



National Extension
Association of Family
& Consumer Sciences



Network

**Thank you to our 2025
Corporate Sponsors!**



American Income
life insurance company

Special Risk Division



OneOp
Readiness. Knowledge. Network.



2025-2026 Executive Board

Dianne Christensen

President | dianneec@nmsu.edu

Chris Zellers

President Elect |
zellers@njaes.rutgers.edu

Jennifer Bridge

Past President |
jennifer.bridge@uky.edu

Jessie Ketterman

Treasurer | jketterm@umd.edu

Cindy Thompson

Secretary | cpthom08@iastate.edu

Carla Farrand

VP of Awards |
carla.farrand@colostate.edu

Troy Anderson

VP of Member Resources |
tanders4@umd.edu

Susan Moore

VP of Professional Development |
susanm@uga.edu

Dhruti Patel

VP of Public Affairs |
dhrutip@umd.edu

Melissa Rupp

Central Director | rupp.26@osu.edu

Lisa Fishman

Eastern Director |
lisa.fishman@maine.edu

Joy West

Southern Director |
jwest@uada.edu

Sheila Gains

Western Director |
sgains@arapahoegov.com

December 2025 Edition

Reflecting on the Past and Looking Ahead: Stronger Together



As we reflect on the past year, it's been one of both challenge and change. And while more changes may be on the horizon, I am incredibly proud of this community. You, our members, have demonstrated such grace, compassion, creativity, and agility in responding quickly to the needs and requirements of the changing landscape of our work. You've been there for your colleagues and communities.

I'm equally proud of how our organization has stepped up. Whether through quick responses to natural disasters, supporting colleagues facing funding cuts, or simply sending a personal note of encouragement, we've shown we're not just an association. **We're a community.** And we remain committed to walking alongside you in whatever comes next.

Looking ahead to 2026, we will continue our focus on building and strengthening our NEAFCS community, at the state, regional, and national levels. We want every member to feel welcomed, valued, and **truly seen**. Many of us do work independently in our roles, and it can feel isolating. But you're not alone. NEAFCS is your professional home, and we are stronger together.

The Board and I find serving you, our members, such a pleasure. Connect with us anytime and share your thoughts. We wish you a wonderful holiday season looking ahead to a new year of hope and growth.

Dianne Christensen

President

NATIONAL NEWS & UPDATES



Seize the Opportunity: Shape the Future of NEAFCS

Jennifer Bridge (KY) | Immediate Past President

“If not you, then who? If not now, then when?”

These powerful words—first spoken by the Jewish scholar Hillel the Elder—still inspire action centuries later. As you strive for professional excellence, NEAFCS offers countless opportunities for you to grow, lead, and make a difference. Beginning in January, the national nominating committee will seek passionate candidates ready to champion our members, build cohesion and shape the future of our association.

Each region has selected the following to serve as the 2026 nominating committee members.

Eastern Region

Gwen Crum (West Virginia)
Karen Mort (New York)
Jennifer Taylor, alternate (New Jersey)

Southern Region

Michelle Wright (Texas)
Rhea Bently (South Carolina)
Susan Routh, alternate (Oklahoma)

Central Region

Emily Marrison (Ohio)
Sara Sprouse (Iowa)
Becky Reed, alternate (Kansas)

Western Region

Amy Robertson (Idaho)
Abby Weber (Colorado)
Hope Wilson, alternate (Arizona)

Are you ready to take the next step? We're excited to announce that nominations will soon be open for these pivotal roles: **President-Elect, Vice President for Professional Development, Vice President for Member Resources, Secretary, Eastern Region Director, and Western Region Director.**

Curious about what it's like to serve on the national board? Connect with a current board member, a nominating committee member, or [reach out to me](#) directly as we're eager to share our experiences and answer your questions!

More information can be found on the [NEAFCS website](#).

Don't miss your chance—applications are due by May 1, 2026!



FCS Industry Economic Impact Study

Cindy Thompson (IA) | Secretary

For the first time ever, AAFCS has released the **Family & Consumer Sciences Industry Economic Impact Study**—a landmark analysis that captures the \$753 billion impact of our profession nationwide. The study can be found on the [AAFCS website](#).

