



NRECA Awards (2021-2022)

2022 LaBerge Nomination Cycle (Chapter: LaBerge Award for Excellence in Strategic Communication)



neLXeezK

Chellie Phillips

Entry details

Your Name		Chris Stephens
Your Job Title		President/CEO
Your Electric Cooperative		Coweta-Fayette EMC
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I have paid for feedback on my entry.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Name of Nominee		Chellie Phillips
Job Title		Vice President of Public Relations and Communications

How long has your nominee been at their current cooperative?

| 4 years 10 months

How long has your nominee been in the NRECA co-op network?

| 25 plus years

Provide a brief description of your professional relationship with the nominee.

| I was fortunate to hire Chellie in May of 2017 as the VP of PR/Communications. Chellie serves on my executive staff team and reports directly to me.

Cooperation Among Cooperatives (20 points)

How has the nominee lived out the cooperative principle of “Cooperation Among Cooperatives” through service to a wider co-op audience?

Since joining the ranks of cooperative communicators over 20 years ago, Chellie has demonstrated “Cooperation Among Cooperatives” numerous times. She’s always willing to share information with fellow communicators, and she’s quick to reach out to new members of the co-op communicator family. She’s actively served the national community as a two-term Certified Cooperative Communicator board member and as a current member of the Council of Rural Electric Communicators. While on the CCC Board, she worked to revamp the Body of Knowledge to help make it more reflective of today’s communicators needs. She’s served on NRECA’s Communications Tool-Kit Committee and assisted with the roll-out. She also serves on the Touchstone Energy Cooperative Relations Committee.

Her reach isn’t only felt by electric cooperative but with the cooperative family as a whole. She’s an active member and former president of the Cooperative Communicators Association, which brings together communicators from all cooperative business forms including finance, dairy, agriculture, and others.

She’s also ready to respond at a moment’s notice when a fellow co-op faces a crisis. Most recently, Chellie assisted Three Notch EMC located in South Georgia when Hurricane Michael devastated the area leaving no meter turning in their service area. Their building took a direct hit from the storm as well. Working alongside management and assisting crews, Chellie developed press releases, social media posts, and videos to be shared with the membership to keep them updated on restoration progress.

Finally, for over 12 years, Chellie Co-Chaired the Alabama Council of Cooperatives Youth Leadership Camp held every summer at the 4-H Center in Columbiana, AL. Rising ninth and tenth graders were chosen to attend the 3-day camp where they learned about cooperatives for the first time. In Alabama, the cooperative form of business isn’t taught until students reach college-level courses. The Council is made up of all types of cooperatives, including the state’s electric cooperatives, farm and ag co-ops, and lending cooperatives. Students created their own co-ops selling snacks while enjoying leadership development, recreation, and motivational speakers. It became a great feeder for the Alabama Electric Co-ops Youth Tour program.

Education, Training and Information (20 points)

How has the nominee demonstrated personal excellence delivering education, training and information? What are specific examples of demonstrated excellence in the roles of Technician, Artist, and Listener?

If awards are an indicator, Chellie’s work has been recognized by the Alabama Council of Public Relations, Alabama Rural Electric Association of Cooperatives (AREA’s Cooperative Communicator of the Year), NRECA’s Spotlight On Excellence Program, and the Cooperative Communicators Association (CCA). She’s received numerous gold awards and has been recognized by CCA with the Michael Graznak award (Outstanding Cooperative Communicator Under 35). Her professionalism and skills are noted outside our industry, as well. She was named Outstanding Alumnus in Public Relations by the Hall School of Journalism at Troy University. She’s also published two books designed to help readers find success in life and career and received a first-place award in the self-help category for her efforts. She has earned the Certified Cooperative Communicator and the Master Cooperative Communicator designation.

Chellie has been called on by a number of cooperative organizations to provide training and educational material to her peers. She’s been a presenter at NRECA’s Connect Conference, NRECA Regional meeting, the Georgia Member Services and Communicators Association, the New Cooperative Communicators Orientation program, and the Cooperative Communicators Association Annual Institute. She’s also made presentations for the Indiana Statewide Communications Conference, Pioneer Utility Resources, Homeserve, and others in the cooperative world. Whether it’s creating member engagement, launching an AMI program, or learning to use member data to compete, she’s well versed and ready to share when called upon.

While serving as a co-op communicator for over 25 years, she's communicated everything from territorial boundary changes when her former co-op and the city agreed to an account exchange, to announcing and explaining the implementation of a 2-year, 2-stage rate change, to dealing with numerous hurricanes and tornados, she's tackled each challenge professionally and in a manner members and key stakeholders could understand.

She, along with another cooperative employee, worked with the Alabama Council of Cooperatives to create an educational and entertaining cooperative education program for 9th and 10th graders. For many this was their first exposure to a cooperative of any kind unless their parents had extensive contact with one (usually Farmers Cooperatives). She created programs and designed a curriculum that got students excited about co-ops. From choosing their products to creating a board to developing a unique marketing program, students became very competitive while learning the value of the cooperative form of business. Many of the campers became Youth Tour participants for the participating electric cooperatives. Some have now gone on to have careers in the cooperative field, as well.

