



“Our values need to align with the needs of our employees, the organization, and also our customers.”

- Reanette Fillmer

Chief Administrative Officer

## Culture Initiative at Golden State Farm Credit

When Golden State Farm Credit was formed in 2014 through the merger of two California associations, it undertook many processes to combine its operations, not least of which was establishing a new name for the joint organization. Several years later, leadership recognized that an additional step in the merger was needed when it realized that employees had different interpretations of Golden State’s values, and as a result, a cohesive culture hadn’t yet developed.

“We had these values in our business plan, but no one really knew what they were, or had the same understanding of them,” says Reanette Fillmer, Chief Administrative Officer at Golden State Farm Credit. “Working with the board in 2017, we decided that since the two organizations came together, it was time to figure out the new combined culture, which we knew needed to be driven by our values.”

To resolve this situation and position Golden State for optimum efficiency, service and employee engagement, the organization has undertaken a “culture initiative” with support from FCC Services. Its first step was creating a Culture Committee, also referred to as the “Culture Club,” seeking volunteers from across the organization to achieve representation from every branch and every department. Where there were gaps in the initial volunteer group, they actively sought participants.

“Golden States’ initiative is so impactful because they have one representative from every department on the Culture Committee, which is a huge commitment from an organization,” says Sarah Spivey, Senior Consultant in FCC Services’ Leadership Development group working with Golden State on this project. “This builds employee buy-in into the process, which is essential for the ultimate success of the initiative.”

A series of meetings involving all employees followed, where open discussion and a “polarity mapping” tool provided by FCC Services helped prioritize a long list of value words, reducing the list over each series of meetings. “We came up with a list of words that resonated with us, and then we voted on which were most on point,” says Reanette. “The ultimate goal was to identify the values that resonate with everyone.”

In January, Golden State identified three organizational values, and the Culture Club is now developing accompanying definitions to further strengthen the mutual understanding of the values across the organization. “It’s important to recognize that this isn’t just about the words,” says Kori Dusina, Golden State’s Accounting Supervisor who, along with Loan Officer Travis Mann is leading the initiative. “It’s that the words and the values are something people can relate to and believe in, and that we have an organization where every employee can wake up each day and enjoy going to work.”

Reanette adds, “Our values need to align with the needs of our employees, the organization, and also our customers. They’ll also give us guidelines for how we behave toward each other, how we hold people accountable, and how we determine which projects and initiatives we undertake in the future by determining if they align with our values.”

Defining the values, though, isn’t the end of the road for Golden State’s culture initiative. An internal marketing campaign including posters, desktop items and other communications will soon be initiated, and over the course of this year, they’ll be administering quarterly assessments and a comprehensive employee survey in December to measure how the values are being accepted and implemented by employees.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2018

“We’ll be able to identify early warning signs of where the values aren’t resonating, as well as measure how well the Culture Club is doing in getting this information out there,” says Kori. “We’ll meet with Sarah after each assessment to talk through the results and identify any areas that need special attention.”

While led by Kori and Travis, and with executive representation in the Culture Club from Reanette, Golden State’s culture initiative has executive sponsorship from the very top: CEO Fletcher Monroe has been an active supporter, communicating to committee members and their managers the importance of the time and resources being dedicated to the initiative.

“We believe that as a team, we need a common goal and set of values to focus on who we are internally, and also externally to customers and the community,” says Fletcher. “This initiative is already making a difference to our organization, and the outcome will be a stronger team, with more focus on who we are, how we operate, and how we work with internal and external customers.”

AUGUST-OCTOBER 2018



John Regentin, FCC Services  
senior consultant in Gettysburg,  
Pennsylvania.