

Name ***Curtis Wynn****Electric
Cooperative

Roanoke Electric Cooperative

**When did
the nominee
become
CEO of this
cooperative?

October 13, 1997

**Has the
nominee
served as
CEO of
another
cooperative
in the past?**

No

**If yes,
where,
when and
for how
long?****Business
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Nominator

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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? *

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Curtis Wynn’s unwavering commitment to effective communication, both internal and external, has greatly advanced the seven cooperative principles, philosophy and way of doing business throughout his tenure at Roanoke Electric Cooperative (REC).

Wynn wholeheartedly believes in an “always on” communications approach. Since becoming President and CEO 19 years ago, REC’s communications channels have expanded to well over 30 to include the cooperative’s blog, e-newsletter, mobile app, and various social media platforms. Wynn recognizes that cooperatives have a story worth telling and takes great pride in being able to meet our member-owners where they are – even face-to-face.

First and foremost, Wynn desires to ensure our member-owners understand that they own and control their cooperative. That’s why, in January of this year, Wynn announced to member-owners that REC had officially made a New Year’s resolution to change their title from “members” to “member-owners” in the monthly newsletter CEO Message.

Perhaps the most profound method Wynn has been able to communicate co-op information with REC’s membership is through REC’s Straight Talk Forums. This series of forums over the co-op’s seven-county region gives Wynn the opportunity to have a face-to-face dialogue with the membership to openly discuss topics important to them. Member-owners discuss everything from energy costs to the co-op’s energy efficiency programs, the value of being a member-owner, and so much more.

Wynn has even been active in this year’s Member Appreciation Day event (Gates County), having one-on-one conversations with member-owners about the co-op’s ACRE program and the importance of their active political participation. As a result, Wynn has assisted the staff in signing up over 1,212 member-owners in the co-op’s ACRE program.

Concern for community is at the heart of how Wynn leads. He truly cares for the community he serves and understands the dire situation of the economically challenged region. That’s why Wynn has been traveling across our region speaking with local government officials and school administrators concerning REC’s fiber project known as Roanoke Connect.

Wynn knows that REC’s mission goes beyond providing you with electricity but ultimately aims to improve the quality of life in our diverse communities. The Roanoke Connect project is a 200-mile fiber build out that brings numerous benefits as REC will have the ability to use more state-of-the-art technology to maintain its electrical system. Also, the unused fiber will be available to internet service providers to boost the availability of high-speed internet access desperately needed in the region.

Wynn’s commitment to communication is just as evident internally with REC’s staff and board of directors. Under his leadership, employees receive monthly initiative updates via presentations at employees’ meetings and executive team meeting minutes. Employees also receive major events and initiative highlights via TV screens throughout the co-op’s headquarter facility. Board members are also presented with monthly communications reports detailing all of the co-op’s communications for the previous month.

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

Wynn recognizes that it is critical to effectively communicate all of the great ideas, programs, and events that are available to our member-owners – especially those that enhance member-owner value and quality of life. He believes that REC has some “million dollar” service offerings and the right resources to communicate them strategically.

Led by Wynn’s strategic discernment, REC has been implementing a strategy execution system for the past three years. This system was introduced by Wynn as a performance management tool to bring clear vision and strategy across four major perspectives of REC (financial, member, internal and employee). REC’s strategy execution process produces measurable targets in reliability, cost, safety, member satisfaction, communications and member engagement.

This strategy report, branded as “The Call 2018: Responding to the Call to Serve,” also encompasses a strategy map that illustrates REC’s core values and identifies specific strategy objectives by theme. The overall goal of the strategy map is for REC to become “best in class” in member service, financial accountability and operational efficiency.

This strategic plan was approved by REC’s board and is reviewed annually at the board retreat. The report is also reviewed monthly by the strategy execution team, made up of senior management and other key employees, to measure the goals and initiatives against the Cooperative Difference quarterly survey results.

Since 2013, the strategy execution team has identified over 30 initiatives to complete by 2018, one of which is a well-defined strategic communications plan. As a major part of our Strategy Execution System, Wynn finds that communicating our actions is just as important as accomplishing the initiatives themselves.

He knows that transparency and engagement are accomplished through consistent and clear communications. Therefore, an overall communications strategy has been developed to ensure that we use the best approaches to inform and engage our employees, member-owners and other key stakeholders.

The strategic plan gives special emphasis, marketing strategy and dollars to the most important projects that can change members’ perceptions of REC and address the “pocketbook issues” that plague the economically stressed communities. Wynn also assigned a strategic objective to each of the communications functions to ensure each one is supporting the strategy execution system.

Wynn continues to challenge the communications team to make sure the impact of each project, service offering, or event, reaches our entire membership through multiple communications channels. Wynn’s standard is that the strategic communications plan initiative fully leverages messages, programs and practices used at the national, state and local levels.

Wynn has provided support and budget dollars for a robust communications program, dedicating more than \$200,000 annually for the communications budget.

Wynn’s progressive mentality deems that the strategic communications plan be a “living” document that will be constantly reviewed and adjusted as various analytics and member-owner feedback directs (i.e. Google Analytics, surveys, etc.). Overall analytics for digital communications are reviewed at least monthly by the communications team.

