconds. During the meeting, check the livestreams to verify they are still working and restart the livestream if necessary.

After the livestream is operating, go to DATEURL file on your main laptop, copy coding

marked "Live now coding" and place in Forum websiteWordPress/Appearance/Widgets Box 1 after removing the earlier coding. Scroll to the bottom of the page to save; call up the website on the Internet and confirm that the new Live Now: Recently2 graphic is on the page. Click on it to confirm that the click transfers viewer to the website's livestream fork page, where user clicks to a livestream running on the Forum website, or leaves for Facebook or YouTube.

Using the tablet, check all camera presets, adjusting the presets S1 through S6 to show where individual presenters will sit. Check the "All" preset to be sure the camera focuses on the presenter seats to be used.

Easiest way to adjust a tablet preset is to click on the preset, then edit it, adjust camera, then save.

Note that many groups use the Room Kit; presets may have been changed or erased between Forum meetings.

All audio to the recording and livestream is controlled by a button on the lower right front corner of the tablet, which is illuminated red or green.

During meeting, handle cameras. Check head count several times and write down the numbers. The in-person attendance estimate is based on the largest of these numbers, plus an estimate of the number of people leaving the room during the meeting. Pre-pandemic, that number was often 6; post-pandemic, fewer people leave.

Be prepared for emergencies: If you want to show an emergency, use a preset or move the PTZ manually. To interrupt the livestream without ending it, use the camera preset to Welcome, which will show the blank left wall screen. All sound to recording and livestream can be turned off via the red/green button on the tablet front bottom right. To end the livestream without ending the recording, use the tablet to pause or end the livestream. My plan: If it is a nonviolent incursion, stream it. If intruders appear motivated by being shown live on the Internet, turn off the livestream, which will disappear from their phones in 16 seconds. Click the camera preset to back of room. At that point, close laptop, place tablet face down and walk away. That action would take focus away from equipment, and it is impossible to tell from looking at Quad camera whether it is operating or not. But the Webex recording would still be rolling, creating a record for law enforcement of both what the Quad camera would show, plus audio.

End-of-meeting tasks

On meeting's end, avoid Webex crashes by shutting down in this order: End livestream. End Webex Recording. End Webex meeting. At that point, the Room Kit tablet will go blank, then reset for the next meeting. (Restream makes another recording, which shuts down without intervention when the livestream ends. That Restream recording may be downloaded after about an hour's delay.)

When livestream is concluded, pick up coding from DATEURLs that is marked "Immediately after Forum closes" and install on Box 1 in Forum website/Appearance/Widgets. This is standing coding that need not change each week, and can be used until the edited video is available Tuesday night.

Forum facilitators want to know how many people watch the livestream. Collecting this data must be collected immediately after the livestream ends, because livestreams turn to recordings on YouTube and Facebook, and the after-meeting watchers inflate the real-time numbers. The three outlets each have their own collection method, and those methods change regularly. Learn by doing but write down numbers of viewers for Facebook, for YouTube and for the Forum livestream page.

Then stow personal equipment; return all four Shure mics to their leather sleeves in audio cabinet. Helpers may empty and clean coffee urns in the kitchen and bring them back to the coffee table; if not, do it; count number of coffee cups remaining and write down the number; count donations and write down the number; make a shopping list for supplies as necessary; stow condiments; to avoid mold in urns, open urns and leave tops off before placing urns in plastic containers; stow orange cord in plastic container; return containers to stuff room.

Archiving key data

Using notes from meeting, call up website Financials, a TablePress file on the WordPress site, and fill in total donations; number of cups used; do the math to complete the entry. Save changes. This TablePress file also includes all hospitality purchases.

Using notes from meeting, call up Website Invited speakers, a second TablePress file on the WordPress site, and fill in attendance numbers by in-person, Webex (0), Facebook, YouTube, website. Copy the coding from an earlier line in the "Total" column and place it in the "Total" box. Save changes; call up the Upcoming Speakers page on the Internet and check your numbers, including the new "Total."

Note that your data now displays on the Internet, and is part of a transparency project perhaps unique among community organizations nationwide. The data includes all weekly financial transactions since 2003 and participation levels at weekly meetings since 2007.

