



Customer Spotlight: Steering Committees Align Conferences with Development Needs

FCC Services has built an outstanding record of successful conferences, delivering topical content that's on-point for our audiences. Conference after conference, our attendees tell us that our sessions are aligned with their daily challenges and provide new ideas about how to lead, manage and help their organization succeed.

The success of our conferences is made possible through the insights and thoughtful suggestions of a small number of dedicated Farm Credit leaders who voluntarily participate in the Steering Committees that guide our conference development – one committee each for the RAAW Conference, The Forum for Ag Lending, Learning Conference, and for role-specific conferences such as the Farm Credit Sales Leaders Conference, which is produced, managed and marketed by FCC Services' Event Management Services consulting team.

“The goal of each Steering Committee is to work together to help shape the agenda so it meets the ongoing and emerging needs of the System,” says Joette Cross, Director of Event Management at FCC Services. “The collaboration that happens as a result of the individual perspectives of the Committee is one of the key processes that make our conferences successful.”

Dennis Fike is Vice President and Chief Service Officer with Farm Credit of New Mexico, and serves on the Workgroup for the RAAW Conference, the largest and possibly most technical of FCC Services' conferences.

“Our goal on the RAAW Workgroup is to make sure the topics presented at the conference relate to what the attendees want to hear and address the reasons they're attending,” Dennis says. “Our members have expertise in specific areas, like appraisal, credit review or audit, and we each bring ground-level ideas to discuss as we develop the agenda for the conference.”

As Joette recruits for the Learning Conference and Forum for Ag Lending Steering Committees, she looks for a cross-section of people across organizations, across job responsibilities and across experience



levels. Some are in high-level positions and some are in the trenches working with customers every day; some have been with Farm Credit for years or even decades, and others are newer to the System.

Each Steering Committee spends approximately five months meeting via phone every two to three weeks. In the early phase, they brainstorm ideas for content that fits the conference theme, keeping in mind the topics identified as important by previous attendees, trends within Farm Credit and the larger business and global environment, and topics covered the previous year. The members then start outreach to potential speakers, dividing the effort and sharing responses back with the group. To get an objective assessment of the potential sessions and speakers, Joette conducts an anonymous survey of the entire Steering Committee to rate the ideas, and pursues those that score highly enough.

Working with Joette, the committee members then finalize the agenda, meet via telephone with each speaker to make sure their messages are targeted to Farm Credit's needs, and, finally, serve as ambassadors at the conference itself.

Mike Schrey is the Chief Lending Officer with AgChoice and serves on the Learning Conference Steering Committee, a role he sought out after being impressed with the program he attended and wanting to be a part of future planning.

"The Steering Committee provides the local association flavor to a national conference," Mike says. "We each know the key issues our organization is facing, and many of these issues are similar despite our geographic or size differences. Together, we're able to identify speakers and content that will provide attendees with ideas to bring back to improve their own organizations."

While the up-front commitment to serve on one of the Steering Committees can be as short as one year, many members find themselves reenlisting year after year.

Ralph Stewart, Executive Vice President and Chief Credit Officer for Alabama Farm Credit has served on the Learning Conference Steering Committee for the past seven years, welcoming the opportunity to share his experience and discuss shared challenges with other committee members.

"I see FCC Services and its conferences as being the conduit for information relating to customer needs and outside influences," says Ralph. "The Steering Committee is a way for those of us with front-line insight to be a conduit to share that information and help FCC Services design a strong program that addresses the challenges we all face."

For more information on how you can participate as a Conference Steering Committee member, please contact Joette.Cross@fccservices.com.