

Leading with Purpose

The Character of ASCFG Board Service

WHEN I OBSERVE OUR ASCFG BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN ACTION,

I'm continually impressed not just by what they do, but also by how they do it. During the past two years, I've written about developing your voice as a board member and the connections formed through service. This year, as we approach our board elections cycle, I want to shine a light on the distinctive leadership qualities our board members bring to the table—traits that could help you recognize yourself as a potential future leader of this association.



Steve Crone
ASCFG Executive Director

The Courage to Ask Hard Questions

Effective board leadership requires the willingness to ask questions that others might find uncomfortable. Our board members don't shy away from challenging assumptions or requesting clarification when something doesn't sit quite right. This courage ensures we make informed decisions rather than rushing toward convenient ones.

I've watched board members pause important votes to request additional data, suggest alternative perspectives we hadn't considered, or voice concerns about unintended consequences. This isn't a hindrance—it's the disciplined practice of due diligence. When you're a steward of an organization that thousands of flower farmers depend on, you owe them your most careful thinking.

Does this describe your approach to decision-making? ASCFG board members bring this thoughtful leadership to our strategic choices.

The Humility to Learn Constantly

Perhaps the most underrated leadership quality I've observed is genuine intellectual humility. Our strongest board members come to the table knowing they don't have all the answers. They ask questions of staff, seek perspectives from members in other regions, and remain genuinely curious about practices and challenges different from their own.

This humility creates space for growth. I've seen board members change their positions after hearing compelling testimony from



The ASCFG Board of Directors including all 2026 members plus some finishing their terms, along with full-time staff (L-R): Rebecca Marrall, John Dole, Dee Hall Goodwin, Dave Delbo, Hillary Alger, Sarah Kistner, Amanda Cook, Niki Irving, Susan Rockwood, Sarah Head, Mimo Davis, Grace Lam, Val Schirmer, Michelle Elston, Janis Harris, Helen Skiba, Steve Crone, Linda Twining, and Sherri Chavez.

fellow growers. I've watched them actively seek out diverse voices to inform their thinking. They understand that their own farming experience, while valuable, represents just one perspective within our expansive and varied community.

The best board members are perpetual students—of floriculture research, of nonprofit governance, of the evolving needs of our membership. They read the research reports we share, they attend educational sessions at conferences, and they stay curious about innovations in sustainable growing practices.

The Generosity to Mentor

Leadership on the ASCFG Board extends far beyond committee meetings. Our directors serve as informal mentors to newer board members, regional members navigating challenges, and even staff working on new initiatives. They share their hard-won wisdom freely, make introductions within their networks, and offer encouragement to those finding their voice.

This mentorship happens in countless small moments—a text message offering support before someone's first big presentation, a phone call to check in with a struggling grower in their region, a willingness to review and provide feedback on draft

materials. These acts of generosity create the culture of mutual support that defines the ASCFG experience.

The Discipline to Represent All Members

One of the most challenging aspects of board service is the shift from advocating for your own farm to representing the collective interests of thousands of diverse members. Our regional directors excel at maintaining this broader perspective while staying rooted in the realities of their regions.

They listen to members with different growing scales, different marketing approaches, and different challenges than their own. They can articulate needs they don't personally experience because they've taken the time to understand them. This approach requires setting aside ego and personal preference in service of the greater good.

When you serve on the ASCFG Board, you speak for organic growers, for urban farmers and rural operations, for those growing on quarter-acres and those managing multiple production acres. Our board members embrace this responsibility with seriousness and grace.

The Vision to Look Beyond Today

Strategic leadership requires the ability to see around corners. While managing immediate challenges, our board members keep their eyes on long-term sustainability and

growth. They ask questions like: How will this decision serve members five years from now? and, Are we building capacity for the future?

This forward-thinking mindset has guided crucial decisions about technology investments, program development, and organizational structure. Board members understand that their service is part of a continuum—they're building on the foundation laid by previous leaders while creating infrastructure for those who follow.

The Resilience to Navigate Change

Healthy boards have constructive conflict. Our directors demonstrate the emotional intelligence to disagree respectfully, to advocate passionately for their positions while remaining open to being convinced otherwise, and to support decisions once they're made—even when they initially held different views.

This resilience also shows up in their commitment through challenging times. Board service isn't always glamorous. It involves difficult budget discussions, complex policy decisions, and the occasional disappointed member. Our board members show up consistently, bringing their best thinking even when the work is hard.

The Wisdom of the Board President

While all board positions require distinctive leadership qualities, the board president's role deserves special recognition. Our board president must embody all the traits I've described while also bringing the unique ability to unite diverse perspectives, guide productive discussions, and represent the organization with authority and grace.

The board president works most closely with staff, helping translate the board's vision into operational reality. They navigate the delicate balance between governance and management, providing oversight without micromanaging. They ensure every voice at the board table is heard while keeping discussions focused and productive. And they serve as the public face of board leadership, speaking on behalf of their fellow directors with wisdom and diplomacy.

I see these qualities in action each time our board president, Val Schirmer, guides us through complex discussions or represents the ASCFG at events. Her leadership demonstrates why this role requires prior board service—it builds on relationships formed, governance knowledge gained, and organizational understanding developed through years of engaged participation.

Your Leadership Awaits

As you read these descriptions, you might recognize yourself. Perhaps you already ask questions at ASCFG conferences. Maybe you mentor newer growers in your area. You might be the person who considers long-term consequences or bridges different perspectives in your community.

These leadership qualities exist in flower farmers across North America. What distinguishes board members is their willingness to channel these traits in service of our collective mission. They take the courage, humility, generosity, discipline, vision, resilience, and wisdom they've developed in their own operations and apply them to advancing sustainable specialty cut flower farming for everyone.

This October, we'll elect leaders for several positions: Southeast Regional Director, North & Central Regional Director, Board President, and Board Secretary. Each role offers unique opportunities to serve, to lead, and to shape the future of the ASCFG.

If you've been considering board service, I encourage you to reflect on the leadership qualities you bring to the table. Our organization thrives because members like you step forward to guide our collective work. The applications we receive represent a wealth of talent and dedication—proof that leadership potential flourishes throughout our community.

Want to learn more about what board service entails or discuss whether it might be right for you? I invite you to reach out to me at director@ascfg.org or contact your current regional director to hear about their experience. Watch for detailed nomination information in upcoming Shortcuts newsletters.

The ASCFG has flourished because flower farmers have consistently stepped forward to lead with purpose, integrity, and vision. Perhaps this year, that leader could be you.

With mission focus,

Steve Crone

ASCFG Executive Director