



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 Nebraska FFA 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. The 'why' should be the core reason you want to serve. Having a clear and purposeful 'why' will help you focus during the interviews and keep you focused throughout the year.

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

Impact lives of FFA members
Motivate others
Advocate for agriculture

Cons

Time away from family and friends
Impact on college or job
Having to speak in front of others

Why is this important? It helps you clarify your reasons for seeking the office. The clearer you are about your reasons, your goals, 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 and out of your mind when you participate in the interviews.

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 were in charge of 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.

Remember no one is skilled in every area. Everyone has areas for needed growth. It's important that you recognize your areas for growth and your willingness to seek improvement in those areas.

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 corn, but you may be asked to comment about agriculture's dependence on water, 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 ag industry, but also for students who are seeking careers in the industry. Nebraska FFA will connect you with current information after election but having a strong foundational knowledge of the ag industry in Nebraska is important.

Agricultural Education/FFA

Questions about Agricultural Education and FFA will be focused on your experiences and general knowledge of the Ag Ed/FFA program. Remember, as a state officer you will be talking to school administrators, Ag Ed Teachers 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, so be prepared to talk about agricultural education and not just FFA. Also, remember to talk about your experiences with your 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 on the Internet 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 Ag Ed. Talk to your principal and superintendent about Ag Ed/FFA. Talk to local agriculture industry professionals to broaden your understanding of the issues and opportunities facing the industry.



While gaining additional knowledge about Ag Ed/FFA and the ag 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 moment and 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 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 to 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 big 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, 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 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.

Will I get feedback on my performance during the interviews?

Yes, after the process, you will receive feedback from the committee identifying areas that you did well and areas for needed improvement.

If I totally mess up on a question, does it eliminate me from consideration?

No, most candidates have at least one round of interviews that don't go as planned. How you respond and bounce back for the next round is an indication of your strength and character.

Will all candidates receive the same number of interviews?

All candidates will receive the same 5-6 initial rounds of interviews with same questions. After the initial rounds, the interview questions are be designed to evaluate specific knowledge and skills and therefore may vary between candidates. Candidate participation in additional interview rounds is not an indication of their potential selection to move on to the final process. Some candidates may move on without the need for additional specific rounds of interviews.



Understanding the Interview Processes

There are two parts to the State FFA Officer Interview Process: Preliminary Interviews and Final Interviews. The following information is an overview of each committee and process.

Preliminary Interview Committee

Committee Membership

The preliminary interview committee consists of at 9-12 individuals who are past state officers, FFA members, business and industry representatives or educators. Individuals serving on the committee receive training prior to the interview process. The committee is chaired by a past State FFA Officer who is still an active member.

The committee process is managed by a facilitator who ensures the equity of opportunity and fairness of the process. The facilitator also completes the tabulation of scores for presentation to the committee. The committee facilitator does not vote. The facilitator may provide advice when asked by the committee.

Committee Operations

- Everyone on the committee is equal and has a voice and vote.
- All questions and activities are scored by committee members using established rubrics.
- Discussion of candidates is not allowed until initial questioning is complete.
- Committee members are required to take notes during each interview. Notes are collected and held by the facilitator to be used in providing feedback on the candidate's performance after the preliminary process.
- Candidates are selected for the final round based on their ability to serve as a State Officer.

Interview Process

- Initial questioning consists of 5-6 rounds – either individual or group interviews
- All candidates are asked the same questions/activities during initial questioning.
- After initial questions, candidates are discussed and call back questions or activities may be conducted for further evaluation. These questions or activities may vary by candidate based on the skills or qualities the committee is looking for during that round.
- Interview rounds may consist of the following:
 - One-on-One interview with each committee member
 - Candidate interviewed by entire committee on the following areas:
 - Agriculture Education/FFA
 - Agriculture industry issues and opportunities
 - Leadership experiences, issues, and opportunities
 - Candidate may be asked to make a presentation to committee consisting of a greetings, short speech or workshop
 - Candidate may participate in a role play scenario, group activity or group interview
 - Candidates may also be required to complete a written exercise similar to writing they may do as a state officer.



Finals Interview Committee

Committee Membership

- The finals interview committee is structured similar to the preliminary interviews with 9-12 individual representing the same categories as the preliminary interview process.
- The final process is facilitated by the same individual as the preliminary process.
- A limited number of committee members may serve on both the preliminary and final process. New committee members are secured for the final process.

Committee Operations

- The committee operates with the same guidelines as the preliminary interview process.
- Results of the preliminary round are made available to the finals committee.
- Final officer selection and positions to be served are determined by the committee and presented at the final convention session.

Interview Process

- Conducted with similar rounds as the preliminary process. Candidates will participate in both individual and group interviews.
- Individual questions and group interviews are more in depth and seek to determine knowledge and skills required to successfully serve as a state officer.
- Candidates will all receive the same set of initial questions. After the initial questions, interviews may be personalized to allow committee members to probe identified areas.