

**New York Coalition for Open Government**

**Thursday June 13, 2024, 6:30 pm**

**Via Zoom**

**Email [paulwolf2@gmail.com](mailto:paulwolf2@gmail.com) for the meeting link**

**Public Comments Are Welcome At Any Time During Our Meetings. Don't Be Shy To Ask A Question Or To Make A Point!**

**AGENDA**

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| 1) Meeting Minutes from May 9, 2024  | <b>PG 3-4</b> |
| 2) Treasurer's Report – 59 total paid members<br>Balance as of 5/31/24 \$5,474.86              | <b>5</b>      |
| 3) Draft calendar for 2024   | <b>6-8</b>    |
| 4) Equal Justice Fellowship Opportunity Update   |               |
| 5) Legislative Session Results   |               |
| 6) Public Relations/Education Committee  | <b>9-10</b>   |
| A) Press Awards 6/27 at 10:30 am Via Zoom  |               |
| B) Coalition Newsletter  |               |
| C) Stuart Allen hosted our Coalition Social on May 30  |               |
| D) Discussed doing an event for the 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of FOIL which occurs in Sept. |               |
| E) New Member Recruitment  |               |
| 7) Open Meetings Law Committee   | <b>11</b>     |
| A) Planning a training session on how to make public comments at meetings                      |               |
| B) Michelle & Robyn are working on a general Open Meetings Law training                        |               |

8) Freedom of Information Law Committee

12-13

- A) FOIL project regarding City Council public comment policies is continuing
- B) Working on a FOIL training session that we can have members present in their communities

9) New Business

10) Next Meetings

Open Meetings Law Committee June 20, at 6:30 pm

Freedom of Information Law Committee June 27, at 6:30 pm

Public Relations July 3, at 6:30 pm or skip?

Board Meeting July 11, at 6:30 pm

# 5-9-24 NY COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT Board Meeting on Zoom

**PRESENT;** Robert Godlewski, Janet Vito, Michelle Allen, Robyn Gray, Maria Tisby, Sonia Dusza, Annmarie Reeb, Sue Kelley, Pat Irving, Axel Ebermann, Stuart Allen, Wendy Szabio, Ken Guarino, Alberta Roman, Paul Wolf.

**NY COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT BOARD MEETING;** Called to order on zoom at 6:35pm 5-9-24 by President Paul Wolf.

**MEETING MINUTES FROM 4-11-24;** Two corrections in spelling for Pat Irving and Stuart. Motion to accept minutes with corrections by Maria and second by Annmarie. Motion carried.

**TREASURER'S REPORT;** Janet Vito Treasurer report 54 total members with balance of 5,224.86 on 4-30-24 with need to take out restricted funds(Larry Vito). Motion to accept Treasurer's report as reported by Alberta and second by Michelle. Motion carried.

**DRAFT CALENDAR;** This 2024 calendar is for informational purposes. May cover something by 4th of July.

**COALITION ANNUAL MEETING;** This date is Wed. 5-15-24 thru zoom with special speakers unconfirmed at present..two NYS Senators being considered. We will also recognize Interns per Michelle and Alex to recognize volunteer work.

**EQUAL JUSTICE FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITY;** Paul reported this opportunity as informed by Cory which is interesting and must be applied for to get a free attorney to pay up to \$63,000 a year Things to think about are insurances needed up to approx. \$15 to 20,000 a year, or a 1099 employee. Michelle made a motion to fill out paperwork for application and Annmarie second. After discussion the motion was withdrawn. A new motion by Annmarie to explore options around application for Fellowship opportunity with a second by Michelle. Motion carried. There are many possibilities here and Paul will keep in mind application due by Sept. 24 with start in Sept 2025 if accepted. This could be a fund raising purpose for us.

**PUBLIC RELATIONS/EDUCATION COMMITTEE;** Axel Chairperson reporting re fundraising ethics in a "cleaned up" version of guidelines presented to establish some ground rules. The spirit of this document is to align further action here with our organization/brand. Since this is a public facing document we will want some oversight,i.e.may not want to accept money from all offers. Many operational items like disclaimer re return of funds if over achieved will be addressed ongoingly. Motion made to accept "cleaned up" version of guidelines of fundraising ethics by Robyn and second by Maria. Motion carried.

