



The Value of Connections

We all have connections. Maybe a few, maybe hundreds, maybe even thousands. Connections with family and friends, with business partners and colleagues, strategic alliances and outside vendors. We connect on the phone and video, through email and social media, one-on-one and in groups.

These connections can seem almost accidental, happening in the normal course of our lives. But should we be actively seeking to build them to create value for ourselves, others and our organizations? The answer is, yes.

One way that connections are valuable is being exposed to new approaches to shared challenges. “There are really dynamic ideas and innovation happening everywhere in Farm Credit,” says Scott Binder, CEO of FCC Services. “Some organizations have more resources to undertake big scale changes, but innovation is happening in every size of organization and team. Every month I run across things that an association is doing, and where we can, we facilitate connecting those ideas with others who could benefit.”

As an example, recently a CEO at an association serving 35 counties talked with Scott about an internal communications tool that they’re using to distribute information and support remote employee meetings. Scott then shared the solution with an association with a bigger footprint serving four states facing a similar challenge.

“Within Farm Credit especially, there are many employees who start and end their careers in the same organization, which can limit their experiences,” says Scott. “Through our programs, we can connect employees and leaders with others across the System so they can have broader conversations, be exposed to different ways of doing things, share their own experiences and discuss the pros and cons of different approaches so everyone can learn and improve.”

Through programs like the Premier and Advanced Governance Series, Leadership Development Programs, the Gettysburg Leadership Experience and the Lewis & Clark Experience, FCC Services offers opportunities for individuals to build connections that can span their careers.

“FCC Services is uniquely situated to connect people who are all focused on the same mission, but who may approach things differently within their marketplaces,” says Jean Cantey Segal, Senior Vice President of Organizational Effectiveness Consulting for FCC Services. “We help people forge strong relationships, both professional and personal, that foster communication and connection and benefit the individuals, the organizations, and Farm Credit as a whole.”

Continued and rapid advances in technology are increasing the need for a stronger focus on human capital and supporting employees to build relationships and connections. “Organizations need to make sure their employees have opportunities to up-skill themselves and stay ahead of the learning curve,” says Jean. “Part of the real imperative around human capital is making sure employees have access to new ideas and then taking them back to their organizations to really help them thrive. Being exposed to, and connecting with, industry experts at FCC Services’ conferences and events is a key way this happens.”

FCC Services also capitalizes on the connections within Farm Credit to deliver powerful data to System organizations that employ our Employee Engagement Surveys: rather than comparing survey results to the general marketplace, or even the financial sector, Farm Credit organizations can measure themselves against Farm Credit-specific benchmarking results. Through other data sources, boards of directors have access to

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governance-related data to help them evaluate how they're performing, reinforcing what they're doing well and identifying opportunities to make small changes to enhance their effectiveness.

The connectedness within Farm Credit delivers direct financial and business benefits, as well. Through the Farm Credit System Captive Insurance Company *[see related article]*, Farm Credit organizations have access to more and better insurance coverages at much lower costs. "The Captive is one of the most successful examples of collaboration and connection within the System, and builds on these connections to deliver significant, bottom-line value," says Larry Lawson, Executive Vice President, Risk Management and Insurance Services.

Passkey (previously the National Discount Program) also capitalizes on the power of collective purchasing to offer discounted prices for industry-leading enterprise and personal products and services. "We're able to leverage the connectedness within Farm Credit to negotiate significant discounts with national product and service providers," says Heather Tseng, Affinity Program Manager with FCC Services. "Our Members benefit from lower prices, our Partners benefit from increased access to customers, and FCC Services benefits from strengthening our relationships through the value we're providing."

While connections within Farm Credit have a long history and a strong foundation, FCC Services also helps build connections with other organizations across industries. With decades of experience supporting effective governance, for example, we can bring our knowledge to rural electric and ag cooperatives, making connections through the challenges shared by boards of directors regardless of the industry.

"FCC Services is in a position to listen to what people are doing, identify industry trends, and explore and learn about alternative solutions and then share those with our clients," says Scott. "Sometimes this is within Farm Credit, sometimes with other clients, but our focus is always to foster collaboration, communication and connection so all our clients can continue to thrive."