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Report

Workshop & Focus Group

Florida Fertilizer & Agrichemical Association

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**Center for Public Issues Education
IN AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

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Background

In the fall of 2011, the Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) was contacted by the Florida Fertilizer and Agrichemical Association (FFAA) to begin a discussion about how the organization could strengthen its long range plan. There were three major objectives of the original planning process. The first was to identify the most important issues facing the organization's members in order to create a plan of work that would address those issues. The second was to determine how current members view their return on investment in the organization and, lastly, how the members viewed the organization's name, logo and overall brand.

In order to achieve these objectives, the PIE Center suggested a facilitated workshop and focus group with the FFAA board during the 2012 winter business meeting. The board of an organization is generally representative of the organization's membership body as well as knowledgeable about the organization's history and mission, making them an ideal group for achieving the planning objectives.

The workshop and focus group were conducted to help the board determine how to move the organization forward, best position FFAA for the future. In addition, this methodology helped identify the needs and priorities that FFAA should address and how those needs and priorities match FFAA's strategic plan.

Workshop

As facilitators of the workshop, the PIE Center began by asking the FFAA board to split up into five teams. As a team, members were asked to list the biggest needs/priorities to be addressed to best position FFAA in the next five years.

Big Picture Needs & Priorities

FFAA's five-year needs/priorities, in no particular order, as decided by the five breakout groups were:

Team 1

- Sustainability of agriculture
- Continuing consolidation of businesses
 - Loss of membership within FFAA
- Perception of agriculture
 - Input industries
 - FFAA name
- Regulatory environment – increasing restrictions
- Labor/water issues
- Global economy
- FFAA focus

Team 2

- Networking
- Money
- Increasing membership
- Increasing awareness
- Regulations and politics
- Communication
- Strength in numbers

Team 3

- Redefining our association (mission)
- Name and logo
- Identify new revenues sources
- Increase engagement of all
- Future staffing needs
- Look at other types of members
- Increase awareness of actions of association internally and externally

Team 4

- Grow the organization
- Be inclusive of other organizations
- Industry compliance with regulations
- Be politically active
- Progressive image of agriculture

Team 5

- Environmental impact of FFAA products
 - Water quality
- Education of public and legislature
- Perception of agriculture
- Flat membership numbers
- Industry alliances
- Do we have enough staff to meet the challenge?

After each team created a list of needs/priorities, they were asked to share it with the rest of the board and explain their reasoning. Since the teams had some overlapping concepts on their lists, one merged list was created. After the duplicates were removed, the following overarching list of FFAA's 19 needs/priorities was created.

Combined Needs/Priorities:

- Networking
- Environmental impacts
- Increase awareness – engage membership
- Communication
- Politics
- Grow organization
- Collaborate with other organizations
- Compliance with regulations
- Image of agriculture and industry
- Environmental impacts
- Education of public
- Lack of staff
- Sustainability of agriculture
- Consolidation
- Perception of FFAA
- Labor/water issues
- FFAA mission statement
- Membership diversity
- Awareness of FFAA

After the combined list was prepared, a nominal group technique was utilized, in which each board member was given five stickers. The board members were then instructed to choose their top five needs/priorities from the combined list and place one sticker by each of those top needs/priorities. Though most needs/priorities received sticker votes, several did not.

Needs/Priorities receiving zero votes:

- Environmental impacts
- Labor/water issues
- FFAA mission statement

When the board began discussing the distribution of stickers, they realized that the merged list of 19 needs/priorities could be reduced further by collapsing similar or redundant items into one. The result of the further condensed list, ranked by sticker votes was as follows:

Ranked Needs/Priorities

1. Image of agriculture industry (10) + Education of the public (9) + Sustainability of agriculture (5) = **24 votes**
- 2a. Politics (8) + Compliance with regulations (6) = **14 votes**
- 2b. Networking (6) + Collaborate with other organizations (6) + Communication (2) = **14 votes**
- 4a. Money (8) + Lack of staff (5) = **13 votes**
- 4b. Awareness of FFAA (4) + Perception of FFAA (9) = **13 votes**
6. Increase awareness – engage membership (1) + Membership diversity (3) + Consolidation (1) + Grow organization (5) = **10 votes**

Focus Group

After the six final needs/priorities were established by the board, the PIE Center began the focus group portion by asking the board to relate FFAA's mission and goals, as stated in the 2010 strategic plan, to the six needs/priorities and concluded with a discussion about an action plan to fulfill the needs/priorities of FFAA.

Mission

Overall, the board was pleased with the conciseness and simplicity of the mission. However, several added that the mission sounded like “just a coalition of businesses,” looking internal, “self-serving” and making the organization seemed closed. One board member asked, “Is that what we want to be perceived by the public?”

FFAA board members also began to edit the mission statement as the discussion continued. Several board members thought that a “legislative statement” or “advocacy piece” should be added to the mission. Two word replacements within the mission were also recommended: promote for educate and use for stewardship (as seen below). By substituting the terms, board members thought it would “take [FFAA] back to sustainability,” and be more representative of their ranked needs/priorities.

Edits to FFAA's mission:

FFAA will ~~promote~~ educate the benefits and responsible ~~use~~ stewardship of plant nutrients and plant protection products in Florida.

Goals

When asked to compare FFAA's goals, as stated in the 2010 strategic plan, to the newly ranked needs/priorities, the board initially thought that most of the new needs/priorities were covered by the goals in the strategic plan. However, as the board continued to examine the strategic plan's goals, they realized that individual board members were interpreting the goals differently, that some goals were repetitive and others were not plausible. In addition, several board members found that both internal and external goals were included together, making it difficult to determine the purpose of each goal.

