

To: **Pennsylvania Opioid Misuse and Addiction Abatement Trust Board of Trustees**

Via: Briana Anderson, MPA, POMAAT Administrator

Re: Recommendations for the 2026 Public Listening Session

July 24, 2026

Dear Trustees,

The Pennsylvania Opioid Misuse and Addiction Abatement Trust was established to ensure that opioid settlement funds are used to address one of the most devastating public health crises in our state's history. Those funds exist because thousands of Pennsylvanians lost their lives, families were forever changed, and communities continue to experience the lasting consequences of the overdose crisis.

Meaningful public engagement is essential to that mission. The August 6, 2026 Public Listening Session is only the second statewide public listening session held by the Trust in nearly four years since its creation. As such, it represents a rare opportunity for people directly affected by the overdose crisis, including grieving families, people in recovery, people who use drugs, healthcare professionals, researchers, service providers, and community organizations, to speak directly with the Trustees responsible for overseeing these resources.

We appreciate that the Trust is providing this opportunity and respectfully offer the following recommendations to strengthen future listening sessions. These recommendations are intended to improve accessibility, transparency, communication, and public participation while helping the Trust build stronger relationships with the communities it serves.

1. Trustee Participation

The listening session should be viewed as an important opportunity for Trustees to hear directly from the people most affected by the overdose crisis. Whenever possible, all Trustees should attend the full session and give speakers their full attention. Trustees who cannot attend should review the recording and written comments afterward. Whenever feasible, Trustees and staff should also remain available briefly after the meeting to speak informally with attendees.

Listening requires more than allowing someone five minutes at a microphone. It requires being fully present, acknowledgment, engagement, and a willingness to learn from lived and living experience.

2. Public Outreach and Notification

Following the 2025 Public Listening Session, the Board expressed disappointment with the limited public participation. Participation, however, should not be measured solely by the number of speakers. Low participation may also reflect barriers to engagement, limited public awareness, scheduling challenges, or uncertainty about whether public input will meaningfully influence future decisions.

During the May 28, 2026 Board meeting, the August 6 listening session was announced near the conclusion of the meeting, and the registration process was briefly described. Based on our observations, no broader public outreach accompanied the announcement before registration opened. Simply making an application available is not, by itself, an outreach strategy. Future listening sessions should be announced through multiple communication channels, including:

- Press releases
- Email distribution lists
- The Trust website
- Social media
- Previous participants
- Single County Authorities
- Recovery organizations
- Harm reduction organizations
- Family organizations
- Service providers
- Statewide advocacy organizations
- Media outlets

Providing at least thirty days' notice through multiple channels would significantly improve awareness and participation.

3. Accessibility and Location

We understand the efficiencies associated with holding the listening session alongside the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania conference. However, the primary purpose of the listening session is public engagement. Future sessions should prioritize accessibility for Pennsylvanians across the Commonwealth by considering rotating locations, community-based venues, evening hours, regional listening sessions, and expanded virtual participation opportunities.

4. Clear Participation Process

Applicants should clearly understand:

- application opening and closing dates;
- notification timeline;
- number of available speaking slots;
- selection process;
- speaking format;
- allotted speaking time;
- accommodations available;
- designated contact person; and
- how comments submitted by individuals who are not selected will be shared with Trustees.

Applicants should receive confirmation that their application was received, followed by timely information regarding participation logistics. The Trust should also continue accepting written

comments from individuals unable to attend and ensure those comments are distributed to all Trustees and included in the public record.

5. Technology

Hybrid participation should provide meaningful access for virtual participants. The audiovisual technology used during the 2025 listening session made it difficult for remote attendees to clearly see speakers or observe Trustee interactions. Future sessions should include:

- dedicated cameras focused on speakers;
- clear views of Trustees;
- high-quality microphones;
- live captioning;
- technical support for virtual participants;
- technology testing before the meeting; and
- clear accommodation procedures.

These are basic accessibility measures that support meaningful statewide participation.

6. Maximizing Public Participation

If scheduled speakers are absent or finish early, the remaining time should be offered to other participants whenever practical. The time reserved for public comment should be fully utilized for public comment.

Individuals who travel to participate should receive clear information regarding arrival, parking, accessibility, and meeting logistics.

Simple accommodations, including water, seating, reasonable breaks, and information regarding available meal options, help communicate that public participants are valued contributors to the process.

7. Communication and Follow-Up

The Trust has allocated significant administrative resources to communication and stakeholder engagement. Public engagement should reflect that investment. At a minimum, participants should receive timely communication before the session, meaningful opportunities to engage with Trustees during the session, and follow-up afterward.

Following each Public Listening Session, the Trust should publish a brief summary describing:

- common themes raised by participants;
- recommendations the Board intends to consider;
- recommendations requiring additional evaluation; and
- recommendations the Board does not intend to implement, together with an explanation.

Closing the feedback loop demonstrates that public participation is valued and encourages continued engagement.

Conclusion

The Public Listening Session represents an important opportunity to strengthen public confidence in the Trust and improve communication with the communities it serves. The recommendations outlined above do not require major policy changes or substantial new resources. Rather, they reflect fundamental principles of accessibility, transparency, professionalism, and respectful public engagement. Every listening session offers an opportunity to build trust with Pennsylvanians whose lives have been affected by the overdose crisis. We hope these recommendations assist the Trust in making that opportunity as meaningful and productive as possible.

We respectfully request a written response identifying which recommendations will be implemented for the August 6, 2026 Public Listening Session and which may be considered for future sessions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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