

**Project Title:** Professional Development Training in the North Central Region [Termination Report]

**Key Word(s):** Extension

**Extension Liaison:** Chris Weeks (replaced by Matt Smith) **Key Words:** Other, Professional Development

**Training Total Funds Committed:** \$70,000

**Initial Project Schedule:** 9/1/16-8/31/18

**Current Project Year:** 9/1/16 – 8/31/18

**Participants:** Zajicek, P., National Aquaculture Association; Engle, C., Engle-Stone Aquatic\$ LLC; Weeks, C., Michigan State University; Phelps, N., University of Minnesota

**Industry Liaison:** West, B., Blue Iris Fish Farm, Black Creek, Wisconsin

**Reason for Termination:** Completion of project objectives.

**Project Objectives:**

1. Assess the status of aquaculture associations in the NCR.
2. Develop strategies to enhance association leadership and participation (e.g., workshops, mentoring, messaging, communication, member satisfaction, improve communication, incentivizing member participation).
3. Conduct training programs for individuals from state and multistate association(s) that support regional aquaculture development.
4. Prepare educational materials which facilitate the association development processes.

**Project Summary**

Effective leadership skills are essential for growth of aquaculture. This project designed and implemented a leadership development program for NCR producers. Four workshops were conducted that focused on: 1) engaging membership, association management, and conflict resolution; and 2) effective communications with members, the media, and others. Experts from outside the region served as resources. Each participant developed an initiative targeting a need identified by aquaculture producers in his/her respective state. Each workshop included group discussions for feedback on initiatives developed. Assignments between workshops addressed prioritized next steps on each project.

The project impacted individual participants who sharpened skills for engagement with other producers to prioritize initiatives to solve industry issues. Training materials developed provide a framework for continued leadership development and on-going support for state aquaculture associations to generate longer-term impacts of aquaculture growth in the NCR.

Specific recommendations are:

1. Continue leadership training for producers with Phase II for current participants and Phase I with new participants;
2. Expand training topics to include: tools for accessing and leveraging state resources, and effective engagement with legislatures (by associations, not NCRAC).
3. Develop mechanism to streamline association communications with members.

**Technical Summary and Analysis**

**Methods**

Objective 1. — Addressed through a separate Rapid Response project completed in 2017 through which a survey was conducted of aquaculture producers in the NCR.

Objective 2. — The survey completed in the 2017 survey of aquaculture producers in the NCR resulted in a set of recommended strategies to strengthen aquaculture associations in the NCR. Those related to leadership development, workshops, mentoring, messaging, and communications to improve member satisfaction were used

to design and develop the leadership training program implemented in this current project. Thus, the specific workshop topics for this training program focused heavily on strategies to engage association members and to improve messaging and communications among association members.

Objective 3. — This project designed and implemented a leadership development and training program for aquaculture producers in the NCR.

Participant Selection. An application form was developed and sent via electronic methods with an invitation to apply to all producers who expressed interest in doing so in the survey conducted for the 2017 Rapid Response project. The project principal investigators from both this current project and the 2017 Rapid Response projects along with the NCR Director's office and state aquaculture associations also distributed applications, recruited applicants from their respective states, and assisted with screening and selection of project participants. Participants selected included 12 representatives from six different states.

Expectations for Participants. Prospective participants were asked to commit to attending all workshops and to devote the time required to complete a series of assignments before and in-between the three workshops to be held. Upon selection, each participant received a packet of information that included: 1) schedule of the workshops; 2) responsibilities of each participant; 3) final report from the 2017 Rapid Response project survey that provided details on how members viewed their respective associations and the benefits/services provided; 3) instructions related to travel reimbursement to participate in the workshops; and 4) instructions for the introductory virtual workshop that introduced participants to the first assignment. Each participant was expected to engage in a priority-setting assignment prior to the initial virtual workshop. The first assignment was to gather input from farmers in their respective states and to identify a challenge faced by their industry from that input. The challenge could be large or small, but needed to be one relevant to aquaculture producers in their state. Additional assignments throughout the leadership development program focused on various steps towards addressing the initiative developed by each participant to address the challenge identified by their state.

Objective 4, — A series of educational materials were developed throughout this project to support the training objectives and were used in the workshops. These included: 1) national webinar; 2) final report that provided details of the leadership development and training activities conducted; 3) a fact sheet that outlined the process of designing and implementing leadership development and training programs; and 4) packets of information for each workshop conducted.