The 'banker' role

When the Forum met at restaurants, participants paid the restaurant for, say, breakfast, and the restaurant provided free coffee for all, even those not paying for breakfast. Forum meetings at other sites created an immediate flow of cash from coffee-drinkers supporting the hospitality table. Unsurprisingly, the maker of the coffee became the Forum's custodian of cash. Posting to the Web all financial transactions was an attempt to promote accountability and avoid suspicions of fraud.

Co-founder Sarah Stevenson promoted the use of coffee money for charitable purposes. Later, charity refocused on entrepreneurial action. To serve both purposes, coffee financial reserves in excess of about $100 would be moved to a separate bucket, for distribution at year's end. As an act of good faith, the "banker" has kept in a personal savings account a balance in excess of funds in the coffee and charitable giving buckets.

Why not just hire an accountant, open a bank account, create a 501(c)(3), etc. etc, etc.? For the cuurrent "banker," the 1970s decision to avoid all that was wise and probably helped contribute to the Forum's long run of community service. By not being a legal entity encumbered with overhead and/or debt, the group maintained its independence of donors, foundations, etc.; minimized its cost of doing community service; and, as it was forced to move its meeting location, it found protective "landlords" committed to the Forum's mission rather than making money.

Retrieving images and recordings

Sign on to the Webex account via browser. On left rail, click on Recording. On the line listing the day's recording, click the download button ( ), then wait: File is an MP4 and will be 1GB or larger, and may take 15 minutes to download,depending on wi-fi speed. Change filename to include "raw" to distinguish it later from edited video files, e.g., [Date]ForumRaw.mp4.

If the Webex recording is corrupted or you forget to begin the recording (Livestream, paragraph 3, above), and are using Restream or another such service, download a recording

from that service. (As a failsafe, I use a digital audio recorder than creates an MP3 of the meeting, That recording could be used if there is no video record. Snippets of it have also been spliced into garbled video.)

Using Raw MP4, take screenshots of presenters and others you will need realtime pictures of. Given that this is video and any one screenshot may be either blurry or unbecoming, take bunches (4-60). Import into photo editor and make the best picture you can. Remember that the fluorescent lights that dominate the Belmont Center room create lousy pictures. Add brightness, then contrast, then perhaps definition – all while being as true as possible to person's skin color.

Export edited pictures back to the Recently Folder at full-size. Choose for use later on the WordPress web page, and export it at a 70x90 size to the "ToWeb" folder for upload to the website library. You will use the full-size images multiple times for the graphics below. If you have a number of pictures for each presenter, you can use several to make the presentation more eye-catching.If the edited pictures show up in Recently folder named Screenshot....., take time now to avoid confusion later: Rename each file by last name of person shown.

Make the graphics

I use Quark XPress, and the base files for all graphics are in the Recently folder copied to the desktop earlier. Above is discussion of Recently1, 2 and 3.

VideoOpen creates a title page that will display at YouTube, Facebook and the website when the video is not running.

Header can be used to frame presenter pictures for a top display on the day's website page.

Videoclose is a standing JPG for use at the end of meeting videos.

Recently3 should not use Saturday's pictures, but live screenshots from the recording, combined as appropriate with any other presentation graphics. It is installed on the website front after the day's website page is complete, and puts a link to that page on the website front while anchoring the website until it is replaced the following Saturday. The coding in Appearance/Widgets/Box 1 will now be edited using the URL of the website page and the URL of the Recently3 file.

Upload the video

To prepare a final video for the day, use a video editor like iMovie etc. Import the downloaded MP4 from Webex or elsewhere and add date-specific videopen.jpg, videoclose.jpg, and any others you have created. The video editor should allow you to delete the dead time from livestream opening to meeting opening; add names; cover over camera fails with a screenshot made from the video where the cameras are back online; use videoclose at 6 seconds at end, followed with a 3-second fade-to-black transition.

