Resource Conservation Districts

Guidebook for Collaboration & Consolidation

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California
Department of Conservation

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Part 1

Why this Matters

California's private and public lands are among the most agriculturally productive and ecologically diverse in the United States. How these lands are managed is of vital importance to communities, wildlife, water, agriculture, and the economy. Landowners need partners who understand the day-to-day challenges of managing land. They need partners who can help them complete complex restoration projects, find practical solutions to resource management problems, and access resources that conserve California's landscapes. Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) fill these critical roles.

Established under California law as special districts, RCDs are a nonregulatory form of local government. They are created by the community to meet a specific need. While other special districts meet needs for fire protection, open space, or flood control, RCDs help meet the need for the protection and wise management of critical agricultural and natural resources: water and soil.

The number of RCDs operating in California has fluctuated over the years. In the 1940s, when the first conservation districts were established in the wake of the Dust Bowl, a strong sense of "local" prompted the creation of multiple districts within a single county, each serving a discrete area. In the early 1970s, there were more than 150 RCDs. Since then, some have consolidated their operations with other districts, and some have dissolved. In 2017, 97 RCDs were recognized within the state.

> "If you want to go fast, go alone.
>
> If you want to go far, go together."
>
> — Wise Proverb

What's special about RCDs?

RCDs have established geographic boundaries. Within their geographic service areas, RCDs identify priorities for soil conservation and resource management and partner with landowners on locally-led conservation. A cross between a trusted advisor and an environmental consulting firm, RCDs offer practical advice and hands-on assistance to help property owners conserve natural resources on their land. RCDs are local hubs for conservation and agriculture. They are the go-to partners for agencies like the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service and for private landowners seeking to conserve wildlife or improve water quality or soil productivity.

RCDs are locally governed by appointed or elected boards of directors and are accountable to the communities they serve. District boards include leaders with deep roots in their communities, and often, a generational perspective on land management. In some cases, a board member's legacy includes decades of service on the RCD board, and they may fill a seat held by their parent before them. The commitment to community and to conservation runs very deep. Many strengths and skills are needed on a district's board, including background in land management, finance, biology, education, and other disciplines. An RCD's connection to community, however, grounds the work.

RCDs' relationships with the communities they serve, and the credibility and trust they have built with those communities, are essential to their ability to do their work. Trust is built on a track record of accomplishments, successful projects, and satisfied landowners. It is also built through the transparency and accountability created by public meeting laws, open records, and financial reporting requirements.

The challenge of capacity

RCDs are uniquely positioned to accelerate resource conservation and restoration. This is due to their statewide coverage, trusted relationships with their local communities, strong partnerships with state and federal agencies, and ability to bring state and federal funding to their communities.

However, having an impact requires funding and leadership. Securing the financial and professional resources districts need to do their work can be a daunting task, particularly for those with no funding from property tax assessments. While some RCDs have been able to hire staff and provide critical services in their communities, others struggle financially, and some have been inactive for years. RCDs have a critical need for capacity-building to ensure that across all of California, districts can respond effectively to local resource conservation needs.

Individual organizations can have more impact by honing their strengths and shoring up weak spots. Capacity-building can also be a collective effort, where groups pool resources to go further and get more done. This can take various forms:

- In some cases, organizations might work closely together in strong, mutually beneficial, long-term partnerships. This kind of partnership is a durable collaboration.
- In other cases, organizations might join to become a single entity to improve impact and efficiency. This is called consolidation.

Collaboration and consolidation are two pathways for RCDs to build their capacity. When collaborating, groups retain their individual organizational structures. Examples of such collaboration include:

- Creating one regional, professional structure, supported by "multi-local" identities and relationships.
- Sharing staff and contractors to boost efficiency and increase access to professional support.
- Coordinating projects, trainings, and other organizational investments to reduce costs.

When consolidating, districts combine their operations into a single organization. Done well, consolidation is a highly strategic move that builds capacity while maintaining local identity and connection to community. The prospect of consolidation often brings up concern and caution, and rightly so. The changes that come with consolidation are significant and lasting. As groups step into these conversations, it's essential that they get good answers and clear direction on issues of identity and focus, among others.

This guidebook provides any RCD with a decision-making process to determine the right path for its future. It provides guidance on how to tackle some of the difficult discussions and explore new ways of creating an impact that lasts, while honoring its leaders' important legacies and its role in locally-led conservation.

What to Expect from This Guidebook

This guidebook is designed to help RCD directors and staff analyze options for building their capacity. It provides structure to a process of assessing, exploring, planning, and implementing either a durable collaboration or a consolidation. With suggestions to help districts start down the path and tips to guide them, this guidebook offers ideas for addressing organizational, technical, and legal issues that may arise along the way.

If an RCD is just starting to think about whether collaboration or consolidation may make sense, this guidebook can help start initial conversations with the district's directors and staff and eventually with peers at nearby RCDs. It explains the key steps for either process, whether groups seek to do it themselves or secure outside support. The process and structure described in this guidebook come from years of practice helping organizations work through the critical questions in similar collaboration and merger processes, and from RCDs that have consolidated or formed strong collaborations. Tools for each part of the process will help district leaders move forward.

The remainder of this guidebook includes four sections:

Part 2. Collaboration or Consolidation? A Decision Point

- Evaluate your RCD's capacity needs
- Understand collaboration and consolidation as capacity-building options
- Discover ways to work effectively with other districts
- Understand the three core questions that form the framework for choosing whether collaboration or consolidation is the right path

A FEW DEFINITIONS

Capacity means the knowledge, people, and money necessary for an organization to do something.

Durable collaboration means a robust, long-lasting, and mutually beneficial partnership between two or more organizations.

Consolidation means the combining of two or more special districts into a single district.

Dissolution means the closing down and disbanding of an official body, such as a special district.

Annexation means the addition of territory to a district, so the district can provide its programs and services in that new territory.

Part 3. Durable Collaboration: A Robust, Lasting Partnership

- Take the first steps to explore what's possible
- Evaluate possible collaborative scenarios with RCD partners
- Plan the partnership
- Document the decisions in a collaboration agreement

Part 4. Consolidation

- Prepare your team
- Conduct thorough due diligence
- Plan your combined offering of programs and services
- Understand the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) requirements
- Work through the consolidation process, and understand what to expect afterward

Part 5. Toolbox

- RCD Self-Assessment Workbook
- Tools to support collaboration or consolidation

What the Guidebook *Will Not* Do

This guidebook provides guidance and support to districts that are looking to work better together, but it will not provide all the ingredients needed for collaboration and consolidation to succeed. Many factors are bigger and more fundamental than can be addressed here. Issues this guidebook won't address include:

- **Organizational problems.** Groups hoping to shore up fundamental organizational problems through collaboration and consolidation often find they must address their organizational challenges first, before they begin stepping into lasting partnerships. The California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) has many RCD-specific tools for supporting organizational effectiveness. Accessing these resources may be a critical first step for groups looking to shore up their role and impact in their community.
- **Dissolution.** Some RCDs may find themselves challenged by a lack of leadership or by financial instability and may face the difficult decision to dissolve. While the conversations and analysis outlined in this guidebook can help, the decision to dissolve is more comprehensive than these chapters are able to address. LAFCO would be able to provide information and guidance on this subject.
- **Funding the process.** Although one goal in pursuing either collaboration or consolidation may be to find operational cost savings, rarely will that cost reduction fund the expenses incurred in both planning and implementation. Additional funds are almost always needed to support the process. The guidebook does not address how to identify and secure the financial resources necessary to see either process through.
- **Implementing a consolidation.** This guidebook does not address every detail of implementing a consolidation once there is approval from the combining districts and their LAFCOs. The tools offered here will be broadly applicable to any consolidation, but the use of outside experts to bring together financial systems, human resources, and other details is advised.

Disclaimer: This is a guidebook for district board members and district staff. It is not a legal treatise. Analysis and strategies offered are not and should not be construed as legal advice. Before proceeding on any course of action relating to the options discussed in this guidebook, RCDs should consult with their general counsel.

Part 2

Working with other organizations is always a bit of a dance. Like any dance, it benefits from a good partner and good choreography.

For partners to be effective, like dancers, they need to understand what each does well and know what is expected. Good partners anticipate as well as respond. Their success is interdependent with that of their partner.

Good choreography gives everyone an understanding of how to move together. It doesn't have to be rigid, but it does need to provide a clear guiding principle that helps each partner understand how to align their strengths to support the other. The more effective the partnership, the more elegant this dance.

This section will focus on one early fundamental question: ***What is the best way to dance?*** It will explore the spectrum of collaboration options, and define the conditions and opportunities for successful consolidation. Districts will be able to see how those options can guide them toward greater stability and impact.

Assessing Your Situation

Organizations come to the table to explore collaboration or consolidation for several common reasons:

- **Crisis.** The organization faces the loss of funding. A key leader has left. There is some major unexpected turn of events. Resulting from these or other crisis events, an RCD must consider reducing its services.
- **Opportunity.** This typically happens through casual conversations among peers, such as staff from two districts talking at the end of a day of regional meetings. One district may lack the expertise that another district has in abundance or shares as a need. If necessity is the mother of invention, opportunity is her sister.
- **Outside Pressure.** A major funder has strongly "suggested" that two districts collaborate or consolidate. Sometimes funding is contingent upon groups taking this step.

Whether groups are responding to a crisis, pursuing an opportunity, or feeling outside pressure, there is a core principle of collaboration that must drive the relationship: ***Working closely together must have clear benefits for every partner.*** Without reciprocity, the burden on one of the partners can begin to chafe. It is difficult to sustain a durable, high-value partnership unless both sides see significant value in the relationship.

As a first step in any partnership exploration process, potential partners need to understand their own strengths, vulnerabilities, and capacity needs. Here are a few resources that can help.

For partners to be effective, like dancers, they need to understand what each does well and know what is expected.

Through participation in the analysis and discussion, board and staff members form a shared understanding of the district's organizational challenges and opportunities.

Quick assessment

In the Toolbox, a two-page **Quick Self-Assessment** (Tool #1) gives each RCD a starting point to help gauge its capacity needs. It focuses on four areas of district operations: board governance, finance, strategy/programs, and human resources. It also provides an opportunity to reflect on prior experience with collaboration and what the district could bring to a new partner.

RCDs also may want to start to identify their strengths and gaps. A **Situation Analysis** (Tool #2) can help each district understand what it does best, where it needs shoring up, and where there might be opportunities to do more through a collective effort.

For both tools, it is important for each director and staff member to complete the analysis individually. The results can then be compiled and discussed as part of a board or committee meeting. Through participation in the analysis and discussion, board and staff members form a shared understanding of the district's organizational challenges and opportunities.

Detailed assessment: RCD Vision and Standards

Districts that have used one or both tools above for a quick scan may also want to do a deeper assessment of their RCD's organizational effectiveness. They may be interested in evaluating their organization using the **RCD Vision and Standards.** The *Vision and Standards* grew out of work that the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) led, starting in 2014. CARCD worked with the California Department of Conservation (DOC), as well as leaders from RCDs from around the state, to develop a set of standards and best practices for RCDs. Their goal was to help RCDs become more *relevant, excellent, and visible* in the delivery of locally-led conservation in their communities.

The RCD Vision and Standards outlines three "tiers" of effectiveness:

- **"Tier 1"** describes the minimum legal requirements all RCDs must meet under current state law. For example, Tier 1 calls for annual reports to the State Controller, ethics training for board members, adoption of Conflict of Interest policies, compliance with the Brown Act public meeting laws, independent yearly audits, and reporting to LAFCO, among other requirements.
- **"Tier 2" and "Tier 3"** go beyond the minimum legal requirements to articulate how districts could increase their effectiveness to provide better services to their communities and constituents. Tier 2 and Tier 3 districts generally have more capacity and greater sophistication.

The ***RCD Self-Assessment Workbook*** (included in Part 5, Toolbox) helps a district identify where it stands on this spectrum of organizational capacity and understand the degree to which it currently meets minimum legal requirements. Completing this workbook will require internal investigation into past activities and decisions: Has the district adopted certain policies? Has it submitted the annual reports? Has the board received the required training?

After completing the workbook, an RCD board may realize the district faces a heavy lift just to comply with Tier 1 requirements. Combining forces with another district could create more capacity and efficiency, while still maintaining a "local face" for the work of the RCD. Alternatively, while the district may meet minimum requirements, completing the workbook will help identify areas where it may want to improve.

Three Core Questions

Whether potential partners are planning to collaborate or consolidate as a way to increase their impact, they need to work through a sequence of three core questions.

- **Why *would* we? *What are the upsides and advantages of working together? What's to be gained?*** Presuming that this question identifies opportunities and positive potential, the groups are ready to answer the next question.
- **Why *shouldn't* we? *What are the risks and disadvantages? Are there any red flags or issues that can't be resolved?*** This question demands that all partners make sure that each group stands to gain from a closer relationship with the others. This question is important in a collaborative relationship; it is absolutely essential if the question on the table is consolidation. In consolidation, this deep exploration is known as due diligence, and it's as complex as it needs to be to understand the risk. If exploring this second question does not turn up any insurmountable difficulties, partners can move on to the third question.
- **How *could* we? *What could it look like specifically, if we moved forward together? How do we implement our partnership?*** This is the point when groups agree on how they will operationalize their collaboration or consolidate their operations. There are many, many ways in which this could be structured, all based on the specific needs and benefits of the partnership. It's critical for groups to know that this does not have to be an unflinching march to consolidation. Adaptive thinking is the key concept here.

When RCDs contemplate working together to have more impact, it benefits them to understand what it takes to create a successful, durable partnership.

The Decision Matrix (Tool #3) can help districts start to answer that first question, **Why *would* we?** Organized as a sequenced set of questions, this tool can help RCDs consider the opportunities and challenges they face, and whether they can handle them alone. The foundation of this tool is an honest self-appraisal that any organization must make about its own capacity and the energy that it can commit to the work. Groups that lack staff or an engaged board, and have no clear path to secure either, may quickly see consolidation as a strategic option to ensure that their communities are still served by an RCD. Groups that have staff but nonetheless have capacity gaps that others could fill may be compelled to consider collaborative relationships with adjacent districts.

When RCDs contemplate working together to have more impact, it benefits them to understand what it takes to create a successful, durable partnership.

Effective Partnerships

As described earlier, opportunities, crises, and outside pressure can be drivers for organizations to work together. So can the desire for reducing competition for funding, the chance to develop joint programs, or the potential for sharing staff or financial resources.

No matter what they hope to achieve, long-lasting, mutually beneficial partnerships need these ingredients to be effective:

1. Shared and clear purpose. Why do the districts want to work together? Partners may have initial ideas to start off the discussion, but to be effective, they need to have a strong reason for coming together — a shared purpose.

2. The right partners. Are all the right people at the table? Make sure that all who have a stake in the outcome have a voice in the process. The range of perspectives of those providing input should reflect those of the communities the district(s) serves.

3. Clear roles and responsibilities. Who is empowered to make decisions? Carefully consider which decisions require formal ratification by partners in the collaboration. Clarity is essential because, in collaborations, the potential for friction and failure is greater than in a single group.

4. Interpersonal relationships. How do people from the different districts get along? Groups collaborate; people form relationships. People at the right levels and roles in their respective groups must invest time, care, and attention to develop productive working relationships that will lead to a successful collaboration. They take each other's measure. They learn each other's strengths, weaknesses, and styles. They develop trust, respect, and even friendship. This "social capital" pays long-term dividends for collaboration and beyond. Working together develops shared, intentional culture.

5. Basic skills and good work habits. How will the partners work together? Most of the "rules" of collaboration, and most of the skills of good collaborators, are in the basic toolkit of healthy groups and effective professionals: good communication, strategic thinking, creative problem-solving, and personal and organizational accountability.

6. Shared leadership, recognition, and risk. How will the partners share? Leadership can be difficult to exercise within a group of peers. Everyone wants to be sensitive to the needs of others, especially early in the process. Recognition must also be shared. When one entity is formally in the lead, these challenges may be especially tough.

7. Accountability. Who answers to whom? Be clear about the level of authority individuals have to act on behalf of their RCD. Each partner needs to be accountable somewhere—to each other and to the outside world. By holding one another accountable in a respectful and effective manner, the partnership can manage the quality of its collective work.

8. Fair and effective dispute resolution. What happens when people disagree? Partners need a way to resolve differences and move forward when, for example, one group doesn't follow through on its commitments.

9. Dedicated capacity. Is each participating group willing to commit staff time to the collaborative? In successful collaborations, members ensure they have sufficient capacity to run the partnership, as if the collaborative were part of its own organization. This way, the group gets things done, and no one is left holding the bag. As with so much in partnerships, reciprocity is key.

10. Sound structure and governance. How will partners make decisions? Policies and procedures, codified in an operating agreement, define how groups will work together and behave. Clear agendas guide decision-making, and minutes document the group's decisions. Communications protocols help define when and how partners will share information about the discussions.

11. Agreements about money. How will the partners handle joint funding? Co-managing substantial funding requires greater formality in systems, communication, etc.—and it's best done up front. If the partnership is clear about what it wants to achieve, it is easier to answer hard questions about where to invest.

12. Transparency. Is there transparency among the members of the group? Collaborative work is best supported when intentions are clear and aligned, all partners are in the loop on decisions through good internal communications, and there is trust between the member organizations.

13. Time and patience. How much time can people devote to the process? It's best not to rush into a partnership. Take time to understand each partner's needs, develop relationships, and examine all the possible ways that the groups could collaborate. Practical experience together, working on real projects where groups have defined common ground, builds trust and shared culture over time.

Not every element will be in place from the beginning, but, over time, they will become critical for the success of a collaboration. If collaboration leads to a consideration of consolidation, these elements will be even more important.

The importance of trust

There comes a time in almost every collaboration when those relationships are tested.

Durable collaborations of any kind are transactions between two or more organizations. But the transaction won't be successful without developing good relationships between people. There comes a time in almost every collaboration when those relationships are tested. Trust among the individuals leading the collaboration discussions will help them through those times when challenges arise.

Rarely do collaboration discussions begin with people who don't already know each other to some degree. Proximity is often where the seeds of collaboration are planted: groups working close by may be more of a "known quantity" to one another and ripe for potential partnership. That said, serious collaboration demands more from those relationships. **Making trust a priority early in the talks with potential partners will increase the likelihood of success.**

It is easy to rush into talks about the potential collaboration details before the relationships are ready. One of the guiding principles of successful collaboration is "take it slow." Share a cup of coffee or a meal. Take a hike. Get to know each other. It's best to listen more than talk. Keep looking for new and better questions for each other. Prospective partners should try to get to know one another before diving into the details of a closer relationship—something akin to dating before marriage.

Having built a trusting relationship, districts will be far better equipped to handle the twists, turns, and uncertainties of any partnership. A trust issue that develops later in the process shouldn't be ignored, however. Partners should talk about it at the first sign of any concerns.

Finally, it's important to extend the trust individuals have built with each other to include the rest of the organization. This can be done by facilitating conversations with other leaders in each district so they are understood and feel a part of the decision. Bringing everyone along ensures that both groups are completely ready, with everyone in the organization committed to participating.

Pitfalls to Avoid

It's important for partners to stay strongly connected and not get too far out ahead of each other. Clear and transparent communication is especially helpful. Failure to bring everyone along can lead to some very difficult journeys. It can be helpful to present regular updates to the directors of participating districts. Consider hosting joint gatherings for board members, both to ensure that everyone receives the same information at the same time and to build relationships across groups.

Clear and transparent communication is especially helpful.

