

2019 J.C. Brown CEO Communication Leader

#8

Information About Nominee

Name *	Duane Highley
Electric Cooperative *	Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation
When did the nominee become CEO of this cooperative? *	November 2011
Has the nominee served as CEO of another cooperative in the past?	No

The Cooperative Difference (35 points) – In what ways does the CEO’s commitment to communication, both internal and external, help advance the seven cooperative principles, philosophy and way of doing business? *

Duane Highley is truly committed to advancing the seven cooperative principles. To ensure that every employee of Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation (AECC) understands the Cooperative difference, Highley wrote a 28–page book entitled One Cooperative Way: Introducing the Electric Cooperative Business Model. This book was provided to all current employee and all new employees receive a copy as a part of their onboarding process. Highley also espouses the cooperative difference to member–consumers by writing a monthly article for the Arkansas Statewide magazine, Arkansas Living, in his monthly column entitled, The Cooperative Difference. These articles focus on how the cooperative way of business is to make business decisions that ultimately work to improve the quality of the lives of member–consumers and not to make a hefty profit. Highley has written on such topics as, All Charged Up: The

Cooperative Difference which discuss how the cooperatives power sources are becoming made up of more and more solar and wind resources. Highley has written, I Just Got Better, which is about an employee who passed away from cancer but reminded Highley each day of the power of human connection and AECC's employee commitment to the cooperative principles. Since joining AECC in 2012, Highley has written eighty (80) articles for the Cooperative Difference column. Highley has also spoken at various NRECA conferences, at conferences within the state of Arkansas and at the conferences of energy-related national organizations where he is always willing to provide the cooperative perspective to energy topics. Highley's communication style is engaging and comprehensive. Highley has the distinct ability to take very complex information and communicate the information in simplified dialogue. Highley is masterful in this regard.

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

One of the first communications initiatives taken on by Duane was to re-model the corporate headquarters lobby so that when anyone walked into the building they would know exactly what AECC does. Duane included flag-posts of each of the seven cooperative principles, included larger than life line-worker images and incorporated the "Reliable, Affordable, Responsible," mission on the walls. From a strategic standpoint, Duane Highley implemented the Touchstone Energy Strategy Execution System and Balanced Scorecard as an effective communication tool to drive strategy execution throughout the company. Duane implemented a balanced scorecard that incorporates the metrics that are most important to our board members. Duane also supported the development of an Integrated Strategy Map that includes the G& T, the Statewide and the Statewide's wholly-owned subsidiaries. Results of the balanced scorecard are communicated to the Board of Directors monthly. An internal Strategy page on the company's intranet was developed to keep employees informed about what strategy is and why strategy is important. Duane consistently supports communication campaigns such as campaigns that center around addressing harmful government regulations and communications aimed at positively swaying state lawmakers on issues that are important to cooperatives. Duane supports communications focused sponsorships aimed at communicating the cooperative story to member-consumers and future member-consumers. As such, AECC is a major sponsor of the Arkansas State Fair, and the state's FFA AND 4H programs. Duane provided the funding to upgrade several of AECC's public websites to streamline information and improve the user experience. Duane supported the creation of an AECC Facebook page solely dedicated to communicating employment opportunities with AECC and for providing a peek into the day in the life of an AECC employee entitled "Careers at Arkansas Electric Cooperatives." Duane is in the process of supporting the development of a comprehensive social media promotions strategy for AECC. Corporate Communications, inclusive of Arkansas Living Magazine, has a budget of approximately \$2.3 million. Finally, one of the most effective communication tools implemented by Duane were the drafting of information papers and decision papers for complex subjects presented to the Board of Directors for information purposes or for use by the Board to make board decisions. These papers have been well received by the Board.

Integrated Approach (20 points) – In what ways does the CEO demonstrate support for the cooperative's communication staff? *

Duane is a strong supporter of the communications staff. He recently approved the upgrade of two positions, elevating the communications manager position to a communications director and elevating the technical communications supervisor position to a technical communication manage. Sensitive to the growing demand for technical communications services, Duane approved the addition of a communications technician. Duane also approves a generous training and development budget for communications staff for professional development aspirations each year. Duane has most recently approved an assistant editor position that will drive social media content and support the Arkansas Living Magazine. Duane supported the implementation of the YAMMER tool, an internal "Facebook" type communication tool and uses the tool to communicate information about the company, highlight the achievements of employees and respond to employee posts. To ensure that employees were more informed about board of directors' decisions, Duane began providing all employees with a summary of board actions immediately following each monthly board of directors meeting. Duane encourages communication at all levels and supports the company-wide employee newsletter, and encourages divisions to create divisional level newsletters to communicate business information and provide accolades for employee achievements. Duane supports and speaks at four All Employee Meetings a year where he provides a "State of the Business Update" Duane also supports four All Managers and Supervisors meetings a year

where he provides more detailed information about company performance. Each year, Duane invites a distribution cooperative member–manager to speak at an All Employee Meeting so that employees gain a better understanding of the needs and pressures of the distribution cooperatives and so that employees can better understand how to best support the distribution cooperatives in their efforts to keep rates affordable.

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. This criterion is not intended to be an evaluation or showcase of the cooperative’s communication products and services as defined in the larger Spotlight on Excellence awards program. *

Since Duane has been President/CEO, AECC has been awarded a “Best Places to Work” recognition in both 2016 and in 2018. AECC’s Corporate Culture and Communications score improved from 77% in 2016 to 82% in 2018. The specific question “This organization’s corporate communications are frequent enough” scored 86%. Under Duane’s leadership, AECC has conducted three employee engagement surveys. Based on survey results from 2013 and 2015, AECC focused on improving communications scores. The largest gain based on the 2017 employee engagement survey results was “Communication: Information and knowledge are shared openly within AECC;” improving from 2.91 on a 5–point scale in 2015 to 3.46 on a 5–point scale in 2017. Some verbatim comments from the survey include: “I think employee communication has improved.” “AECC is becoming more open with sharing information.” “I think cooperation and communication between departments has improved.” “Communications to employees of company issues has improved.” Under Duane’s tenure, AECC has also been honored with a Humanitarian Award for the cooperative’s community service work with non–profit organizations such as the Arkansas Foodbank, Toys for Tots and ARkids Read. Additionally, Duane is always the highest rated speaker at the bi–annual Arkansas Statewide Directors’ Conferences. Concerning board of director feedback specifically, on Duane’s ability to “communicate effectively with stakeholder to build support for the mission and goals of the cooperative,” Duane consistently rates above average. Some verbatim comments are: “excellent communications,” “exceptional speaker,” and “talented communicator.”

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