



Engaging Local Government : Promises and Pitfalls

Peggy Eagan, ACSW

Director, Mecklenburg County DSS

June 13, 2019

Engaging local government – Promises and Pitfalls

- Missions Must Align
- Opportunity to Assist
- Pay for Performance
- Under Promise/Over Deliver
- Personality and Bureaucracy
- All Politics are Local
- Rome wasn't built in a Day...Or, play the long game!

Missions must Align

Promise

- Local Government might consider your services as a natural fit to assist furthering a specific mission, (e.g. housing, preventative services, transportation)

Pitfall

- Be very clear on what Local Government needs to from you and expect to deliver that
- You most likely will be seen as a “vendor” and will be treated as such
- Local Governments by nature are often risk averse...this leaves little room for creativity.

Opportunity to Assist

Promise

- Occasionally Local Government looks for an entity to provide a mandated service(s)

Pitfall

- These opportunities are often presented as an RFI or RFI with very short turnaround time.
- Mandated services come with very high standards for reporting and accountability
- Often governmental entities are a bit slower to pay

Pay for Performance

Promise

- This method allows you to determine the full cost of providing a service, and recoup those costs for each service rendered.
- Allows a focus on outcomes, rather than outputs

Pitfall

- You need to be able to quantify all of your costs, and be transparent in how you arrive at that cost
- Billing for performance often results in unpredictable cash flow into your agency
- If you are unable to produce to the level expected, your revenue will be less than you expect

Under Promise/Over Deliver

Promise

- If you approach your local government as funder, and treat them as you would a major donor, they will be pleasantly surprised.
- With competing interests, be the NPO they remember as always meeting or exceeding goals
- Never forget that your services should help meet government goals

Pitfall

- Government entities have their own sense of urgency that has nothing to do with your agency needs.
- Local government staff seldom have had NPO experience, so don't assume they understand your world
- Unless you have worked inside local government, you can't understand their world

Personality and Bureaucracy

Promise

- Positional power and referent power are very real. Know where the power resides.
- Accountability, transparency and checks and balances do not always make sense, but always are focused on minimizing risk.
- Relationships are the key...from the Chief Administrator to the finance clerk.

Pitfall

- People change positions, often.
- Priorities change as often as people change. What happened before can be to your advantage or be a curse.
- Things take longer than you might ever imagine (e.g. contracts, payment, decisions)
- Spend your social capital wisely!

All Politics Are Local

Promise

- Local politicians are accessible – take the time to watch, listen and show up.
- Use your Board members to build/broaden networks
- Demonstrate your worth with both stories and numbers
- Communicate how your services aligns/strengthens a position that the politician cares about, and share the credit generously

Pitfall

- Don't put all of your eggs in one party's basket
- Don't oversell, shame or embarrass
- Use the media sparingly
- Remember praising one can be interpreted as undercutting another

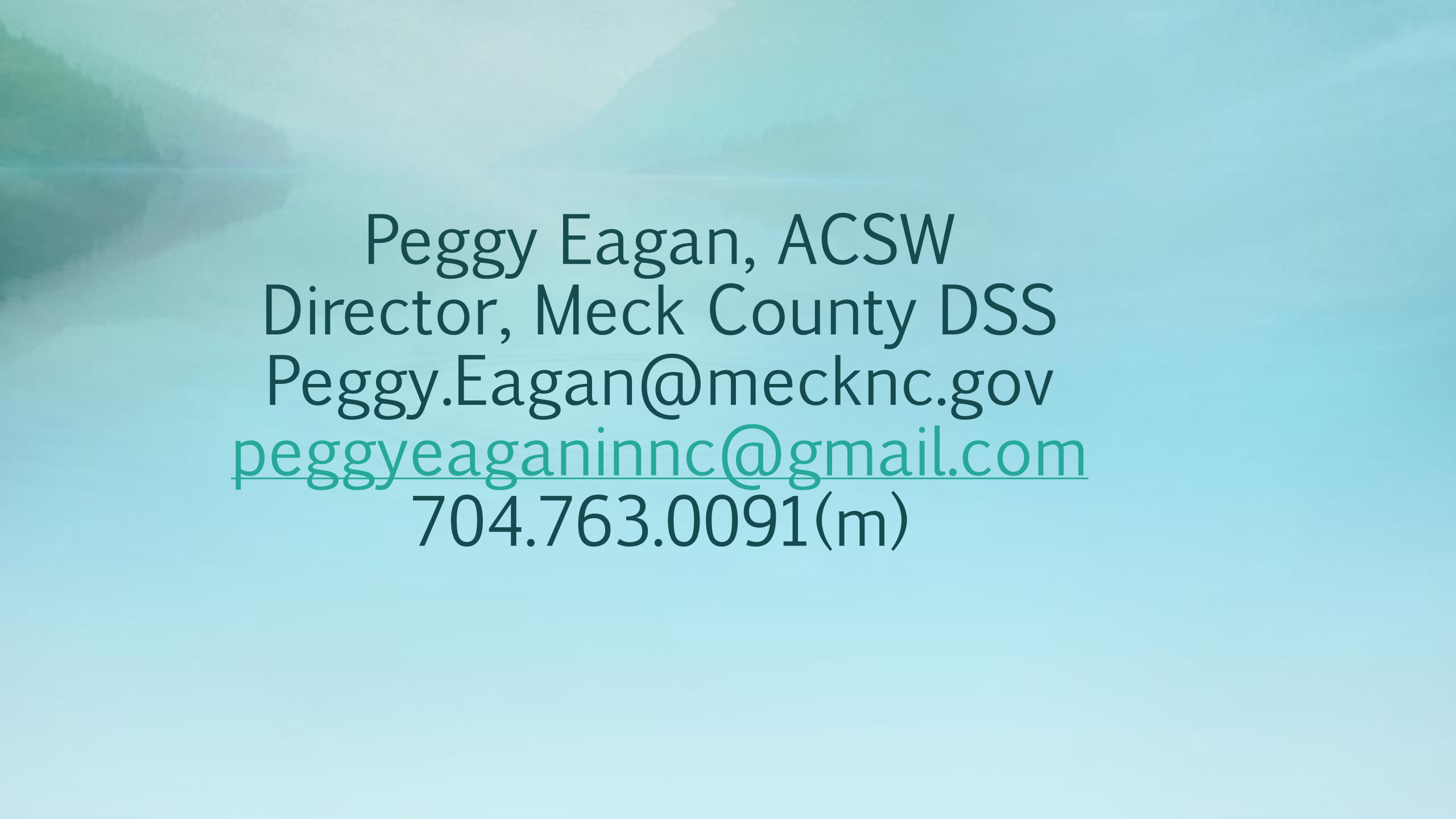
Rome wasn't Built in a Day...or, Play the Long Game!

Promise

- Relationships (and trust) take a long time to develop
- Priorities and leaders change, allowing opportunities
- Small wins can turn into larger programs
- A broad and strong network can counteract unexpected change and help plan for expected change

Pitfall

- The Wheels of Government not only turn slowly, but they sometimes fall off!
- New leaders bring new priorities and sometimes react by throwing out all that was



Peggy Eagan, ACSW
Director, Meck County DSS
Peggy.Eagan@mecknc.gov
peggyeaganinncc@gmail.com
704.763.0091(m)