Stuart Allen will be hosting our Coalition Social on May 30, 6:30pm on zoom. Paul discussed our first Newsletter that will be coming out Sunday.

**OPEN MEETINGS LAW COMMITTEE;** Michelle Chairperson reporting re planning a training session on how to make public comments at meetings.

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION LAW COMMITTEE;** Maria Chairperson report that final FOIL project regarding state agencies was released on May 2, with clear bar graphs by Annmarie. There is a recording of this press conference on our youtube and FaceBook pages. Several newspapers reported this event.

FOIL project regarding City Council public comment policies is under way with 10 volunteers headed by Annmarie for 61 cities to be surveyed.

**NEW BUSINESS;** Our National Freedom of Information Coalition(NFOIC) membership dues are up for renewal. Motion to pay \$250.00 dues to NFOIC made by Sonia and second by Michelle. Motion carried.

Annmarie updated moving along with acknowledgement of volunteers on Cities project.

Michelle report that 6 bills are making great strides on legislative reform and making a difference.

**Motion to adjourn made by Maria and second by Annmarie. Motion carried at 7:43.**

**NEXT MEETING; BOARD MEETING JUNE 13, 2024 AT 6:30 PM**

Zoom Meeting June 13, 2024

NEW YORK COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT

**Treasurer's Report May 31, 2024**

Paid Members = 59 as of 5/31/2024

Bank Balance - as of April 30, 2024		\$5,584.86
Deposit - Bank - Mail-In - 5/29/2024 - \$20.00		20.00
Deposits - Direct Online Deposits - \$120.00 (5/2/2024-5/28/2024)		<u>120.00</u>
	Total	\$5,724.86
Expenses: Ck #180 - NFOIC - Annual Dues (5/20/2024)	\$250.00	<u>- 250.00</u>
	<u>Bank Balance - 5/31/2024</u>	<u>\$5,474.86</u>

(Restricted Donations) -360.00

**NYCOG Available Funds 5/31/2024 \$5,114.86**

Larry Vito Memorial Fund (Givebutter)

(2023 Restricted Donations) \$360.00 360.00

Check Book/Bank Balance 5/31/2024 \$5,474.86

Janet Vito  
Treasurer



# New York Coalition for Open Government 2024 Goals

## Internal Goals

- Increase membership (93 as of 12/10/23)
- Start Sharing Our Stories Through Videos
- Increase Facebook followers (684 as of 12/10/23)
- Increase Twitter followers (421 as of 12/10/23)

## Project Goals

- Increase training sessions on OML & FOIL
- FOIL report regarding public comment policies
- Sunshine Week Event Albany Day
- Annual Meeting
- In person Meetings/Events

### January

Board Appointments

Membership Renewals

Op-Ed regarding open government resolutions for New Year

January 1, 1977, anniversary of Open Meetings Law

Plan Sunshine Week Event for March (Albany Day)

Contacting State Legislators

### February

Plan Sunshine Week Event for March

Draft Op-ed for Sunshine Week

Plan May Annual Meeting

Contacting State Legislators

2/23 Student Press Freedom Day

### March

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday in March, National Town Meeting Day

Sunshine Week Op-ed

Sunshine Week Event (March 11 to 15 Sunshine Week)

Forum Re Hearing Officer bill 3/28, 5:30 pm

Plan May Annual Meeting  
OML Forum

**April**

Planning for Annual Meeting  
Start gathering info for new FOIL report

**May**

Annual Meeting

**June**

**July**

Op-ed regarding anniversary of Freedom of Information Act  
Continue gathering info for FOIL report  
July 19-20, 1848 Anniversary of Seneca Falls Women's convention

**August**

Continue gathering info for FOIL report

**September**

FOIL report press conference  
Sept 1, 1974, anniversary of FOIL  
Sept 15<sup>th</sup>, Democracy Day  
Sept 17<sup>th</sup> Constitution Day, 17-23 Constitution Week  
Sept. 28<sup>th</sup> universal access to information day  
Plan member in person meeting for November  
Live Streaming Meeting Forum

**October**

October 17<sup>th</sup>, School Board Recognition Week  
Plan Member in person meeting for November

87

**November**

In person member meeting in Albany

**December**

End of year review, 2025 goals

Plan Board and Officer elections for 2025



**New York Coalition For Open Government  
Public Relations and Education Group Committee Minutes  
Thursday, June 6, 2024 via Zoom**

Meeting called to order at 6:35 pm by the Chair: Axel

Members in attendance: Axel, Ken, Stuart, Michelle, Maria, Sue, Pat, Robyn, Julie and Annmarie.