Baggage from prior experience

For many of California's RCDs, embarking on a collaborative exploration process may not be their first experience with collaboration or with the potential collaborative partners. There may be some air to clear before establishing a new partnership. Part of building trust is being open and honest about what did and didn't work well in the past. What's different this time? Have people incorporated the lessons they learned? Do they have additional resources that they didn't have last time? What needs to be different? Prospective partners may need to focus more time in the exploration phase to making sure they are ready to re-engage with the same partners.

Challenging internal dynamics

In Parts 3 and 4 of this guidebook, several examples of commitments and operating agreements will help groups considering collaboration or consolidation. Even with these foundational pieces, internal interpersonal dynamics can continue to challenge partners' trust, confidence, and commitment to group process. These can include:

1. Communication. Clear, honest communication can be hard. Sometimes, partners ignore red flags at their peril. When partners fail to share information regularly or to keep open lines of communication with each other, it can be difficult to maintain connection, trust, and accountability. Email can be a poor communications device for sensitive or tense subjects, because it can be easily misinterpreted.

2. Internal buy-in. While a district manager or an individual director might see a partnership opportunity, at some point the rest of the group needs to share the vision of what's possible in pursuing collaboration. Even before "buy-in" needs to be formal, there should be enough internal agreement to support exploring options with peers at a neighboring RCD. Potential collaborations may be derailed or delayed when board members learn about elements of an agreement late in the process and pump the brakes.

3. Performance. Partners will come to rely on each other. When one partner can't perform, the partnership is on the hook for the results. In the future, the partners may be cautious about seeking future shared commitments, especially sensitive deliverables often associated with grants. Being late on deliverables impacts everyone in the collaborative – so it's critical for partners to be able to make good on their commitments.

4. Quality control. Grant applications or communication materials represent the whole partnership. A peer review process can help address differences in writing skills: someone with a good idea can frame the idea on paper, and a strong writer / editor can sharpen the idea in a grant proposal, website, press release, or other material to make sure it reflects the group as a whole.

5. Solo decision-making. When one group makes decisions that commit the collaborative or that impact others without group input, the entire partnership is at risk. These sorts of behaviors are the opposite of collaborative, and compromise the fundamental fabric of trust.

6. Staff succession. At the heart of any collaboration is a group of people working together. Cultivating strong relationships based on trust is critical; passing an institutional relationship to a new individual is difficult. Particularly when a partner group experiences multiple leadership transitions over successive years, such transitions put a strain on partnerships in the need to onboard new leaders.

External risks

Collaboration isn't easy, largely because whenever human beings are involved there is the potential for things to get messy. External factors can also push against groups' ability to successfully work together.

1. Community perception. Diverse constituencies across communities can present a challenge when some partners lack credibility with specific audiences. Over time, organizational reputations are burnished or tarnished by interactions with the public. These may bleed over to affect the community's perception of other groups in the collaborative. Members of a partnership need to be careful about jumping into things that could damage a partner's reputation.

2. Credit. If credit for shared success is constantly taken by individual groups, it minimizes the partnership, and the value of the collective may be in question. It's nice to believe that credit is infinitely divisible, but this is only true if credit is given away generously by all involved.

3. Loss of funding. Participation in a collaborative may potentially confuse funders or risk that they will shift their giving from one partner to another in the collective. For groups exploring consolidation, county policy and budget constraints must be factored into the equation. For example, each of two RCDs serving a single county may receive $80,000 in county support – or $160,000 for the two districts – because the county's policy is to provide $80,000 to each agency within its borders. If those two RCDs consolidated, the new district could be limited to the per-agency allocation of $80,000. In such cases, collaboration may provide additional benefits.

Bottom line

Partnership takes extra work. It requires an investment. It should make sense as an investment that pays dividends that increase the RCD's capacity, with payoff that's often measured in years, not months. It can also take repeated tries. Good partnerships don't always come out right the first time.

With everything that has been described above about what it takes to work together effectively, how do groups know whether they should collaborate or consider consolidation? Working through the questions in the **Decision Matrix** (Tool #3) can help RCDs define the right path given their situation. Preliminary work done to this point—answering **"Why *would* we?"** in particular—helps position groups to answer the question of what form of partnership is right. As with so much in organizational structure, form follows function.

At the heart of any collaboration is a group of people working together.

Collaboration is appropriate when groups share a goal that no single group can accomplish alone but that is within reach if the groups work together.

The Heart of the Matter: Which Pathway?

When Collaboration is the Right Path

Collaboration is appropriate when groups share a goal that no single group can accomplish alone but that is within reach if the groups work together. They want to remain independent organizations, but they also want to have more impact, provide better services, or preserve access to multiple funding streams. Examples of district collaborations include joint programs, joint grant-seeking, and even a shared district manager. Collaboration may be a good choice for a district when one or more of the following conditions is true:

- The district has staff, though its staff capacity might be limited.
- The district finds an opportunity that it can't step into alone.
- Other organizations with complementary skill sets operate nearby.
- Maintaining a local identity is important.

For districts that think collaboration may be the right path, go to **Part 3, Durable Collaboration**.

When Consolidation is the Right Path

In some cases, the best course may be for districts to pursue consolidation by combining structurally into a single RCD that serves the geographic area previously served by multiple districts. There is considerable precedent for RCD consolidations, which are facilitated by geographic proximity and generally driven by a desire for greater financial sustainability, efficiency, and program impact. Some of today's RCDs are the result of earlier consolidation efforts that brought one or more RCDs together to become a single entity. Examples include the consolidation of East Lake RCD and West Lake RCD to become Lake County RCD, and the consolidation of South Sonoma RCD and Sotoyome RCD to create the Sonoma RCD. Remember when consolidation is not the right answer: Shotgun marriages formed to impress funders or respond to the pressure of a local or state agency are often doomed from the start.

Consolidation may be a good choice if one or more of the following conditions is true:

- One or both districts has a board of directors that is largely defunct, or is limited to an insufficient few
- One or both districts has very limited funding, and long-term sustainability of the district is in question
- One or both districts has no staff and no path to hire them
- One or both districts has been inactive for some time and getting re-energized seems unlikely

Consolidation may also be a highly strategic option from an efficiency and impact perspective. Two or more strong districts serving adjacent territories may decide to consolidate operations simply as a means of gaining economies of scale and doing more for their communities. Sometimes this is facilitated by a staff leadership transition, when one of the district managers moves on from the organization.

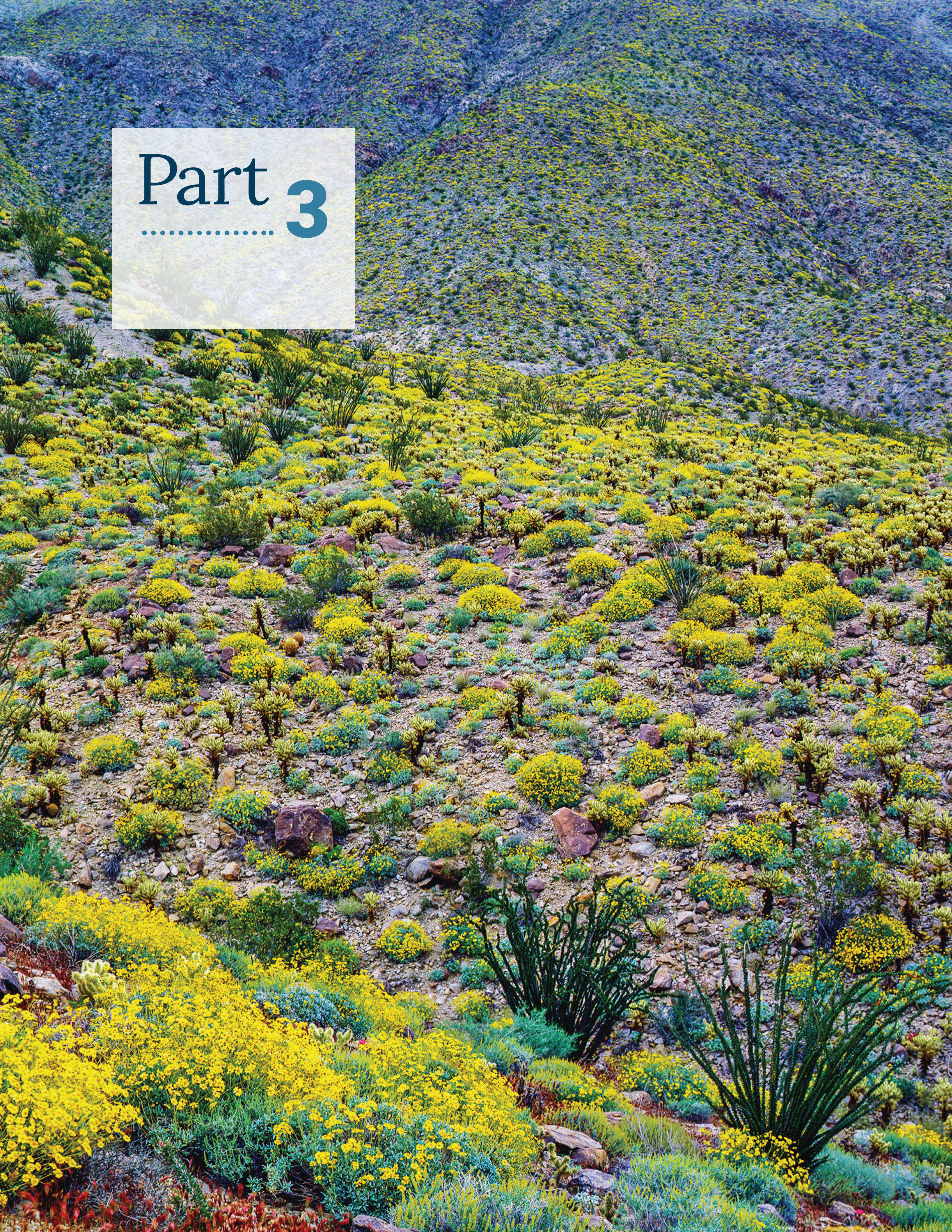
For districts that think consolidation may be the right path, the details for this work are found in **Part 4, Consolidation.**

Resources for This Section

In **Part 5, Toolbox,** districts will find the following tools:

- **RCD Self-Assessment Workbook (based on the RCD Vision and Standards)**
- **Tool #1: Quick Self-Assessment**
- **Tool #2: Situation Analysis**
- **Tool #3: Decision Matrix**

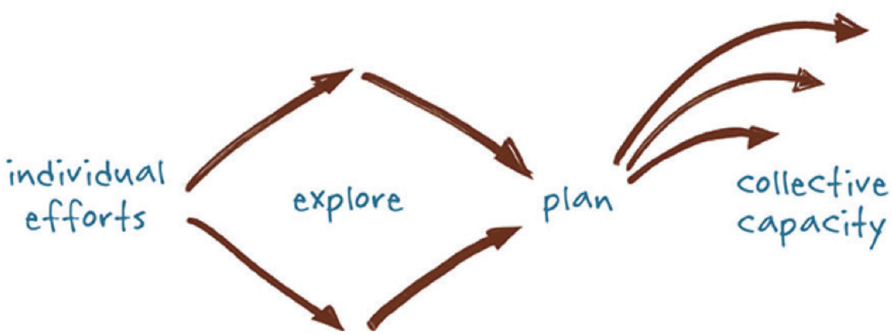
Part 3



Why collaborate? It's simple: more impact and greater resilience. Any potential collaboration needs to be viewed through a lens of building lasting capacity. If working with other districts isn't going to increase an RCD's ability to do more and to sustain its work over time, it may not be a good investment. The key word here is more. Partnering with others should result in:

- More of something the district already does
- More of something the district wants to do but has not had the resources to do
- More funding, more staff, more of something that allows the district to increase its impact
- More resilience to ensure the group will be here for future generations

When groups come to the table, bringing individual strengths and complementary skills, knowledge, and community connections, the realm of "what's possible" may be substantially expanded. When groups work closely together, their collective capacity offers the potential for bigger results and greater impact.



It's important for partners to be realistic about the investment: collaboration requires significant work up front. Organizations that are considering a partnership need to get to know each other, and work through the details. The long-term return on investment should look like the classic synergy equation: **1 + 1 = 3.**

This part of the guidebook will help take RCDs through the steps of exploration and planning for collaboration. Careful, intentional collaboration may open the door to other partnership opportunities. It's possible that exploring collaboration may lead to a decision to consolidate. Districts that discover that consolidation is the right path can move seamlessly from this section of the guidebook to the next. But first, a focus on durable collaboration—the why, what, and how of creating a robust, long-lasting partnership.

When groups come to the table, bringing individual strengths and complementary skills, knowledge, and community connections, the realm of "what's possible" may be substantially expanded.

Collaboration At-A-Glance

What are the steps in the process?	How long does this take?
1. Explore What's Possible	
Why would we? RCD clarify their reasons for wanting to collaborate. What-if meetings. RCDs get to know each other's strengths and learn about their respective programs. Share hopes and concerns. Work through collaboration checklist. **Brainstorm.** Identify what might be possible if the RCDs collaborate. **Agreements.** Clarify early commitments about participation and decision-making. **Leadership.** Form a collaboration team to guide the process.	These early commitments and process decisions can be made in one or two meetings.
2. Evaluate Options	
Opportunity Workshop. Share information about each district's strengths and gaps. Brainstorm possible collaborative opportunities. Explore possible roles for each partner. Clarify questions to be answered and prepare for planning.	A one-day meeting works well. Some groups benefit from multiple shorter meetings over a few weeks or months.
3. Plan the Partnership	
Why shouldn't we? Pause to see if there are reasons not to proceed. Evaluate the relative effort and relative impact of different possible collaborative projects. **How could we?** Plan the details of how the RCDs will work together. Clarify roles and responsibilities. Define protocols for decision-making, meetings, and communication protocols.	Working out these details might take several weeks or months, depending on the partners' degree of trust.
4. Document the Collaboration	
Agreement. Based on the decisions made in the prior step, codify partners' agreements about how they will work together. The form of agreement could be a Collaboration Charter, Operating Agreement, MOU, or other document.	This step can be completed in just a meeting or two. It helps to circulate a draft for review by partners.

The Collaborative Spectrum

RCDs partner in a variety of ways to share resources and leverage their impact. Their collaborations are as unique as the organizations that come together. That's largely because collaboration has many forms. One size does not fit all. Collaboration can mean anything from working together to achieve a common goal to sharing information to sharing staff or more.

Sharing information is an example of a low-cost collaboration. There is minimal downside or risk to that relationship; by the same token, the potential to do more or have more impact may also be low. This risk-reward relationship is true across the spectrum of collaboration. Consider some examples of various types of RCD collaborations that have taken place over the years, with varying degrees of commitment and benefit. The range of ideas here suggests that to some degree, districts are limited only by their creativity and willingness to work together:

- **Joint programming.** Multiple RCDs apply jointly for a grant to implement projects. This may be a short-term relationship just for the duration of the grant or could continue over multiple grants.
- **Staff-sharing.** One district arranges with a neighboring district to share the technical know-how of one of its half-time staff members, a civil engineer. This gives both districts access to the technical skills they need that neither on its own can afford full-time.
- **Administrative authority.** An RCD serves as the employer of record for a staff person who serves the local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office.
- **Alliance.** Multiple districts agree to work together to educate state legislators about the need to fix state contracting rules that hamper RCDs' ability to carry out projects on private land.
- **Joint Powers Authority.** Multiple districts in a region come together to jointly exercise common powers or to form a new, legally separate organization that is jointly run by the partners.

Every collaboration is shaped by unique circumstances, history, and internal cultures. Collaboration is a means to an end, not the end itself. The "end" is better service to the community and greater resilience.

CASE STUDY: The Difference Funding Can Make

After the designation of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, there was a lot of pressure on the region's six RCDs to support water quality in the bay. Funding significantly influenced the districts' collaboration: together, the National Marine Sanctuary, NRCS, the Farm Bureaus, and the six RCDs secured earmarked funding for development of a collaborative plan to improve the quality of water entering the national marine sanctuary. The funding made it possible to hire a coordinator for the collaborative. San Mateo RCD District Manager Kellyx Nelson commented, "What we accomplished through that collaborative was phenomenal, and got attention in Washington DC. The way the Chesapeake Bay is known here, Monterey Bay collaborative was known in DC." Despite national recognition for the strength of the collaborative work, when the funding was no longer available, the collaborative lost its RCD coordinator and became less effective.

RCD of Santa Cruz County and San Mateo RCD have continued to seek opportunities to collaborate, and see themselves as "sibling RCDs" with a shared Central Coast identity. The district managers are intentional about spending time together, meeting regularly for coffee to catch up and support each other. San Mateo RCD, RCD of Santa Cruz County, and RCD of Monterey County partner to implement an Integrated Watershed Restoration Program (IWRP). Of the various collaborations the districts have undertaken over the years, IWRP has endured because it has secured funding; other initiatives have not.

RCDs considering collaboration can take steps in four areas:

Collaboration among two or more RCDs

1. **Explore What's Possible.** The RCDs form a collaboration team to lead the process. They clarify the reasons for pursuing collaboration and identify a range of possible ways they might work together.
2. **Evaluate Options.** An opportunity workshop helps the groups evaluate and narrow their choices.
3. **Plan the Partnership.** The RCDs identify any reasons they shouldn't proceed. Barring none, they define the details of their partnership, including goals and strategies, roles and responsibilities, and decision-making protocols.
4. **Document the Collaboration.** The partners codify their agreements about how they will work together.

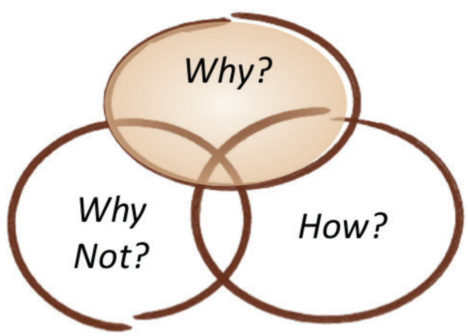
Each of these four areas includes multiple steps. The rest of this chapter will spell out the details in each step and provide tools to walk districts through the process.

Even before an RCD sits down to talk with prospective partners, it's best to have a clear understanding of why the district is at the table.

1. Explore What's Possible

Kick Off Collaboration

Why would we?



Even before an RCD sits down to talk with prospective partners, it's best to have a clear understanding of why the district is at the table. What's driving the desire to develop a strong partnership? Having done the initial **Quick Self-Assessment** (Tool #1) and **Situation Analysis** (Tool #2), a district may have a sense of what its capacity gaps might be. The **Decision Matrix** (Tool #3) may suggest that collaboration would be the best strategy for this district's situation. But what's the case for collaboration?

Make sure that the team sees collaboration as a win-win strategy and can convincingly describe what the district stands to gain by working closely with a partner. **The Case for Collaboration** (Tool #4) offers some space for each prospective partner to generate ideas. Having each group clarify its own reasons for wanting to collaborate might be helpful if there are individuals within the group who are not convinced that collaboration is worth the effort. Districts might find that answering this question reinforces the case for collaboration. Once they sit down with prospective partners to explore what's possible, they may discover even more reasons to collaborate. The more that this is a shared process of discovery, the more it will serve as important common ground.

Get to know each other

An early step forward in exploring collaboration opportunities is to commit to at least one "what-if" meeting. At this stage, the notion is that each district brings one to two board or staff members to the table for an informal discussion of what's possible — as when several North Coast RCDs sat down together to learn more about one another's strengths and the potential for doing more together. Even if the discussion goes nowhere beyond this early stage, the process may help strengthen relationships with and build trust among neighboring RCDs in the region. Districts may identify opportunities for informal alliances or partnerships with other RCDs in the region that will expand their individual organizational and regional capacity, as well as increase their relevance and effectiveness within the communities they serve. Districts in neighboring service areas might be able to turn competition for regional resources into collaborative uses of those resources.