NATIONAL NEWS & UPDATES

Increase Your Impact with Military Families

OneOp | Corporate Sponsor

The goal of OneOp is to provide open-access professional development opportunities for service providers supporting military families. From active duty, Reserve, and National Guard service members, to their spouses and children, many FCS professionals directly and indirectly serve our nation's military families. OneOp offers free, evidence-based webinars, courses, and podcasts to support FCS professionals working across various disciplines. From bolstering military child and youth well-being to building safety nets for food security and promoting upstream prevention of suicide and self-harm, OneOp resources can be integrated into state and local efforts to strengthen systems of support for military families. The annual Military Family Readiness Academy combines Defense Department and Cooperative Extension programs and services to equip FCS Extension professionals and military service providers with the knowledge and skills to help military families navigate complex issues.

Connect with OneOp to explore the vital role of FCS professionals in the Military Family Readiness System and discover strategies to engage your local military population. Visit oneop.org or contact us for more information on how you can be a powerful provider.





Chris Zellers | New Jersey
President-Elect

Focus Area: Wellness

Star Strengths

- ★ Organized
- ★ Supportive
- ★ Compassionate



SAVE THE DATE | P I L D 2026

LEARNING • LEADERSHIP • ADVOCACY

Hyatt Regency Bethesda
Bethesda, Maryland



AWARDS

Should I Apply for an Award?

Diane Reinhold (IL) | *Awards & Recognition Training Committee*

Knowing the submission process takes time, intentionality, and often collaboration, you may find yourself asking this question: **Why should you submit an award application?** Before you become overwhelmed by all that is involved, pause and consider your **WHY**.

Understanding your why is powerful. It gives you purpose, direction, and motivation. All qualities that foster long-term fulfillment. Success is not limited to state or national placement, recognition or a plaque. It includes personal growth, strengthening relationships, and learning to view setbacks as steppingstones towards your goals.

With this in mind, consider applying again, especially if you believe your work has strong merits. Take time to revise and strengthen your application. Aim for clarity and conciseness. Demonstrate impact through meaningful data and a well-structured narrative. Be specific and thorough, use clear headings, and review the application, judging criteria, and all eligibility requirements.

Finally, seek wisdom from colleagues and past award winners. Their experience can offer invaluable insights, encouragement, and practical tips to help you stay motivated. Whether or not your application earns top honors, the process fosters growth that will lead to award-winning personal & professional achievement.

Information for submitting awards for the 2026 season can be found on the [NEAFCS Awards webpage](#).



Carla Farrand | Colorado
VP of Awards
Focus Areas: Food safety, preservation & Fermentation and 4-H
Star Strengths
★ **Detail-oriented**
★ **Planner**
★ **Teacher**

The Silent Auction Sparked Inspired Bidding!

Joy Czmyrid (NM) | *Past-Chair, Support and Sponsorship Committee, Awards*

Crystal Anaya (NM) | *Chair, Support and Sponsorship Committee, Awards*

First and foremost, as the outgoing chair of the Support & Sponsorship Committee, I want to extend a huge thank you to all our contributors who made this year's Silent Auction and 50/50 Raffle a huge success! From those who worked tirelessly on the Support and Sponsorship Committee, to our volunteers, to those who contributed items to the silent auction – **we had 102 items this year, a new record**, to everyone who bid on all these wonderful items!

Through all these combined efforts we were able to raise \$3562 through the auction and



approximately \$1000 through the 50/50 Raffle for a **total of \$4562!** This impressive total goes directly to the Awards committee to support all the great work our FCS Professionals across the country.

MEMBER RESOURCES

Leadership Within Member Resources (MR): A Spotlight on Key Leaders

Troy Anderson (MD) | VP of Member Resources

NEAFCS enhances life quality through dedicated leadership. This year, we spotlight four leaders who excel in managing their respective MR committees.



Meagan directs the **Journal Editorial Committee**, enhancing the quality of JNEAFCS research dissemination. Her leadership

ensures the journal remains a valuable resource, employing innovative editorial processes to expand its reach and relevance.

Lynn leads the **Membership & Life Members Committee**, focusing on expanding NEAFCS's membership. She fosters a welcoming environment and implements initiatives that celebrate long-standing members while attracting new talent.

