

Empire State Food and Agricultural Leadership Institute (LEAD New York)

Strategic Plan: 2008 – 2010

Approved at January 9, 2008 meeting

Preface:

This revised document is based upon a 2005 – 2007 plan approved by the LEAD board of directors on September 15, 2005. As we reach the end of that plan's lifespan, new goals need to be set for the coming years. We continue to use a concise strategic plan to guide the program's efforts, however.

For many organizations, the strategic planning process itself can take several years. This process usually results in a lengthy, detailed document designed to guide the organization through a period of five, seven, or even ten years. Often, these documents are not followed throughout their intended lifespan, or worse yet, collect dust soon after they are developed. Too, many groups develop strategic plans when they are struggling or face a need to significantly change the way they work.

We choose to keep this planning document "short and sweet", with the intention that it only be used for the next three to five years. This plan should be nimble and responsive to the changing needs and circumstances that our industry and stakeholders face. Furthermore, LEAD NY is a program that has been around for 22 years and continues to function well – we do not need to "overhaul" the way we operate, but could benefit from a more strategic approach to planning, growth and evaluation.

The Mission of LEAD New York:

The mission of LEAD New York is one that has stood the test of time. Short and simple, it fits our program as well today as it did when it was originally adopted. It was revised slightly by the Board on September 15, 2005 to reflect our desire to develop leaders for the broader food and agricultural industry, not just those in New York State:

“The Mission of LEAD New York is to Inspire and Develop Leaders for the Food and Agricultural Industry.”

Program Overview:

The first class of LEAD NY started in 1985. It was modeled after leadership programs found in a few other states at the time, most of which were funded by pilot grants from the Kellogg Foundation. There are now similar programs in nearly 40 states throughout the US and internationally. State organizations that were instrumental in getting the New York program started include the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell, the NYS Agricultural Society, the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, and several other statewide agricultural organizations and leaders.

LEAD is a 2-year professional development program for adult professionals in the food and agricultural industry. We accomplish our mission by selecting 25 – 30 participants for each class and then offering them a variety of experiences designed to

develop their leadership ability, and inspire them to accept leadership roles. Our training has three main areas of concentration:

First, we work on leadership skill development. By skills, we include things like public speaking and written communication skills, conflict resolution, time management, effective listening, meeting management, teambuilding, etc. All of these skills are necessary for them to be effective in future leadership roles.

Second, we inform them of the public policy process. We have sessions on local, state, federal and even international politics. We are not necessarily preparing people to run for elected public offices, but rather to inform them of how the political process works so that they are less intimidated by it and more likely to get involved.

Finally, we expose participants to a wide variety of issues facing the industry today. Many professionals are very good at what they do – they are specialists - but have a fairly limited perspective on the broader food and international political systems. Our program lets them see that they are part of a larger, diverse industry, and that in order to be an effective leader; they must have at least a basic understanding of a wide range of topics.

Participants meet monthly from October through April in each of the two years. There are 15 separate sessions, with a total of approximately 50 days of training. The class meets in a variety of locations throughout NY State, as well as Ottawa, Washington, DC, and an out-of-state study tour. The sessions usually incorporate a variety of pedagogical methods, including lecture presentations, panel discussions, tours, small group activities, readings, and individual assignments.

Funding for the program is as follows:

- 30% Support from the Dean of CALS (salary and in-kind support)
- 15% Participant Tuition (\$1600 per year for class 12)
- 15% Income from our endowment account
- 40% Annual fundraising initiatives (alumni, foundation and industry gifts)

Desired Outcomes and Strategies to Achieve Them:

Outcomes are usually thought of as observable, measurable, and specific results that provide evidence that an organization is achieving its stated mission.

The overall goal of the LEAD NY program is to produce effective leaders for the food and agricultural industry in New York. Of course, this is a challenging outcome to measure or report. One reason for this is that measurement of “effective leadership” can vary depending on how it is defined. Too, how can we prove (provide evidence) that the LEAD New York Program is solely responsible for the effective leadership that some of our alumni exhibit? Measurement challenges aside, we offer the following strategic plan.