## **Results**

Objective 1. — Completed through the Rapid Response project entitled “Assessing the Status of Aquaculture Associations in the North Central Region” (Engle et al. 2017). A survey was conducted of producers in the NCR to improve understanding of the value of various association activities and services. The two most common reasons for not belonging were: 1) “Do not know how membership would benefit my business”; and 2) “Have never been asked to join”. More than half of the respondents indicated that the following benefits/services would entice them to join: newsletters, networking opportunities (i.e., meetings, workshops), web sites, industry alerts, and representation with regulators. Current association members indicated strong loyalty to their associations. The strength of state Extension support showed a strong positive effect on the value of membership. A complete final termination report on the project is available through NCRAC.

Objective 2. — Strategies identified to support and strengthen aquaculture associations in the NCR include: 1) develop and maintain industry directory; 2) enhance member benefits and services identified; 3) implement recommended recruitment and retention strategies; 4) expand Extension support in the region; and 5) implement leadership training programs. These strategies can be addressed and supported over time through NCRAC. The leadership training program focused on the strategies identified to strengthen aquaculture associations in the NCR.

Objective 3. — Four workshops were conducted. The first introductory workshop was held October 10, 2017, as a virtual web-based meeting to introduce participants to the project team facilitators, to review responsibilities and expectations for their participation in the project, review the project timeline, and to provide background information (Appendix A). In addition to reading materials sent related to key factors that drive the success of associations, specific results from the 2017 Rapid Response project were reviewed in detail. Each participant reported on their work on the first assignment by describing the initiative selected based on producer input related to a need in his/her respective state. The group discussed each initiative and offered thoughts and

suggestions in terms of resources and strategies for implementation. Evaluation scores by participants averaged (on a 5-point scale where a score of 5 was “strongly agree” and a score of 1 was “strongly disagree”): 4.6 for “gave me a good working knowledge of the subject matter”; 4.6 for “environment was conducive to my learning”; 4.4 for “handouts were useful”; 4.9 for “presenter was knowledgeable”; and 4.8 for “training was worth my time and investment”.

The second workshop was held in-person on November 15, 2017, following the Iowa Aquaculture Association meeting in Ames, Iowa. Workshop 2 focused on engaging with association members (Appendix B). Following welcomes by the NCRAC Director and the Executive Director of the National Aquaculture Association, introductions were made as well as a short presentation of strategies to identify producers and their contact information. The out-of-region resource person, Pete Anderson, from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services presented the strategies that were successful in the reinvigoration of the North Carolina Aquaculture Association. He discussed the types of challenges that they experienced and approaches used to overcome those obstacles. Group discussions were held among participants and facilitators on progress and action plans for each participant’s initiative following which

additional presentations were made on the nuts and bolts of association management, initiatives of the National Aquaculture Association, and conflict resolution strategies to keep disagreements among individual members from growing into major schisms in associations. The workshop concluded with discussion of resource materials needed for the next steps in participants’ projects, topics for the next workshop, and the assignment to be completed prior to the next workshop. Evaluation scores for this workshop averaged (on a 3-point scale where 3 was “very helpful” and 1 was “not at all helpful”): 3.0 for “finding your producers”; 3.0 for “engaging your membership”; 3.0 for “nuts and bolts of association membership”; and 2.8 for “conflict resolution”.

Workshop 3 was held January 25, 2018, the day before the Ohio Aquaculture Association annual meeting. The focus was on effective communications with members, the media, and other groups (Appendix C). The out-of-region expert who participated was Cindy Snyder, a freelance reporter from Idaho who writes regular stories primarily related to the trout (*Oncorhynchus* sp.) industry. Following the welcome and introductions, Snyder talked about what producers can do to prepare for interviews with the media, how to develop the type of relationship with reporters that can lead to effective media reports, and the types of challenges that reporters face when engaging and attempting to interview aquaculture producers. Group discussions were then held of participants’ projects, their progress, obstacles, changes made to address obstacles, followed by presentations on engaging effectively with association members and with state agency personnel. Final group discussions were held about plans for the coming months with their projects and a review of the project timeline. Evaluation scores for this workshop averaged (on a 3-point scale where 3 was “very helpful” and 1 was “not at all helpful”): 3.0 for “engaging effectively with media; 3.0 for “engaging effectively with association members”; and 3.0 for “engaging effectively with state agency personnel”.

The final workshop was held June 25, 2018, as a virtual web-based meeting. Each participant reported on the progress on their initiatives (Appendix D). The discussion then turned to recommendations related to the overall project, particularly in terms of whether it would be useful for leadership development and training for producers to be continued through NCRAC.

Objective 4.— Educational materials developed in the project include: 1) national webinar; 2) final report that provides details of the leadership development and training activities; 3) a fact sheet that outlines the process of how to design and implement leadership development and training programs; and 4) packets of information for each workshop conducted.