1. Approval of Minutes May 2, 2024 – Motion by Maria, seconded by Sue; All in favor; None opposed; Motion carried.
2. Coalition Newsletter – What did people think about this? Next release on June 9, 2024 and future editions to be released on the second Sunday of each month. Axel provided the overview.
  - Michelle really liked it and is looking forward to the next one.
  - Maria liked it as well; very well done.
  - Axel would like this newsletter to engage our membership and let them see what we are doing.
  - Suzanne asked if this can be printed and distributed. Axel will look into this because of links. A discussion occurred with comments and information from Michelle, Maria, Axel and Robyn.
  - Annmarie thought it was a lot of information in one location on the State. Well done. How do we send news articles? Send to Axel or Paul for now.
  - Michelle asked if the newsletter is by subscription. Yes, just members, not on website. Robyn also commented on this.
  - Axel said to feel free in providing an op ed.
3. Thoughts regarding Annual Meeting held on May 15, 2024 -
  - Michelle was happy with information provided and those who were highlighted and recognized.
  - Annmarie thought it was very well done by Michelle, very professional, smooth, etc.
  - Axel thought it was a great idea to bring in the young leaders, further information provided on the benefits of this and showcasing it.
4. Freedom of the Press Awards – possibly on June 27<sup>th</sup> via Zoom – Reviewed attached list as explained by Axel. The Press are our partners and are knowledgeable on FOIL. We are getting an enormous amount of press coverage with over 50 to 60 articles etc., this year. Others are envious of this.
  - Annmarie asked if there were any criteria in addressing the list of names? It would be nice to recognize those not previously recognized and to encourage them to do future articles. Can we use newspapers from across NYS?
  - Pat addressed concerns with a local paper and lack of coverage. This is very discouraging. Pat is hoping that outside newspapers will help. Very frustrating in Suffolk County.
  - Axel said that reporters rarely get pitched in person. Maybe make an appointment and establish a relationship.
  - Michelle explained the list of 20 reporters. Michelle is working on the college and high school papers. We need to hone this down to about 12 with 1 each from college and high school. No recognition of reporters previously nominated or honored. Annmarie appreciated the clarification.
  - Maria thinks we should recognize a young, old (seasoned), most up and coming reporters. She provided specific reporters. We should appreciate them and maybe only 10.
  - Robyn suggested that we contact the Press Association - there are a lot of small newspapers and they know what is going on across the state. Michelle added to this and how recipients are selected.
  - Annmarie would be interested to know if we have members in the counties where these reporters are from and provided additional detail.

5. 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NY's Freedom of Information Law – September 1, 2024. Axel provided an overview on going to Albany (in person event) and working with our other partners on this.
  - Robyn suggested holding the event at the Egg.
  - Axel suggested that Annmarie do a report "50 years later".
  - Maria asked for a save the date. Maria will get stuff sent out to Paul, etc. She provided other suggestions for this event.
  - Axel suggested a booklet that we can hand out. Maybe invite all the legislative interns.
  - Annmarie provided the date of September 1, 1974, readopted in 1977. Suggested having it after the 1<sup>st</sup> which falls on a Sunday and the following weekend is Labor Day (holiday weekend).
6. Developing OML & FOIL training – Axel provided an overview on this topic and time consuming to do each presentation from scratch. Good templates but upgrading them. Okay to also talk off the cuff. Run with board members first.
  - Maria agrees with Axel; target the audience; not a boiler plate; basic template with recent updates. Some good strategies for a mock training. We can have different components. There should be no one excluded in standardizing the FOIL training. Axel said we don't exclude anyone.
  - Axel informed that he is working with Annmarie on fillable FOIL forms with instructions, including best practices.
  - Maria said we need a measurable tool such as an evaluation, details provided. Axel said we should have a standard survey via QR code.
  - Annmarie explained what she suggested. She also explained how difficult it is to target an audience and why. Annmarie addressed a recent training and those who provided feedback. How important it is to have our membership knowledgeable and provide feedback.
7. Brainstorm New Member Recruitment – Axel shared a spreadsheet on relevant organizations (template), etc. and gave an overview of why this is important. Research will be needed and best to be done by the members in those communities. Axel is creating this so we can reach out to organizations and introduce us (the Coalition). Axel will first try this in his area to see what works well.
  - Robyn said that in public meetings are important. She also addressed regional chapters that was previously set up. This helps you introduce yourself to the community and build your base. Invite the local papers for free press. Maria and Axel supported this.
  - Annmarie supported in person meetings and offered other outreach suggestions and using the business card. There is a positive with both in person and zoom.
  - Ken said we should do a Who We Are article because some of our counties have no members.
  - Maria said why not ask the groups that we partner with to join or give money. Axel explained why this won't work. Donor and Membership rolls are not shared.
  - Robyn suggested meeting with other groups on how we can work together. This is not easy as our interests may be different in some ways.