In conclusion, the leadership of Kyleigh, Christi, Meagan, and Lynn embodies the dedication needed to advance NEAFCS's mission, inspiring members to contribute to the association's success. Today MR shines the spotlight on these key leaders.

Explore the [Member Resources webpage](#) for more information on these committees.



Kyleigh heads the **Access, Engagement, and Outreach (AEO) Committee**, expanding NEAFCS's reach. Her innovative strategies boost

member involvement and foster inclusivity. Kyleigh's leadership has strengthened community ties and improved resource accessibility.

Christi leads the **Mentoring & Leadership Committee**, focusing on developing leadership skills. Her commitment to mentorship empowers

members to tackle new challenges. Christi's efforts have created a strong mentoring program, pairing seasoned professionals with emerging leaders.



MEMBER RESOURCES

When Service Comes from the Heart

Troy Andersson (MD) | *VP of Member Resources*

Darlene Minniefield (AL) | *Leadership Experience Mentor*

At the 2025 PILD Conference, an unexpected incident highlighted the essence of genuine leadership and compassion within the NEAFCS community. An attendee faced a frightening ordeal after suffering a serious fall that resulted in a broken shoulder. Amidst the chaos, one calm and familiar voice emerged, providing comfort and assistance.



Rebecca Elliot, a dedicated FCS and Food Systems Extension Agent for UF/IFAS Extension in Marion County, exemplified the core values of NEAFCS: service, leadership, compassion, and community. She recognized the attendee from previous conferences and immediately stepped in to provide support. Her actions went far beyond mere obligation; they were a testament to deep human empathy and care.

Throughout the ordeal, she never left the attendee's side. She accompanied them in the ambulance, stayed overnight in the emergency room, updated their family, secured medication, and arranged transportation back to the hotel. Remarkably, she managed all of this while fulfilling her role as a conference presenter.

Her commitment serves as a powerful reminder that the impact we make often extends beyond the professional realm. It is in the lives we quietly touch that our true influence is felt. Her actions embody the spirit of connection, support, and unwavering dedication that defines NEAFCS.

In a world where professional responsibilities often overshadow personal connections, this story shines as a beacon of hope and a call to lead with heart.

♥ grateful ♥

MEMBER RESOURCES

Unlock Your Leadership Potential with NEAFCS!

Christi Demitz (MI) | *Mentor & Leadership Committee Chair*

Danielle Day (IA) | *Mentor & Leadership Committee*

Carrie Elsen (MR) | *Mentor & Leadership Committee Immediate Past Chair*

Of all the opportunities NEAFCS offers, the **Leadership Experience** may be the most transformative. This program is designed to help you grow—whether you're ready to lead or eager to support others on their journey.

Created by the Mentoring and Leadership Committee, the **Leadership Experience** tackles a challenge many members face: confidence in leadership. Through personalized mentoring and skill-building, you'll gain the tools to lead with purpose and inspire change.

As a mentee, you'll receive guidance, encouragement, and career-building insights from an experienced mentor who shares your passion for NEAFCS and the Extension mission. Mentors, in turn, rediscover their own inspiration and gain fresh perspectives through these powerful partnerships.

The program focuses on four key areas:

- Leading Yourself
- Leading Others
- Leading in FCS
- Leading in NEAFCS

The **Leadership Experience** is more than a program—it's a catalyst for confidence, connection, and growth. Are you ready to step into your potential and shape the future of our

profession? Applications open January 2026. Make plans to [apply](#)!



2025 Mentors & Mentees at Annual Session in Grand Rapids, MI



Troy Anderson | Maryland
VP of Member Resources (MR)

Focus Areas: Financial Wellness,
Housing & Interior Design,
Clothing & Textiles, FCS Licensure

Star Strengths

- ★ Visionary Thinker
- ★ Emotional Intelligence
- ★ Adaptability/Flexibility

MEMBER RESOURCES

APPLY TO BE A
Mentor

APPLY TO BE A
Mentee



Unlock your potential with the

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE ACADEMY

APPLICATIONS DUE MARCH 1, 2026



Contact Mentoring & Leadership Chair
Christie Demitz: demitzch@msu.edu



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Beyond the Webinar: Rethinking Online Professional Development

Melissa Cook (WY) | *Online Professional Development Committee Member*

When we think of online professional development, we often imagine yet another webinar. But real growth isn't passive; it's about curiosity, connection, and action.



