

Nebraska FFA Association

State Officer Candidate Preparation Guide





Congratulations on your decision to seek a state office in the Nebraska FFA Association!

Serving as a state officer is an honor and obligation. You will have the opportunity to impact the lives of over 8,000 members as well as countless parents, sponsors, agribusiness leaders and Agricultural Education teachers. You also have the obligation to learn, grow and be the best advocate and representative of Nebraska FFA during your term of office.

The purpose of this guide is to help you prepare for your year of service – it's not about getting ready for the interviews, it's really about preparing yourself to serve as a state officer. The interviews are simply part of that process.

Where Do I Start?

The “Why”. First and foremost, think about why you are seeking to serve as a state officer. Why you desire to serve as a state officer should be clear during the election process and if elected, the core for your year of service. Take the time to think about and write down the pros and cons of you serving as a Nebraska State FFA Officer. For example:

Pros	Cons
Impact lives of FFA members	Time away from family and friends
Motivate others	Impact on college or job
Advocate for agriculture	Limited free time

Why is this important? It helps you clarify your reasons for seeking the office. The clearer you are about your reasons, your goals, and your desire; the more your answers will reflect your motivation. If you have any doubts about serving, think them through or talk to someone about them so they are resolved before you participate in the election process.

Inventory Your Knowledge and Skills

It's critical that you identify your areas of strength and knowledge/skills. It is also important for you to identify areas for potential growth, either prior to the interviews or during your training and service as a state officer. Admitting that you don't know something or haven't experienced something is not bad; in fact, it's preferred rather than making something up or stretching the truth when responding to a question.

Make a list of your strengths and abilities. Beside each strength, identify where/how you developed the strength, when you demonstrated the strength and what successes you have had when using the strength. While this sounds tedious, it is important to do for the strengths you rely on most. It will help you develop sound answers to questions about the strengths you bring to state office.



For example, if one of your strengths is the ability to organize, write down examples of how this strength has helped you. Perhaps it was at the FFA Banquet or the community service project you helped conduct. Don't limit your examples to FFA. Think about church, community, family and other school activities as well.

If you are asked, "Give me an example of when you oversaw a project. What roles did you play and what was the outcome of the project?" Knowing that one of your strengths is organizing, you should make certain you talk about how you used that strength to impact the success of the project. Having purposefully written examples and experiences will help you think more quickly to identify the best example to share for any question.

What Should I Study?

You will not be asked FFA or Agricultural Education trivia, so concentrate on current, "big picture" information. Here are some tips for getting ready for the interview process, as well as how you can stay up-to-date throughout your year of service.

Agriculture Industry:

Keep up-to-date with issues and current events in the agriculture industry. You won't be asked the price of a commodity, but you may be asked to comment about agriculture's dependence on a natural resource, status of agricultural trade, impact of the livestock industry in Nebraska – all based on current information. This knowledge is important when talking to sponsors or adults in the agriculture industry, but also for students who are seeking careers in the agriculture industry. Nebraska FFA will connect you with current information after election to expand your knowledge base, but having a strong foundational knowledge of the agriculture industry in Nebraska is vital for a strong state officer.

Agricultural Education/FFA:

Questions about Agricultural Education and FFA will be focused on your experiences and general knowledge of Agricultural Education and FFA. Remember, as a state officer you will be talking to school administrators, Agricultural Education Instructors and other education professionals. You need to be able to accurately discuss the merits of Agricultural Education and FFA. The FFA organization cannot exist without an Agricultural Education program. With that, be prepared to talk about agricultural education and not just FFA. Also, remember to talk about experiences with your personal SAE. You worked hard for your state degree – be prepared to share what you have learned and experienced and how it will help you in the future.



Other Knowledge:

Develop a general understanding of what is happening in our state, country and world, as well as issues and opportunities facing youth today. Don't memorize a great deal of facts and figures, but be aware of what is happening in our world. Keeping up with credible social media sources or reading a newspaper or news magazine will keep you up-to-date. Spend some time reading current articles published from various sources to broaden your knowledge. Always seek information from reliable, credible sources, and you can gain some great insight through meaningful searches.

One of the best preparation methods is simply talking to people. Spend some time with your Agricultural Education Instructor to understand the total program of Agricultural Education. Talk to your principal and superintendent about Agricultural Education and FFA. Talk to local agriculture industry professionals to broaden your understanding of the issues and opportunities currently facing the agriculture industry.

Know yourself:

While gaining additional knowledge about Agricultural Education, FFA, and the agriculture industry is great, remember that the most important preparation is to know yourself; know your strengths and abilities; and be able to share about who you are and what you will bring to state office.

Should I Practice Interviewing?

Having a couple of mock interviews is important—not necessarily because of the type of questions being asked, but because you train yourself in how to develop a succinct and meaningful answer. It is great practice to listen carefully to a question and then respond in a thoughtful and impactful way.

When asked a question, take a brief moment to collect your thoughts – don't wait 30 seconds, but while 5-10 seconds seems like an eternity to you, it is not long to the person asking the question. This gives you a chance to collect your thoughts before you start speaking and will help you focus your answer and avoid "rambling."