Even if prospective partners already know each other well, a "what-if" meeting is a good time for each participant to share stories about their respective organizations and the programs they offer. Participants might share their case for collaboration, as well as their hopes and concerns.

The districts may also find it helpful to fill out the **Collective Assets** worksheet (Tool #5), either separately (prior to the meeting) or together. This worksheet helps groups identify the total human resources (board, staff, and volunteers), capital assets (vehicles, equipment, facilities, and technology systems), and financial resources (committed revenues or reserves) that each RCD brings. Keeping a tally of combined assets could set the stage for creative thinking about what might be possible if the districts joined forces.

At some point during the meeting, it's useful to assess each potential partner's readiness to collaborate. The **Collaboration Checklist** (Tool #6) may be helpful early in the exploration process. It may also be a useful tool to bring to future partner meetings to check on the health of the partnerships. As with many of the other tools in this guidebook, districts may want to ask their directors and staff to work through these materials individually, then share as a group to identify commitments they still need to meet or areas that need further exploration.

Blue-sky brainstorm

As a first exercise, districts can use **Collaboration: What's Possible** (Tool #7) as a starting point for exploring possibilities together. This tool will help a district identify its initial drivers for potential collaboration. It also helps groups think broadly about the possible ways they could work together, what organizational strengths each potential partner brings to the table, and potential roles each partner might play in a collaboration. Remember, at this stage, the point is brainstorming, not making any decisions or commitments.

Brainstorming is freewheeling, creative thinkingunfettered by convention or real limits. It gives complete permission to innovate. This is a chance to open the thinking process, before narrowing the options in the planning stage. It is valuable to challenge and hone ideas that emerge, without restricting them. At this step, a district might also ask everyone in the group to share examples or stories about their prior experiences with collaborations. What worked well? What didn't?

Brainstorming possible collaboration scenarios can make it easier for the partners to commit to working together. The second page of the What's Possible worksheet includes a creative exercise that can be done individually or in pairs, to help participants envision the future impact of the collaboration.

Make early commitments

Early commitments help build trust. After clarifying an interest in continued exploration of partnership opportunities, it might be time for a few initial agreements:

- **Commitment to participate and engage.** Can participants commit to attend meetings? Can they commit to participate and engage in the conversations actively? Having the same people come to each meeting, rather than bringing new people up to speed each time, will ensure continuity and make the process go more smoothly.
- **Commitment to inclusion.** Is there something the districts need to do to make it easier for people to attend meetings? When partners must travel distances to make a meeting, varying the meeting location ensures convenience and inconvenience are shared. Partners may need to be creative to ensure members feel fully included and respect the additional travel costs to participate if some groups are geographically isolated.
- **Commitment to safeguard sensitive information.** Prospective partners may find it necessary to share sensitive information (for example, a labor dispute). While districts are subject to open meeting and public records laws, partners may nonetheless want to ensure that such information will be protected as appropriate, unless the public interest would best be served by sharing it. Board presidents can serve as the sole points of contact for their respective organizations, for purposes of sharing the most sensitive information. The board presidents can then debrief with their respective boards, and each district can decide how to move forward. Some matters may be discussed in closed session. RCDs should work with their legal counsel to ensure they comply with state laws such as the Brown Act.
- **Commitment about how partners will make decisions.** There are many models of decision making. The collaborating groups need to establish how they will decide. Will they make decisions by simple majority, by consensus, or by some other methodology? Majority rule is always more efficient but can leave people behind. Consensus does a better job of bringing everyone along but requires understanding and commitment to the process. Finding the right balance is an important, early commitment.

Brainstorming possible collaboration scenarios can make it easier for the partners to commit to working together.

To the extent they can reach agreement on these important ingredients, it will help strengthen relationships, build trust, and lead to more successful and effective outcomes.

New partners may not be able to work through all potential areas of commitment in the first or even second meeting. To the extent they can reach agreement on these important ingredients, it will help strengthen relationships, build trust, and lead to more successful and effective outcomes. Keep meeting notes so groups can later refer to the decisions they made.

After covering the first four items on this list — kick off, getting to know each other, brainstorming, and making early commitments — it may be a good point to pause. Some groups might cover this ground in a day, while others may take more time to work through this. At this point, it may be worth reflecting on the prior work, and setting a date for another meeting to work through the next set of tools. Assign follow-up steps, such as ensuring all the potential collaborators have completed their internal self-assessment, before the next meeting.

Form a Collaboration Team

At some point, the process will need greater formality and accountability to move forward. Specifically, a successful collaborative effort needs champions to drive it and keep the momentum going. Each organization that participates in the partnership needs to bring its champion(s).

As it goes forward, an RCD will want to create a collaboration team of two people, either board or staff, to begin exploring collaboration options with one or more other districts. All-volunteer districts without staff leadership may nominate just one person from the board to participate in discussions. This team or representative will need to be sure to check back in with the group before making commitments on behalf of the RCD. While collaboration may initially be driven or facilitated by a few individuals, it is formalized by their respective organizations, as a whole. It's critical to keep leaders and the boards of directors informed all along the way.

CASE STUDY: LandSmart

LandSmart® is a regional collaborative program that helps land managers meet their natural resource management goals while supporting productive lands and thriving streams. The program was developed by the Sonoma RCD, Napa County RCD, Mendocino County RCD, and Gold Ridge RCD in collaboration with NRCS, land managers, and environmental agencies.

Through its collaborative structure, LandSmart® draws on the skills and expertise of each RCD to offer enhanced services. Its services include resource conservation plans, carbon farming plans, water security, and habitat improvement projects. By working collectively, the regional collaborative provides the communities served by these RCDs with a unique, cost effective conservation service that is specific to the region and offered through a trusted local organization.

2. Evaluate Options

Opportunity Workshop

During their first "what if" meeting, districts considering partnering identified some opportunities to work together and reached some early commitments. Now they are ready to develop a deeper understanding of each other's strengths and limitations, and to identify the most likely collaborative possibilities. The next steps are designed to be completed in a half-day or full-day meeting together.

Share internal assessment information

The **Quick Self-Assessment** (Tool #1) and the **Situation Analysis** (Tool #2) gave each group some insights into its own organization. The self-assessment process puts a spotlight on areas in the organization that need improvement, or that could benefit from collaboration with a partner with strength in those areas. When partners share what they have learned about their respective organizations from the self-assessment work, it's possible to see whether they may be able to help one another.

This is where trust is especially important. Groups may discover that they have to share information that is usually kept confidential. For example, one district may have to share that it has difficulty submitting certain reports on time, that its funding is about to run out, or that it is involved in a labor dispute. It's best if groups review the commitments they have already made and confer with their legal counsel before sharing such sensitive information.

As each district shares information from its own capacity assessment and reviews the **Collective Assets** worksheet (Tool #5), the partners will start to see where they already have strengths together and what pooled resources they have access to.

After the partners have shared their assessment information and the collective assets are tallied, debriefing the worksheet with partners will highlight where groups have shared interests and complementary assets. It may also point to areas where one group has assets and the other does not. It may be helpful to make notes about areas where there is a mismatch of assets.

Identify collaboration possibilities

From the "blue sky" brainstorming done earlier with the **What's Possible** worksheet (Tool #7), now it's time to separate the wheat from the chaff. Districts have finite resources. Where is it important to put the focus? Which of the ideas are most practical and implementable? The **Priority Focus Filter** worksheet (Tool #8) can help each partner identify their priorities from the list. Some questions for districts to keep in mind:

It's best if groups review the commitments they have already made and confer with their legal counsel before sharing such sensitive information.

Remember, opportunities and threats are key drivers of collaboration.

- Which of your potential collaboration ideas do you think would be particularly effective to work on together?
- Which would be difficult—or impossible—to do on your own?
- Which would most likely increase the impact you have in serving your community or conserving natural resources?

A simple "voting" exercise in which each director chooses three possibilities from the list, and then groups tally the votes, may help reduce a long list to three or four priorities. That's a manageable number to review in the next stage.

For any option that is a shared priority for the partners, what skills and strengths could each partner provide, and what role could each partner play? Following that, the **Opportunity Matrix** worksheet (Tool #9) can be used to specify partners' roles for ideas where a sense of shared priority provides a reason to advance the collaborative idea.

Remember, opportunities and threats are key drivers of collaboration. Answering the question, "Why would we?" can lead districts to identify the reasons that a joint effort would make sense, either to step together into an opportunity better prepared to succeed or to respond to a common threat by banding together.

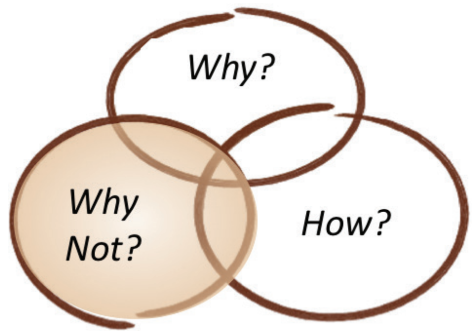
This is the last step for the exploration meeting. Before heading home, the prospective partners should try their hand at crafting a brief written statement (in one page or less) that:

- Makes the case for why the RCD should pursue this collaboration.
- Identifies the questions that need to be answered.

If the group can't develop the brief statement together at the end of this meeting, this task could be assigned to a smaller team of people—perhaps one from each RCD. This team would take the lead and circulate a draft to everyone else for review after the meeting for feedback and internal buy-in.

Allow enough time before the next meeting to check in as well as get answers to questions that have been identified. Set the next meeting date, and prepare for the planning stage.

3. Plan the Partnership



After the initial exploration meetings, each district should have a good idea of why it wants to collaborate, the individual and collective assets of the districts, and the potential capacity gaps they might fill for each other. The districts have identified some potential scenarios for how they would work together, and defined their priorities. Ideally, each participant has also shared the results of the exploration process internally with peers in their respective districts. Participants have confirmed their agreement on the opportunities to work together, to ensure everyone sees the value of the durable collaboration the partners are creating.

What's the Worst that Could Happen?

Why shouldn't we?

With good reasons to move forward in exploring a closer relationship, it's important to investigate any reasons that collaboration may not be a good idea. The potential collaboration scenarios may have disadvantages or result in unintended consequences. It's worth pausing to explore and anticipate.

The task at this point is to answer honestly the question, "why *shouldn't* we?" If answering "why *would* we?" generates positive reasons to work together, it would still be important to identify any obvious red flags that would preclude a close partnership.

By now, it's important to have everyone's input on the brief "case for collaboration" statement that each district prepared. If new concerns have been raised that need to be addressed more completely, or that preclude working together on the prioritized collaboration scenario, it may be necessary to re-examine scenarios before moving ahead to craft a partnership action plan.

The Toolbox offers a **2x2 Grid** (Tool #10) for this analysis. A grid like this can be used for different types of investigations. In this case, groups are looking at the **relative mission impact** (high or low) and the **relative cost** (high or low) of the collaboration they are contemplating. With this 2x2 grid, the job is to place the various potential collaborative opportunities into the appropriate quadrants.

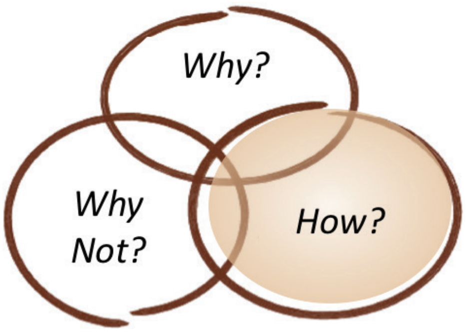
If, through this exploration, a district discovers it would like to pursue legal consolidation with one or more other districts, a comprehensive due diligence process will be necessary. The due diligence, described in the following section of this book, goes much deeper than 2x2 grids. It is designed to leave no stone unturned and to ensure that there are no liabilities, risks, or other potential hazards of bringing the organizations together. Districts that conclude consolidation is the right path can go to **Part 4, Consolidation.**

Ideally, it will make sense to prioritize efforts with high impact that don't cost much. By the same token, projects that don't deliver on mission and that are expensive will be easy to turn down. It's trickier to decide whether to pursue a collaborative project that has high benefit and is also expensive to implement.

If multiple organizations are looking to collaborate, this analysis might be done in pairs. If it's just one district and its potential partner, the two partners would do it together. In going through this step, it helps to keep track of where additional information might be needed.

Hammering Out the Details

How could we?



If there is a good reason to work more closely together and nothing that precludes continuing to plan a potential collaboration, two essential questions have been answered and it's time to move on to the third question: how could this collaboration work? This step begins to hammer out the details of a joint action plan for how the districts will proceed. This includes:

- **Goals and strategies.** Having clarified their purpose in collaborating and defined what success would look like in their collaborative project, the partners' next step is set goals that incrementally start to build toward that future vision. The **Goals and Strategies** worksheet (Tool #11) offers a place for districts to define what they want to accomplish together, and how.
- **Roles and responsibilities.** Who does what must be defined for the collaboration team, as a whole, as well as for the participating groups. It may become apparent that in the kind of collaboration under consideration it may be appropriate for one district to lead.
  - For example, when submitting a grant to fund a joint project, one district may have more time to write the grant, or may have someone on the board or staff who is a strong writer. The other partner or partners could provide input into the proposal.
  - As another example, two districts might decide to share the services of a staff person with technical skills, such as a soil scientist or civil engineer. The district that employs that staff person might develop a draft agreement to share staff services, and the other district would review and help refine the draft.
- **Leadership and decision-making.** It's important to be clear about who has authority over which decisions and how decisions will be made. The **Leadership and Decision-making** worksheet (Tool #12) includes key questions to answer, such as: How will each partner be represented at the decision-making table? How many representatives will each partner

have? How will groups choose (or change) their representatives? What kinds of decisions will collaborative leadership be asked to make? How will decisions be made? If the collaboration includes more than two partners, will all partners need to reach consensus, or will the group accept a majority vote?

- **Meetings and communications.** Now is the time to discuss and formalize decisions about in-person and electronic communications. Key questions to answer include: How often will the partners meet? Which other stakeholders need to be engaged and how? Where will meetings take place? What process, if any, will be used for taking meeting notes? What expectations do partners have about internal communications among members of the collaborative? The answers to these questions can be spelled out in a **Collaboration Charter** (Tool #13).

4. Document the Collaboration

After making the key decisions about how partnering districts will work together, groups will want to codify those decisions in a working agreement. The agreement should be clear about how the organizations will work together as a practical matter. It should define who participates in the partnership, what they hope to accomplish together, everyone's roles, and decision-making and communications protocols. The **Collaboration Charter** (Tool #13) can serve as a road map for documenting agreements. Partners may choose to codify agreements more formally in an Operating Agreement or a Memorandum of Understanding that they craft together. The **Operating Agreement Sample Table of Contents** (Tool #14) shows types of topics such an agreement could include.

After making the key decisions about how partnering districts will work together, groups will want to codify those decisions in a working agreement.

Resources for This Section

In **Part 5, Toolbox,** districts will find the following tools:

- **Tool #4: The Case for Collaboration**
- **Tool #5: Collective Assets**
- **Tool #6: Collaboration Checklist**
- **Tool #7: Collaboration: What's Possible?**
- **Tool #8: Priority Focus Filter**
- **Tool #9: Opportunity Matrix**
- **Tool #10: Why Shouldn't We? 2x2 Grid**
- **Tool #11: Goals and Strategies**
- **Tool #12: Leadership and Decision-making**
- **Tool #13: Collaboration Charter**
- **Tool #14: Operating Agreement Sample Table of Contents**

Part 4

The fundamental motivation driving consolidation of RCDs is the desire to provide California landowners with opportunities for voluntary resource conservation. It is in that context that a decision about consolidation should be made. This process follows the framework of the collaboration process described previously, but requires a higher degree of review and precision.

The best consolidation decisions take a long-term view. Nearly always, the short-term costs, disruptions, paperwork and expectations make a consolidation seem overwhelming. When seen through a longer lens, the goal of enhanced capacity to serve communities' resource conservation needs may provide the stronger and more appropriate justification for the investment.

At this point in the journey, districts considering consolidation need a roadmap. This chapter offers one, outlining steps in seven areas:

Consolidating two or more RCDs

1. Explore What's Possible. The RCDs clarify the reasons for pursuing consolidation. They learn about each other's strengths and respective programs. They share hopes and concerns.

2. Commit to Proceed. The RCDs form a Consolidation Task Force to lead the process. They commit to participate and clarify the reasons for pursuing consolidation.

3. Conduct Due Diligence. The RCDs conduct a full discovery process to uncover any issues that might preclude consolidation. This includes a review of board, staff, finances, facilities, programs, and services.

4. Create a Plan for Services. The RCDs compare their respective programs and services, and develop a plan for the services they'll provide, in response to a Municipal Service Review.

5. Prepare for the LAFCO Process. The Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) administers rules for consolidation. The RCDs contact their LAFCO to explain their interest in consolidation, and to seek LAFCO staff input. The RCDs prepare substantially similar resolutions for adoption by each district's board. They meet with LAFCO staff for guidance on their application for consolidation.

6. LAFCO Process. The RCDs submit their application for LAFCO review. LAFCO conducts the review according to guidelines in statute, and issues a decision. Barring termination by protest, the consolidation becomes effective.

7. Integrate Operations. The consolidated RCD has all the powers, duties, and liabilities of the predecessor RCDs. The new board is appointed by the county Board of Supervisors. The new RCD brings together all systems (e.g., office, payroll, accounting) and communicates with key stakeholders.

The best consolidation decisions take a long-term view.

Consolidation At-A-Glance

What are the steps in the process?	How long does this take?
1. Early Exploration	
Why would we? RCDs clarify their reasons for wanting to pursue consolidation. RCDs learn about each other's strengths and respective programs. Share hopes and concerns.	These early commitments and process decisions may take several meetings.
2. Commit to Proceed	
Leadership. Form a Consolidation Task Force to lead the process. **Agreements.** Commit to participate. Clarify the reasons for pursuing consolidation. **Protocols.** Define communications, decision-making, and stakeholder relations protocols.	These early commitments and process decisions can be made in one or two meetings.
3. Conduct Due Diligence	
Why shouldn't we? Examine in detail the board, staff, finances, facilities, programs and services to see if there are reasons not to proceed.	The timing depends on the complexity of the districts.
4. Create a Plan for Services	
Comparison. Compare the RCDs' respective programs and services. **Plan.** Develop a plan for services that describes what services the consolidated district will offer and when, how it will finance its services, and any infrastructure improvement or upgrades the local agency would require because of this consolidation.	These steps may take a few weeks or a few months, depending on the complexity of the districts and the service territory's needs.
5. Prepare for the LAFCO Process	
Inquiry. Contact local LAFCO to explain interest in consolidation and seek LAFCO staff input. **Resolutions.** Prepare substantially similar resolutions for adoption by each RCD board. **Guidance.** Meet with LAFCO staff for guidance on the application for consolidation. **Submittal.** Submit the application for LAFCO review.	It's best to meet with LAFCO staff early. This step may be done concurrently with due diligence and development of a plan for services.

