From August 2018-February 2019 there was external and internal uncertainty with how UMass Boston handled government relations. There were multiple individuals on campus and the President’s Office that had overlapping responsibilities, so important audiences – at the state, city and federal levels – were hearing from different people on the same issues. This lack of continuity presented challenges for the campus because elected officials and their staffs were unsure who to contact.

That all changed starting in March when the Chancellor created a defined structure and we developed a renewed government relations outreach plan. Instead of only holding reactive meetings after an issue or event occurred, we began a series of one-on-one introductory meetings with federal and state elected officials to introduce the Chancellor, discuss her vision for the campus and highlight a select few initiatives that reaffirm our important role as Boston’s public research university. In roughly two months, the Chancellor and/or Matt held the following individual legislative meetings:

Dan Hunt                Nika Elugardo
David Biele            Mike Moran
Nick Collins           Michelle Ciccolo
Tackey Chan            Chynah Tyler
Liz Miranda            Russell Holmes
Paul Donato            Pat Jehlen
Ron Mariano            Sonia Chang Diaz
Jeff Roy               Julian Cyr
Mike Finn              Dylan Fernandes
Joe Wagner             Anne Gobi

We will continue to schedule regular, proactive meetings with our immediate legislative delegation, members in surrounding neighborhoods, alumni in the legislature and key committee chairs and leadership to keep them updated on our progress and discuss ways we can be of assistance. Since these one-on-one meetings began in May, there has been a noticeable improvement in our campus relationship with the legislature. By and large, the elected officials have been impressed with we have presented and seem encouraged by our direction. While there is still work to do on repairing and forming relationships, we are on the right path.

In Washington D.C. we had productive one-on-one meetings with Senator Ed Markey, Congressman Stephen Lynch and Congressman Joe Kennedy. It remains to be seen if federal infrastructure funding ever becomes a reality, but if funds do become available we are well-positioned for assistance with the plaza demolition because of our meeting with Congressman Lynch.
On the staff side, in the winter I began holding monthly meetings with representatives from city, state and federal elective offices. These were productive meetings to introduce campus priorities and updates, and I also invited a guest speaker to each meeting who would discuss an area of expertise we could offer, including: climate resiliency, urban planning and public policy research. In the fall we will reassess whether to continue holding monthly staff meetings or shift to quarterly meetings with the elected officials and the Chancellor, but either way the staff meetings were a good step in re-opening lines of communication.

2. Business Outreach

Our goals for outreach to the business community are threefold:

- Internship and employment opportunities for students
- Philanthropic opportunities for advancement
- Curriculum review and research opportunities for faculty

Each of these goals is manifested through our cluster initiative which we launched last spring by holding cluster visits in accounting, finance and communications (clusters planned for fall 2019 include banking, tech, data/computer science, cyber security, nursing and health sciences, social services and criminal justice, block chain management and a summit with VCs on working for startups). Cluster visits have been successful because of the quality of attendees, which is driven by our host partners.

We have worked very closely with Alliance for Business Leadership President Jesse Mermell and have also benefitted from the Massachusetts Business Roundtable and Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce. While each cluster visit is different, we have built a structure that maximizes our time with industry executives and allows for curriculum review of specific courses, discussion of emerging trends in a given industry, student interaction in the form of a facilitated roundtable and a concluding conversation on next steps of how attendees can work with UMB. The follow up meetings with cluster attendees from the spring are ongoing, starting with accounting where we are pursuing a winter internship program. Based on the unanimous agreement from the Big 4 firms that the best way for our students to get jobs after graduation is by having a winter internship, we are convening a meeting to position ourselves for success once the curriculum is designed to accommodate a winter internship program.

Additional follow-up documents have been produced and shared with our co-host on how cluster attendees from finance and communications can engage with us in academics and/or career services. Of note, one student who presented at the communications cluster was offered – and accepted – a job by an attendee and she started after graduation.

Aside from the clusters, our relationship with the Chamber includes playing an integral role in the Talentsetters initiative. Talentsetters was launched this year as a pilot program with 10 companies to increase diversity in the business community with a pipeline strategy: recruit full-time, paid summer interns of color, then have them become entry level employees after graduation and then work their way up the ladder in a given firm or industry. We worked very closely with the Chamber from the inception of Talentsetters, including hosting a meeting on our campus of the 10 Talentsetter companies where our students presented.
Of the 400-plus online entries with the Talentsetters platform, nearly 1/3 came from UMB students. In the end, only five of the 10 companies were able to hire a summer intern, and one was from UMB. At the request of the Chamber, our Office of Career Services and Internships is holding a series of four programs this summer for the five students. Moving forward, the Chamber is looking to scale Talentsetters by increasing the number of participating companies and number of internships offered and we are intimately involved in these conversations. The Chamber has identified philanthropic foundations that are interested in funding the program and the Chamber has responded favorably to our idea of a full-time, dedicated staff member at UMB who would coordinate the program from a university-partner, if we can get external funding.