She's created a program for our EMC – Coweta-Fayette EMC – that even more clearly illustrates this point. VISION EMC is a year-long employee engagement and professional development program. Chellie includes leadership, strengths assessments and other personal growth topics, but the core of the program provides participants with a history of electric cooperatives, a deep dive into their EMC, and a look into the future of the industry along with the challenges we will be facing. This program format is now being used by other electric cooperatives, too.

“Always On” Approach (60 points)

How has the nominee embodied the principles of the “Always On” Communication model to advance strategic electric co-op communication? What are specific examples of demonstrated excellence in the roles of Advocate, Manager and Innovator? Please address each of the following areas and provide specific examples and measures of success to demonstrate how communication plan(s) developed, directed and implemented by the nominee have helped to “storm harden” co-op communications.

Communication as an integral part of the co-op's strategic plan, not just a support function of that plan. (15 points)

One of the first things that Chellie did when she arrived at CFEMC was to totally revamp our surveys, greatly enhancing our member satisfaction survey and our monthly transactional survey. Taking the results of the surveys, she tracked responses and worked with staff to quickly fix problems. In addition, she communicates regularly with me and is an instrumental part in the development of our corporate goals and our 5-year plan. She works closely with me to ensure that the goals for the communication department help support our strategic agenda.

As a result of her hard work and dedication to communicating the value of CFEMC to our members, our ACSI score has increased to 88, well above the national average for cooperatives, municipals, and investor-owned companies. We are very proud to let our members know that our score outranks such notable companies as Apple, Southwest Airline and Walmart.

In addition, Chellie works with our safety steering committee and our continuous improvement teams to address areas of concern within our organization. She facilitates the discussions and helps implement the ideas that come from the group.

One such idea led to the creation of the CFEMC Grid. Because of concerns about communication between departments, Chellie and her team created an online platform to help improve employee engagement, awareness and understanding through monthly reports to all employees from every department in the co-op.

Member engagement to build loyalty and grassroots political strength. (15 points)

As mentioned earlier, the communications department's work can be seen in the way our satisfaction numbers have grown since Chellie joined our team. From implementing monthly surveying which asks members about their most recent encounter with our employees or programs to taking part in community events, Chellie and her team have helped us become the trusted source of information for our members. Our growth in ACSI numbers also impacts our success with competitive economic development projects and competitive customer choice loads for our EMC.

She has increased the use of video messaging to help put a face to our organization. Chellie's use of our employees and local families in these videos is growing our Operation Round-Up program and helping to educate our members on topics like renewable energy and helping emphasize the fact that we are part of the community where our members work and live.

She also continues to help us foster our relationship with our state, local and national political representatives. Her VISION EMC program provides our employees a chance to meet one-on-one with our local and state delegation to hear what's coming before the legislature and to help build relationships. She also serves on several community boards which allows her to be a source of information and available when questions arise since many of these representatives also serve in these positions as well.

Use of multiple communication channels and platforms to meet members where they are. (15 points)

CFEMC's communications channels are designed to help provide key information to members using the platform they find most comfortable. Information is shared via social media, like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn; however, we know there are members who prefer to put their hands on a monthly newsletter that comes as part of their bill. We continue to do traditional radio, newspaper and magazine advertising, but have expanded into online advertising and targeted social campaigns, as well.

We have increased our use of video, which has led to higher member engagement and more recall of the information provided. Since coming to the CFEMC, Chellie led the redesign of our website and member newsletter to make it easier for members to locate information and to provide a more visually appealing presentation.

Finally, in 2021, we rolled out "In The Loop," a podcast designed for our under-40 members. The podcast is dedicated to educating our members (and our employees) about CFEMC. So far, Chellie and her team have produced episodes covering topics like tornado recovery, a day in the life of a lineman, the difference between co-ops and IOUs, capital credits, and our annual meeting. The podcast is hosted by two of our millennial employees, and we feature our employees on the podcast whenever possible.

Her department is responsible for the annual meeting, as well. Along with updates on the EMC, the event includes a health fair and children's area. She coordinates with our other departments to provide education opportunities for our members who participate.

Positioning of the co-op as a trustworthy source of information on complex and dynamic energy issues. (15 points)

As I mentioned, Chellie serves on numerous community boards which allows her to share EMC updates with the business community and other key players in the area. She's also fostered a good relationship with our local media and in the surrounding Atlanta market. They know if they call on her, she'll respond with information they can trust and feel good about reporting. She's an active voice on social media, as well. She meets our media where they are and provides the information where and when they need it.

She makes herself available to local groups, including the chambers of commerce, technical college and state university, as a guest speaker on topics of interest to these groups.

She's worked closely with our Energy Services department to create engaging and educational programs to help promote CFEMC and our programs to the community. Just this past year, she was a tremendous help with the topics of EVs and renewables. CFEMC hosted a week-long program called the Summer Alternative Energy Adventure for Teachers that brought together teachers from one of our school systems and helped showcase our commitment to STEM education and also allowed the community to participate virtually through our social media efforts.

Log in to nreca.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.



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