Consolidation At-A-Glance continued

What are the steps in the process?	How long does this take?
6. LAFCO Process	
LAFCO decisions are guided by the Sphere of Influence Review and Municipal Services Review, which look at current and future land use within the service area, the current and future need and capacity for service, relevant communities of interest such as agricultural producers, and the adequacy of services offered by special districts within the service area. LAFCOs are required to update these service reviews every five years, and to make these studies available on their websites. LAFCO actions, including the Sphere of Influence, are also subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Under certain situations the proposal may be exempt from CEQA. If the consolidation does not qualify for an exemption, the CEQA analysis looks at potential environmental impacts. Applications for consolidation are reviewed by LAFCO through the following process:	
Review. The RCDs' proposal for consolidation is circulated for comment to all affected public agencies in the area. Once LAFCO completes its service review, staff will take a position regarding whether the consolidation is the best option.	The entire LAFCO process can take as long as 18 months, sometimes longer.
Certificate of Filing. LAFCO issues a Certificate of Filing once the application is complete.	
Set a hearing date before the LAFCO Commission.	Within 90 days of Certificate of Filings.
Commission hearing. LAFCO commission reviews staff analysis, considers the proposed plan for services, and receives public testimony.	Within 35 days of the hearing.
Determination. LAFCO issues its decision.	Within 35 days of LAFCO's determination to approve the proposal.
Protest proceedings. Protests lodged by a critical mass of landowners or voters in the affected area trigger a protest proceeding. A protest of 50% or more overturns LAFCO's decision.	A 30-day reconsideration period following LAFCO's decision.
Reconsideration. Once LAFCO has made its decision, new information can be presented that was not available at the time of the hearing. The commission may hold an additional hearing.	
Completion. If there is not sufficient protest and all conditions of approval are satisfied, LAFCO issues a Certificate of Completion for the consolidated district.	
7. Integrate Operations	
Powers. The consolidated RCD has all the powers and duties of the predecessor districts. **Liabilities.** The consolidated RCD has all the liabilities of the predecessor districts. **Directors.** The Board of Supervisors appoints the Board of Directors. **Operations.** Bring together operations and systems, and communicate with key stakeholders.	

Each of these seven areas includes multiple steps. The rest of this chapter will spell out the details in each step and provide tools to walk districts through the process.

But first, it's helpful to understand the regulatory context.

A consolidation is one form of structural "reorganization" or "change of organization," as defined by state law.

State Law

A brief legislative history

RCDs are governed by state law. Any decision dealing with consolidation must be made with a clear understanding of the state statutes governing special districts generally and resource conservation district specifically, as well as the statutory powers and responsibilities of the agencies that oversee the consolidation process.

A consolidation is one form of structural "reorganization" or "change of organization," as defined by state law. The broad category of "change of organization" also includes annexations, detachments, and dissolutions. California Code defines the regulatory landscape for consolidation of resource conservation districts in two places: *Division 9 of the Public Resources Code and the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000*.

Division 9 of the Public Resources Code is very brief on this subject. In fact, it refers districts immediately to the other legislation for guidance. Public Resources Code Division 9, Chapter 5, Article 1 addresses consolidation in Section 9601: "Any two or more contiguous districts, or districts situated within the same geophysical area, organized under this division may consolidate in accordance with the provisions of the District Reorganization Act of 1965, Division 1 (commencing with Section 56000) of Title 6 of the Government Code."

The District Reorganization Act of 1965 was one of three enabling acts administered by Local Agency Formation Commissions until 1985. The other two acts were the Knox-Nisbet Act and the Municipal Organization Act (MORGA). In 1985, these three acts were combined into the first consolidated LAFCO Act, the Cortese-Knox Local Government Reorganization Act of 1985. Fifteen years later, this was reauthorized as the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000.

The Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 establishes procedures for local government changes of organization, including annexation to special districts and special district consolidations. LAFCOs, which have numerous powers under Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg, are charged with encouraging the orderly formation and development of local agencies. With specific regard to district consolidations, the LAFCOs' relevant powers entail acting on local agency boundary changes and ensuring the adequacy of services provided within those boundaries.

This part of the Guidebook explains the consolidation process using descriptions from the statute as well as plain language. Statutory citations from the Government Code, starting with Section 56000, are included in parentheses.

Glossary

Statutory language can be hard to follow. It's helpful to define the terms that are relevant to this process. As defined in the California Government Code starting with Section 56000, also known as the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000:

Term	Definition	Translation
"Change of organization" (GC §56021)	Includes "annexation to a special district," "consolidation of special districts," "a district dissolution," and "merger of a city and a district."	The boundaries of a government unit change in some way.
"Annexation" (GC §56017)	"The inclusion, attachment, or addition of territory to a city or district."	Adding new territory to the district.
"Consolidation" (GC §56030)	"The uniting or joining of...two or more districts into a single new successor district."	Two districts combine to become one.
"Service" (GC §56074)	"A specific governmental activity established within, and as a part of, a general function of the special district as provided by regulations adopted by the commission."	The programs and services RCDs provide in their communities.
"Sphere of influence" (GC §56076)	"A plan for the probable physical boundaries and service area of a local agency, as determined by the commission."	The physical area where the RCD provides services.
"Principal county" (GC §56066)	"The county having the greater portion of the entire assessed value, as shown on the last equalized assessment roll of the county or counties, of all taxable property within the districts for which a change of organization is proposed."	The county where most of the district is located.

Key requirements

There's a lot of detail in the statute. Some important factors to understand (again, with Government Code references in parentheses):

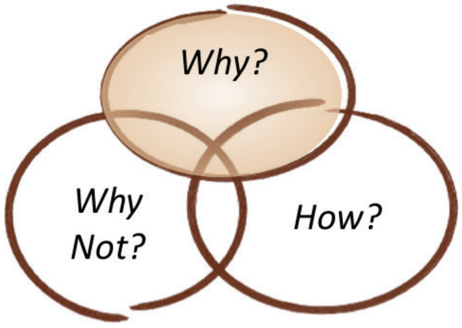
- **Contiguity and consent requirement.** Any territory annexed to a district must be adjacent to the district. Territories cannot be joined without the consent of the other district (GC §56119).
- **Service reviews.** LAFCO's powers include the review of services provided within the county's boundaries. Any determination made by LAFCO—such as approving a consolidation—must be consistent with the sphere of influence of the local agencies affected by the determination (§56375.5). Every five years, LAFCO is required to evaluate the adequacy of the functions provided by special districts within its geographic area. In conducting a service review, LAFCO "shall comprehensively review all of the agencies that provide the identified service or services within the designated geographic area" (§56430).
- **Fees.** The local LAFCO may charge fees for the proceedings that are under its purview, including "filing and processing applications, proceedings undertaken by the commission, amending a sphere of influence, [or] reconsidering a resolution making determinations" (§56383). Applicants may be required to pay the fees, or the commission may reduce or waive its fees "if it finds that payment would be detrimental to the public interest."

With this background in mind, below are the steps toward consolidation. Again, statutory references are included where applicable. A suite of tools is also included to support districts through the steps.

1. Explore What's Possible

Having done the initial **Quick Assessment** (Tool #1) and **Situation Analysis** (Tool #2), a district may have a sense of what its capacity gaps might be. The **Decision Matrix** (Tool #3) may suggest consolidation as the best strategy for the RCD's situation. For RCDs considering consolidation, it's best to be clear about their motivation. What would each RCD gain by joining forces?

Make the case for consolidation



One of the earliest tasks each RCD should do is clarify the reason consolidation is under consideration. The three core questions that this Guidebook introduced in Part 2, Decision Point, must be answered in depth in a consolidation process. The first of those questions is, ***"Why would we?"*** It is beneficial for each

RCD to articulate why it wants to pursue consolidation. Once the districts have defined the **Case for Consolidation** (Tool #18), they can incorporate it in the application to LAFCO.

Get to know each other

In a consolidation process, trust is vital. Even if prospective consolidation partners already know each other well, it is recommended that representatives from both groups meet to articulate their reasons for wanting to consolidate, as well as their hopes and concerns. Much of the consolidation process is driven by nuts-and-bolts requirements of LAFCO review. That said, when two or more organizations come together to combine operations, positive interpersonal relationships are helpful. When people know and respect each other, it increases the likelihood that the consolidated organization will be strong and impactful.

When people know and respect each other, it increases the likelihood that the consolidated organization will be strong and impactful.

2. Commit to Proceed

Leadership

Any process needs a team to guide it, including defining the process, defining roles and responsibilities, creating accountability for tasks, and ensuring follow-through on assignments. In a reorganization process, a Consolidation Task Force (or similar shared leadership group) will provide this leadership. The task force should have equal numbers of people from each RCD (ideally no more than two from each district). Participants may be directors or district managers.

The task force is charged with coordinating the due diligence process, ensuring that a Plan for Services is crafted, drafting the resolution for consolidation that each board will adopt, and following through on LAFCO requirements. The task force may delegate responsibility for certain tasks to specific individuals, but its overall job is to make sure that each step of the process is completed. And just as with the collaboration process described in Part 3, it's important for the people on this task force to spend time developing their relationships and building trust. The entire process will be more manageable if it is based on trust.

Districts can adapt the draft **Consolidation Task Force Charter** (Tool #15), sample **Consolidation Task Force Meeting Agenda** (Tool #16), and sample **Consolidation Work Plan** (Tool #17) for the team's use.

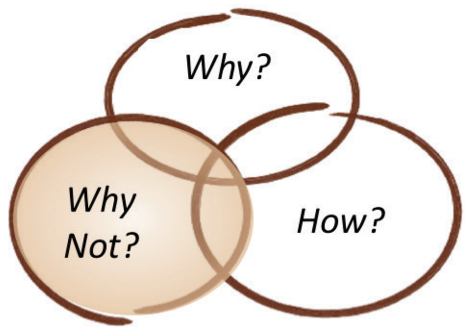
Agreements and Protocols

As with collaboration, it's critical that a consolidation process have the full participation of key people from each organization. It's also essential that districts agree how to share sensitive information, how they will communicate with each other internally, and how and when they will communicate with key external partners and stakeholders.

- **Participation.** Having the same participants on the task force throughout the process, rather repeatedly "onboarding" new people, will support a smooth process.
- **Inclusion.** Make it easy for people to attend meetings: vary the meeting location to make sure convenience and inconvenience (distance and time, which translate into cost) are shared.
- **Handling sensitive information.** During the due diligence process, participants will become privy to internal information. While districts are subject to open meeting and public records laws, partners may nonetheless want to ensure that sensitive information will be protected as appropriate, unless the public interest would best be served by sharing it. For example, board presidents can serve as the sole points of contact for their respective organizations, for purposes of sharing the most sensitive information, such as labor disputes, benefits packages, pending litigation, financial matters, and transfer of real property. The board presidents can then debrief with their respective boards, and each district can decide how to move forward. Some matters may be discussed in closed session. Confer with legal counsel how best to handle sensitive information in compliance with the Brown Act.
- **Communications.** Partners need to make a commitment about how they will communicate with each other and with their respective districts. How are the representatives from each district reporting back to their staff leader or board of directors? Communicating early and often can help identify any concerns before the discussion goes too far. Investments in integrating each district's decision-makers and ensuring their engagement pay dividends toward a smooth consolidation.
- **Stakeholder relations.** The districts that are considering consolidation will need to reach agreements about when and how to bring in county supervisors or LAFCO. They may also need an agreement beyond reaching out to partners at the county level: what about talking with other neighboring RCDs in the region? CARCD? Other core partners? Do the districts share any funders that need to be informed about the discussion?
- **Decision-making.** There are many models of decision-making. The districts need to decide how they decide: simple majority, consensus, or by some other methodology. Because consolidation is such an important decision, it is a best practice that the adoption of a consolidation resolution be made either by complete consensus or by a supermajority of the board of each district.

Districts can document their **Key Agreements** (Tool #19), either using or adapting the tool provided.

3. Conduct Due Diligence



For districts seeking to consolidate, thorough due diligence is critical to ensure that there is no reason for them not to proceed. Due diligence is a comprehensive exploration of the second of the three core questions, ***"Why shouldn't we?"*** The Consolidation Task Force leads this effort.

At this point, districts exploring consolidation can share the results of their internal **Quick Self-Assessment** (Tool #1) and **Situation Analysis** (Tool #2). These tools provide an initial level of review for the groups to learn about one another. Due diligence goes much deeper, seeking to leave no stone unturned. The **Due Diligence Topics and Questions** (Tool #20) guide districts through critical questions to be answered in four areas:

- Governance
- Finance
- Human resources
- Programs and services

Some of the key due diligence questions will have to be answered internally by each district first. The Consolidation Task Force may want to assign some of this initial information-gathering as "homework," with specific individuals taking responsibility for following through. For example, if the district managers have been meeting about establishing joint programming, and that led to a conversation about the potential to consolidate, is it time to bring in other staff members or directors? If board members have been meeting, is it time to get the district managers or staff accountants involved in the financial questions? If both districts currently have grant funding from a government agency, are both districts in good standing with the funding agency? Are both districts on track to meet deliverables? If not, what is the timeline and plan for completing the work?

Area of Review: Governance

This area of review includes the board of directors itself – its functions, composition, and other aspects of leadership. It also explores how each district's current board functions, in terms of how engaged the directors are, how hard or easy it has been to recruit directors, how the group handles decision-making, and other facets of board culture. A review of recent board meeting minutes will shed some light on some of these questions, but it will probably be most helpful for members of the Consolidation Task Force to sit down together with the due diligence questions on governance and discuss.

A thorough financial review may be the most important element of due diligence during the consolidation process.

The Governance topic area may also cover risk, contracted relationships, and administrative items like the name of the consolidated organization and its office location. Some of these items have implications for other areas of review (for example, contracts with agencies or funders are not only governance matters, they are financial matters) and could be shared with other review teams.

Area of Review: Finance

As with any marriage, money is a touchy subject. A thorough financial review may be the most important element of due diligence during the consolidation process. Each RCD's board of directors has a responsibility to ensure that it is not stepping into a hornet's nest of financial woes with its potential consolidation partner.

Financial review examines the financial condition of each district — assets and liabilities — and looks at all sources of revenue, timing of cash flows, financial planning cycles, investments, and reserves. Board members need to know whether grant contracts are in good standing, how the other organization manages risk, and what the financial impact would be of bringing the districts together under one roof. For example, if one district offers its staff a much less robust (and less expensive) benefits package than its counterpart does, there could be a cost to bring the two into parity. The cost could be money (for example, giving everyone the same more generous benefits package) or loss of talent (for example, if staff who previously enjoyed greater benefits decide to leave because of reduced benefits as a result of consolidation). These are important considerations.

If either or both districts prepare an annual audit of finances, it would be appropriate for a team with financial background review them, along with the annual budget, recent financial statements, and other relevant documents that can paint the full financial picture.

Special care must be taken when one RCD is supported by tax revenue and the district with which it is consolidating is not. Because tax revenue enjoyed by RCDs is tied to property taxes, and voted on by property owners in that territory, funding from property tax assessments received within the boundaries of one district cannot be applied to activities completed within another territory, even if the two RCDs that are consolidating are within the same county. The tax revenues earned within a territory must be used for the benefit of the landowners who paid those taxes.

Area of Review: Human Resources

Reviewing the personnel and human resources systems of each district seeking to consolidate is important to prevent ill will among staff or even loss of talent. This includes comparing current staff positions, salaries and benefits packages, and being thoughtful about the management capabilities needed in the district manager for the consolidated operation.

This analysis fits hand-in-glove with developing a Plan for Services. It's hard to say what staff the consolidated district will need if there hasn't been a decision on what programs the new district will offer. This part of the due diligence may help determine the way forward:

- **Inventory current staff.** For each district, make a list of current staff, their skills, and the combined value of each employee's salary and benefits packages.
- **Define programs and services.** Describe the programs and services the consolidated district will offer.
- **Define needed staff skills.** Make a list of the staff skills and competencies needed to successfully deliver the programs and services described above.
- **Evaluate alignment.** Compare the skills and competencies of existing staff with what's needed for the consolidated district. Develop a plan to address areas of overlap and any gaps between current and needed skills and competencies.

Even when everything else looks like it is in place for a successful consolidation, a mismatch of cultures can throw a wrench in the gears. Management expert Peter Drucker once said, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." Culture is sometimes defined as the collective behavior or "personality" of an organization. While culture is present in every organization, large and small, it can difficult to fully assess.

When two or more organizations are exploring ways to work together, they too often focus solely on what we do and pay little, if any, attention to how we do it. Some RCDs are more formal than others, some more risk-averse, more organized, or more egalitarian in their decision-making. If one organization is very formal and the other very casual, they will need to address this if they are going to combine staff and programs. Having organizational cultural differences isn't bad, but these differences in culture — and how the groups decide to address them — may be more significant than any other factor. Understanding those differences is critical if groups are going to succeed in bridging them. The consolidated district will need to be able to draw the best from the cultures of each organization to build a shared culture.

In addition to working through the human resources questions in the **Due Diligence** worksheets (Tool #20), the **Organizational Culture Scan** (Tool #21) will provide insights into the cultures of the districts considering consolidation. Districts can use this tool in one of two ways. The representative of each potential partner can complete the scan for their district, which provides one person's view of organizational culture. Alternatively, board and staff could complete the scan anonymously, and have a designated individual compile the responses. Results can then be tallied for both districts and compared.

Area of Review: Programs and Services

Comparing the RCDs' current programs and services, and their respective staff capacity and equipment, will make it easier for the group to think about what a consolidated RCD would do. This will set the stage for development of a Plan for Services (see below).

The last page of the **Due Diligence** tool includes an outline for how districts can summarize the findings within each of these topic areas. Compiled together in a readable format, this information will facilitate decision-making by the boards. It may be required as part of the application to LAFCO. It may also simply be helpful background information in the event of questions at the public hearing.

4. Create a Plan for Services

Before submitting their application to LAFCO for its regulatory review of the consolidation, RCDs need to prepare a plan for how the consolidated district will provide services within the affected territory. The Plan for Services is prescribed by Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg to include the following (GC §56653):

1. An enumeration and description of the services to be extended to the affected territory.
2. The level and range of those services.
3. An indication of when those services can feasibly be extended to the affected territory.
4. An indication of any improvement or upgrading of structures, roads, sewer or water facilities, or other conditions the local agency would impose or require within the affected territory if the change of organization or reorganization is completed.
5. Information with respect to how those services will be financed.

The Plan for Services will be evaluated by LAFCO (see below) to ensure it is sufficient to meet the community needs.

5. Prepare for the LAFCO Process

Consolidation can be initiated in one of two ways. Districts can make a proposal to consolidate, and submit their proposal to LAFCO. Or, LAFCO can initiate a consolidation if a special study, the Municipal Service Review, or the Sphere of Influence study makes that recommendation. Regardless of which scenario starts the process, LAFCO oversees the consolidation. The LAFCO process can take as long as 18 months, sometimes longer.

LAFCO proceedings for a Change of Organization are described in Part 3 of the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000. The legislation specifies the contents of the application to consolidate, requirements about public notice and public hearings, and the public's right to protest the consolidation.

Sphere of Influence Review and Municipal Services Review

LAFCO decisions are guided in large part by two interlocking reviews: a Sphere of Influence Review and a Municipal Services Review.

- The Sphere of Influence Review concerns the planning boundary, outside of an agency's legal boundary (such as city limits), that designates the agency's service area. This review looks at current and future land use within the service area, the current and future need and capacity for service, and relevant communities of interest such as agricultural producers, sewer and water users, and others.
- To prepare and to update a sphere of influence, LAFCO conducts a Municipal Service Review to evaluate the adequacy of the functions provided by special districts within its geographic area. A Municipal Service Review (MSR) is like an almanac of the district, providing information on activities, funding, and structure.