Placing a copy of the final meeting video on the website takes usually 40 minutes of machine time. Grab a bite to eat or something. Example of process:

The March 12, 2024 ForumRaw file from Webex was 1.29 GB. The edited version, renamed MWBE.mp4, cut the pre-8:30 dead time but came out of iMovie at 8.96 GB, nearly 15 times the maximum upload to the website. To squeeze the MP4, cut the pixel width and, only if necessary, the quality to create a M4V file smaller than the 600 MB website upload cutoff. The final file that was uploaded, MWBE.m4v, came out of EasyHTML5Video at 439.7 MB. The Forum's current Internet Service Provider uses CloudFlare to speedily and securely link its

servers. CloudFlare won't accept files larger than 100 MB, but the ISP can turn off CloudFlare, and then turn it back on after the video file upload – just another little production step to be committed to muscle memory – or a cheat sheet.

The website page

If presenter used a PowerPoint and approved its inclusion on the Forum website, convert the PowerPoint to PDF; make JPGs of each slide. install on the page with the video and some paragraphs about the presentation and Q&A.

On the right side of the WordPress page are a number of boxes. Taking each in turn:

"**Excerpt**." This text is used on the website Upload completed meeting video to website; build permanent page using graphics above; write synopsis of meeting; look for and include on the page links to any reports filed by journalists about the meeting; upload presentation PDF to Forum website and link page to it; install all the slides below the meeting video.

"**Publish**." WordPress will force on you a new sense of the meaning of time. WordPress keeps order by the publication date and time of materials. To have a webpage for material from the Jan. 5 meeting be marked as Jan. 5, the publication date must be sometime on Jan. 5. If you do not publish the Jan. 5 material until just after midnight on Jan. 6, change the publication date to Jan. 5 at 23:21 or some such.

"**Category**." Is the material about education, or elections, or some element of community? Then choide you make here affects which vertical box on the website front carries the excerpt and 70x90 picture on the front. The choice also affects how the page shows up in the website's archives. Avoid marking two categories because it will create duplicate listing on the website front. If no category is chosen, the default is "uncategorized" which prevents a website-front reference to the page. This has its uses for pages that are on the website chiefly to provide extra material for a page already categorized normally.

"**Speakers/Groups**." Hundreds of names are already available to click. Click names of everyone who played a presenter or unusual role in the meeting. If a presenter's name is not yet available, "Add New Category," listing last name then two hypens then first name. Immediately click on "Add New Category" to save the new name. The check boxes control the automated "Articles By Name" archive that allows a reader to get a list of all the times a given person has appeared or contributed to a Forum meeting since about 2012.

"**Feature Image**." Install here the 70x90 picture you placed in the ToWeb folder. It does not get a separate name line or cutline.

As you place things on the website page, save the draft frequently. When draft is complete and proofreading is done, Publish it, then check the website on the Internet to be sure the excerpt is correct, and leads to the appropriate page.

Updating social media

Upload meeting video to YouTube and Facebook. Copy the website page "excerpt" for use in these postings. After video reprocessing is complete in about 30 minutes, delete from both sites the livestream recording (the one with all the dead time).

As of this writing, no one has taken ownership of Forum social media – watching for reader comments, initiating conversation. Forum facilitators have favored keeping Forum conversations in the room. The livestreaming that began in 2015 was a monumental departure from norm, and was supported at the time by Sarah Stevenson.

Preparing the Tuesday E-blast

With the Forum page complete, copy pictures, text and links about the meeting into a copy of the previous week's new e-blast.

Transcribe Forum announcements made from floor. Convert fliers handed out during Announcements into PDF or JPG files.

Upload to website all the PDFs and JPGs sent in regarding announcements, plus all the newsletters etc. Create the links between the e-blast listings and the PDF/JPG archive on the Forum website. Check and recheck until all the links work.

When all the announcements and their links are correct, copy the text of the announcements in the E-blast, go into the website WordPress and create a new announcement file. With the page in visual mode copy the announcements to the new page. Be sure the publication date of the file will be the date of the meeting. For announcements that begin with dates that won't be in red because of embedded links, the best visual workaround is to bold face those not-red dates. Publish the announcements file, then check the website on the Internet to confirm that the most recent meeting's announcement are visible.

Send the e-blast when done, which is usually 9:30 p.m.-1 a.m.

WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY (2-16 hours)

Respond to inquiries prompted by Tuesday night's e-blast, including requests for corrections. Do what never got done Tuesday night.