Appendix A offers a list of specific outcomes and potential measures of achievement. The following sections discuss the general strategic priorities of recruitment, curriculum, finance, other offerings, staffing and program management. Suggested strategies to achieve these desired outcomes will be listed immediately following each of the outcomes.

A. Recruitment

No other outcome is as important as a successful recruitment effort. A sound curriculum, healthy budget, adequate staff and positive image mean nothing if we do not have a qualified group of participants to work with. Furthermore, we have long recognized that our participants learn as much from each other as they do from the program speakers, so diversity in the class makeup is central to providing a rich experience for all those involved. To that end, we seek to:

1. Attract a pool of at least 40 qualified applicants for each class
 - a. Utilize alumni, current class members and Board members as our primary vehicle of word-of-mouth recruitment
 - b. Set aside a reasonable amount in each budget for advertisements and other media to promote the program
 - c. Increase efforts to write articles, press releases, etc. that will reach a wide audience
 - d. Director, staff, board members and alumni should attend as many industry related functions as the schedule and budget will allow to make the Program visible and educate prospective applicants
2. Select a final class of 25 – 30 participants with diversity in race, gender, age, educational background, professional experience and geographic location
 - a. Selection committee should consider the ultimate diversity of the new class in total, in addition to the qualifications of the individual applicants, when making selections of new class members
 - b. A strong effort should be made to have production agriculture well represented in each class
3. Attract the highest quality applicants possible, those that are truly committed to full participation in the program, making it a truly competitive process
 - a. A good problem to have is to be forced to turn away well-qualified applicants. The process should be handled in a sensitive manner to encourage reapplication for future classes.
 - b. Foster a sense throughout the industry that LEAD New York is truly an elite program, and that it is an honor to be offered a position in the program

B. Curriculum/Adult Learning

Second only to recruitment is a strong curriculum. If the program is not perceived to be of the highest quality, then both our recruitment and fundraising efforts are sure to fail. On the other hand, an outstanding program and the positive reputation that goes along with it will be our greatest assets as we solicit both applicants and donations. To that end, we seek to:

1. Utilize the expertise of board members, alumni, Cornell faculty and staff, the program director, current class members, sister leadership programs and other advisors to continually develop and improve the curriculum of LEAD NY
 - a. Director should continue attending the International Association of Programs for Agricultural Leaders (IAPAL) conference and other networking with program directors from other states
 - b. Continue to engage the program committee in session planning
2. Utilize feedback from class members, alumni, and board member evaluations to make continual improvement in specific aspects of the program
 - a. Continue to share evaluation results with the current class and full board, but the program committee in particular
 - b. Conduct follow-up surveys with alumni 1, 3, and 5 years after they have completed the program.
 - c. Continue to use participant surveys, 360 degree assessments and other tools with each class to assess changes in behavior as a result of participation in the program
3. Experiment with new curriculum components (e.g. technologies, topics, activities) to keep the program fresh and seek out new opportunities.
 - a. Always remain open-minded to suggestions about new potential topics/activities, and try them if budget, time and other factors allow
4. When possible, work with faculty and graduate students in the Department of Education to study, evaluate and improve specific components of the LEAD Program.
 - a. Inform department faculty and graduate students that the LEAD program is available for study; class members or activities may be used as research subjects, if appropriate
5. Continue those activities that have proven themselves through time as valuable components of the program
 - a. With our long track record of success, we should continue to conduct those activities that have proven successful in the past (e.g. teambuilding retreat as first session of program)

C. Financial

This is perhaps the third leg of a strong program. Even when we attract excellent applicants and have a sound program design, we cannot accomplish what we hope to accomplish if we do not have the resources to do so. LEAD has enjoyed a fairly stable economic position over the past 22 years, but has been limited in truly expanding the program's horizons because of limited financial growth. To that end, we seek to:

1. Continually grow the annual fund contributions by at least 5% per year, translating to fundraising amounts of: \$63,000 in 2007/2008, \$66,000 in 2008/2009, and \$69,000 in 2009/2010.
 - a. In addition to maintaining the support of current donors, we need to continually identify new potential donors. Class members, board members, and alumni can help identify and solicit these new donors.
2. Maintain the level of support from the Dean/College (currently funding 100% of the Director's salary and benefits and 50% of the Administrative Assistant's)
 - a. Class members, alumni and board members should communicate to the Dean and Department Chair at every opportunity the importance and value of the LEAD New York Program, and hence why they should continue to support it.
3. Maintain the percentage of alumni (about 1/3) contributing to the annual fund.
 - a. Current class members should continue to make personal contacts with alumni as part of their class fundraising activity
 - b. The board alumni committee should serve as "whips" during the alumni fundraising campaign, keeping class captains on task
 - c. Two alumni from each class will be identified to serve as class captains, calling on fellow alumni that have not contributed to the current class
4. Hold tuition increases, if any, to no more than \$250 per class
 - a. Tuition may be increased if budget predictions for an incoming class dictate that we should do so. This decision will be made by the Board of Directors based on the suggestion of the Finance Committee and Program Director.
5. If possible, re-invest endowment earnings back to the endowment account and solicit other funds to continually grow the endowment fund value
 - a. This decision will be made by the Board of Directors, based upon the suggestion of the Finance Committee and Program Director, at the end of each fiscal year

D. Other Program Offerings

As stated earlier, the LEAD program currently enjoys a relatively stable financial situation and positive statewide reputation for the core 2-year LEAD Program. However, other projects were either less successful (Biotech Conference, Advanced Leadership Forum, various alumni events) or not sustainable (Leadership Enhancement Programs). While continuing to strive for excellence in our core program, we should also explore new opportunities for other offerings. To that end, we seek to:

1. Assist class members that desire to earn academic credit for their LEAD experience in doing so – either through an independent study with the Cornell University Graduate School, or another academic institution
2. Continue our role in assisting with the planning of the NYS Agricultural Society Annual Forum – a successful alumni event
 - a. Current class members and/or recent alumni should serve on the NYS Ag Society Annual Forum Program Committee
3. Find new ways to keep alumni engaged in the program (study trips, alumni conferences, etc.)
 - a. Continue to encourage alumni participation in the Ag Society Annual Forum and other optional events like the ILAC conference. Perhaps provide financial assistance for participation if budget allows.
4. Allow graduate students to observe or audit LEAD classes and participate in activities
 - a. Program Director will work with Department Faculty to make this option available
5. The Program Director should continue to accept (schedule permitting) speaking engagements, conduct workshops for other groups, participate in conferences, etc. not only as a service to those audiences, but also as a means of promoting the LEAD New York Program
6. Investigate opportunities for, and when appropriate, pursue options to combine resources or cooperate with other leadership development programs

E. Staffing and Program Management

1. Maintain current college-supported staff positions of a full time Program Director and full time Administrative Assistant
 - a. As stated in Financial #2 above, class members, alumni and board members should communicate to the Dean and Department Chair at every opportunity the importance and value of the LEAD New York Program, and hence why they should continue to support it.
2. Stay abreast of new university procedures, especially with regard to account management and financial reporting
 - a. Administrative Assistant should continually attend available training to stay abreast of University requirements
3. Utilize other faculty/staff, graduate students, or temporary hires for other projects as appropriate (see above)
4. Engage the board of directors and utilize their expertise and networks to further the desired outcomes as mentioned above (recruitment, fundraising, etc.)
 - a. Board members should commit to an active role in soliciting new recruits and potential business donors
 - b. Board members should commit to attending all regularly scheduled Board meetings, and other committee work as assigned
5. Evaluate the performance of the program director annually
 - a. Official review is to be done by the Department Chair or their representative
 - b. All Board members should be consulted for input to this review, and the Executive Committee should play an even more active role
6. Encourage the program director to pursue higher education and other professional development activities
 - a. Given the planned area of study (Adult Education and Program Evaluation), pursuit of a graduate degree should lead to new ideas on how best to evaluate and provide evidence as to the effectiveness of the LEAD New York Program
7. Have a succession plan in place for the program director's position