Additional topics discussed. Fundraising Group reports to the PR/Education Committee.

8. New Business – None.

Motion to adjourn meeting at 8:09 pm by Annmarie, seconded by Robyn, All in favor; None opposed; Motion carried.

Our next meeting is Thursday, yet to be determined due to falling on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, but will be announced, still at 6:30 pm via zoom. Minutes prepared by Annmarie Reeb.

**NY Coalition for Open Government**  
**Open Meetings Law Committee**  
**Thursday, May 16, 2024, at 6:30 pm via Zoom**

Meeting called to order by the Chair, **Michelle** at 6:34 pm

Members present: Michelle, Robyn, Ken, Stuart, Pat, Axel, Margaret and Annmarie

**Motion** by Robyn to approve the minutes of April 18, 2024 and seconded by Axel – All in favor; None Opposed.  
Motion carried.

1. Public Comment Report – Michelle provided an overview on Tips on making public comments. Michelle shared her screen on public comments provided and Robyn put it together with edits.
  - Pat addressed that there is no recourse if the public comments are not in the minutes.
  - Michelle addressed legislative reform.
  - Axel explained that the record can't be altered. Axel requested the final version for our education section.
  - Robyn suggested writing a letter to your local paper, as a letter to the editor.
  - Annmarie addressed one public comment tip.
  - Robyn informed on the difference between a public hearing comment and public comment at a regular meeting. They should not interrupt you during a public hearing.
  - Michelle will send out the document of public comments.
  - Margaret addressed public comment as a mandate. She expressed the loss of public comment in her town. Michelle provided information on legislation that would address mandating public comment.
2. Open Meetings Law Forum – Michelle provided information on those not allowing public comment. Explained the need for training on executive sessions.
  - Margaret asked about the agenda having a possible executive session, which occurs at the end of the meeting. Michelle stated that it could not be prescheduled and a lawsuit is the remedy.
  - Robyn stated that executive sessions are not a regular event and must be voted on in public. There are reasons you can have an executive session and it can't be a general reason. She suggested that you inform your newspaper or go to the Justice Center for help. Information to be emailed to Margaret. Additional information provided by Robyn.
  - Annmarie explained an anticipated executive session, executive session voting and executive session minutes which must be available in one week. You can review the NY Committee on Open Government Advisory Opinions on these subjects. Both topics were discussed further by members.
3. New Business
  - Annmarie provided an updated on the amended public comment report.
  - Annmarie suggested that the chairs and the co-chairs create OML and FOIL presentations and conduct mock trainings for our membership. Michelle supports this and provided further details.
  - Axel provided information about our organization and participation. Michelle explained voting and how everyone is welcomed and additional information available on our website.
  - Stuart brought up the research that has propelled us to the next level and the press.
  - Axel addressed our media exposure (40 to 50). Other organizations want our exposure.
  - Michelle addressed a coalition award from the Syracuse Press Club.

**Motion** by Axel to adjourn the meeting at 7:27 pm and seconded by Robyn. All in favor. None opposed.  
Meeting adjourned.

Next OML meeting is **June 20, 2024, at 6:30 pm, via Zoom**. Minutes prepared by Annmarie Reeb.