When it conducts a service review, LAFCO "may assess various alternatives for improving efficiency and affordability of infrastructure and service delivery within and contiguous to the sphere of influence, including, but not limited to, the consolidation of governmental agencies" (GC §56430). As a practical matter, this means that even if consolidation is something a district is only just considering for the first time, the LAFCO may have been thinking about it for a while, if its service reviews indicate lack of sufficient RCD services.

Under Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg, LAFCO is required to update these service reviews every five years. This helps LAFCO fulfill its role of evaluating the sufficiency of services provided in its region (GC §56425). For LAFCO to approve a consolidation, a current Sphere of Influence that includes a recent Municipal Service Review (MSR) must support joining the territories of two or more RCDs into a single service area. In other words, LAFCO must determine that the services provided by the districts seeking to consolidate are consistent with the community's needs. That judgment is codified by the MSR. If the MSR hasn't been updated in the previous five years, LAFCO is responsible for conducting this analysis — upon which rests its decision about the proposed consolidation.

Sometimes LAFCOs hire consultants to conduct these studies. Sometimes LAFCOs wrap the costs of these studies into the cost of the consolidation. It's essential for RCDs to understand whether their LAFCO is compliant with the state's requirements, and whether they will incur some of these costs as part of the consolidation process. LAFCOs are required to make these studies available on their websites.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

LAFCO actions, including the Sphere of Influence, are subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Under certain situations the proposal may be exempt from CEQA (there are various statutory and categorical exemptions). If the consolidation does not qualify for an exemption, then the CEQA analysis will begin with an initial study. The analysis identifies whether there are any potential impacts in any of 17 specific areas. The initial study could conclude a negative declaration is appropriate because there is no evidence the consolidation will have a significant impact on the environment. It could also point toward the need for mitigation that will lead to a negative declaration. Alternatively, the initial study could point to the need for a full environmental impact report.

6. LAFCO process

Patience is advisable, since this part of the consolidation process takes the most time.

What can districts expect when they initiate a consolidation process? Here are the steps as defined in statute — although districts should check with LAFCO to understand specific requirements and fees. A warning: these steps are very specific and are supported with greater detail in the statutes themselves. Patience is advisable, since this part of the consolidation process takes the most time. This overview should be helpful for navigation and overall understanding.

- **Application.** LAFCO specifies the form of an application to consolidate, but the contents are prescribed by law (GC §56652). The application must include a resolution to consolidate, passed by each board of directors. It is best to have the districts adopt substantially similar resolutions, because in that event, LAFCO must approve: "If a majority of the members of each board adopt substantially similar resolutions of application making proposals for the consolidation, the commission shall approve, or conditionally approve, the proposal" (GC §56853). (The Toolbox includes a sample resolution that districts can adapt. It may be advisable to review the resolution with legal counsel.)

  The application must also include a statement of the nature of the proposal, a map of the boundaries of the subject territory, data and information required for the Commission's decision-making (e.g., the Plan for Services), and the names of up to three officers or persons who are to receive the report and be mailed notice of the Commission hearing (GC §56652). The application may also include a proposed name for the new consolidated RCD (GC §56860.5).

- **Review.** Upon receiving an application, LAFCO staff begins analysis of the proposal. The proposal is circulated for comment to all affected public agencies in the area, including the county, any nearby special districts, and cities. The LAFCO Executive Officer has 30 days to determine if the application is complete or to request additional information (GC §56658). Once LAFCO staff completes its service review of resource conservation within the affected area, staff will take a position regarding whether the consolidation is the best option for continuing the level of service offered for the area.

- **Certificate of Filing.** Once the application is determined to be complete, the Executive Officer issues a Certificate of Filing and has 90 days to set a hearing before the LAFCO Commission (GC §56658).
- **Commission hearing.** At the hearing, the commission will review the LAFCO staff analysis, consider the proposed plan for providing services to the territory, and receive oral and/or written testimony (GC §56666).
- **Determination.** Within 35 days of the conclusion of the public hearing (GC §56880), LAFCO will make a determination regarding the proposal for consolidation (GC §56881). Its resolution making determination may approve, conditionally approve (GC §56885.5), or deny the application. Approval or conditional approval must conclude that the consolidation "promotes public access and accountability for community services needs and financial resources." LAFCO must also "assign a distinctive short-term designation to the affected territory and a description of the territory." Finally, it must "initiate protest proceedings pursuant to Part 4 (commencing with GC Section 57000) in compliance with the resolution." A consolidation of two or more districts can be ordered without confirmation by the voters (GC §57000) unless protests are lodged by a critical mass of landowners or voters in the affected area. The thresholds are: "at least 25% of the number of landowners within the territory subject to consolidation who own at least 25% of the assessed value of the land within the territory" or "at least 25% of the voters entitled to vote as a result of residing within, or owning land within, the territory" (GC §57077.2). In such a case, a protest proceeding must be held within 35 days of LAFCO's determination to approve the proposal. Refer to the "Protest proceeding" section below for additional explanation.
- **Protest proceeding.** The protest proceeding is a referendum on the LAFCO action. Either LAFCO staff or the commissioners conduct the protest hearing. Protests may be received verbally or in writing at the hearing. If there is greater than a 50% protest, the LAFCO action is overturned. Based on the type of district and whether the territory is inhabited or uninhabited, a majority protest means 50% or more of the registered voters, or in uninhabited territory or landowner-voter districts, 50% or more of landowners who own 50% of the assessed property value.
- **Reconsideration.** Once LAFCO has made its determination, there is a 30-day reconsideration period whereby new information can be presented that was not available at the time of the hearing (GC §56895). The commission may decide if an additional hearing is warranted based on the new information.
- **Completion.** If there is not sufficient protest and all conditions of approval have been satisfied, LAFCO will issue a Certificate of Completion that includes the name and boundaries of the consolidated district, indicating the successful completion of a change of organization (GC §57177.5).

Looking beyond a single county

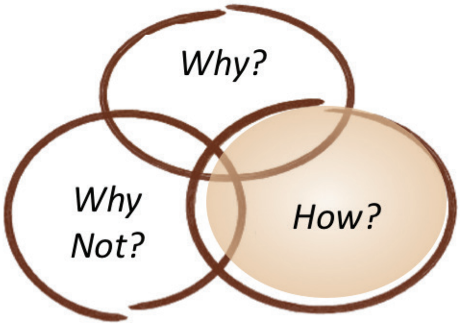
Lack of sufficient administrative resources, lack of capacity, lack of a full board complement—any of these can cause an RCD to fail in its attempt to serve its geography. Sometimes these organizational factors cause a district to look at other potential consolidation partners that are not RCDs, or even to look outside its geographic service area for a possible partner. If the districts that are seeking consolidation operate in two or more counties, "exclusive jurisdiction shall be vested in the commission of the principal county" (GC §56123). This means the principal county is responsible for following through on all requirements of notice, proceedings, reports, and records required by law.

Inactive districts

If a district lacks a functioning governance structure, has no persons who are accountable for delivering its programs, and fails to even manage a financial transaction for 12 consecutive months, the RCD may be compelled to dissolve. When a district has essentially become defunct, it may not be worth the effort to rejuvenate the board only so that the board can vote to consolidate into another district.

For an inactive district, dissolution and annexation into a healthy RCD may be the path of least resistance. (The inactive RCD must first be dissolved by LAFCO, because an RCD can't annex another district that has the same powers, even if the district has become inactive.) In annexation, LAFCO's analysis seeks to ensure there are no financial or service concerns. Financial review focuses on the ability of the territory being annexed to "provide sufficient taxes, fees, and charges, including connection fees, if any, to pay for the full cost of providing services." In terms of service capacity, the question is whether the district to which territory is being annexed will be able to provide services to the new territory (GC §56857).

7. Integrate Operations



Once districts have received their Certificate of Completion, they need to bring together their operations and set up the new organization. As a legal matter, three facts are immediately true for the consolidated district:

- **Powers and duties.** On the effective date of consolidation, the consolidated district has all the powers, rights, duties, and obligations of all the predecessor districts that have been joined in the consolidated district (GC §57500).
- **Liabilities.** The territory of the consolidated district also assumes the liabilities of its predecessor districts. It must pay whatever bills they have due, including revenue bonds or other contractual obligations, taxes or assessments, service changes, etc. (GC §57502).

- **New board of directors.** A new board is "selected in the manner provided by the principal act *[the law authorizing the establishment of the district].* If the principal act or the terms and conditions of the consolidation provide for the election of officers, they shall be nominated in the manner provided in the principal act and shall be voted upon at the special election or elections upon the questions of confirming the order of consolidation" (§57139). The consolidating districts can propose a board structure to accommodate the need for representation within a larger boundary. LAFCO staff will work with the districts to ensure appropriate representation.

What's also true is that the consolidated district has a body of work ahead of it to bring the operations of the formerly separate organizations under one roof. This includes:

- **Financial integration.** Bringing together payroll and benefits plans, charts of accounts, and other financial records.
- **Programmatic integration.** The Plan for Services has defined the programs and services of the consolidated RCD at a high level. Now is the time for more detailed annual work planning for program delivery—defining tasks, setting timelines, and identifying board and staff roles.
- **Human resources integration.** Bringing together the staff teams and leadership.
- **Creating a new culture.** Every organization has a culture, and now that two separate organizations have come together under a single roof, it will be important for team members to work together to create an intentional, new culture for the consolidated district.

Additional Considerations

Everything RCDs are and do is defined by statute. It cannot be emphasized enough that districts seeking to consolidate should confer with their general counsel and with their LAFCO early on, to understand the process and requirements.

It benefits California's communities to have strong local resource conservation districts with the expertise, commitment, and capacity to serve. Consolidation is a strategic pathway to building that capacity for districts that have struggled, and for enhancing impact and effectiveness in strong districts serving neighboring territories.

Resources For This Section

In **Part 5, Toolbox,** districts will find the following tools:

- **Tool #15: Consolidation Task Force Charter**
- **Tool #16: Consolidation Task Force Meeting Agenda**
- **Tool #17: Consolidation Work Plan**
- **Tool #18: The Case for Consolidation**
- **Tool #19: Key Agreements**
- **Tool #20: Due Diligence Topics and Questions**
- **Tool #21: Organizational Culture Scan**
- **Sample Resolution to Consolidate**

It benefits California's communities to have strong local resource conservation districts with the expertise, commitment, and capacity to serve.

Part 5

Toolbox

The RCD Self-Assessment Workbook, included on the pages that follow, is also available through the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts' website through the member portal. The 21 tools and two additional resources referenced in prior chapters of this guidebook are included in this section.

Decision Point	RCD Self-Assessment Workbook **Tool #1.** Quick Self-Assessment **Tool #2.** Situation Analysis **Tool #3.** Decision Matrix
Collaboration	**Tool #4.** The Case for Collaboration **Tool #5.** Collective Assets **Tool #6.** Collaboration Checklist **Tool #7.** Collaboration: What's Possible? **Tool #8.** Priority Focus Filter **Tool #9.** Opportunity Matrix **Tool #10.** Why Shouldn't We? 2 X 2 Grid **Tool #11.** Goals and Strategies **Tool #12.** Leadership and Decision-making **Tool #13.** Collaboration Charter **Tool #14.** Operating Agreement Sample Table of Contents
Consolidation	**Tool #15.** Consolidation Task Force Charter **Tool #16.** Consolidation Task Force Meeting Agenda **Tool #17.** Consolidation Work Plan **Tool #18.** The Case for Consolidation **Tool #19.** Key Agreements **Tool #20.** Due Diligence Topics and Questions **Tool #21.** Organizational Culture Scan Sample Resolution to Consolidate

THE CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

RCD SELF-ASSESSMENT WORKBOOK

How to Use this Workbook to Meet the Standards

2014 PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE: A Statewide Pathway to Excellence in Service **defines the goal of California RCDs to be Relevant, Excellent, and Visible** "go-to" hubs for natural resource conservation in communities while providing high-quality services.

The RCD Vision and Standards map the path forward, with practices that RCDs can implement to grow their effectiveness and impact. The RCD Vision and Standards identify the need for high quality programs, excellent operational management, robust partnerships, a solid reputation as a trusted information source, and broad community and legislative awareness of RCDs' work on natural resource conservation.

RCDs can use this Assessment Workbook to evaluate their own operations against the Standards. Through this workbook, board and staff members can self-evaluate the extent to which their RCD is implementing the minimum requirements today and in five years (Tier 1), optimal practices (Tier 2), or the best practices in the field (Tier 3).

In the tables on the pages that follow, the Standards are shown on the left.

☐ Please check the box for those practices that your RCD currently implements.

The right side of the table shows the CARCD Resource Library area where you will be able to find tools, templates and other resources to improve your RCD's operations. For areas where the assessment shows opportunity for improvement, the Resource Library will be the place to go for help. Doing a Self-Assessment, to discover where the gaps might be, is the first step!

STANDARDS

TIER 1: MEETING LEGAL & BASIC REQUIREMENTS

Instructions: In the left-hand column, check the box for those practices your RCD currently implements (that is, your RCD has these policies or does these things already). The right-hand column shows the section of the CARCD Resource Library where you will be able to get more help.

Basic Reporting/Training Requirements	Resource Area
☐ Annual report to State Controller with Government Compensation Report (*Government Code 53065.5*)	Permitting and Regulatory Compliance
☐ Ethics Training (*Government Code 53235*) every 2 years	Permitting and Regulatory Compliance
☐ Form 700 - Statement of Economic Interests (All Directors and designated staff) – complete annually including assuming and leaving office. (*Government Code 87200*)	Permitting and Regulatory Compliance, Governance
☐ Independent audit yearly with rare exceptions (*Public Resources Code 9528* and *Government Code 26909* (5) Audit or a statement must be filed with State Controller. http://www.sco.ca.gov/aud_single_audit_requirement.html)	Permitting and Regulatory Compliance
☐ Provide employees with Sexual Harassment Literature. (*Government Code* 12950) [Training for District manager is suggested as well as adopting District policy.]	Permitting and Regulatory Compliance
☐ Directors must take an Oath of Office (*Public Resources Code* 9302, *Government Code 1360*)	Governance
☐ File reports and/or provide info to the Local Agency Formation Commission	Permitting and Regulatory Compliance

Quarterly and/or Monthly Requirements	Resource Area
☐ Maintain written records/minutes/agendas for meetings	Governance
☐ Follow the Brown Act (*Government Code Section 54950 et. al*). Properly post all agendas 72 hours in advance and on the RCD website.	Governance
☐ File and pay appropriate payroll taxes. Employers in California must submit the following payroll taxes: Federal - Federal Withholding (Income tax), Social Security, Medicare; State - State Income tax, State Disability Insurance	Operations
☐ File reports with State Board of Equalization	Permitting and Regulatory Compliance

Policies/Plans/Requirements	Resource Area
☐ Mission statement	Governance
☐ Annual and Long Range Plans	Governance
☐ Annual Budget	Operations

☐	Associate Director Policy	Operations
☐	Bidding Policy	Operations
☐	Conflict of Interest Code (REQUIRED OF ALL SPECIAL DISTRICTS) *(Government Code 87300)*	Governance
☐	Fee for Services Policy, if applicable *(if your RCD does fee for service)*	Operations
☐	Investment Policy, including Reserve Policy	Operations
☐	Nondiscrimination Policy (REQUIRED OF ALL SPECIAL DISTRICTS)	Operations
☐	Personnel Policy (REQUIRED FOR THOSE WITH EMPLOYEES)	Operations
☐	Public Records Request Policy	Operations
☐	Records Retention Policy that governs how organization and transaction records are created, stored, and disposed. The policy addresses: ☐ Short-term records storage ☐ Long-term records storage ☐ Where records are stored ☐ How records are protected from loss, damage, unauthorized access ☐ How documents are destroyed	Operations
☐	Reimbursement Policy (REQUIRED OF ALL SPECIAL DISTRICTS) (*Government Code 53232.2.*)	Operations
☐	Vehicle Use Policy	Operations
☐	Volunteer Policy	Operations

Suggested/Required Insurance		**Resource Area**
☐	Liability Insurance including special riders for projects	Operations
☐	Vehicle/Premises Insurance	Operations
☐	Errors and Omissions Insurance	Operations

Basic Operational Requirements		**Resource Area**
☐	Has the human resources it requires to deliver its mission. ☐ The RCD has staff. ☐ Each staff position has a written job description that specifies the responsibilities and the goals of that position. ☐ If the RCD has no staff, the RCD is led by an all-volunteer board that fulfills the duties of staff	Operations
☐	Carries out the RCD mission through projects and/or programs. Executes at least one program or project towards the RCD's strategic plan goals within the last three years. List / describe program(s) or project (s):	Operations
☐	Informs the community about its work, responding to requests for information from the public, decision makers, partner organizations, and others, either orally (over the phone or in person), with printed materials (such as a newsletter or annual report), or with electronic materials (such as a website).	Engagement and Outreach

☐	Manages its finances and assets in a responsible and accountable way, as demonstrated by the following: ☐ Adopts a budget based on programs and projects planned for the year. Projected revenue is great than or equal to projected expenditures, unless reserves are proposed to be used. ☐ The Board leads the budget development every year *(see #4 below).* ☐ If not, then the Annual Budget is reviewed and approved by the board, or is consistent with board policy. ☐ Keeps accurate financial records. ☐ Has written accounting procedures to govern financial management.	Operations

STANDARDS
TIER 2: THE RCD OF TODAY

Instructions: In the left-hand column, check the box for those practices your RCD currently implements. The right-hand column shows the section of the CARCD Resource Library where you will be able to access tools, templates and other resources for increasing your effectiveness and impact.