Start with NEAFCS: Join a national committee or sign up for the Leadership Experience mentoring program. Looking for something hands-on? Co-create curriculum with colleagues to build skills while addressing shared challenges. Prefer to learn on the go? Podcasts and audiobooks turn your commute or dog walk into learning time. For more structured options, check out:

- **LinkedIn Learning** – Short, targeted videos on everything from Excel to communication.
- **Coursera & Canvas Catalog** – Full university-level courses (many free).
- **Extension Foundation** – Extension-specific webinars, modules, and communities.

Even better, ask your peers what they've tried. They might save you from a bad course or invite you to join a great one.

And think outside the Zoom box:

Co-teach, try a new tech tool, attend a conference, lead a team, learn AI, focus on self-care, and set goals.

Professional development doesn't always mean PowerPoint. Sometimes, it's a conversation or saying yes to something new.

Ready to grow? Start where you are and follow what makes you curious.

Explore a wide variety of learning opportunities on the [NEAFCS website!](#)



Susan Moore | Georgia
VP of Professional Development

Focus Areas: Emergency preparedness & health and wellness

Star Strengths

- ★ **Creativity** - I love new ideas.
- ★ **Compassion** - I thrive on helping people.
- ★ **Ceaseless** - I work tirelessly on projects I believe in

NEAFCS Webinar Information

- Upcoming webinars and webinar submission [website](#).
- Archived webinar [website](#).



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Mark Your Calendar for the 2026 Annual Session!

Cindy Thompson (IA) | Secretary

The **2026 NEAFCS Annual Session** will be held in beautiful Knoxville, Tennessee!! Watch the monthly *What Members Need to Know* for timely information, as well as information from your regional director. Full conference details will be posted throughout the year on the [NEAFCS 2026 Annual Session website](#).



Meet the 2026 Annual Session Tri-Liaisons



Shay Davis | Tennessee
2026 Tri-Liaison

Focus Areas: Aging, wellness, food safety & preservation, family & community education clubs

Star Strengths

- ★ Compassion for others
- ★ Understanding
- ★ Team player & helpful



Elizabeth Renfro | Tennessee
2026 Tri-Liaison

Focus Areas: General FCS education, particularly food preservation

Star Strengths

- ★ Detail oriented
- ★ Personable
- ★ Calm in stressful situations



Lacy Yeley | Tennessee
2026 Tri-Liaison

Focus Areas: Nutrition, wellness, financial education, & healthy aging

Star Strengths

- ★ Strong Communicator
- ★ Dependable team player
- ★ Creative Thinker

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Your Impact Stories

Dhruti Patel (MD) | VP of Public Affairs

Through Public Affairs activities, NEAFCS keeps members informed about issues that relate to FCS Extension and raises awareness of FCS Extension among consumers, the media, and policymakers.

A few pertinent reminders the PA team wishes to share with you.



Dhruti Patel | Maryland
VP of Public Affairs (PA)

Focus Areas: Nutrition, wellness, AI, education technology, & community research.

Star Strengths

- ★ **Big Picture Nerd** - I think from a systems lens.
- ★ **Learner** - I love learning almost everything.
- ★ **I like being supportive!**

The Impact submission form will begin on December 1.

- **Quick Tip:** To minimize redundancies, please discuss with your team who will submit the team impact.

New Highlight: The "FCS Impact Heroes"

- This effort will spotlight your meaningful programmatic efforts to drive positive change in communities. From Spring 2026, we will feature one outstanding impact story each month on our social media channels to amplify your incredible work.
- You will see this section right under the impact form. We strongly encourage sharing high-quality photos, short video clips, or testimonial videos of the program activities and impact to maximize your story's visual appeal!

Learn more about impact statements on the [NEAFCS Impact webpage](#).

