

**Principals, Parents, and Partners, Oh My: Integrating Round Robin Stakeholder
Conversations into a School-Based Agricultural Education Program Planning Course**

Joe Ramstad

University of Wisconsin—River Falls
135 Agriculture Science Building
611 South 3rd Street
River Falls, WI 54022
651-280-0214
joseph.ramstad@uwrf.edu

Scott Smalley

Iowa State University
206 Curtiss Hall
513 Farm House Lane
Ames, IA 50011
515-294-0047
smalle16@iastate.edu

Principals, Parents, and Partners, Oh My: Integrating Round Robin Stakeholder Conversations into a School-Based Agricultural Education Program Planning Course

Introduction and Need for Idea

Early career teachers face a significant amount of challenges and anxiety (Leman & Solomonson, 2025), leading to ongoing battles with teacher retention within school-based agricultural education (SBAE; Eck & Edwards, 2019). Of the 15,273 SBAE teachers in the United States during the 2024-2025 school year, 2,081 were new to their position and 1,262 were first-year teachers (Smith et al., 2026), suggesting a great deal of movement and turnover. Stakeholders can play a major role in supporting teachers as they enter a program and as they continue within their programs. However, communicating with stakeholders can be perplexing, despite these ongoing communication efforts being essential to achieving success within a program (Ramstad & Smalley, 2025). If effective relationships are built with these stakeholders, they may be better able to support and retain high-quality agricultural education teachers.

Despite the importance of stakeholder communication and engagement (Ramstad & Smalley, 2025) given persistent trends in teacher turnover and mobility (Haddad et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2026), we recognized there was very little curriculum which focused on stakeholder partnerships and engagement within the Iowa State University SBAE teacher preparation program; this trend was also confirmed with other neighboring institutions. Further, first-year teachers participating in the Iowa mentorship program cited stakeholder engagement as both a barrier and an area of growth at the end of their first year. As a result, the round robin stakeholder conversations idea was developed. These short, simulated conversations offer pre-service teachers an opportunity to practice having three difficult conversations they may encounter with three different stakeholders in a safe learning environment. For example, as part of the experience, one of the three stakeholders they may meet with would be a retired administrator who engages in a conversation with the pre-service teacher about limiting the program budget. It is the responsibility of the pre-service teacher to engage in a dialogue and reach a point of agreement in this potentially tense and difficult conversation, and then receive feedback on the conversation from their stakeholder. This innovative idea helps support teachers in developing their capacity to have these difficult conversations, and ultimately, build networks to retain them within the profession.

Methodology

The round robin activity was a capstone assessment within our program planning course. At the start of the semester, three stakeholders were recruited by the instructor and kept secret from the students. During the semester, students engaged in conversations about key issues they may face within their SBAE programs and FFA chapters, and how to work with key stakeholders who may have a vested interest in these challenges, such as administrators, parents, students, community partners, advisory committee members, state staff, and more. Toward the end of the semester, the final days of the course focused on having open communication with these stakeholders, how to advocate for our SBAE programs in a professional and poised manner, and how to compromise when needed. Students engaged in a few practice round robin conversations with one another and with the instructor to practice the logistics of the conversations and build their confidence.

The day of the round robins, stakeholders joined in person or via Zoom. Students were scheduled in groups of three to report to the holding area and rotated through the three stakeholders individually. Prior to entering the room, students read the prompt posted on the door, and when they were ready, entered the room and began their conversation. Each conversation was timed for exactly seven minutes, and students had an opportunity to quickly wrap up the conversation with

a final sentence or two before exiting and moving to the next conversation. Stakeholders then had a few moments to offer comments and a 50-point score using an electronic scoresheet. Following the conversations, the instructor gathered overarching feedback from each of the stakeholders, along with scores and comments for each individual student. Feedback was shared with all students through a Canvas announcement, and the scores and personalized comments for individual students were compiled from all three stakeholders and posted as a grade out of 150 points. Finally, students worked together as a class to handwrite and mail a thank you note to each stakeholder as a token of appreciation for their engagement and feedback.

Results and Implications

The 18 students and three stakeholders shared positive feedback. One student commented, “This activity challenged me in a good way. It was good to apply what we’ve been talking about all throughout our time in college. Now, I feel way more prepared to talk about program issues with stakeholders.” One of the stakeholders was a member of state staff in a neighboring state, and shared, “This was a fun way to meet future teachers I’ll cross paths with again in the future, and also got me thinking through how these pre-service teachers approach these tough conversations. It was mutually beneficial.” Through practicing in class, students were able to build their capacity to have a positive learning experience and have effective conversations, as demonstrated by their qualitative feedback and by the average score of 138 out of a possible 150 points.

Future Plans and Advice

Based on positive student and stakeholder feedback, future plans include continued use of this activity in the course. We also plan to integrate this idea in other courses to provide additional real-world experiences. For example, round robin conversations might be a good addition to a classroom management or methods course, where students can have simulated parent-teacher conferences about a child’s progress or behaviors, as these tend to be difficult conversations.

For those wishing to implement this idea, we advise recruiting stakeholders a few months in advance (i.e., the start of the semester), and having a back-up stakeholder available to participate in case someone is unavailable or has an emergency is strongly encouraged. Additionally, we strongly encourage recruiting stakeholders the students will not know, such as retired school administrators, state staff or teacher educators from other states, or others within personal networks to serve as stakeholders to provide a fair and unbiased experience, and to help students further develop their relationship-building and conversation skills.

Costs and Resources

Aside from mailing a handwritten thank you note to each stakeholder (< \$4), having a subscription to Zoom (optional, only needed if doing virtual stakeholders), there is no financial cost for this idea. From an instructor perspective, the idea also requires about an hour of time to recruit stakeholders and prepare conversation scenarios, an hour to brief stakeholders on the logistics via email, and another hour to update the scorecards, compile feedback, and organize schedules. The teacher also needs to create a schedule, and a scorecard for each stakeholder to fill out; this takes less than an hour. Within the class, this idea does require the investment of about two, 90-minute class periods for practice and preparation, and a block of time to complete the round robin conversations. Given the rotation schedule and that students meet individually with three stakeholders, it is appropriate to estimate about 30 to 35 minutes per three students. For example, for the spring 2026 class had 18 students meeting with three stakeholders, and all conversations were completed, with feedback compiled, in just over three hours.

References

- Eck, C. J., & Edwards, M. C. (2019). Teacher shortage in school-based, agricultural education (SBAE): A historical review. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 60(4), 223–239.
<https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2019.04223>
- Haddad, B., Rada, L., & Smith, A. (2024). Measuring mobility: A quantitative description of SBAE teacher mobility in Minnesota. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 65(1), 226–244.
<https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.v65i1.2471>
- Leman, A. M., & Solomonson, J. K. (2025). Investigating the key social supports for early career agricultural education teachers. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 66(4), Article 7.
<https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.v66i4.3215>
- Ramstad, J., & Smalley, S. (2025). Getting the word out: Examining key trends and strategies in school-based agricultural education programs' communication and marketing efforts. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 66(3), Article 3.
<https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.v66i3.3022>
- Smith, A. R., Spiess, M., Foster, D. D., Rogers, A. R., & Lawver, R. G. (2026). *National agricultural education supply and demand study, 2025 executive summary*.
<https://nsd.aaaeonline.org>