A RELEVANT RCD:

1. Serves its mission to meaningfully meet the resource needs of the community as demonstrated by the following:	Resource Area
☐ Executes at least three projects towards the RCD's strategic plan goals within the last three years. List projects: ______	Operations
☐ Addresses multiple resource issues in the community. List at least three resource issues the RCD currently addresses through active programs: ______	Operations, Resource Conservation
☐ Remains informed and consistent with local and regional management plans as appropriate.	Operations

2. Addresses the resource issues in the community as demonstrated by the following:	Resource Area
☐ Identifies the major resource issues in the community.	Operations, Resource Conservation
☐ Proactively chooses which issues to engage in based on funding, importance, relevance, other groups working on the issue, and magnitude of the issue. (Example: creates a map of issues with strategic decisions included).	Operations
Explain decision process: ______ a. Identifies the proper role of the RCD to partner with other organizations working on issues. List areas in which the RCD is partnering: ______ b. Identifies issues in which the RCD is the appropriate entity to take the lead on an issue. List areas in which the RCD leads: ______ c. Identifies when it is appropriate for political, scale of problem, or other reasons for the RCD not to address a critical issue. Define issue and decision making process: ______	Operations

3. Engages the community in its programs as demonstrated by three of the following:	Resource Area
☐ Communicates its mission to landowners, community leaders, the general public, and others, via oral (phone or in person), print or online methods. (Examples: respond to inquiries, distribute newsletter, conduct workshops or presentations)	Engagement and Outreach

☐ Prioritizes community engagement in the strategic plan and/or in funding applications. Cite strategic plan and/or funding application: ______ a. RCD programs and projects build a sense of community as demonstrated by public interest. (Examples: ability to recruit volunteers, amount of public input received on projects/plans, attendance at meetings, letters of support, visits to RCD website, Facebook likes, etc.) Please list:______	Engagement and Outreach
☐ Includes a public education component in its programs when appropriate. (Example: If the RCD is implementing a restoration project, one component is a public education workshop.) Name workshops or public education programs held in the last year: ______	Engagement and Outreach
☐ Has a volunteer/internship program that includes the regular recruitment and use of volunteers/interns (more than three volunteers/interns per year). Cite volunteer positions and/or internships used in last year: ______	Engagement and Outreach
☐ Holds public presentations about RCD programs. (Example: Presents to the Board of Supervisors, legislators, civic groups, non-profits about the RCD's efforts). List presentations in the last year: ______	Engagement and Outreach

4. Has collaborative and diverse partnerships as demonstrated by the following:	**Resource Area**
a. Has strong relationships with partners as defined by meeting at least three of the following: *Check all that apply* ☐ Coordinates and collaborates on projects, strategic goals, and funding proposals ☐ Completes projects with the partner ☐ Holds regular meetings (at least quarterly) in which information is exchanged ☐ Holds stakeholder meetings that include the partner ☐ Partners attend or consult at monthly RCD meetings	Operations
b. Has a strong relationship with at least three diverse partners: *Check all that apply* ☐ County Supervisors and Departments ☐ Local government, including Parks and Rec., special districts, etc. ☐ Local farm and trade associations (Examples: Farm Bureau, Cattleman's Association) ☐ Non-profit organizations (Examples: Audubon, Center for Land-Based Learning, watershed groups, RC&Ds, Fire Safe Councils, Farm Bureau, Cattleman's) ☐ NRCS ☐ Other Federal partners (Ex.: US Forest Service, US Army Corps) ☐ State Agencies (Examples: DFW, DWR, RWQCB, Caltrans, CalFire) ☐ Tribes	Government Relations, Operations

5. Represents the diversity of their district:	**Resource Area**
☐ The RCD recommends, solicits and/or considers a variety of candidates for associate directors and board member positions. (Examples of representation: areas of expertise, geographic and demographic diversity, landowner/land user type, agricultural, conservation, businesses, etc.) State how diversity is included in the RCD's recruitment process: ______	Governance

6. Engages with CARCD at a basic level as demonstrated by meeting at least three of the following: *Check all that apply*	**Resource Area**
☐ Attends the CARCD annual meeting. ☐ Pays full CARCD dues. ☐ Promotes CARCD legislation and initiatives through educating local legislators on pertinent issues, and/or specific CARCD meetings with local legislators. This can be done through letters of support, emails, phone calls, etc. ☐ Supports the CARCD strategic plan by serving on committees or providing in-kind time to move CARCD statewide priorities forward. ☐ Financially contributes to a contract with CARCD's consultant group (currently Conservation Strategy Group). ☐ At least one board and staff member attends every CARCD Regional Meeting in the RCD's area. ☐ Board member service as a CARCD regional chair.	Operations

AN EXCELLENT RCD:

1. Has diversified funding sources and leverages funding:	**Resource Area**
The RCD has at least two of the following funding sources. To qualify, each funding source should represent more than 15% of any year's budget during the past three budget cycles: *Check all that apply* ☐ Tax Increment ☐ Government Grants (Federal, State, Local or Tribal) ☐ Community Donations (Ex.: membership program, scholarship funds) ☐ Local Government Support (Ex.: county, city, tribal, water district) ☐ Federal Agreements (Examples: NRCS contribution agreements) ☐ Sales/ Fee for Service Programs (Examples: plant sales, bird house sales, permit coordination programs, chipper programs) ☐ Demonstration projects that add value to the community or district property. (Examples: gardens, green building/energy efficiency items, greenhouses, aquaculture, etc.) ☐ Foundation Funding ☐ For Profit Business Support ☐ Non-profit Support	Operations

2. Has appropriate technical capacity to meet the needs of their community as demonstrated by the following:	**Resource Area**
☐ Has technical staff, contracts, or has established relationships with other entities to provide technical assistance. List staff technical capacity: ______ ☐ Owns (rather than rents or leases) equipment that is regularly utilized for routine work. (Examples: computers, specialized printers, chippers, no till drills, port-o-potties, vehicles, etc.) List equipment: ______	Operations

3. Provides timely and efficient services as demonstrated by the following:	**Resource Area**
☐ Give an example where this was key to accomplishing a project (Examples: The RCD has policies or procedures in place to allow for timely action in between regularly scheduled board meetings.): ______	Operations

4. Has a proper balance of board/ staff operations as demonstrated by the following:	**Resource Area**

a. The board meets at least seven of the following ten criteria:
☐ Has an orientation for new board members that covers roles and responsibilities as well as specifics about RCD programs.
☐ Has an awareness of and involvement in the RCD's programs by meeting at least two of the following: *Check all that apply*
    ☐ Board can describe programs without prompting
    ☐ Board participates in programs (Examples: hosts workshops at their property or helps recruit participants)
    ☐ Board attends public events and workshops
    ☐ Board participates in community outreach (Examples: conduct outreach to County Supervisors, legislators, civic groups, presents at RCD workshops, etc.)
☐ Board members are encouraged to work as a team: present their views, opinions and ideas and ensure others have room to present theirs.
☐ Evaluates District Manager performance at least annually against the goals and responsibilities of the position.
☐ Sets-policy including budget rather than implements policy by meeting all three criteria:
    i. Board leads the budget development every year (in collaboration with the RCD District manager)
    ii. Board leads the creation of the strategic plan (in collaboration with the RCD District manager)
    iii. Board regularly revisits the strategic plan in board meetings or special planning meetings
☐ Makes thoughtful decisions that are not subject to conflicts of interest.
    i. Board meeting minutes are open to the public.
	Governance

☐ Attends regular training on topics related to board member roles and RCD operations/projects. List trainings the board members have attended in the last two years: ______ ☐ Secures private donations for RCD operations and/or programs ☐ Donates resources to RCD efforts (Example: significant donation of time towards an RCD product, like a legal review of contracts.) List donations from board members in the last two years: ______ ☐ Creates goodwill with partnering organizations and potential partners (attend meetings, membership in other groups, etc.).	
b. Staff (led by the district manager) meets all of the following criteria: ☐ Implements policy set by the board (rather than sets policy). ☐ Supervises employees and guides day-to-day implementation of policy (the board does not supervise employees other than district manager). ☐ Board communications go through the district manager. ☐ Attends regular training. List trainings staff has attended in the last two years: ______ ☐ Evaluates staff performance at least annually against the goals and responsibilities of the position.	Operations

A VISIBLE RCD:

1. Has an informational relationship with its local legislators as demonstrated by the following:	**Resource Area**
☐ Directors and staff meet on a regular basis and/or contact their local, State, and Federal legislators to distribute information about the RCD, its programs, and legislative needs. List dates of the meetings:______ ☐ Sends newsletters and press releases to their local legislators. ☐ Invites legislators to RCD events, trainings, and workshops.	Government Relations

2. Regularly publishes and distributes information regarding RCD activities as demonstrated by the following:	**Resource Area**
☐ At least 4 press releases each year. List press releases in last year: ______ ☐ Quarterly newsletters and/or annual report. Include a copy of your last newsletter/annual report. ☐ Distributes information to partners, diverse stakeholders, and funders. ☐ Agendas and minutes are published for each special district meeting.	Engagement and Outreach Governance

3. RCD has an Internet presence as demonstrated by a website. It is current and updated at least once monthly.	**Resource Area**
Cite link and who is responsible for keeping it up-to-date: ______	Engagement and Outreach

STANDARDS

TIER 3: THE RCD OF TOMORROW

Instructions: In the left-hand column, check the box for those practices your RCD currently implements. The right-hand column shows the section of the CARCD Resource Library where you will be able to access tools, templates and other resources for increasing your effectiveness and impact.

A RELEVANT RCD:

1. Serves its mission to meaningfully meet the resource needs of the community as demonstrated by the following:	Resource Area
☐ Works with community stakeholders to identify major resource needs.	Operations, Resource Conservation
☐ Board and staff define RCD's role in meeting those resource needs.	Operations
☐ Executes at least six projects towards the RCD's strategic plan goals within the last three years. List projects: ______	Operations
☐ Reviews its strategic goals and evaluates the impact of its programs to ensure consistency with the mission and the strategic plan. ☐ The strategic plan contains measurable anticipated outcomes. ☐ Progress is regularly reviewed by the Board and staff.	Operations, Governance
☐ Ensures that all of the RCD's projects are individually planned and meet the RCD mission and goals. ☐ The RCD works with the community to ensure that important resource conservation values are identified and protected while meeting the RCD's mission and goals. ☐ The RCD inspects the site before initiating a project in order to identify the important resource conservation values and reveal any potential threats to those values. ☐ The RCD has a written project planning process, site checklist, etc. to guide project planning.	Operations

2. The RCD has good working relationships with the RCDs in their region (within legal LAFCO regulations) as demonstrated by meeting three of the following: *Check all that apply*	Resource Area
☐ Holds regular meetings with at least one neighboring RCD to exchange ideas and information (without violating Brown Act). State when regular meetings occur: ______ ☐ Communicates at least once a month by phone, in person or email with another RCD to exchange ideas or resources and to create programs. ☐ Understands other RCDs viewpoints and projects well enough to represent them at a public meeting. ☐ Submits funding proposals with neighboring RCDs for common programs. List funding proposals submitted in the last year: ______	Operations

☐ Shares staff. List staff and state defined role (Example: 40% time / 60% time. Watershed coordinator at one RCD, irrigation specialist at the other):______ ☐ Shares programs with other RCDs. List programs:______	

3. Mentors emerging RCDs or trains other RCDs as demonstrated by the following:	**Resource Area**
☐ Trains and/or assists other RCDs on basic district operations (budgeting, accounting, etc.) List training or assistance provided:______ ☐ Trains other RCDs how to implement current RCD programs ☐ Shares resources with the other RCDs. (Example: Pays for grant writer's time for a joint fundraising proposal, "loans" accountant for several hours of work) List resources shared:______ ☐ If mentoring other RCDs is not applicable please state why: ______	Operations

4. Engages regional RCDs or other partners in resource issues that cross boundaries or are similar in the neighboring RCD boundaries as demonstrated by meeting three of the following: *Check all that apply*	**Resource Area**
☐ Engages in watershed planning across district boundaries with other RCDs and partners. List issues and structure: ______ ☐ Engages in resource issues with other RCDs and partners other than watersheds. List issues and structure: ______ ☐ Participates in researching emerging regional issues (i.e. ecosystem markets, bio char, no till agriculture). List issues: ______ ☐ Works with non-traditional partners while staying within the RCD mission. (Examples: youth development organizations, schools, homeless shelters, nutrition advocates, county or city roads departments, universities, junior colleges, community, civic and philanthropic groups, and private companies -including foundations, tribes, etc.) List partners: ______	Operations, Resource Conservation

5. Serves as a leader in solving regional resource issues as demonstrated by the following:	**Resource Area**
☐ Proactively engages partners as new issues emerge and is able to mobilize partners ☐ Recognizes areas in which the RCD excels and takes leadership in addressing appropriate issues. List area in which RCDs lead the partnership: ______ ☐ Recognizes areas in which other entities excel, supports other entities in meeting resource goals (Example: Assisting Audubon CA in meeting bird conservation goals). List areas in which RCDs support the partnership: ______ ☐ Is usually contacted when new projects, issues, or other items of regional resource interest emerge.	Operations, Resource Conservation

AN EXCELLENT RCD:

1. Works with a variety of partners to integrate cutting edge research and science into program development and implementation as demonstrated by meeting one of the following: *Check all that apply*	**Resource Area**
☐ Is connected with academic professionals and able to assist in advancing scientific research on emerging issues. List academic professional and the emerging topic the RCD is addressing: ______ ☐ Aware of new research in a topic area and incorporates new research into project design. Explain which topics and how: ______ ☐ Is conducting research on a topic area that has not yet received academic attention. List topic area and project: ______ ☐ Has resource library, access to research, and access to scientific implementation of practices.	Operations, Resource Conservation

2. Quantifies its impact on the local resources as demonstrated by meeting all of the following:	**Resource Area**
☐ Maintains quantifiable data on the RCD's impact on local resource issues using standardized statewide RCD criteria. Include a copy. ☐ Maintains quantifiable cumulative impacts of RCD programs/work. Include a copy. ☐ Reports cumulative impacts to funders and other partners. List who receives the report: ______	Operations, Resource Conservation

3. Has a sustainable funding base and capital reserve funds enabling the RCD to provide long term, consistent conservation programs and leadership to their community and its constituents as demonstrated by meeting three of the following: *Check all that apply*	**Resource Area**
☐ At least two of the RCD's funding sources have been reliable for 10 years. List sources: ______ ☐ Has at least four funding sources: ______ ☐ Has a marketable skill that they utilize as a fee for service project. List skill(s): ______ ☐ Has built a six-month operational reserve. (If the RCD did not receive funding it could operate for 6 months). ☐ Shows a commitment to future funding by utilizing any of the following, which collectively contribute to at least 20% of an FTE over one year: i. Professional grant writer ii. Development director iii. Other fundraising professional(s)	Operations

4. Has a succession plan for board members to promote new leadership as demonstrated by meeting all of the following:	**Resource Area**
☐ Actively recruits and trains new board members based on skills and areas of expertise.	Governance

☐ Has associate directors who are actively engaged in projects. ☐ Board members evaluate the needs of the board annual to accurately represent the diversity and changing needs of their district. Last evaluation date: ______ ☐ Board members conduct annual self-assessments of their performance on the board and the board evaluates its overall effectiveness. State date of review: ______ ☐ The board's roles and responsibilities change and evolve as the district changes and evolves. ☐ Board members hold each other accountable to be active and engaged board members. Explain how: ______ ☐ Has a board policy manual	

5. **Has a succession plan for staff (particularly district manager) as demonstrated by meeting all of the following:**	**Resource Area**
☐ Has appropriate staff. (Administrative, multiple project coordinators, and finance staff) ☐ Documents, policies, procedures, and projects are captured in written format to be readily transferred to a new staff member. ☐ Multiple staff members attend board meetings and other planning meetings. ☐ General RCD operational needs (rather than just project specific topics) are covered in staff meetings so that multiple staff members are aware of the operational needs of the RCD. ☐ Staff members are given the opportunity to assume leadership roles in RCD operations not just projects. ☐ Staff members are given opportunity for training in new interest areas.	Operations

A VISIBLE RCD:

1. **Works closely with the decision makers in their community as demonstrated by meeting three of the following:** *Check all that apply*	**Resource Area**
☐ Has a strong relationship with legislators as demonstrated by meeting all of the following: a. RCD develops projects with legislative offices or involves them in projects. b. Legislator writes letters of support or provides other types of support, for projects. (Examples: financial, staff time, and advocacy) c. Legislator calls RCD as source of information in decision-making. d. RCD is able to contribute to legislation being created in the legislator's office. ☐ Has a strong relationship with the County Supervisors as demonstrated by meeting all of the following: a. RCD meets regularly with County Supervisor(s). State how often: ______	Government Relations

b. RCD presents at Board of Supervisor meetings at least annually. c. RCD invites County Supervisor(s) to workshops, tours, and other relevant events. d. County supervisor(s) are aware of RCD projects. ☐ Has a strong relationship with the City Council (if appropriate) as demonstrated by meeting all of the following: a. RCD meets regularly with City Council Member(s). State how often: ______ b. RCD presents at City Council meetings at least annually. c. RCD invites City Council Member(s) to workshops, tours, and other relevant events. d. City Council Member(s) are aware of RCD projects. ☐ Has a strong relationship with leaders in the business community (Examples: belongs to the Key Club or Chamber of Commerce, receives donations from business leaders for events and projects). Demonstrate business community relationships: ______	

2. Is a leader in CARCD and district issues statewide as demonstrated by the following:	**Resource Area**
☐ Participates in statewide committees or task forces. ☐ Engages with CSDA and other statewide partners. ☐ Writes statewide goals and objectives into funding proposals. (Ex.: Writes a section for disbursement of information gained statewide). ☐ Participates in setting direction for CARCD legislation and initiatives. ☐ Provides resources including staff support to CARCD. ☐ Participates and/or supports Day in the Capitol, legislative hearings, partner meetings at the statewide level, and other opportunities to represent RCDs at the statewide level. ☐ Engages regional RCDs within the CARCD structure on pertinent issues. Shares documents and/or templates for other RCDs. ☐ Is recognized by state and/or federal agencies as a leader in local conservation efforts. ☐ Is frequently approached by state/federal agencies to implement projects. ☐ Actively works with state/federal groups to address issues of statewide significance. ☐ State/Federal agencies solicit RCD opinions on new initiatives. ☐ Receives awards from state or federal agencies for RCD projects.	Operations, Resource Conservation

3. RCD has a social media presence as demonstrated by a Facebook page, twitter account, blog, or other social media tool.	**Resource Area**
☐ It is current and updated at least twice a week. Cite link and who is responsible for keeping it up-to-date: ______	Engagement and Outreach

TOOL #1: QUICK SELF-ASSESSMENT

This quick self-assessment will give you a snapshot of your RCD at this moment in time, with focus on four capacity areas: board governance, finance, strategy/programs, and human resources. It also prompts you to consider the strengths and skills you might bring to a partnership. Ask your board and staff members to complete this form individually, then compile the responses and discuss as a group. Pay special attention to places where people's perceptions seem to differ.

Your RCD "At-a-glance"

Board Governance	Yes	No
Our RCD has a full board complement with no vacant seats.		
Our RCD has the board we need to deliver on our mission.		
Our board is engaged and active.		
Our RCD attracts and retains the best board talent.		

- What board governance concerns are your highest priority to address?

Finance	Yes	No
Our RCD receives tax base funding.		
Our RCD has adequate funding to cover administrative costs.		
Our RCD has historically generated adequate funding to deliver our programs.		
Our RCD has the capacity to seek out grant funding to support our work.		
Our RCD has the capacity to manage our grants.		
The funding trend over the past three years has been positive.		
Our RCD has earned income / fee-for-service revenue.		
We are optimistic about the financial future of our RCD.		
Our RCD has adequate reserves to sustain us through difficult times.		
Our RCD has access to adequate financial information to make good decisions.		

- Operating budget of your RCD:

  This fiscal year: ______________

  Last fiscal year: ______________

- List the primary funding sources for the past two years.

- What financial concerns are your highest priority to address?

Strategy/Programs	Yes	No
Our RCD has a current strategic plan that guides our work.		
Our service area has unmet needs that we could address if we had funding.		
Our RCD has the capacity to deliver programs of value to our service area.		
Our RCD does a good job of outreach and education in our service area.		

- What are your primary program offerings / project focus? What would you want to offer or expand if funds were available?

- What program or strategy concerns are your highest priority to address?

Human Resources	Yes	No
Our RCD has the right number of staff to carry out our work.		
Our RCD has the right staff skills and competencies to carry out our work.		
Our RCD is able to attract and retain the best staff.		
Our RCD has a volunteer program.		

- Please list your current staff by title and % FTE.

- What skills and capabilities do you need on your staff?

- Please describe the nature and scope of your volunteer program.

- What staffing concerns are your highest priority to address?

Prior Experience in Collaboration

Partnerships	Yes	No
Our RCD has successfully collaborated with other RCDs in the past.		
Our RCD has successfully collaborated with non-RCD partners in the past.		

- What collaboration opportunities do you see that could strengthen your RCD?
- What strengths and capabilities would your RCD bring to a collaboration effort?
- What is your RCD looking for in a potential collaboration partner?

Compiled Responses

Below, add up the number of responses for each question so you can quickly see if there is alignment. Focus your discussion where there appears to be disagreement.

