

2019 Polar Field Staff Conference Summary

The 2019 Polar Field Staff Conference (PFSC) was held in Sturbridge, MA at the Publick House Historic Inn. The PFSC is a biennial conference that is held jointly by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) and the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO). Over the course of two and a half days, the conference allows the opportunity for field staff to share their experiences and discuss best practices in the field to bring back to their respective companies.

This year the theme of the conference was Responsible Field Leadership. The agenda was packed with presentations given by experienced field staff as well as professional speakers, and included breakout sessions which gave attendees the opportunity to have candid discussions about the presented subjects.

Below are summaries of the specialized presentations given during the conference.



Presentation on The Art Of Briefing

Cultural Considerations

The presentation on Cultural Considerations was given by Tessa van Drie (Hurtigruten).

- Interactions and impressions by vessels visiting remote settlements in the Arctic.
- How to make sure community guidelines are carried out correctly.
- Managing a several different nationalities onboard a vessel at once
- Managing the growing Chinese market and expectations

Evolution of Guest Expectations

A presentation about Guest Expectations and the changes and evolution within was given by Mariano Curiel (Antarctica 21).

- Check Marketing material pre-season/trip. Make sure all information given to guests is correct and realistic information
- Understand what the guest's expectations are before the trip
- During the trip, address and highlight different nationalities and cultural diversity

- Give guests respect and honest direct communication
- Educating guests on the operations onboard and on shore

Social Media

Hayley Collings (IAATO Communications and Engagement Manager) lead a social media session sharing social media updates with field staff, inviting them to submit their own content with the permission of their employers.

Highlights from the session include:

- IAATO's updated policy regarding inappropriate Antarctic imagery and how to share expectations with guests.
- Reputational Bingo; identifying which of nine images could breach IAATO and AECO social media guidelines
- Mindfulness of images being posted, and recognizing where images could be misinterpreted by the public.

The Art of Briefing

A presentation was given by Alex Cowan (Natural World Safaris) on the art of briefing. Some of the great tips given during the session were:

- Be brief but descriptive, consider cultural differences with the amount of information given
- Be specific; detailed explanation so guests are informed and invested. Being specific and transparent in a situation will also help build trust with guests.
- Consider different learning styles. Try to use different platforms to engage with all guests and use examples/demonstrations whenever possible
- Make sure messaging is consistent between pax/crew/staff
- Be yourself
- Communicate to expect the unexpected; convey patience and persistence in challenging polar conditions
- Remember the "Why"

Responsible Field Leadership

This presentation on Responsible Field Leadership was given by Kerry Plemmons, a Professor at the University of Denver. It focused on the importance of realizing your purpose for the work that you are doing and how you can align your core values to the overall mission to inspire and lead.

- Listening to your team and your clients for feedback to improve the experience
- Think outside of the box, not how things have always been done
- How do decisions made align with core values and guiding principles
- Set clear short term and long-term goals
- How does your staff feel?
- Staff engagement

Citizen Science

The [Polar Citizen Science Collective](#) led two engaging sessions at the PFSC including:

- An overview of why scientist-led citizen science is globally significant and how it benefits the science and IAATO/AECO communities;
- How the Polar Collective facilitates citizen science;
 - Engaging with science enquires and determining which projects will work for IAATO and AECO operations;
 - Work with scientists and operators to integrate projects;
 - Develop necessary training materials, presentations and other tools.
- There is a list of ‘ready to go’ projects in the IAATO Field Operations Manual, section 16, Supporting Science. They do not require permits from Competent Authorities.
- Ongoing projects supported by the Polar Collective and IAATO include Happywhale; the Antarctic Travel Experience Project; GLOBE Clouds; Seabird Surveys; Polar Tag; FjordPhyto plankton sampling; secchi disc and PenguinWatch.
- The Polar Collective introduced a new app in development, demonstrating how it can be used in the field to enhance data collection and management. The Polar Collective are seeking a core group to test the app. If interested, please see the user instructions attached.
- Hands on sessions that allowed people to ask questions about specific projects or collect data in a workshop about GLOBE Clouds;
- Interactive discussions with field staff to share best practice and lessons learned, the importance of having a citizen science coordinator to manage projects and maximise success; managing workloads and securing the right support.



Citizen Science
Demonstration

Antarctic Ambassadors

A workshop held at the University of Tasmania in November 2018 drafted a definition for ambassadorship as follows (not for use without their permission):

“An Antarctic ambassador is someone [i.e., individual or group] who has a connection to, knowledge of and passion for the Antarctic (as a space, place or idea), who represents and

champions Antarctica and its values, and who supports Antarctica through communication and behaviour.”

At the PFSC, an interactive session on the Ambassador concept was facilitated by Amanda Lynnes (IAATO Director of Environment and Science Coordination) and Hayley Court (IAATO Communications & Engagement Manager). Delegates were sent a pre-session email with four questions to think about ahead of the meeting. A noted challenge was demystifying what an ambassador is. Field staff suggested platforms for guests after they leave Antarctica, an alumni programme of sorts (IAATO also manages Antarctic Ambassador social media platforms), that will help keep them engaged. Climate change was overwhelmingly the ‘hot topic’ to communicate with support given for offsetting opportunities and resources for field staff to share with guest that would help guide them into becoming an ambassador if they wished. The ideas from the field staff conference are being collated and incorporated into a strategy to be reviewed by IAATO’s Education and Outreach Working Group.

