



**NRECA Awards (2022-2023)**

2023 J.C. Brown Nomination Form (Chapter: J.C. Brown CEO Communication Leadership Award)



MgBNqOEZ

# Jeff Wadsworth, CEO and Champion of Cooperative Communications

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## Entry details

Your Name	Amy Rosier
Your Job Title	VP, Member + Government Relations
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Preferred Method of Communication	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Phone <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Email
I have read the eligibility requirements found in the Call for Entries and confirm my nominee is eligible for the award.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I have paid for feedback on my entry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**The Cooperative Difference (35 points):**

In what ways does the nominee's commitment to communication, both internal and external, help advance the seven cooperative principles, philosophy and way of doing business?

Jeff Wadsworth, President & CEO of Poudre Valley REA (PVREA) is a champion of the cooperative business model. Whether through the strategic emphasis he places on communications or the way he embodies the cooperative spirit, Jeff places immense value on telling our cooperative story and advancing the seven cooperative principles.

Jeff is focused on ensuring members understand what it means to be part of a cooperative. Jeff led an effort to redesign the lobby to include a digital information center + member mirror to create an interactive experience. The member onboarding process continues to evolve with a focus on communicating the value of membership. Jeff routinely shares our story at schools, community presentations and even handwritten notes to members asking how we can better serve them; a small gesture paying big dividends in reinforcing the cooperative difference.

Being owned and governed by those we serve is a pillar of PVREA's communications efforts. Jeff ensures communication efforts and updates are regularly discussed in the board room and the board understands the importance strategic communications PVREA member satisfaction. The board of directors has yearly strategic planning sessions designed to solidify PVREA's path forward and spark dialogue that doesn't shy away from constructive conflict. Communications and member experience related topics remain fixtures on the agenda.

Jeff encouraged the team to rethink how PVREA communicates capital credits, the cooperative's main opportunity to communicate our members' economic participation. As a result, PVREA rolled out a communications campaign to help members understand their renamed "member credits."

Under Jeff's leadership, the onboarding of new employees was overhauled to include specific cooperative education including the seven cooperative principles. PVREA's strategy map has several employee education specific initiatives. Two of the cooperative's staff are Certified Cooperative Communicators with a third starting the certification in 2023. PVREA has also hosted education sessions for members and contractors.

In true cooperative spirit, Jeff continues to share his expertise to help advance fellow cooperatives. On a national stage, Jeff has shared our communications story on variety of subjects including engaging the membership, using data to better connect with cooperative members and improving internal communications. He serves on NRECA's Strategic Technology Advisory Council further shaping the future of cooperatives.

Jeff also encourages and supports his staff to seek communications leadership roles at the state level through the Colorado Rural Electric Member Services group and at the national level through the Council of Rural Electric Communicators, as New Cooperative Communicators Orientation volunteers, and the Touchstone Energy board of directors. The team also participates in regional and national cooperative communications working groups to collaborate and share ideas.

Jeff launched an employee volunteer program to encourage employees to give back to the community. PVREA also launched a school grant program to promote STEAM projects in the classroom awarding \$25,000 in its first year. These are just a few examples of how Jeff has created an environment to actively engage in the community while telling our cooperative story.

**Strategic Approach (25 points)** In what ways does the nominee integrate communication into the organization's strategic planning and management processes?

Since taking the helm as PVREA's President and CEO, Jeff has brought a disciplined approach to communications and organizational strategy. Jeff implemented several changes to ensure the communications function plays a prominent and centralized function within the organization.

Jeff launched a three-year strategy map, currently on its second implementation. The strategy map is an organization-wide endeavor where every employee has the opportunity to contribute ideas and track organizational progress. The Strategy Team meets monthly to discuss progress and any roadblocks.

Several initiatives speak directly to the importance communications plays at PVREA. Some of those initiatives not referenced elsewhere:

a. Jeff added an initiative to improve the member journey. This cooperative-wide effort has identified each type of member interaction across departments. The team is currently mapping those interactions, looking for improvement opportunities and putting solutions into place.

- b. PVREA is undergoing a complete brand refresh to better connect both employees and members to the cooperative. The three-phase, organizational endeavor includes a brand platform, visual + verbal brand standards and a defined employee role.
- c. PVREA is preparing to launch a new online member experience including an improved responsive design, web chat, and intuitive, member-centric content.
- d. Each employee created an impact statement directly tying their unique contribution to PVREA's mission.
- e. Utilizing multi-channel target marketing, combining data and member personas to connect members with customized product and service offerings based on their individual needs.
- f. PVREA implemented a measurable safety communications program designed to connect with each employee more deeply through robust communications through the intranet, video testimonials, training, and signage.
- g. The Key Accounts program was overhauled to expand communication and engagement with both large power users and community-based influencers and leaders.

Each quarter, the large-scale outage procedures are reviewed for updates. When Jeff began his tenure as CEO, he added communications as a critical part of these procedures. Under his leadership, the communications team not only receives informational updates but is also involved in the response every step of the way. The crisis communications plan is also reviewed as part of this process.

Jeff also launched tabletop response exercises mainly focused on catastrophic outages or cyber-security events. Under Jeff's direction an emphasis has been placed on communications, both internal and external bringing the communications and technical operations teams together to discuss impacts and solutions.