Our outreach to the business community extends beyond the traditional downtown firms and big employers. We made a concerted outreach effort to local small business in our immediate neighborhoods of Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan and South Boston by hosting a small business summit in the spring. We convened representatives from city, state and federal government, as well as financial firms and non-profit agencies for a summit that offered small business owners insight and advice into accessing capital, procurement and available services.

We had roughly 75 attendees for a program that included key note addresses by City of Boston Economic Development Chief John Barros and Massachusetts Competitive Partnership President Jay Ash and a roundtable discussion with those on the front lines of business assistance. As Bayside progresses, it is our hope that local small businesses will benefit from the development. The program ended with a commitment from John Barros to hold up a follow-up session that would be managed by the City of Boston.

3. Public Policy

As Boston’s public university, we take seriously our responsibility as a leader in convening discussions on key public policy matters. I served as the liaison for the debate consortium (McCormack School, Boston Globe and WBUR) with the three ballot questions that were held in the fall – nurse staffing ratios, transgender rights and a commission on Citizens United. This included drafting formal invitation letters, coordinating logistics and being the point of contact for each side of the three ballot questions. The debates were also broadcast live on WBUR, streamed live by the Globe and UMB websites and received positive coverage for the informative nature of the conversations.

A benefit of developing working relationships with elected officials and their offices can be the opportunities that arise to host events from intimate conversations about specific initiatives to large, town hall style meetings. We were fortunate that three prominent elected officials requested to hold important public conversations on our campus. Congressman Joe Kennedy, along the Former Members of Congress Association, chose UMB as the higher education site to host an open meeting as part of the Congressional Study Group. This bipartisan initiative engages audiences from high schools (earlier in the day they were at Jeremiah Burke High School, a visit we arranged) through colleges to senior citizens about how bipartisanship still exists in Congress. Kennedy was joined by two Republicans (Rodney Davis from Illinois and Markwayne Mullin from Oklahoma) and another Democrat (Lisa Blunt Rochester from
Delaware who happened to be a senior fellow at the ICI) for a conversation with more than 75 attendees from our campus.

When Senator Ed Markey wanted to give a speech on Earth Day about the Green New Deal, he chose UMB as the location. We had over 300 attendees, the overwhelming majority of which were our students, and the event included a Q&A. When State Senator Eric Lesser and the NewDEAL (a national organization of young state and local elected officials) wanted to hold a roundtable discussion on The Future of Work, they came to UMB. We arranged a diverse group of students, deans, faculty, administrators and entrepreneurs to join with elected officials for a thought-provoking conversation about employment.

We have also submitted a competitive proposal, alongside the JFK Presidential Library and EMKI, to host a 2020 Democratic presidential primary debate on Columbia Point. We are also working with the McCormack School on a series called Your Congress where we hope to host each Member of the Massachusetts Congressional Delegation over the next two years, starting this fall.

4. Co-branding opportunities

When established organizations and entities hold events that allow for co-branding opportunities it can serve as an extension of credibility to us. A great example of this is our participation with HUBweek, an annual, multiday innovation festival held in Boston that began in 2015. For the first two years of HUBweek, UMB had no role providing expertise for featured events or breakout sessions. That changed in 2017. In 2018 we expanded our position even further by hosting four breakout panels as part of HUBweek, all of which we coordinated (affordable childcare hackathon, diversifying innovation economy pipeline, ethics of AI, Boston Harbor environmental science cruise) and one event on the held on the City Hall Plaza mainstage in a geodesic dome (a discussion of immigrant entrepreneurs and the positive impact of economic development, job creation and investment). The events we hosted received glowing media coverage.

5. Public Records

Serving as the University’s public records access officer is a critical function that encompasses a range of responsibilities, chief among them is ensuring our responses are in compliance with the Massachusetts Public Records Law. As a public university and state agency, all records and documents must be maintained in accordance with our internal retention policies and state law. This year we established a system where all public records requests come through me and all responses come from me. Previously, public records responses were decentralized and often handled by whoever received the request. Having one central point of contact for overseeing public records request is essential, or else we run the risk of a request being overlooked, an inaccurate response, materials being shared that should be redacted and/or failing to comply with state law. We held a meeting with all A&F representatives where I gave a presentation on the public records law, processes and timeline. This enabled everyone to understand the importance of the law and why a centralized system is necessary.
We also developed internal protocol for responses that guarantees a streamlined process. This especially is important with media requests. We have a developed a system where I work closely with the communications team. Similarly, a system has been developed with the registrar’s office - which receives regular requests for student directory information - a sensitive area that can include FERPA-protected information. No matter the nature of the request, we also have developed a system in consultation with the President’s Office of the General Counsel to review and seek guidance on public records responses.

6. Communications

Along with the communications team, we have developed a system and strategy for proactively pitching and placing positive news stories about ongoing activities on our campus. Weekly calls allow us to stay in close contact about items that can help spread our positive message about exciting campus initiatives so we are doing more than just reacting to media inquiries.

Additionally, when it comes to elected and public officials, it is crucial that they hear about important campus updates from the University before reading a story in the newspaper or seeing it on TV. The communications team and I work in tandem to create a timeline for drafting, releasing and sharing campus messages in a manner that allows key government officials to have adequate notification when necessary. This contributes to building a trusting relationship with policy makers.