Crisis Management

A presentation was given by Crisis Management speaker of the Riverside Trauma Center, Jim McCauley.

This presentation focused on psychological First Aid and the response to traumatic events. This presentation created much discussion among participants about different ways to handle trauma in the moment, immediately after the incident, and in the long term.

The presentation covered:

- What classifies a critical incident
- Individual vs collective experiences
- Trauma and traumatic/toxic stress
- Actions during traumatic experiences, Safety-Predictability and Control
- Types of Trauma and responses
- Post-Traumatic Stress Management
- Psychologic First Aid Core Actions
- Trauma Vs Grief
- 3 R’s of Self-Care; Reflection, Regulation and Relaxation

Environmental Projects

A short presentation was given by Melissa Nacke (AECO Environmental Specialist) and Amanda Lynnes (IAATO Director of Environment and Science Coordination) outlining the collaboration between IAATO and AECO on the Clean Seas project. The four goals of the Clean Seas project are to:

1. significantly reduce the use of single-use plastics;
2. enhance cleanup efforts;
3. educate and motivate passengers, staff and crew; and
4. share knowledge and best practices.

The presentation also discussed the efforts of members to reduce single-use waste and organize cleanup activities.

In the second part of the Clean Seas presentation, participants were divided into ten groups for discussions. The following section includes the questions the groups were asked to discuss and a summary of their responses:

1. What actions to reduce to single-use plastic have you noticed onboard or what changes would you like to see?
 - Less straws
 - Water refill stations/stainless steel bottles and the use of soda streamers to fill jugs of water rather than cans
 - Less overuse of cling film
 - Use soap and shampoo dispensers
 - More efforts to reduce in the laundry department and gift shops
 - Reduce single use cups
 - Reduce toothpicks and stirrers
 - Recycling coffee “pods”
 - Reusable bathroom bin liner
 - Need microplastic ‘guppy’ filter for laundry
 - Encourage rechargeable handwarmers
2. What are some challenges in reducing single-use plastic?
 - Issues reducing plastic from suppliers (e.g. packaging on the gear)
 - Knowledge on where waste ends up once the ship gets to port
 - A need for an analysis of plastic coming off ships to identify key volumes and sources of plastic to reduce
 - The operator doesn’t always own the ship so it can be difficult to make decisions
 - Some passengers and crew refuse to drink ship water
3. What are some strategies in talking to guests about reducing single-use plastic?
 - Include messaging about plastic reduction actions in pre-departure information and onboard presentations
 - Include additional question on guest comment cards
 - Create AECO/IAATO Ambassador Program/ Polar Ambassador

Port Lockroy- UK Antarctic Heritage Trust

Lauren Luscombe and Lucy Dorman of the UKAHT gave an update some new operational procedures for the 2010-20 season.

- Celebrating 75 years of Port Lockroy
- Conservation Program at Port Lockroy
- Long term study of Gentoo Colony
- Continued closure of boatshed visitor landing site

- New visiting time periods for 2019-20 season; 09:00- 13:00 and 14:00- 18:00

Protecting Our Values

This presentation was given by Laura Smith (Quixote Expeditions).

Laura's presentation focused on the "why we are IAATO" message, while being inclusive of both Polar organizations; why IAATO and AECO's 'rules' are 'tools' for enabling field staff to deliver safe, environmentally responsible tourism for the long-term protection of Antarctica. Break out groups then discussed how IAATO and AECO strengthen their core values into the future.

Suggestions included:

- Creating safe places for employees to communicate concerns if they feel actions are falling short of IAATO and AECO standards (IAATO has a [Care and Concern policy](#) for staff and guests);
- Feedback loops between Operator's/Organisations to share lessons learned between experienced and new staff, promote best practice and ultimately support operational discipline;
- Strengthen the ambassador concept by creating ambassadors from the top of companies down (not just guests) and adding ambassador values to bylaws;
- Create a pledge focused on core values;
- Encourage senior executives to attend IAATO/AECO meetings to enhance awareness of our missions/core values and strengthen culture across companies;
- Address climate change more readily. Accept it is a difficult topic to communicate but explore means of doing so that will encourage learning and action;
- More communication of our core values to regulators.

Other presentations include:

- Off-Vessel Risk Assessment Tool (O-VRAT) Jim Mayer (Hurtigruten on behalf of AECO)
- IAATO Operational Developments- Lisa Kelley (Director of Operations and Government Affairs/ Deputy Executive Director)
- AECO Operational Developments -Karin Strand (AECO Chair of Executive Committee)
- IAATO/AECO Standards Update Karin Strand & Terry Shaller (IAATO Acting Executive Director)

If you have any questions about topics discussed at the 2019 Polar Field Staff Conference, please email IAATO (operations@iaato.org) or AECO (aeco@aeco.no)

Thank you to all who participated in the 2019 PFSC, especially to the Operator's for seeing how important field staff conferences are to share best practices across the industry.

We look forward to seeing new and returning faces when AECO takes the lead in hosting in 2021.