Meet our Subcommittee Chairs

Advocacy Subcommittee:

Lorrie Coop (TX) | lorrie.coop@ag.tamu.edu

- **Public Engagement & Impact Subcommittee:**

Linda Burgard (KY) | linda.burgard@uky.edu

Dylan Gentry (KY) interim | dkge222@uky.edu



REGIONAL DIRECTORS



Sheila Gains | Colorado
Western Region Director

Focus Areas: Food safety, food preservation, nutrition financial management

Star Strengths

- ★ Loyalty
- ★ Caring
- ★ Logical

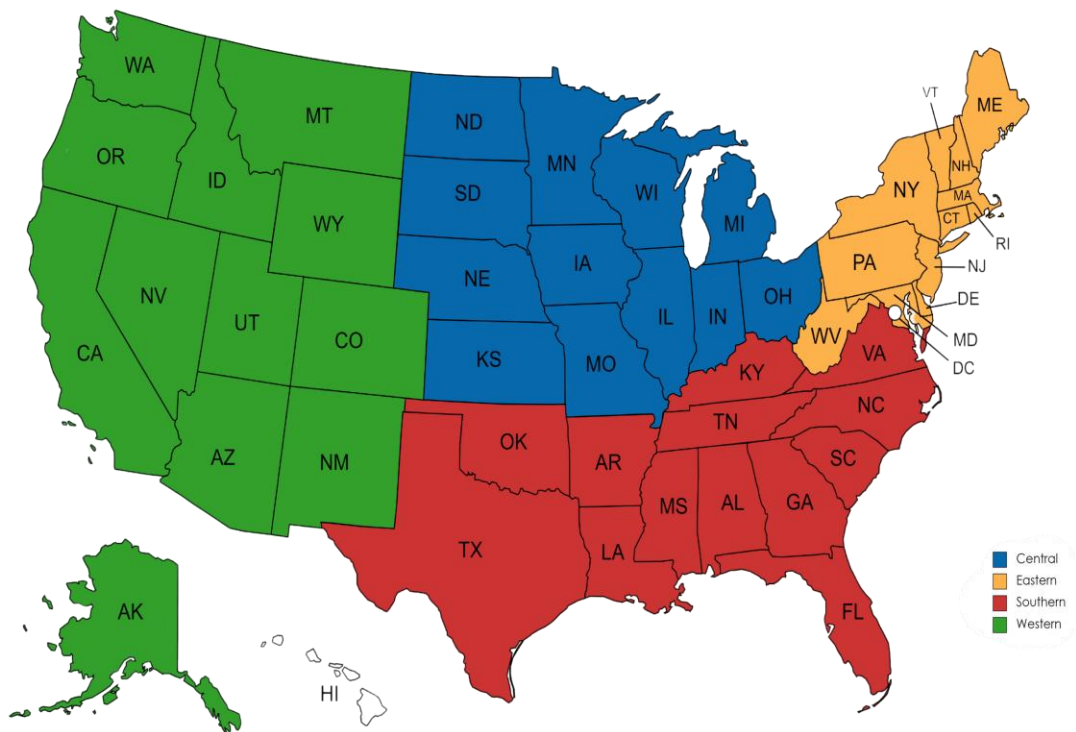


Melissa Rupp | Ohio
Central Region Director

Focus Areas: Financial wellbeing, food safety, healthy living

Star Strengths

- ★ Strategic thinker & connector
- ★ Great travel partner!
- ★ Seeing, building & supporting the strengths in others.




Joy West | Arkansas
Southern Region Director

Focus Areas: General FCS with a preference for personal & family relationships

Star Strengths

- ★ Support & encouragement
- ★ Ability to work with people
- ★ Organization



Lisa Fishman | Maine
Eastern Region Director

Focus Areas: Extension Homemaker Volunteer Coordinator, food preservation/food safety, nutrition education

Star Strengths

- ★ Good humored
- ★ Optimistic
- ★ Direct

ENDOWMENT

Endowment Committee 2025 Activity Update

Theresa Mayhew (NY) | *Committee Chair and Life Member*

The [Endowment Fund](#) took in \$7,250 from September 1, 2024 through September 30, 2025 from nine first-time donors and 26 repeat donors, two of whom are monthly sustainers while another three were affiliate or group donations. Absent a formal campaign, 31% of the money received came from memorial or honorary donations totaling \$2,265. Memorial and honorary donations are wonderful ways to recognize members and preserve their legacy.