The communications team creates an annual strategic communications plan to support the goals and strategic initiatives of the cooperative. Jeff is an active participant in the development of the plan and ensures the team has the resources, both budgetary and staff, they need to complete their goals. With Jeff's support, the work plan has been moved to a cloud-based platform allowing for the real-time motoring and modifications to be made.

### **Integrated Approach (20 points)**

In what ways does the CEO demonstrate support for the cooperative's communication staff?

Jeff remains passionate about improving communications both internally and externally. Prior to Jeff's tenure the cooperative did not have any dedicated communications professionals on staff. He created a communications director position followed by a community relations position and most recently a digital media specialist role. Jeff reimaged the vice president, member + government relations position to focus on communications and the overall member experience.

Jeff also reorganized the departmental make-up of the cooperative, moving the Member Services (call center) team under the Member Relations umbrella to create a more consistent member experience. These deliberate, strategic changes have resulted in communications playing a more prominent, integrated, and vital role in the organization.

Jeff also ensures the cooperative's board of directors are engaged and understand the importance of strategic communications. For example, during the board's most recent strategy planning session the board took a deep dive into member demographics and marketing segmentation data to gain a better understanding of who the members of Poudre Valley REA are and how to better communicate across member segments.

Jeff inspires a collaborative workplace to cultivate improved communications across departments creating an environment of accountability and transparency. There were several key actions that have impacted improved internal communications:

- 1) Moving the main internal communications responsibility to the communications team (previously in HR) to bring strategic communications expertise to the effort.
- 2) Made a significant monetary and time investments to launch the Circuit, PVREA's intranet and mobile app. The Circuit allows for information to be easily delivered to all employees as well as for two-way, social discussions to occur.
- 3) Launched monthly online updates of department happenings with information submitted from each department. This is pushed out through both The Circuit and email.
- 4) Jeff introduced TAM or Team Alignment Meetings where mid-level and senior leadership of the cooperative come together to collaborate and share information across departments. These bi-weekly meetings focus on transparency and ensuring all departments are working towards the same goals.
- 5) Jeff works with his team to plan several all-employee meetings throughout the year where he provides strategic updates on

a variety of subjects always tying things back to the role all employees play to providing the members with exceptional service. 6) PVREA launched an Innovation Team of high potential employees to work cross-functionally to look at potential challenges for members and collaborate to present solutions to the Executive Team and Board of Directors. One of their ideas led to a collaboration between members and employees to help with reforestation efforts in an area destroyed by a wildfire. 7) Under Jeff's direction, employee performance reviews are tied to PVREA's strategic initiatives further demonstrating how each employee contributes to the goals of the organization.

Jeff enables and encourages the co-op's communications professionals (and all employees) to participate in continuing education, credentialing programs and regional + national councils/committees.

### **Measures of Success (20 points)**

Please note indicators of the success of the cooperative's communication/marketing programs during the CEO's tenure, and on which he or she has had an influence.

The biggest measure of success for Jeff's leadership, strategic focus, and commitment to advancing the role of communications is evidenced by the cooperative's ACSI (American Customer Satisfaction Index) score improvement. In 2012, the year Jeff became CEO, he implemented a member satisfaction survey which included an ACSI score. That year PVREA scored a 76. In 2022, PVREA has a 87 with a focus on continued improvement. The ACSI score is a direct reflection Jeff's success in developing an organization-wide focus on improving the member experience through strategic communications.

As a result of Jeff's focus on improving communications, PVREA has dramatically improved its crisis communications efforts. An example of this can be evidenced through the cooperative's response to the Cameron Peak fire, the largest wildfire in Colorado's history. Jeff's message to the team was clear: The members impacted by this fire are in crisis. It is PVREA's duty to not only restore power but to do everything possible to ease their burden through our communication efforts. PVREA was able to measure the success of these efforts through the countless notes of thanks from impacted members, more than 81 million impressions across platforms, a smooth line of internal communication and national and local news coverage.

Jeff, PVREA and other employees have received many awards directly tied to Jeff's commitment to championing both the cooperative business model and communications. Jeff was named one of *Fortnightly's* 2020 Top Innovators and in 2018 PVREA was honored with the Smart Electric Power Alliance (SEPA) Power Players Electric Cooperative Utility of the Year award. The communications team has also been honored with several Spotlight on Excellence awards and Statewide communications awards.

He continues to be an advocate for electric cooperatives at the local, state, regional and national level. Jeff launched a grassroots program that has seen a 47% hike in participation over the past two years. He has testified multiple times at the state legislature, most recently in support of a bill to create a funding for microgrids to increase grid resiliency. He was invited by the Obama administration to participate in a committee focused on making solar electricity available to low- and moderate-income earners; using his position to ensure cooperative members have a voice.

With Jeff's support and urging, a call coaching program was implemented to provide our member services team with tools to help them better serve our members. This included training on what it means to provide PVREA members with exceptional service, defined expectations + goals, monthly coaching + call listening sessions and a dashboard to track their progress. In six-months, the member services team saw a 52-point jump in call quality going from 22 (baseline – no training) to 74 in the first six months.

While there is no way to fully encapsulate how amazing it is to work at an organization that truly values communications, it is certain Jeff's commitment to tell and empower those around him to tell the cooperative story will continue to have lasting and measurable impacts.

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