



Cooperative Notes

Northeast Cooperative Council

Information Education Collaboration

VOLUME 28—ISSUE 3—SUMMER

The “Better” Board Meeting

By Bobbie Severson, Cornell University Cooperative Enterprise Program

According to a study conducted by Mike Cook, University of Missouri, 58% of cooperative boards surveyed meet 11 to 15 days per year and 19% meet less than one day per year. Considering the length of the meeting, the numerous topics to be discussed, and the decisions to be made, good communication skills, on the part of directors, are critical to the success of the cooperative. Communication is defined as ‘the act of imparting or exchange of thoughts, opinions or information by speech, writing or signs.’ (dictionary.reference.com). Strengthening communication skills is one way to achieve the “better” board meeting. I suggest that good communication starts before the chair or president calls the meeting to order.

The Preparation:

- Get a good night’s sleep before the meeting. It is impossible to hear what is said when one is dozing off.
- Receive and review the agenda and information in advance of the meeting. List discussion points, write questions to be asked and additional information needed to be concise when called upon to speak. If necessary review previous board packets to refresh your memory of the history of the issue or previous actions taken. If appropriate, share how reports or information might be presented in a manner that is more useful.
- Directors should make sure things are ‘in order at home’ before leaving for the meeting so that they can fully concentrate on the issues at hand when the meeting starts.
- If new to the board, in advance of the meeting, contact the board president or chair to be brought up to speed on specific issues.
- Limit casual conversations with other board members to time before or after the meeting, or during breaks so that your focus and the focus of the person next to you is on the issue being discussed in the meeting. Be seated and ready to go, 5 minutes before the meeting is called to order.

In the Meeting:

It is true, 90% of communication is non-verbal. Checking your cell phone or surfing the Internet during the board meeting distracts you and others around you from hearing and understanding what is being said. This ‘multi-tasking’ is also a signal to other board members that you may not value what they have to say. The same goes for eye rolling, checking the clock, or ‘the look’ - ‘There (s)he goes again!’ (SIGH)



- Listen more to understand, than respond. Research shows that we engage in creating our response well before the person is done speaking.
- Each board member is elected to represent the voices of the membership. Total silence at the board meeting does not represent those voices. Balance your time talking, telling, and asking questions with that of others. Directors have an obligation to their members and the cooperative to share opinions and seek out the perspectives of other directors. The more heated the discussions, the greater the need to understand and respect one another.
- Use ‘I’ statements, not ‘you’ statements. Share your thought process. “I believe we need to do this because...” Share your assumptions in reaching the conclusion. Remember, your assumptions may or may not be valid.
- ‘Thinking out loud’ or ‘throwing mud at the wall’ are ways of introducing a new subject or idea. When doing so, be succinct.
- Be genuinely curious about the ideas of people at the table. Being open to new information requires you to suspend judgment and not rush to view others’ ideas as competing with or cancelling out your viewpoint. Remember the goal is to fully discuss the issue before a decision is made. Even exploring contradictory statements can reveal important perspectives, which when explored can lead to good decisions.
- Acknowledge the viewpoint of others. When appropriate use humor to diffuse a situation, but with caution as what one person sees as funny may not be funny to others. Be aware of tone of voice when speaking.
- When necessary use reflective listening to demonstrate understanding of what the other person says. “If I understand you correctly, you mean....” Do not repeat the words of the other person, rather rephrase what was said in language that you understand.
- Third parties can be useful in creating surveys, analyzing responses, and reporting back to cooperative leaders interested in validating present practices or determining if new methods are needed. Contact the Cornell University Cooperative Enterprise Program, Bobbie Severson for more information at 607/255-1987 or rmh27@cornell.edu

BOARD EVALUATION TOOL—COMMUNICATION

STATEMENT (check agree or disagree)	Agree	Disagree	Suggestion for improvement
The agenda and supporting documents were appropriate to allow me to be properly prepared for the meeting.			
I was well prepared for the meeting.			
I believe the other board members were well prepared for the board discussion.			
Reports of management were clear and concise.			
I am satisfied that I made useful contributions to the board meeting.			
Everyone contributed to the discussion.			
Diversity of opinions were expressed in a respectful manner.			
Issues were properly vented before a vote was taken.			
The Chairman/President guided the discussion effectively.			

NORTHEAST COOPERATIVE COUNCIL—Mission Statement

The mission of the Northeast Cooperative Council is to stimulate the overall effectiveness of member organizations by increasing the understanding of the power of the cooperative business model among directors, members, employees, managers, advisors, and educators through a working partnership of cooperative leaders and faculty at Cornell University. To achieve this mission, the Council:

- Provides leadership to members for leveraging their own educational resources through collaboration.
- Creates an ongoing forum fostering the exchange of ideas among cooperatives here and around the world.
- Sponsors educational workshops, conferences, and seminars.
- Produces and distributes educational materials.
- Publishes “Cooperative Notes” newsletter.
- Keeps members informed of the activities of other state and national cooperative councils.
- Provides information on legislative issues and informs legislators on cooperative matters.
- Works with the Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences as well as other state and national educational organizations.

NECC Board Members

Jean Angelini—Ocean Spray, Inc.

Bill Banker—Agri-mark, Inc.

Gary Heckman—AgChoice Farm Credit, ACA

Gordon Hoover—Land O’Lakes, Inc.

Celeste Kane-Stebbins—Yankee Farm Credit, ACA

William Nelson—CHS, Inc.