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

Wynn embodies the “all in” approach with everything that the employees and staff perform at REC. Under his leadership, the co-op has adopted the slogan, “The Roanoke Way”, to demonstrate REC’s cultural commitment to achieving our goals and mission collectively. Additionally, Wynn worked alongside the executive team to establish “teamwork” as a core value within REC’s overall corporate strategy early in REC’s strategy execution process. Not only does Wynn support employees’ participation as REC’s communications staff, but he encourages and empowers them to do so.

That’s why it is no surprise that Wynn considers all employees to be critical in REC’s effective communications efforts. Consequently, our strategic communications plan initiative team consists of staff from member services, engineering, operations, subsidiary organizations, and executive team.

Recently, REC began using SharePoint, a software enhanced two-way collaboration tool, so that team members to stay up-to-date on each of REC’s strategic initiatives as well as offer feedback on recent developments.

This year, Wynn also recruited staff members from accounting, our subsidiary organization, member services, and engineering and operations to present program updates and answer member-owner concerns at the various Straight Talk forums within our service territory.

Crew members have also become very active in contributing to the communications process via photo submissions and field updates during outages and new constructions. For the past two years, crews have continued to submit “Crew Corner” video segments that give office employees and member-owners an exclusive look into the responsibilities of REC’s line workers.

Wynn ensures that the entire staff and board of directors are kept up to date on critical project updates and management decisions through various methods including the following: quarterly CEO breakfast talks with 25 percent of the staff to discuss corporate strategy, new programs and initiatives, and seek employee feedback; monthly employees’ meeting updates; email blasts with staff meeting minutes; and television screens throughout the office with important co-op business constantly scrolling on the monitors.

Wynn is also a proponent of empowering staff members with opportunities to communicate with fellow staff. During REC’s celebration of Customer Service Week, employees interacted with their peers during lunch and learn opportunities. Employees are also presented with quarterly legislative briefings that highlight the current state of the political landscape. Monthly employee communications updates are also presented to the entire staff so that employees are informed of analytics and future communications. These presentations sometimes include member feedback/testimonials and analytics to show how effective our communications are amongst our membership and video segments of staff telling how communications are critical in performing their everyday duties.

Wynn believes in having the right people, in the right place with the right resources it takes to perform their duties proficiently. In addition to empowering each staff member with critical REC updates, Wynn’s communications staff is also able to secure the tools and resources they need for their jobs, including ongoing training opportunities and the ability to hire outside freelance communicators and consultants to aid in editing, writing and video production.

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. *

As with each of the initiatives in REC's strategy execution process, our strategic communications efforts are measured for effectiveness in various ways. Our digital communications engagement strategy are constantly measured on REC's Balanced Scorecard based on web hits, email opens, and Facebook likes. In addition to engaging REC's staff in the entire communications process, the opportunity statement established for the strategic communications plan initiative has been to use effective communications with our member-owners to change their perception of REC's value proposition.

Under Wynn's leadership, REC has achieved significant gains in our Member Engagement Index. The 2015–2016 Cooperative Difference Survey shows REC ahead of the national benchmark by a score of 80 to 77. Member-owners scored us significantly higher than the national benchmark regarding our effort to communicate about important issues and costs. Another indicator of the success of REC's communication/marketing programs is member-owner engagement and participation in REC's calls to action. Wynn believes that an engaged member-owner is one who responds to the cooperative's communications efforts. Since REC's employees have become more active in community outreach communications, our ACRE program has received numerous awards during Wynn's tenure.

Wynn's strong support of the PACs not only led to 100 percent board and employee participation in both REAP and ACRE, but also to the enrollment of over 1,200 member-owners in its ACRE Cooperative Owner program. This recognition was largely due to Wynn's dedication to communicating the importance of political activism and the change in our marketing strategy for the program. REC communicated with an engaged marketing strategy resulting in having the highest number of member-owners to participate in the Vote.coop campaign. The cooperative is a certified 5-star co-op.

In 2006, REC also won the Apogee Interactive ACE Award for Online Best Practices by Utilities for rolling out five different websites for the cooperative and its affiliates. This award demonstrates Curtis's willingness to inform member-owners and the general public of REC and its subsidiaries through online practices.

In addition to our digital communications presence, REC has also been voted by readers of the Roanoke–Chowan News Herald, a prominent newspaper in the region, as the area's best electric company over Dominion Power. The Gates County Chamber of Commerce also announced Roanoke Electric Cooperative as Business of the Month for June 2016.

REC is also a two-time winner of the prestigious NRECA Community Service Network (CSN) Award. Wynn had great influence on the CSN award received in 2005 for The Roanoke Center, REC's subsidiary organization created under his tenure that focuses on improving economic development in the region and the quality of life. Wynn led the communications efforts surrounding the marketing strategy for The Roanoke Center and its benefits to the REC territory.

Wynn is a major proponent of thinking strategically about everything REC does for its member-owners – especially when it comes to successfully communicating our initiatives and programs. As a result, REC has also been chosen by Tom Laing for the 2016 Palladium Balanced Scorecard Hall of Fame for Executing Strategy.

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