Wednesday and Thursday are the days for longer-term website design work and maintenance, posting of news items unrelated to the week's Forum, and communication with Forum participants and fellow facilitators.

Forum-related Expenses (annualized)

(Forum facilitators are unpaid volunteers. Each brings to the work their own tools at their own expense. The estimated annual expenses below total $4,862.)

Meeting space: $0

The Forum is currently hosted by the City of Charlotte's Community Relations Committee, where Forum co-founder Sarah Stevenson once worked as a mediation specialist. Earlier unpaid hosts have included County Park & Rec sites, YWCA, restaurants and churches.

Hospitality: $0

The coffee fund has long been kept solvent by free-will gifts from those who drink the coffee. In pre-pandemic years, the coffee fund would generate a few hundred dollars extra each year, which was used to make charitable gifts to scholarship funds or needy individuals in the neighborhood where the Forum met. The pandemic ended coffee service. After restart of in-person meetings, participants have held on to their reluctance to carry cash, and coffee-drinkers often leave nothing in the cash box. Occasional larger donations from individuals have kept the fund solvent.

Website: $2,035

The Forum's Internet Service Provider is BigScoots in Tampa, FL. The monthly fee rises every 3 months or so as videos and graphics eat up more storage space.

Livestreaming: $664

Facebook and YouTube posts are free. Getting the videos to those social media sites involves Webex (single-person account, $174) and Restream ($490.) Half the Restream fee is a proprietary coding facility that allows the stream to be embedded in the Forum's website pages. If the social media sites are shredded by the culture wars, by corporate incompetence or by abandonment by users, the livestream will remain accessible on the Forum's website.

Website graphics: $595

Quark XPress software creates the website's polished look and is used in creating all Forum handouts, signs etc.

Online research tools: $568

Included are access fees to Dropbox, Newspapers.Com, Yearbook.Com.

Equipment: Roughly $1,000

The largest equipment expenses have been laptop computers. But the list includes webcams, digital audio recorder, cabling, tripods, multiple hard drives for file storage, portable microphone/speaker systems, coffee pots and hospitality table supplies.

Date _____

Presenters _____ _____

_____ _____

Announcements

Notes

Meeting head counts

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Web page counter

After _____

– Before _____

Total Attendance

On Website _____

On Facebook _____

On YouTube _____

On Webex _____

In-person _____

Meeting total _____

Belmont/Webex Meeting Checklist

On Asus: Plug laptop into HDMI wall outlet via cord; start welcome PPT; click slideshow, then click "from beginning: If screen is not on left wall screen, turn on all four wall screens and restart Asus instructions.

On Mac: On Firefox/Website/Watch Live page, write down Counter number. Use Webex app to start a personal meeting. Disconnect from Webkit if that is an option. When Webex window opens, turn off Mac's mic and video. Start Record to Cloud.

On tablet: Start Webex; meeting number is 182 491 5884. On tablet screen, find Sound; choose Normal. On Share, choose HTML 2 to View. Turn tablet soundbutton (bottom right of screen) from green to red until piano or meeting begins. On Camera, choose Advanced and Welcome window.

On Mac: In Webex window, start Record to Cloud. Start livestream:
 restream.io
 rtmp://live.restream.io/live
 re_5561172_05b69a5a3f1d4119d4b8

On Mac: Go to Forum website wpadmin/Appearance/Widgets, install coding for Forum3 graphic with link to Watch Live page. This coding is updated Sundays at (date)URLs text file, and copied into Box 1 on Widgets.

On Tablet:
Turn off sound. Check camera presets. Turn sound ON (green)

Ending meeting:
1. On Mac Webex window, end Recording; then end Livestream; then end Meeting.
2. On Mac from Forum/WP/Settings/SAC Pro, download CVS to Mac. Delete Questions.
3. From Forum/Appearance/Widgets, change Box 1 to coding in URLs file to the post-meeting version. Save. Call up Forum page and verify that new Recently graphic is operating and linking to the Facebook page running the livestream recording.
4. On Firefox, Website Watch Live page, write down Counter number.
5. On Firefox, call up Facebook page and using Insights under livestream, write down Post Reach.