This past year, the Endowment Committee funded three program grants to members from Florida, New Hampshire and Oklahoma (we received six grant applications in all) and 19 Annual Session scholarships (39 members applied for annual session financial assistance). The total value of the three grants was \$8,998 and the 19 scholarships was \$9,975 or \$545 per awardee. That's almost \$19,000 we were able to give back to members!

The endowment committee thanks the NEAFCS Board and Executive Director Danielle Jessup for their ongoing support. Committee members include Mary Blackburn, Melinda Daily, Danielle Day, Karen Ensle, Dianne Drennan, Jayne McBurney, Mary Evans, Theresa Mayhew, Lance Hansen, and Rick Giriffths. Karen, Lance and Rick are cycling off the committee and we thank them for their active participation. We look forward to another productive year in 2026! Thank you!

2026 Endowment Committee

Eastern Region

- **Theresa Mayhew**, New York (*Chair*)

Southern Region

- **Dianne Drennan**, Texas
- **Jayne McBurney**, North Carolina

Western Region

- **Mary Evans**, Wyoming
- **Mary Blackburn**, California

Central Region

- **Melinda Daily**, Kansas
- **Danielle Day**, Iowa

Board Representation

- **Jesse Ketterman**, Maryland (*Treasurer*)
- **Jennifer Bridge**, Kentucky (*Immediate Past President*)



HISTORIAN

Your Assignment...Voices from the Past, Present, & Future – PART TWO

Christine Kniep (WI), *Historian*

At the Annual Session Business Meeting, Voting Delegates were asked to help complete Phase Two of **Voices from the Past, Present and Future** – how's that assignment coming? Have three members from your affiliate been asked to write?

The clock is ticking away to the **June 1st deadline....**

Working as an affiliate, please compile stories from 3 members, capturing their work and involvement in NEAFCS using the following guidelines. In 250 words or less share:



- Name, years of Extension employment, years of NEAFCS membership
- If retired, please respond with information relevant to when you ended employment
- Reason for joining NEAFCS
- Memory from an NEAFCS event (state, regional, or national)
- A wish for the association

Also include a picture of the member submitting the story. Submit the three stories and pictures to [Christine Kniep](#).

Affiliates that have submitted their stories include: Alabama, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Vermont and Wyoming. Voices of the Past, Present, and Future stories can be found on the [NEAFCS website](#).



Capturing Affiliate History

Christine Kniep (WI), *Historian*

And while you're thinking history, the **second challenge** for each affiliate is to dedicate some time in the next couple of years to update your affiliate's history. During the 50th and 75th Anniversary years, affiliates were asked to submit their affiliates' history. You'll find these posted on our website: [NAEHE Affiliate Histories - 50th Anniversary](#) and [NEAFCS Affiliates Histories - 75th Anniversary Celebration](#). By 2034, your help is needed in capturing the last 25-50 years of your affiliate. Tap into colleagues who are retired, retiring or clearing out offices to see what historical treasures are out there. Contact [Christine Kniep](#) with questions or to submit histories.



THE BACK PAGE



Cindy Thompson | Iowa
Secretary
Focus Area: Early childhood education, consultation, & mentorship
Star Strengths
★ Detail-oriented
★ Enthusiastic
★ Supportive/Empowering

Obituaries

Barbara Brahm, TX

- February 15, 1951 – April 24, 2024
- [Obituary](#)

Jackie Carattine, WI

- July 30, 1974 – October 27, 2024
- [Obituary](#)



**Happy Holiday Season from the
NEAFCS Executive Board!**

*The December 2025 Edition of NEAFCS
Network Newsletter is brought to you by
Cindy Thompson, National Secretary,
with support from the National Office.*



Mark Your Calendar

December

12/31/25 Membership Renewal Deadline
12/31/25 Affiliate Annual Report Due

January

1/31/26 NEAFCS Call for Proposals Due

February

2/1/26 NEAFCS Impact Statement Portal Closes
Watch for state award deadlines, which vary.

March

3/15/26 NEAFCS National Awards deadline