Michael Oleksak—CoBANK, ACB

Jacques Parent—St. Albans Cooperative Creamery

Craig Pollock—Farm Credit East, ACA

Ed Schoen—Dairy Farmers of America

Rob Smith—National Grape Cooperative

Stephen Tudhope—Farm Credit East, ACA

Cynthia Van Lieshout—Upstate Niagara Cooperative, Inc.

Eric Zuber—O-AT-KA Milk Products Cooperative, Inc.



PRESIDENT’S COLUMN

The internal structure of an organization, the culture of the entities with whom it partners, and the leaders involved play into the roll of any cooperative’s ability to make timely and effective decisions.

This is our third newsletter for 2014 and it is important that you take a few minutes to consider the role of the Northeast Cooperative Council in the future. **The board of directors needs input and guidance from its member organizations.** The NECC currently have 18 cooperative members (down 2 from 2013) and 7 associate members. The organization has a Memorandum of Understanding with Cornell University, Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management that will expire in June 2015. Each year the organization pays for services of the Executive Secretary provided through allocation of time by the Extension Associate of the Dyson School’s Cooperative Enterprise Program. The dues paid by NECC members pays for these services. Currently fringe and indirect costs are borne by the Dyson School. No other program or position is supported in this manner in the Dyson School. Under the upcoming funding model, the organization will have to pay for the services rendered by the Executive Secretary and associated fringe and indirect costs. To continue the status quo, it is suggested that the NECC increase its contribution by 68 percent.

Good leaders ask difficult questions. Is this organization a legacy of previous generations? What is its relevancy for the future? What is its competitive advantage? How can NECC be valued by present and future members? And, how might things be done differently in the future? As a member, does the NECC meet your needs and if so, are you willing to increase your dues (as much as double) or provide sponsorship of the Leaders Forum, or other NECC events, etc.? Please contact one of the NECC board members listed at the left with your thoughts today.

As a reminder, the Council formally adopted an anti-trust policy at the March board meeting. Anti-trust laws can be costly to a cooperative and the NECC is no different. Events conducted by the NECC must not be viewed as an opportunity for those in attendance to illegally advance their respective company interests regardless of existing business relationships.

On a lighter note, a giant thank you to Judy Joy for her past participation and support of NECC. We wish her well in her retirement. Upon the recommendation of Ocean Spray, Inc., the NECC board of directors accepted the appointment of Jean Angelini to serve as their representative and complete Judy’s term of office. Thank you for devoting your time to the organization. The Council has written a letter to Cornell University recommending the reappointment of Kathryn Boor as Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Thanks to AgChoice Farm Credit and Land O’Lakes for hosting the 2015 Future Leaders Conference. Mark your calendars for the NECC Leadership Conference with CoBANK March 16-17, 2015 in Syracuse, NY.

Please feel free to contact myself (585-590-7503) or any NECC board member about your suggestions on the MOU with Cornell. Have a great summer.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Van Lieshout

Cynthia Van Lieshout, President

WANTED - COLLEGE INTERNSHIPS

Internships are one means by which cooperatives can intersect with the best and brightest students. These talented individuals could be future leaders or members of your cooperative. Returning college students will seek out internships as early as September or October for the following summer. Cooperatives seeking interns should create and submit a position description to share with the University Career Services Department or a teaching faculty member.

Interns should be viewed as pre-professionals. They desire to learn about a business and industry while contributing something of value as they build their skills and apply knowledge they gained from the classroom.

Suggestions for a successful internship include:

Know what you want. Create a specific job description with a project that allows students to learn about the cooperative and the industry in which it operates. Provide a learning experience and project from which they expand their skills and enhance their resume.

Know the labor laws. Some cooperatives put interns through new employee orientation and safety programs. This helps interns to understand the culture of the cooperative and expectations in the workplace.

Be clear on compensation. Interns who are paid generally perform to a higher standard and have a more satisfactory experience. Unpaid interns have a tendency to feel they are being taken advantage of by the business. Remember that if the student is doing the internship for college credit, (s)he is paying tuition dollars for the experience.

Set the length of the internship. Internships usually last 2 to 6 months. Decide beginning and ending dates. Remember that the supervising staff maybe requested to make periodical reports to the student's advisor.

Find the right mentor. The person managing the intern must be enthusiastic about working with students, provide support to complete a project, and guidance when a project seems to be headed in the wrong direction. Mentors are critical to keep interns motivated. Ask interns what experiences would provide them with the most satisfaction. Place them with other staff members with the ability to serve as on-the-job coaches, whose responsibilities align with the interests of the student. Offer them time with Senior level management. Be prepared, interns will share the positives and the negatives of their experience of your cooperative with others.

My summer at DFA was valuable and rewarding. I was surrounded by amiable and incredibly talented people who had a sincere desire to see me succeed.
—Marty Wilson,
Wake Forest University

DAIRY EXECUTIVE PROGRAM



The Cornell Dairy Executive Program (CDEP) provides a unique, professional educational opportunity in leadership and management principles for progressive dairy producers in New York and across the country. This yearlong program develops the skills that are necessary to run a successful dairy business in individuals who have 5 or more years of dairy experience in a decision making position, and who are committed to a career in the dairy business.

Timely topics in dairy business management are presented by a team of national experts from within and outside of the field of agriculture through three multi-day sessions over a 12-month period. Program content focuses on four different areas within the dairy business: business planning, financial management, human resource management and risk management. After attending this participants will have developed a comprehensive self-evaluation of their business; one and five year strategic business plans; improved leadership and management skills, a network of dairy executives; and a plan for building business relationships. The class is limited to 30 people. **Applications are due by October 15, 2014. For more information visit the Cornell ProDairy website.**