Therefore, the FFAA board began to edit and condense the strategic plan goals. For instance, the board combined the first and second goals as well as the fifth and seventh goals while eliminate the sixth goal completely (see below). Two word or phrase substitutions were also used within the goals: nutrients for inputs as well as use for stewardship and distribution.

Edits to FFAA's goals as stated in the 2010 strategic plan:

- — Enhance the public's perception of plant nutrients inputs and crop protection products
 - ~~P~~romote ~~the~~ safe, responsible stewardship and distribution use of plant nutrients and crop protection products
 - Promote industry security
 - Enhance industry education efforts throughout the state
 - Engage the association's members in FFAA and
- ~~Promote a positive business climate in the state~~
- ~~N~~etwork with allied industry groups

Other board recommendations to the goals in the strategic plan included adding a message about “a safe and affordable food supply,” and values as well as enhancing sustainability and “making sure the industry stays around.”

Action Plan

After comparing the ranked needs/priorities to FFAA's mission and goals, the board members were asked to get back into their original teams. Once back in teams, each team was assigned one of the newly revised strategic plan goals and asked to compose action steps for that goal. Below are the steps FFAA board members conceived for the updated goals.

Goal 1: Enhance the public's perception of plan inputs and promote safe, responsible stewardship and distribution

Action Step: Engage the local farmers and ranchers to speak to local non farming groups including children, women organizations and news media.

Action Step: Increase the participation of FFAA members in political activities- i.e. numeric nutrients

Action Step: Provide hands on projects and include funding to non agricultural schools to influence and educate about food production

Action Step: Use Ag Institute as a resource to align efforts

Action Step: Consider staff addition to focus on this important initiative

Action Step: Grassroots promotion of “4Rs” to public

Goal 2: Promote industry security

Action Step: Provide membership with communication about new requirements when enacted

Action Step: Conduct workshops and training sessions to update affected segments of membership

Goal 3: Enhance industry education efforts throughout the state

Action Step: Continue to cooperate with other state associations

Action Step: Outreach to public television

Action Step: Encourage member involvement in public school programs

Action Step: Develop web-based informational education

Goal 4: Engage association's members in FFAA and network with allied industry groups

Action Step: 4Rs stewardship

Action Step: Form an outreach committee to contact other associations

Action Step: Form regional FFAA chapters

Action Step: Increase company member involvement

Findings

The FFAA board generally agrees on the future needs/priorities of the organization to achieve continued success. Although there were more than 30 needs/priorities when the five teams began, the board was able to narrow its focus and simplify those needs/priorities to a core of six:

1. Improving the overall image and sustainability of the agricultural industry
2. Maintaining political lobbying efforts
3. Increasing collaboration with other similar organizations
4. Lack of resources
5. Increasing the visibility of FFAA
6. Developing membership services

While the board was able to condense the needs/priorities of FFAA, there was much debate over the wording and potential redundancy of the strategic plan's goals. The vagueness of the goals' intent to be internal or external was also a source of contention. In addition, a great proportion of the board thought that FFAA's mission could be updated to have a greater appeal to external audiences. However, most agreed that the mission should stay short and concise.

Lastly, though the board talked extensively about the perception and awareness of both the agricultural industry and FFAA, there was little discussion of the organization's logo, brand or name. However, this may be inferred because the name, logo and brand identity elements are an implied part of industry and association awareness.

Recommendations

Based on the perceived ambiguity of the goals in the strategic plan by the FFAA board and the desire to update the FFAA mission statement, the FFAA board should conduct a full-day strategy session. During the strategy session, the FFAA board should consider the following:

- Define and classify goals, needs, priorities and objectives for the purpose of the organization and then separate them into internal and external categories. Categorizing as internal and external will clarify the purpose of each and ease the process of building a plan to accomplish or fulfill those goals, needs, priorities and objectives.
- Expand the current strategic plan to incorporate the six needs/priorities determined by the board, including a specific strategy to accomplish each and measurable benchmarks so as to evaluate effectiveness and success.
- Make the strategic plan time-limited so that success can be measured, evaluated and benchmarked within predetermined time spans. For instance, if FFAA created a five-year strategic plan in 2012, the board could review progress annually. In 2016, after five years, the board would evaluate overall success and create a new strategic plan based on the fluctuations of the organization since 2012. This will allow the organization to set short- and long-term goals or objectives for the needs and priorities of the organization.

- Contemplate the capacity of FFAA to accomplish some of the broader industry-wide priorities (i.e. improving the overall image and sustainability of the agricultural industry). FFAA should consider partnering with or contributing to national and state organizations whose main objectives are to accomplish those major industry-wide priorities.
- Focus the mission on external audiences to present FFAA as an open organization.
- Reevaluate membership categories of FFAA to be more inclusive of peripheral individuals who might be interested in membership. Inclusive membership categories could lead to increased revenue.
- Develop and communicate the current membership services to current and potential FFAA members so that all are aware of the benefits of membership. Also consider expanding the available membership services, including, but not limited to, networking opportunities, leadership development, advocacy, and philanthropy. Visibility and transparency about membership services could also increase the overall membership and therefore revenue of FFAA.
- Collaborate with national and state organizations with parallel efforts. Many agricultural organizations are working on outreach and educational efforts to help connect with the public. By collaborating with those organizations and pooling resources, more knowledge about more industry segments will be distributed. In addition, most associations have annual meetings. To boost attendance and participation, it may be beneficial for FFAA to hold annual or quarterly meetings in conjunction with other state organizations.
- Connect FFAA's committee structure, post strategy session, to the updated goals, mission, needs and priorities of the organization.