The curriculum for the training program consisted of two main learning objectives: 1) Engaging your membership; and 2) Communications with members, the media, and with others. Separate workshops focused on each specific topic. The agenda for each workshop constitutes the outline of the content for the learning objective for each workshop. The content was developed as training modules, each in the form of a PowerPoint presentation that will be provided to NCRAC for future use, if desired.

Specific training materials developed and provided to NCRAC include:

Workshop 1: Virtual web-based workshop. October 10, 2017.

1. Engle, C.R., P. Zajicek, C. Weeks, N. Phelps, M. Smith, and K. Quagraine. 2017. Assessing the Status of Aquaculture Associations in the North Central Region. Project Termination Report, North Central Regional Aquaculture Center, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. Background reading material.
2. Prokopovych, B. 2015. The emergence of new markets for environmental services: the role of U.S. shellfish industry associations. M.S. thesis, University of Massachusetts – Amherst, Massachusetts. Background reading material.
3. Engle, C.R. 2017. Strengthening Aquaculture Associations. PowerPoint presentation.

Workshop 2: Engaging Your Membership. November 15, 2017

1. Engle, C.R. 2017. Finding Your Producers. Ames Iowa. PowerPoint presentation.
2. Anderson, P. 2017. Engaging Your Membership. Ames, Iowa. PowerPoint presentation.
3. Zajicek, P. 2017. National Aquaculture Association Initiatives. Ames, Iowa. PowerPoint presentation.
4. Engle, C.R. 2017. The Nuts and Bolts of Association Management. Ames, Iowa. PowerPoint presentation.

Workshop 3: Communications with Members, the Media, and with Others. January 25, 2018

1. Snyder, C. 2018. How to Engage Effectively with the Media. Columbus, Ohio. Word file speaking notes.
2. Engle, C.R. 2018. Engaging Effectively with Association Members. Columbus, Ohio. PowerPoint presentation.
3. Zajicek, P. 2018. Engaging Effectively with Public Agency Personnel. Columbus, Ohio. PowerPoint presentation.

### **Principal Accomplishments**

This project successfully designed and implemented the first leadership training program for aquaculture producers in the NCR. Moreover, the project has produced a fact sheet that outlines the process of how to design and implement leadership development and training programs as well as initiate the development of a library of training materials that can be used in the region for future leadership training workshops and programs. Thus, this project may serve as a prototype model for individual states in the region and for Extension personnel in other regions throughout the United States.

### **Impacts**

The immediate impact from this program is two-fold: 1) each participant initiated an effort to work towards solving an issue identified as a priority in their states; and 2) participants gained experience and enhanced their skills in working on issues important to the industry in their respective states. Each participant was able to make progress on their initiative by recruiting assistance from others and identifying other resources. While no participant completely resolved the issues tackled, the progress made has clearly encouraged others to also engage. A medium-term impact would be the continuation and expansion of this leadership program. Participants were in favor of continuing individually in a Phase II training effort, but also recommended continuing the Phase I with new producers recruited to participate. The longer-term impact would be the strengthening of aquaculture associations and industries through the leadership developed to resolve key obstacles that are faced in the state of the NCR.

### **Recommended Follow-up Activities**

1. Continue leadership training for producers in the NCR.
  - a. Develop a mechanism to keep this initial group of participants in the Leadership Training project intact to continue to build leadership skills and provide support to this group of individuals as they continue to work on their projects, perhaps in a Phase II program.
  - b. Develop process to recruit additional producers for leadership training and to engage in activities that will strengthen aquaculture associations in the region and aquaculture industries, perhaps as Phase I leadership development.

2. Additional training needs:
  - a. Ways to effectively engage legislatures for aquaculture to have its voice heard. [Note: NCRAC cannot organize this due to restrictions on use of federal funding, but individuals or industry associations could organize this type of training on a state-wide or regional basis.]
  - b. Tools for leveraging state resources and how to access such resources.
  - c. Develop guidelines for organizations and individuals in terms of how to provide assistance to those seeking to effect change. For example, while university research and extension personnel, including those involved with NCRAC, cannot engage in political activity or lobbying, they can draft summaries of the relevant science and communicate those to industry groups.
3. Take full advantage of video conferencing capabilities for future leadership training to minimize travel for producers, many of whom need to tend to their businesses every day.
4. Develop a mechanism to streamline ways for associations to get content out to their members. Examples might include a single executive director who works with multiple associations, manages the various web sites, and disseminates newsletters. There was discussion about interest in re-instating the Fin Clips newsletter through NCRAC and the possibility to use it as a mechanism for state associations to communicate to their members. It would be important, however, for individual associations to not lose their identity if this is done through NCRAC; their members need to see benefit from their membership in their individual state associations.