Board Governance	Yes	No
Our RCD has a full board complement with no vacant seats.		
Our RCD has the board we need to deliver on our mission.		
Our board is engaged and active.		
Our RCD attracts and retains the best board talent.		
Finance	**Yes**	**No**
Our RCD receives tax base funding.		
Our RCD has adequate funding to cover administrative costs.		
Our RCD has historically generated adequate funding to deliver our programs.		
Our RCD has the capacity to seek out grant funding to support our work.		
Our RCD has the capacity to manage our grants.		
The funding trend over the past three years has been positive.		
Our RCD has earned income / fee-for-service revenue.		
We are optimistic about the financial future of our RCD.		

Our RCD has adequate reserves to sustain us through difficult times.		
Our RCD has access to adequate financial information to make good decisions.		
Strategy / Programs	**Yes**	**No**
Our RCD has a current strategic plan that guides our work.		
Our service area has unmet needs that we could address if we had funding.		
Our RCD has the capacity to deliver programs of value to our service area.		
Our RCD does a good job of outreach and education in our service district.		
Human Resources	**Yes**	**No**
Our RCD has the right number of staff to carry out our work.		
Our RCD has the right staff skills and competencies to carry out our work.		
Our RCD is able to attract and retain the best staff.		
Our RCD has a volunteer program.		
Partnerships	**Yes**	**No**
Our RCD has successfully collaborated with other RCDs in the past.		
Our RCD has successfully collaborated with non-RCD partners in the past.		

TOOL #2: SITUATION ANALYSIS

There are two facets to your district's "situation:" **internal** strengths and gaps, and **external** opportunities and challenges. A situation analysis prompts you to examine both sides. An internal review helps RCDs understand what they do best and where they may need to shore up operations. An external scan can highlight trends in the operating environment—shifts in policy, funding, demographics, public perception, and other big-picture factors—some of which might represent an opportunity and others a threat. Putting the two sides together, you can start to see the degree to which your RCD has the internal capabilities and the capacity to respond to external pressures and opportunities it faces.

The Situation Analysis tool is useful for pulling together all the internal and external factors that can affect your district's effectiveness and future direction, while at the same time helping you formulate a set of critical questions that need to be answered before developing your strategy in response.

Here's a table filled in with a few examples from a hypothetical organization:

Strengths ■ Technical knowledge ■ Staff capabilities ■ Reputation ■ Community goodwill	**Gaps** ■ Too little staff capacity ■ Board turnover ■ No succession plan
Opportunities ■ Engaging younger constituents through educational programs ■ Developing a new line of business for revenue	**Challenges** ■ Too little funding for projects

Ask your board and staff members to do a Situation Analysis individually, then discuss as a group:

Strengths *What do we do well? What assets do we have—in terms of human resources, equipment, etc.?*	**Gaps** *What areas need attention to improve our internal operations or culture?*
Opportunities *What's coming down the pike that we should jump on? How can we build on our strengths to take advantage of opportunities?*	**Challenges** *What trends or threats–social, agricultural, political, environmental, demographic, etc.—do we need to avoid, neutralize, or work around?*

TOOL #3: DECISION MATRIX

Starting at the top of the table, follow the pathways below by answering "yes" or "no" for each statement. This should help determine whether your RCD should consider ***collaborating*** with another district (or a mission-related organization) or pursue ***consolidation***. You may need a group discussion about the level of your board's engagement, or the degree to which you could "re-energize" if your district has been inactive for an extended period. There may be other factors that influence your decision.

Key question	If yes, then	If no, then
1. Do you have a functional board?	Go to question 2	Go to question 3
2. Do you have professional staff?	Go to question 5	Go to question 4
3. Could your board re-energize and become active again?	Go to question 6	Consider consolidation
4. Does your board deliver your RCD's programs?	Go to question 6	Go to question 5
5. Does your staff deliver your RCD's programs?	Go to question 6	Consider consolidation
6. Do you face an opportunity you can't do alone?	Go to question 7	Go to question 7
7. Do you have capacity gaps that others might fill?	Go to question 8	Go to question 8
8. Do you have expertise that other RCDs could benefit from?	Go to question 9	Go to question 9
9. Do other RCDs operate nearby?	Consider collaboration	Go to question 10
10. Do other complementary organizations operate nearby?	Consider collaboration	Consider capacity-building training

If you answered "yes" to questions 1, 2, and 5, and "yes" to either question 7 or 8, collaboration might be a good path for your district to consider.

If you answered "no" to questions 1 and 3, consolidation might be a good path for your district to consider.

If you answered "no" to questions 1, 3 ***and*** 5, consolidation is recommended.

TOOL #4: THE CASE FOR COLLABORATION

Collaboration needs to be a win-win strategy. You ought to be able to convincingly describe what you stand to gain by working closely with a partner. This is especially important if you have naysayers in your group who aren't sure it's going to be worth the effort. To them, in particular, you need to make the case.

Use the space below to describe, in as much detail as you see fit, how it benefits your RCD to collaborate with its prospective partner(s). You may want to do this activity in pairs with others on your board. Alternatively, everyone could spend a few minutes writing, then share ideas in a full-group conversation. Use an additional sheet of paper if you need more space.

TOOL #5: COLLECTIVE ASSETS

If one district has three staff and the other has five, simple math says that together they have eight. The challenge is for partners to think creatively about how they might deploy their collective eight people to enhance their impact. That's the purpose of this worksheet. You and your partner can use it to tally the collective assets you bring to the table. This will help you consider how you might use them to do ***more together*** than either of you can do alone.

Asset	Name of partner 1:	Name of partner 2:	Total together
No. board members			
No. staff with % FTE			
Board and staff skills and strengths			
Office square footage			
Equipment owned			
Revenue this fiscal year			
Other assets			

TOOL #6: COLLABORATION CHECKLIST

Use this tool when your district is in the process of forming a collaboration with another group or groups. To begin, each group circles Yes or No for each statement below. Next, groups compare answers as a means of sparking conversation and identifying potential weak areas. This tool can be used throughout the collaboration process to "spot-check" what's working well and to address gaps.

YES / NO	We have identified a clear purpose and shared vision for the collaboration.
YES / NO	This collaboration advances the mission of each participating group.
YES / NO	Groups in the collaboration begin this process with a high degree of trust for each other.
YES / NO	The right people are at the table from each organization. (Representatives are in positions of authority to commit their group's resources or have access to decision-makers within their group.)
YES / NO	We have clear rules for making decisions, especially difficult ones.
YES / NO	Each group in the collaboration is prepared to commit the resources and capacity to participate fully in the collaboration.
YES / NO	Each group in the collaboration understands its roles and responsibilities and how everyone can contribute to group goals and objectives.
YES / NO	We have a core group of people with leadership skills and commitment.
YES / NO	Each group in the collaboration understands what it takes to lead a collaborative effort and make it successful.
YES / NO	Groups in the collaboration understand the need for balancing process (the how) and product (the what).
YES / NO	When open communication isn't enough, we have additional tools to resolve conflicts.
YES / NO	The time people spend together is generally pleasant

TOOL #7: COLLABORATION: WHAT'S POSSIBLE?

Sometimes an obvious opportunity drives groups to come together in a collaborative effort. And, sometimes, one obvious partnership opportunity provides an entry for other interesting ways to work together. Take a few minutes to complete the following activities, working individually or in pairs. Then come together as a group to share and discuss.

Driver

Is there a clear opportunity driving the interest in collaboration? If so, describe it here.

What else could we do together?

With a partner, brainstorm other ways you might work together. Think of as many ideas as possible and list them in the space below.

What does the future look like?

This is a brief creative writing exercise. Ask each person in your group to write the headline and the first three or four paragraphs of a news story dated three years from now. The story is in the local paper, and it's about the success of the collaborative effort. What has the collaboration produced? What has been its impact? Work individually or in pairs. ***(Time: allow 20-30 minutes for writing, then 10 minutes for volunteers to share their news story)***

Three years from today...

Headline

Story

TOOL #8: PRIORITY FOCUS FILTER

This worksheet can help partners prioritize among the possible collaborative opportunities you brainstormed on the **What's Possible** worksheet (Tool #7). Each partner should complete the table below, and then compile the results for discussion. When defining the level of priority focus for a given idea, use the following range, and circle the number that corresponds to the level of priority of that idea for your RCD:

1 = not important ***2 = somewhat unimportant*** ***3 = somewhat important*** ***4 = very important***

Collaborative focus	Priority level - partner 1	Priority level - partner 2
Example: Joint fee-for-service program	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

What emerged as ***somewhat important*** or ***very important*** for both partners?

TOOL #9: OPPORTUNITY MATRIX

For each of the opportunities you listed on the **What's Possible** worksheet (Tool #7), and identified as the top priorities to focus on through the **Priority Focus Filter** (Tool #8), what strengths does each RCD bring? What role might each play? The example below, "joint fee-for-service program," is carried forward from Tool #8 where it was identified as a shared priority.

Collaborative Focus	Organizational Strengths	Roles
Example: Joint fee-for-service program	Happy Valley RCD: financial management skill Tucker RCD: people skills, extra office space	Happy Valley RCD: billing Tucker RCD: customer relations, office space for program staff

TOOL #10: WHY SHOULDN'T WE? 2x2 GRID

When exploring whether to pursue an opportunity, it's important to analyze whether it has the potential for mission impact, its cost-effectiveness, and potential risks or other downsides. Here is a grid for doing this analysis to test the merit of your idea and validate or discard it. With your partner, discuss each potential collaborative opportunity you identified using the **Priority Focus Filter** (Tool #8) and **Opportunity Matrix** (Tool #9) and try to decide together where they fit in the grid. On the page that follows you'll find a set of discussion questions.

	High financial cost	**Low financial cost**
High mission impact	The opportunities in this quadrant are high impact, but they also cost a lot. Decide whether to proceed. For example, can you get a grant to do this? Would doing it together potentially reduce costs?	The opportunities in this quadrant are high impact, low cost. These are the ones you want!
Low mission impact	The opportunities in this quadrant are low impact, high cost. Avoid these!	The opportunities in this quadrant are low mission impact, but don't cost much to execute. Decide whether to proceed. For example, are there other side benefits, such as raising your visibility in the community or creating goodwill?

Discussion questions

For each collaborative focus area identified using the **Priority Focus Filter** (Tool #8) and the **Opportunity Matrix** (Tool #9), discuss the following with your prospective partner:

1. Strategy. Is working together a mission "win-win" for each partner? Can each RCD absorb the financial cost of our respective parts of this effort?

2. Leadership. Are we able each to commit the time and energy of a staff or board "champion" to advance this collaborative effort?

3. Culture. Could this project make additional, unreasonable demands on our staff or board capacity? Are we compatible as partners, in terms of how we make decisions and do our work?

4. Brand. Could this collaborative effort adversely affect our reputations? How might other key stakeholders view this collaborative effort?

TOOL #11: COLLABORATIVE GOALS AND STRATEGIES

With a clear statement of your ideal future – the joint effort you and your collaborative partners are undertaking – and your role in helping to make it a reality, you can develop a set of goals that incrementally start to build toward that future vision. The example below is a collaborative goal where multiple districts are partnering on fire safety. Note how broad the wording is – and that the goal statement is written as if it's already true. Goals are very high-level, big umbrellas that describe what you want to be true at some point in the future.

EXAMPLE
GOAL 1. Fire safety: County residents understand how to live safely within a fire-prone environment.

Our goals

In the space below, describe the goals of your collaboration in broad language. It is best if your goal just describes the outcome you're heading toward, without specifying how your group will get there. (The "how" is the next step.)

For each goal, consider what you and others in your collaborative want to accomplish together in terms of programs, services, or projects.

Following, you'll have space to describe how you intend to achieve your goals. Make note of facilities and equipment, technology, cost, and the people-power required to make it work.

Our strategies

Once you've set your goals, you need to define the approaches that you'll use to make progress toward your desired outcomes. Strategies are still written at a fairly high level: they are not tactical details. Using the example from the previous page, the RCDs' high-level goal to increase knowledge about fire safety is achieved through collaboration with each other, with agencies, and with other stakeholders:

EXAMPLE
GOAL 1. Fire safety: County residents understand how to live safely within a fire-prone environment.

STRATEGIES

1. **Share fire safe coordinator staff position to provide technical assistance and information for landowners interested in fire fuel reduction on their property.**
2. **Seek joint funding from CalFire, Department of Conservation, and NRCS for reforestation efforts aimed at promoting fire recovery.**
3. **Conduct targeted outreach to key upland landowners to promote fire-safe land management practices, including providing information on invasive species management.**
4. **Partner with Master Gardeners programs to provide public education workshops and online resources on the ecology of fire-prone / fire-dependent ecosystems.**

Use the worksheet on the next page to identify the strategies you plan to use to achieve each of the goals your collaborative has defined. Use a different sheet for each goal.

GOAL:

STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:

TOOL #12: COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

Any group of people working together needs to answer some basic questions about who participates, who leads, and how decisions are made. You and your collaborative partner may be comfortable with an informal relationship that succeeds on a "handshake deal." Or you may discover you need a formal governing group, like a steering committee. At the very least, consider forming a collaboration team that includes a representative from each RCD partner.

Using the worksheet below, partners can work through the basics of leadership and decision-making for their collaborative.

Key issue	Our decisions about this
Number of representatives each RCD has in the collaboration:	
How do groups choose representatives? How do they change representatives if someone leaves?	
Is there a commitment to a term of service?	
How are new groups brought in to the collaboration?	
How will the group make decisions? (For example: majority rule, consensus, one vote per group, or one vote per person)	
Who serves on the collaboration team, providing leadership to the collaborative?	
What kinds of decisions will the collaboration team be asked to make?	

TOOL #13: COLLABORATION CHARTER

A charter is a written description of your collaboration codifying important information about how participating groups will work together. It can take the form of a legal document, a memorandum of understanding, an informal description, or something else. Every collaboration is unique, so charters may differ in both content and format. Complete this worksheet as a first step toward developing a charter for your organization's collaboration with another group or groups.

Collaboration Name

Naming your collaboration makes it official and helps build the identity of the collaborative effort. Take the time to arrive at a name that reflects the purpose for the collaboration. Write the name in the space below:

Purpose and Vision

A purpose statement will guide the work of the collaboration and help everyone maintain focus. Otherwise it's easy to get off track and move into areas outside the scope of the original intent. It is critical to define the purpose, niche, and core activity for the collaboration. This will clarify what the collaboration does and does not do. Questions answered by the purpose statement should include:

- What needs does the collaboration exist to fill?
- How is the collaboration unique?
- What is the scope of the collaboration?

The purpose statement should also paint a picture of the vision or desired outcome of the collaboration. What will the community look like when the collaboration has completely fulfilled its mission? A vision for the desired results of the collaboration will enable collaboration partners to track progress along the way. Using the concepts from your **Case for Collaboration** (Tool #4), work with your partner to craft a purpose statement for your collaborative. Write this in the space below:

Collaboration Partners

List all the groups in the collaboration.

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles serve as a touchstone for the collaboration partners to define the way they work together. Principles describe the values the collaboration holds and the beliefs that guide individual or organizational thinking, actions, and decisions. This section spells out "how we work together." Examples include: *"Assume good intentions, believing that each person is trying to act in the best interest of the team and our partnership,"* and *"Once a decision has been made, I will honor the decision and support it."* List these in the space below.

Goals and Strategies

From the **Collaborative Goals and Strategies** worksheet (Tool #11), use the space below to write the goals the collaboration wants to achieve, and the approaches that you will use to achieve the desired results.

Leadership and decision-making

From your worksheet on Collaborative Leadership (Tool #12), specify how your collaborative will govern itself.

Members of governing group (steering committee or collaboration team)	
Number of representatives each group has in the collaboration:	
How representation is determined:	
Term of service:	
How new groups join:	
Decision-making process:	

Roles and Responsibilities

It's important that the charter spell out the role of the collaboration team as a whole and the roles and responsibilities of each participating group. This might include defining which group takes the lead on a specific conservation project and developing a schedule of rotating hosting duties.

Role of collaboration team (types of decisions members of this team may make)	
Role(s) of participants in the collaboration	Responsibilities of participants in the collaboration

Meetings

If there will be regularly scheduled meetings, the charter should spell out expectations for attendance.

Meeting purpose:	
Meeting frequency:	
Meeting location(s):	
Process for taking and filing minutes, if appropriate:	
Are alternates allowed to cover absences? If so, with or without limitations?	

Communications

The charter should describe how partners will communicate with each other, including the form and frequency of communications.

Form of communication:	Frequency:	Responsible:

TOOL #14: OPERATING AGREEMENT

SAMPLE TABLE OF CONTENTS

TOOL #15: CONSOLIDATION TASK FORCE CHARTER

As you form a Consolidation Task Force to lead your process, you can use or adapt this sample charter to orient each district to the committee's charge.

Purpose

This task force provides overall guidance for the consolidation process, ensuring the inclusion of representatives from all districts seeking to consolidate and the timely and accurate flow of information to the directors.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Lead the due diligence process, ensuring that all key questions and issues are resolved to the satisfaction of both districts' directors.

2. Meet with LAFCO staff to review requirements for consolidation.

3. Develop a Plan for Services.

4. Draft the resolutions for consolidation that each board will adopt. Bring the resolutions to the directors for their review and adoption.

5. Prepare and submit application to LAFCO.

6. Develop talking points for communicating with key stakeholders about the consolidation process.

7. Communicate with partners, funders, landowners, and other key stakeholders as appropriate to inform them of the consolidation process at key points.

Expectations

1. Participate fully in all meetings of this task force.

2. Ensure that all members of the committee feel included in the process.

3. Keep sensitive information private (e.g., labor disputes, employee benefits packages, pending litigation) as allowed by law.

4. Serve as liaison to your respective districts.

5. If required, participate in hearings held by LAFCO as part of its review process.

6. Respond to LAFCO's requests for additional information.

Composition

Each RCD has the same number of representatives on the task force—ideally, two from each district. Participants may be directors or staff (district managers or comparable staff).

TOOL #16: CONSOLIDATION TASK FORCE MEETING AGENDA

Here is a sample draft agenda for the first meeting of the Consolidation Task Force. Note that this example assumes a 90-minute meeting that includes lunch. You can adapt this to your own situation, time of day, and logistics.

Goal

Our focus during the due diligence phase of this process is to affirm the answers to the question *"Why would we consolidate?"* and to go deep into the question *"Why would we not consolidate?"* This exploration will help us decide how to move forward with combining (*"How should we?"*) if there is agreement between the two groups. This first meeting is designed to review the overall process. Subsequent meetings can be guided by the **Due Diligence** (Tool #20) questions.

Agenda

11:30 1. Introductions

2. Our role: Review **Consolidation Task Force Charter** (Tool #15)

3. Overview of the goals, scope, process, and roles in due diligence

   - Review the **Due Diligence** questions and issues (Tool #20)
   - Are we asking the right questions? Are they complete?
   - Prioritize key issues

4. Further research

   - What issues do we want to investigate more deeply? What else needs attention?
   - What further information do we need from each district?

5. Reporting out

   - Review proposed template for summarizing the findings in each facet of the organizations, included at the end of **Due Diligence** (Tool #20)
   - Identify the note taker for the committee
   - Identify the lead writer(s) for the final summary for each topic area

6. Focus for our next meeting

   - Actions before the next meeting and lead person for each

1:00 Wrap up

TOOL #17: CONSOLIDATION WORK PLAN

Here is a sample work plan for the Consolidation Task Force to follow. You can adapt this to your own situation, adding details and tasks as you see fit.