Remember that "I don't know" is an acceptable answer. It is never okay to make something up or try to "fake" your way through an answer – it usually comes back to haunt you later.

One of the most important aspects of practice interviews is timing your answers. There is a "sweet spot" of just the right amount of time to answer the question completely without turning it into a life story or essay. Practicing how to respond to questions will help you organize your thoughts and share a solid answer. The basic



rule of thumb is: make certain you answer the question (listen for what the question is asking!) to the best of your ability, but don't ramble on.

How to respond to behavioral questions

Nebraska FFA uses some behavioral interviewing techniques. This is simply asking the candidate to "give me an example of when...", or "tell me about a time when you..." The questions are designed to have the candidate talk about a specific experience that demonstrates a skill or what they learned from an experience. The best way to answer those questions is with a simple formula. It's called the STAR approach and is widely used in industry.

Situation: Describe the context within which you performed a job or faced a challenge at work. For example, perhaps you were working on a group project, or you had a conflict with another student. This situation can be from a work experience, a volunteer position, or any other relevant event. Be as specific as possible.

Task: Next, describe your responsibility in that situation. Perhaps you had to help your group complete a project under a tight deadline, or resolve a conflict with another student.

Action: Describe how you completed the task or worked to meet the challenge. Focus on what you did (your action), rather than what your team, teacher or other students did.

Result: Finally, explain the outcomes or results generated by the action taken. You might emphasize what you accomplished, or what you learned.

Some example questions you might use the "STAR" method for...

- Tell me about a time you had to overcome a substantial challenge in your SAE.
- Tell me about the most meaningful team building experience you had.
- What experience taught you the most about serving as a leader?

When you are asked a question that isn't directly about a situation or experience...

- Give the "answer" in the first one-two sentences of your response. Don't put a lot of "fluff" at the beginning of your answer...give it to them up front!
- Provide supporting information, details, and descriptions as a follow up.



Example questions might include...

- What are the two most critical skills you developed during high school to help make you a successful State FFA Officer?
- In what ways will you stay active in the agriculture industry while you are in college?
- What is the biggest issue facing American agriculture?

Most Importantly...

Remember the nominating committee members want to get to know the real you. Don't try to act like you have seen other state officers act and don't try to project something that you are not – be honest and be yourself.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I ask to have a question repeated if I didn't hear it or don't understand it?

Absolutely! Don't attempt to answer a question if you don't understand what was asked. Seek clarity so your response truly answers the question. Remember to truly listen to the question when it is first asked—focus on the intent.

Should I get a new FFA jacket for the interviews?

You do not need a new jacket, but please remember your personal appearance does make an impression. Having clean, appropriate official dress is all that is required.

Do I need to bring anything to the interview process?

No, if materials are needed, they will be provided. Just bring yourself at your best!



Application and Interview Process

Written Application

Written Applications will be completed on-line beginning in 2018. A signature page, commitment page, resume, and head & shoulder photo in official dress will be submitted as part of the application. The Signature Page and Commitment Page is available at <http://neaged.org/ffa-state-officer-team.html> to be printed, signed, and uploaded to the application as pdf documents. The candidates resume must be uploaded as a pdf as well. Resumes should not exceed one page in length. On-line applications are due by February 15.

Advisor recommendation statements are to be emailed as a pdf to Nebraska FFA Advisor, Krystl Knabe, at krystl.knabe@nebraska.gov no later than February 15. Recommendation letters are not to exceed one page in length. Guidelines for what to include in the recommendation letter include:

- Do you recommend the candidate as qualified to complete the duties of a state officer? Why or why not?
- What qualities of the candidate best qualify him or her to serve as a state officer? Provide specific examples.
- What challenges do you see your candidate potentially facing as a state officer?
- What do you most appreciate about your candidate as a student leader?
- How do you see your candidate growing most either through the state officer selection process or through the state officer program experience?

Interviews

All applicants will be invited to participate in the preliminary interviews. Dates and location of preliminary interviews will be posted on <http://neaged.org/ffa-state-officer-team.html>. During preliminary interviews students will have the opportunity to interview in a variety of settings including one-on-one interviews with nomination committee members, interview with a small groups of nomination committee members, interview with the entire nomination committee, and/or complete activities/tasks with other applicants while being observed by nomination committee members.

The nomination committee will select finalists at the conclusion of preliminary interviews. Candidates will receive a letter prior to departing the preliminary interviews indicating if he or she is invited to return for finals interviews.

Finalists will be invited to interview on Tuesday prior to state convention in Lincoln. Specific location and times will be posted in the same location as preliminary interview logistics are posted. Finals interviews will not conflict with any state



convention events or activities. The committee will meet following finals interviews to determine the selection of the state officer team.

Announcement of the newly elected state officer team will be announced during the final session of the Nebraska FFA State Convention held at Pinnacle Bank Arena in Lincoln, Nebraska. Any individual wishing to attend this session must purchase a convention button for admission either through their local advisor via chapter convention registration or on-site at Pinnacle Bank Arena at the registration desk.

Questions

Questions regarding the Nebraska FFA State Officer Selection Process are to be directed to Nebraska FFA Advisor, Krystl Knabe at krystl.knabe@nebraska.gov.