New York Coalition for Open Government  
Freedom of Information Law Committee Meeting - Minutes  
Thursday, May 23, 2024 6:30 PM via Zoom

Meeting was called to order by the Chair, Maria at 6:35 pm.

Attended by: Maria, Axel, Mike, Ken, Michelle, Andrea, Pat, Stuart and Annmarie.

**Motion** by Michelle to approve the minutes of the April 25, 2024 meeting and Seconded by Axel. All in favor. None opposed, Motion carried.

There was a discussion on FOIL Training vs Presentations. Mike suggested that we reference the laws for the FOIL trainings. Some people agreed and some people didn't.

1. State Agency FOIL Report was released on May 2, 2024 – Maria provided a brief overview. Annmarie provided some additional details on the 70 State Agencies we Foiled.
  - Maria and Annmarie addressed the reasons for postponement.
  - Maria and Axel informed of the press we received (about 8 to 10 articles).
  - Michelle informed on coverage from the Capitol Press Room.

A new member introduced themselves.

2. Update on City FOIL Project – Annmarie provided an update on this current project. Annmarie will be looking for people to vet once the project is completed.
  - Pat informed that she is getting FOIL responses on Saturdays and/or Sundays.
  - Maria thought that smaller towns might only work a few days a week.
  - Michelle informed that only business days that are counted for FOIL.
  - Annmarie informed that we used the NYS Civil Service holiday list. Maria agreed.
  - Mike asked about the 20-day extension. Annmarie, Michelle and Maria responded.
3. FOIL Training – Maria discussed about doing more of these; who is interested, etc.
  - Pat explained her first training and how it benefited her from the questions people asked. Pat explained that Kim Hermance from Project Civica thought we should market this training.
  - Annmarie provided an overview of the success of our training for Project Civica; OML training and future FOIL trainings.
  - Annmarie suggested that the Chairs/Co-Chairs put together the standard presentations for OML/FOIL. This is a basic presentation that can be done in your style. Also mock trainings for our membership so we can improve training and educate the membership. Annmarie informed how she is getting trainings by presenting them with the Coalition's business card.
  - Maria asked about standard evaluations and why we should provide them and the benefits. Maria disagreed about limiting co-chairs for (putting the presentation together). Annmarie addressed this issue and others.
  - Maria explains why she disagrees with the presentation suggestion.
  - Axel will keep track of all the presentations/trainings, etc. for grants/fundraising. We are educating about their rights and civic engagement. Maria discussed this further.
  - Michelle informed that we need to have consistent training. (Standardized) A discussion occurred.

- Pat informed what she got out of the training and Annmarie explained the process and why we need to get this started.
- Maria offered her insight on FOIL training, member skills, etc.

#### 4. New Business

- Pat explained how she is being harassed when receiving FOIL responses by Police Officers when she has requested responses via email and where is the press on this issue.
- Pat also informed how a legislator is interested in FOIL training for them and their staff.
- Mike also expressed his concern about the police delivering the FOIL response and what she can do. Maria expressed her concern about respect, etc. Others expressed their concerns with the press and discouragement with lack of press. A discussion continued.
- Axel and Maria talked about the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of FOIL and what we can do. He will refer this to Paul. Annmarie thought this was a great idea and how could we utilize all our members. Maria said this was in 1974. Maybe a collage with a press release. Collaborating with the other groups.
- Mike suggested this is an opportunity why people should listen to us and additional details.
- Maria addressed the message of FOIL, the progress, etc.
- Stuart brought up tie ins with other events and making it relevant. We should give a report to the Governor prior to the State Address, further details provided. Maria said this was a great thought and innovative. Annmarie suggested we go to the Governor's Mansion.
- Annmarie offered a few of our members to attend a private training for Amherst Concerned Citizens Group. Details were provided.
- Discussion on FOILING of Fiduciary Records (court records).

The next meeting is June 27, 2024 at 6:30 pm via Zoom. Next week Thursday is the Zoom Social hosted by Stuart.

**Motion** to adjourn meeting at 8:15 pm was made by Annmarie and Seconded by Mike. All were in favor, none opposed, **Motion carried.**

Minutes prepared by Annmarie Reeb