Task	Timeline	Who	Status
Establish Consolidation Task Force			
Meet with LAFCO staff to understand their process / requirements			
Conduct due diligence – review areas:			
- Governance			
- Financial review			
- Human resources			
- Programs and services			
Develop a Plan for Services			
Draft resolutions for consolidation			
Adopt substantially similar resolutions		Each district board	
Meet with County Supervisors (inform)			
Prepare LAFCO application / proposal			
Attend public hearing; respond to questions / information requests			
Work with LAFCO on follow-through			

TOOL #18: THE CASE FOR CONSOLIDATION

Why are the districts seeking to consolidate? What problem does this solve, and how will the community be better served? There might be one overwhelming reason pointing to consolidation as the appropriate path, or seven smaller reasons that add up to support this strategy. You ought to be able to convincingly describe what your RCD stands to gain through consolidation. This is especially important if some people in your group aren't sure consolidation is the right path. They may have concerns about capacity, funding, adding to the territory served, or other factors. You need to make the case to them. In addition, you need to make the case to LAFCO: when you prepare your application, you will need to describe why you want to pursue consolidation.

Use the space below to describe, in as much detail as you see fit, how it benefits your RCD and the communities you serve to consolidate with one or more other districts. This activity may be completed individually or in pairs with others on your board, followed by full-group discussion. Use the back of this page if you need more space.

Ways we could benefit from consolidating with ______________________________:

How the community could benefit:

TOOL #19: SAMPLE KEY AGREEMENTS

The participating districts enter into the following agreements for our consolidation process:

Participation and representation	We will ensure consistent district participation throughout the process, avoiding the need to repeatedly "onboard" new people. Districts will be equally represented in this process. Participants will include: 1. 2. 3. 4.
Inclusion	To make it easy for people to attend meetings, we will vary the meeting location to make sure convenience and inconvenience are shared. We will alternate between the following locations: 1. 2. 3. (*Optional mid-point location*):
Communications	Representatives from each district will report back to their organization on a regular basis and ensure a two-way flow of information from each district to the Consolidation Task Force, particularly if there are concerns or questions.
Stakeholder relations	**LAFCO.** We will meet jointly with staff to understand requirements. **Supervisors.** After meeting with LAFCO but before adopting a resolution to consolidate, we will meet with the County Supervisors to notify them of our intent to consolidate and to hear their concerns or questions. **Funders.** If we share any funders that need to be informed about the discussion, we will meet jointly with those funders to understand their requirements and any concerns they may have. **Others.** We will develop "talking points" to inform neighboring RCDs and the Department of Conservation that we intend to consolidate.
Decision-making	We will decide by simple majority / consensus / other.

Signed: ______________________________ District: ______________________

Signed: ______________________________ District: ______________________

TOOL #20: DUE DILIGENCE TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

Due diligence is a critical component of the consolidation process—no one appreciates being surprised by unforeseen burdens or undue risks! It falls to the Consolidation Task Force to ensure that a robust analysis is conducted of the promise and potential pitfalls of consolidation. Depending on the size and sophistication of the districts involved, due diligence can range from straightforward to complex and time-consuming.

This tool outlines four key areas of due diligence review—governance, finance, human resources, and programs and services—and includes a recommended structure for a summary report. How your RCD conducts due diligence is up to you, but you may find it helpful to assign individuals with relevant experience and knowledge to analyze specific areas. And it's a good idea to have a representative from each district involved so that each board can feel confident that its concerns and questions will be addressed.

For the report, make sure to include a summary for each topic area. Use as much space as you need. Remember, the goal of the report is to help district leaders make an informed decision about consolidating. A thorough, well-written report will also help the Consolidation Task Force prepare its proposal to LAFCO in the event a decision is made to join two or more RCDs together.

For All Areas of Review

Initial process decisions

1. What is our process for agreeing when consideration of a topic goes beyond the boundaries of this phase, and when such consideration is critical to a consolidation decision and when it's not?

2. How should we track the items that invariably emerge around implementation without letting them distract from the due diligence at hand?

Area of Review: Governance

Key questions

1. What are each RCD's fundamental expectations of its board of directors? How might those expectations change if the groups combine? How will those expectations translate into board participation, contributions, and culture?
2. How do the size, composition, and structure of the boards compare? How do those elements reflect the roles and expectations of directors?
3. How does each district approach its use of committees as delegates for the board and its authority?
4. How does each district approach lines of authority between board of directors (governance) and staff (management)?
5. What are some of the most important aspects of each district's board culture that impact how the board approaches decisions and commits to the organization's success? What are the major differences in these cultural elements? How would those cultural elements be combined in a single consolidated district?

Other issues to resolve or tasks to complete

6. List all memoranda of agreement or understanding that each district has with other entities (governmental or private), including a description of whether those memoranda need to be reviewed or modified to take into account district consolidation.
7. Report on any past or pending legal issues and any resulting liabilities.
8. Identify any other legal or risk analysis issues that must be addressed during this process.
9. Review issues that will likely impact the effective date of consolidation.
10. Clearly define roles of the board and committees in writing.
11. Refine any talking points that have been developed to communicate details about the likely impact of a consolidation.
12. Identify short-term and long-term office location options and plan.
13. Explore how to approach the task of naming the new consolidated RCD. (The application to LAFCO may propose a name for the consolidated district.)
14. Understand LAFCO's process and requirements for the consolidated board, including number of directors, officer roles, how to select initial officers, and a timeline for interim leadership.

Area of Review: Finance

Key questions

1. What is each district's financial condition, including assets, liabilities, and net assets?
2. Does either RCD receive tax-based funding? If so, how much?
3. What funder, donor, or creditor restrictions exist in relation to each district's assets, liabilities, and net assets? Which, if any, of these restrictions must be addressed as part of the consolidation?
4. Does either district have contingent liabilities or knowledge of claims that have been or may be asserted?
5. What are each district's current debt obligations on real property? Lease obligations for rental properties?
6. Is either district planning to purchase, obtain, or lease additional real property?
7. What are each district's operational cash flow needs? To what extent do the districts experience seasonal patterns in cash demand and availability, and to what extent will those cash flow cycles pose opportunities or challenges within merged operations?
8. What is each district's planning cycle for revenue generation (including sales, service contracts, grantwriting, technical assistance fees, etc.)? To what extent has each district entered into commitments relating to income generation for future periods—including commitments to customers, vendors, professional service providers, etc.?
9. Are there any significant differences in the districts' investment policies and practices and/or any barriers to transitioning to a uniform approach?

Other issues to resolve or tasks to complete

10. List existing grants, including funders' names, amount of funding, and status of the grant, reporting, and final grant deliverables.
11. List personal property (including equipment and vehicles) and real property (buildings and land), its value, what economies of scale can be expected by merging, and what assets can be liquidated.
12. List all assets that will be transferred to the consolidated district. (Typically, districts' assets are combined upon consolidation.)
13. Identify the location of all assets of the consolidated district, particularly if any asset will be located at a place other than the official office.
14. Describe each district's liabilities and how those liabilities will be disposed following consolidation. (Prior to the completion of the petition, an audit of each of the consolidating districts may be conducted and the results of the audit shared with the districts. In some cases, districts may share their most recent annual audit rather than conduct an additional audit.)

15. Identify the location of the office(s) of the consolidated district as well as any planned reduction in the location and number of offices available to the public during the consolidation period. (All official records of the consolidated district must be maintained at the official district office location.)

16. Clarify the anticipated financial impact on the merged entity of the condition of any real property owned by either RCD, including anticipated major improvements and repairs.

17. Explore each district's approaches to enterprise risk management. Identify and evaluate key risks and risk management strategies for the merged entity.

18. Clarify the ongoing financial impact of employment and benefit policies of each RCD in relation to accrued vacation, employment agreements, severance pay, etc.

19. Clarify each district's business model for infrastructure and management, including infrastructure requirements related to programs (e.g., project management software, etc.) and services (e.g., replacement or repair of equipment, etc.). Note that the plan for merged operations will need to clarify the new business model, including the extent to which current revenue generation and contributed income strategies will continue to be used. It should also identify strategies to ensure availability of needed systems, expertise, financing, and oversight to operate programs, develop grant proposals, and perform other fundraising functions.

20. Evaluate any extraordinary costs associated with the consolidation.

Area of Review: Human Resources

Key questions

1. What are the most important aspects of each RCD's culture that impact how staff approach their job, derive satisfaction, and commit to the organization's success? What are the major differences in each district's culture? To what can we attribute those differences?

2. How do the districts' compensation programs compare?
   - Is there a pay structure (e.g., grades and ranges)?
   - How do pay rates for similar positions compare?
   - How are salary ranges established?
   - How is pay delivered to staff?
   - How are pay increases determined (e.g., merit, cost of living, other)?
   - Is there a stated compensation philosophy?
3. How do the districts' benefits plans compare?
   - **Health Insurance**—Compare coverage (individual and family), premiums, deductibles, co-pays, provider networks, alternative healthcare coverage, and other plan features.
   - **Paid Time Off**—Compare vacation, sick leave, and medical and family leave policies. It is important to pay close attention to even the smallest details. For example, do employees accrue time, or is it granted? Is there a waiting period?
   - **Retirement**—How do retirement plans compare?

4. What are the potentially redundant staff roles in the event of consolidation?

5. What management capacities are needed to successfully operate the consolidated district's multiple lines of business—specifically at the district manager level—in terms of planning, analysis, and strategic thinking?

Other issues to resolve or tasks to complete

6. List each district's key staff.

7. List any existing employment agreements, contracts, or special arrangements.

8. List any outstanding employment claims or employment-related legal actions.

9. Develop a hypothetical organizational chart for the consolidated district.

10. Are there any unresolved HR issues? If so, identify and propose a resolution.

Area of Review: Programs and Services

1. What programs and services does each RCD offer?

2. How are those programs and services currently staffed?

3. How does each district approach long-range planning for programs and services?

4. To what extent are programs and services offered in response to community need? How is that determined?

5. Does each RCD monitor the effectiveness of its programs and services?

6. What programs and services would the consolidated RCD offer?

7. What information technology, equipment, and other supportive systems will be required to deliver the consolidated district's programs? Are upgrades to existing systems necessary?

Other issues to resolve or tasks to complete

8. Develop an inventory of current equipment, software, etc. needed to deliver programs.

Reporting Your Findings

Here is a recommended structure for a report summarizing what you learned through due diligence. Your report should cover all areas of analysis, including governance, finance, human resources, programs and services, and any others.

Summary of Findings

1. **Topic area.** Identify which topic area your summary addresses. In a few sentences, briefly describe the topic area, including the types of issues the group reviewed.
2. **Strengths.** Describe the strengths that a consolidated district would bring to the table, including staff skills, systems and structures, assets (e.g., technology, cash, equipment, etc.), and reputation, among others.
3. **Challenges.** Describe any significant organizational differences that would need to be overcome for consolidation to be successful.
4. **District Comparison.** Summarize areas of distinction, complementary programming, and overlap. This is where you provide answers to the "Key questions" from the preceding sections. Refer to other areas of due diligence as appropriate.
5. **Opportunities.** Based on the foregoing analysis, describe opportunities that a consolidated district could pursue.
6. **Issues to Resolve.** Describe any significant issues that need to be resolved before going forward. For example, there may be issues that do not require resolution if the districts intend to seek joint grant funding, but that would if the districts were to consolidate.
7. **Critical Questions that Remain.** Identify any critical questions that remain to be answered before proceeding with consolidation.

TOOL #21: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE SCAN

Organization name: ____

Organizational cultures can be described in a variety of ways. Often, people perceive group culture as a point on a spectrum between two extremes (or, at one end or the other). The group culture of a unit or department may be different from the group culture of the overall organization.

As you consider the culture of your organization—and your team within it—consider the ranges below, bookended by words at two ends of each spectrum. Please circle the number that you feel best describes your team's place on the spectrum. Feel encouraged to complete one worksheet for your department and one for the overall organization if you would handle these differently from one another.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Forgiving *(What's the approach to professional growth and learning?)* **Critical**

Mistakes are allowed *Premium on perfection*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Risk-taking *(What's the appetite for innovation and risk?)* **Risk-averse**

Very willing to take risks *Very unwilling to take risks*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Fun-loving *(What's the energy of the group?)* **Serious**

We have a good time doing it *This is hard work*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Bottom-up *(How are decisions made?)* **Top-down**

Staff-driven, lots of staff input *Management-driven, little staff input*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Casual *(Everything from dress code to office vibe to how people talk to each other)* **Formal**

Flip flops and jeans *Suits and ties*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Relaxed *(What are our attitudes toward time and deadlines?)* **Strict**

Time is fluid — *A.S.A.P.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Inclusive *(Whose ideas, values, and norms matter?)* **Prescriptive**

The more views, the better — *"Our way" is best*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Indirect *(How much do people put their cards on the table?)* **Direct**

Polite and kind — *Honest and blunt*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Warm *(What's the atmosphere like?)* **Chilly**

Friendly, welcoming — *Standoffish*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Authentic *(How honest are people in their interactions?)* **Political**

Everything is out in the open — *Hidden agendas*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Loose *(How do teams approach their work?)* **Organized**

"Go with the flow" — *Details nailed down*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Relationships *(What matters most in prioritizing the work?)* **Strategies**

People-oriented — *Task-oriented*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Flexible *(How accommodating are people of new ideas and approaches?)* **Rigid**

Highly adaptive *Set in our ways*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Conflict-avoidant *(How do people resolve their differences?)* **Conflict-facing**

Avoids hurting others' feelings; seeks harmony *Fearless about disagreeing*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Empathetic *(How much effort do people make to understand each other?)* **Apathetic**

Relating to how others feel *People don't care*

SAMPLE RESOLUTION TO CONSOLIDATE

When the East Lake RCD and the West Lake RCD prepared their application to LAFCO to consolidate to become the Lake County RCD, the boards adopted the resolution below. You might be able to draw from this example to develop your own resolution. We suggest you work with your general counsel to craft the language.

Concurrent Resolution of Application

By The East Lake Resource Conservation District and The West Lake Resource Conservation District Resolution No. 2016-0001

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE EAST LAKE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT AND THE WEST LAKE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT CONSTITUTING THE DISTRICTS' RESOLUTION OF APPLICATION TO THE LAKE LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION TO INITIATE PROCEEDINGS FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE EAST LAKE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT AND THE WEST LAKE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Recitals:

WHEREAS, the Boards of Directors of the East Lake Resource Conservation District ("RCD"), located in Southeastern Lake County, California, and the West Lake RCD, located in Northwestern Lake County, California (the Parties) desire to initiate proceedings pursuant to the Cortese-Knox Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000, Division 3 (commencing with Section 56000) of Title 5 of the Government Code ("Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act") with the Lake Local Agency Formation Commission ("Lake LAFCo") for the Consolidation of the RCDs as specified herein; and

WHEREAS, the Parties have agreed to initiate the Consolidation with Lake LAFCo by adoption of this concurrent resolution; and

WHEREAS, Government Code section 56853 provides in part that, in the case of a concurrent consolidation, Lake LAFCo shall approve, or conditionally approve, the proposed Consolidation; and

WHEREAS, notice of intent to adopt this Concurrent Resolution of Application has not been given to Lake LAFCO, or to any interested agency or subject agency; and

WHEREAS, this proposal is consistent with the Spheres of Influence for the East Lake and West Lake Resource Conservation Districts; and

WHEREAS, the boundaries of the territory included in the consolidated RCD will be the combined territories of the East Lake RCD and the West Lake RCD, as described in Exhibit "A", attached hereto and incorporated herein by this reference; and

WHEREAS, the territory included in the consolidated RCD is inhabited, as defined in the Cortese Knox-Hertzberg Act; and

WHEREAS, the following agencies would be affected by the proposed jurisdictional changes:

1. West Lake Resource Conservation District
2. East Lake Resource Conservation District; and

WHEREAS, the Parties desire that the proposed Consolidation be subject to the following terms and conditions of the consolidation are set forth herein:

a. The name of the consolidated RCD (successor district) shall be the Lake County Resource Conservation District.

b. The consolidated RCD is intended to achieve greater economy and efficiency in providing RCD services for resource conservation issues. The Parties have determined that it is in the best interest of the Parties to consolidate in order to provide better service to the residents of the consolidated RCD.

c. Pursuant to the provisions of California Public Resources Code section 9301.1, the Board of Directors of the consolidated RCD shall be composed of seven members appointed by the Board of Supervisors for overlapping four-year terms, as provided by law. The seven members of the consolidated Board of Directors shall consist of (1) one Director from each Supervisorial District; (2) two additional "at-large" Directors; and (3) no one Supervisorial District shall be represented by more than two Directors. In the event that the initial Lake County RCD Board does not reflect these requirements, then the initial RCD Board will be comprised of members of both prior boards willing to continue in the capacity of Director. The Lake County RCD Board will endeavor to fill vacancies to obtain the required composition.

d. All assets, unrestricted, restricted or fiduciary, held by the Parties, shall be transferred to and become assets of the consolidated RCD. The consolidated RCD shall be the successor agency to the Parties. The assets include, but are not limited to water tank, computers and programs, GPS units, office equipment, chain saws and other tools, display panel, demonstration table and cash assets.

e. All liabilities of the Parties shall be transferred to and become liabilities of the consolidated RCD.

f. The effective date of the Consolidation shall be the date of recordation of the Certificate of Completion of the consolidation by Lake LAFCo.

g. Distribution of Services: The newly-formed Board of Directors of the consolidated RCD will authorize an annual work plan for services throughout the consolidated RCD

h. The Lake County Resource Conservation District shall establish two service zones, areas of benefit, and/or such other structure as may be necessary to ensure that the debts and obligations of the respective Dissolved Districts are borne by the customers residing in the territory of the Dissolved District which incurred the debt or obligation. The service zones, areas of benefit, or other structures shall correspond to the existing service territory of the Dissolved East Lake Resource Conservation District and Dissolved West Lake Resource Conservation District as identified in Exhibits B-1 and C-1 (legal descriptions) and Exhibits B-2 and C-2 (maps); and

i. The sphere of influence for the Lake County Resource Conservation District shall be coterminous with the approved Lake County Resource Conservation District boundary, described above.

WHEREAS, the Parties hereby consent to the proposed Consolidation without election by the registered voters within their respective Districts and request a waiver of conducting authority proceedings; and

WHEREAS, the Parties find that the proposed Consolidation is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") by virtue of Section 15320 of the State CEQA Guidelines (Class 20 Exemption) because the proposed Consolidation is a reorganization of local government agencies where the changes do not change the geographic area in which previously existing powers are exercised;

NOW, THEREFORE, the Boards of Directors of the East Lake RCD and the West Lake RCD hereby find, determine, declare, resolve and order as follows:

a. The foregoing recitals are true and correct and are adopted as hereinabove set forth.

b. Lake LAFCo is requested to undertake proceedings for the proposed Consolidation according to the terms and conditions stated above and in the manner provided in the Cortese Knox-Hertzberg Act.

c. The President of the Board for each Party is authorized and directed to execute this Concurrent Resolution and any other documents as Lake LAFCo may reasonably request to accomplish the consolidation initiated by this Concurrent Resolution upon affirmative Board vote.

d. The Boards of Directors of the Parties shall be, and are hereby, authorized and directed to perform any and all acts required to effect the consolidation initiated by this Concurrent Resolution, including, but not limited to preparation and coordination of the application to Lake LAFCo.

(Note: The Signature Block and Date Block have been deliberately removed from this sample.)

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Resource Conservation Districts

Guidebook for Collaboration & Consolidation