Evaluation and Measurements of Success:

A list of specific, desired outcomes is provided in Appendix A, broken down by the three major areas of leadership skills, civic responsibility, and relevant issues. The following measures may be used as “dashboard indicators” of progress, and should be incorporated into the Program Director’s report to the board of directors, as appropriate:

Number	Measure	Goal	Status
1	Number of applicants	40	
2	Annual fundraising 2007-2008 2008-2009 2009-2010	\$63,000 \$66,000 \$69,000	
3	Percent of alumni contributing to current campaign	35%	
4	Did we achieve the diversity of applicants we were looking for?	Yes	
5	Are the overall responses to class session evaluations positive?	Yes	
6	Are alumni surveys and evaluation comments generally positive?	Yes	
7	Have new curriculum components been tested?	Yes	
8	Do we continue to offer those “tried and true” activities?	Yes	
9	Does the College/Department continue to support us financially at the same level?	Yes	
10	Has tuition been held to the suggested acceptable level?	Yes	
11	Have we been able to grow the endowment account value?	Yes	
12	Are alumni generally more involved in class or other activities?	Yes	
13	Does the Director continue to attend trade shows, conferences, and other PR events?	Yes	
14	Does the Board take an active role in fundraising?	Yes	
15	Does the Board take an active role in recruitment?	Yes	
16	Do Board members attend current class activities?	Yes	
17	Are Board meetings well attended and productive?	Yes	
18	Does the Board have an active role in the Director’s performance review?	Yes	
19	Is the overall reputation of the LEAD New York Program around the state positive? Improving? As good as it could be?	Yes	
20	Is a succession plan in place for the director’s position?	Yes	

Appendix A

Empire State Food and Agricultural Leadership Institute (LEAD New York) Program Outcomes

Our desired outcomes can be identified in three broad categories, as follows:

- A. Participants' **leadership skills** and behavior will improve, including:
 - a. Public speaking, written communication, and effective listening
 - b. Working with the media, marketing and promotion
 - c. Conflict Resolution, argumentation and debate
 - d. Personality type awareness and self assessment
 - e. Teambuilding and Teamwork (Bonding Social Capital)
 - f. Networking, diversity appreciation (Bridging & Linking Social Capital)
 - g. Meeting management
 - h. Problem identification / Collaborative problem solving
 - i. Critical thinking / Systems thinking / Change management
 - j. Technological literacy / research skills
 - k. Time management and organization
 - l. Commitment to lifelong learning
- B. Participants' sense of **civic responsibility** and service will strengthen:
 - a. Activities will help our participants understand the policy development process at the local, state, federal and international levels.
 - b. In addition to learning how the policy development process works, they will learn how it affects them and how to influence it.
 - c. Participants will be challenged and motivated to get involved in the public policy process and community service roles.
 - d. Awareness of our "place" in a global society.
- C. Participants will be better informed of **relevant issues** facing their industry and community
 - a. The specific issues studied in LEAD New York will change from class to class, depending on the learning needs of the participants, and the relevancy to current industry/community challenges.
 - b. These issues provide the context in which leadership skill development is practiced, and public policy is examined.
 - c. These issues may include, but are not limited to, such things as:
 - i. Labor, immigration reform
 - ii. Trade, free trade agreements
 - iii. Environment
 - iv. Technology
 - v. Food safety/security
 - vi. Land use and development, farmland preservation efforts
 - vii. Ethics
 - viii. Innovation/creativity/change
 - ix. Specific agricultural sectors (e.g. dairy, equine, forestry, etc.)