THE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT GUIDEBOOK

A Guide to District Operations and Management

2000

THE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT GUIDEBOOK: A GUIDE TO DISTRICT OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME I: AN RCD HOW-TO GUIDE

STEP 9: HOW TO WRITE ANNUAL REPORTS

LIST OF FIGURES

VOLUME II:
MATERIALS FOR WORKSHOPS

VOLUME III: APPENDICES

APPENDIX   TITLE

VOLUME I
AN RCD HOW-TO GUIDE

PREFACE: HOW TO USE THE RCD *GUIDEBOOK*

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Resource Conservation District (RCD) *Guidebook,* which not only widens the scope of the 1993 *RCD Sourcebook* greatly, it also expands its usefulness. In reviewing the 1993 *Sourcebook* and in listening to requests and recommendations from RCD directors and staff around the state, the *RCD Guidebook* team (a working group of the California Conservation Partnership[1]) decided to greatly expand the concept of the *Sourcebook* to make it much more useable, in several ways.

First, the *Guidebook* is a desk reference, much like the earlier *Sourcebook*. In it you will find information you will need concerning state laws and recommendations governing RCDs, such as Division 9 of the state *Public Resources Code* [2]. Second, the *Guidebook* is also a how-to guide. It systematically takes you through RCD operations and management and provides you with sound advice to move your RCD program forward, one step at a time. Finally, the *Guidebook* is a training tool: it provides you with outlines, instructions, and workshop materials—everything you might need to hold workshops in strategic planning, grant writing, holding effective meetings, and more. The following paragraphs describe in detail how you can use the *Guidebook* to operate and manage your RCD.

THE *GUIDEBOOK* IS A HOW-TO GUIDE

Volume I of the *Guidebook* is founded on many of the source documents, such as Division 9, mentioned above, but it seeks to present this information in a more useable format: a "how-to guide." Directors, managers, and staff of RCDs often ask such questions as, "How do I make sure district meetings are in compliance with the Brown Act?" or, "How should the district create an annual plan?" We have tried to answer questions such as these in an easy to use, logical format.

The nine chapters of Volume I are set up as a sequence of steps: They progress from fundamental issues such as the powers and authorities of RCDs and how to hold district meetings through a step-by-step set of recommendations for planning future district activities, strengthening community involvement, identifying funding sources, educating the public, managing a district on a day-to-day basis, and reporting on district activities.

Obviously, not every RCD will follow this exact sequence in its effort to strengthen its district, but the information contained in these nine steps presents the major provisions of Division 9 and other fundamental documents in a way that is both logical, and, we hope, readable.

Step 1 presents basic information on how to be a district leader. It summarizes the major provisions of Division 9 related to RCDs, provides recommendations for how to structure a district board, and includes brief information on the roles of board members, employees, and contractors.

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[1] A list of California Conservation Partnership working group for training members is included in Appendix Z, RCD Guidebook Development Team.

[2] Throughout the *Guidebook* Division 9 of the *California Public Resources Code* will be referred to simply as "Division 9."

Step 2 provides information on holding district meetings, both to be in legal accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act, and tips for holding successful meetings on a variety of topics.

Step 3 outlines Division 9 requirements for creating district long-range and annual plans, and it provides suggestions for how to implement the strategic planning process to produce a district 5-year plan and associated annual plans.

Step 4 presents community organizing as the starting point for implementing district plans. This step provides suggestions for how to get your community involved in district conservation work.

Step 5 summarizes the main points about funding district plans through government programs. It follows strategic planning and community building as the next logical step in implementing district goals. Although step 5 is closely related to step 6, which offers suggestions for fund raising and grant writing, it highlights government programs that are commonly used to fund district activities.

Step 6 provides a wide range of funding strategies for districts, and it highlights the grant writing process as essential to any district fund raising effort. Central to Step 6 is a grant writing "how-to guide," which present a step by step process for writing, obtaining, and reporting on grants.

Step 7 offers suggestions for district outreach and education programs, and includes strategies for teaching adults, children, and government representatives important ideas about your resource conservation programs.

Step 8 is the "nuts and bolts" chapter on running district operations on a day-to-day basis, included are advice and suggestions on anything from finding affordable office space and equipment to managing projects day to day.

Step 9 concludes the sequence of activities a district might undertake during the course of a year with suggestions for writing district annual reports. Although this chapter focuses on the form and content of annual reports, many of the suggestions offered might pertain to any type of report the district need to create to inform stakeholders of its activities.

Volume I also includes a list of references cited, a bibliography, and a list of acronyms used in the volume.

THE *GUIDEBOOK* IS A TRAINING TOOL

Volume II of the *Guidebook* provides supporting materials for some of the steps in Volume I in the form of workshop materials. Volume II is presented as a curriculum guide for holding training sessions with the public, other agencies, directors, and employees on some of the key issues surrounding the operation and management of districts. Public education in resource conservation is not the only educational task of districts; districts must also educate *themselves* in order to achieve their potential as forceful delivery systems for resource conservation.

Thus, many of the chapters, or "steps," in the *Guidebook* Volume I are presented in Volume II as supporting materials for presenting topics at workshops or other training sessions. For instance, Step 3 in Volume I presents basic information on strategic planning, while Step 3 in Volume II presents a meeting outline and materials for holding the strategic planning sessions themselves. In many cases you may find yourself not only trying to teach yourself about some aspect or procedure of an RCD, but you may find yourself needing to teach others as well.

THE *GUIDEBOOK* IS A DESK REFERENCE

The 1993 *Sourcebook* was designed as a reference tool for finding information on the operation of an RCD. It included major sections on Division 9, guidelines for meetings, and how to hold elections of board directors.

The *Guidebook* keeps important sections of the original *Sourcebook* and adds many more reference materials on topics such as strategic planning, writing annual reports, grant writing, and the Brown Act. These reference materials have been collected into a separate volume of the *Guidebook* (Volume III) in the form of appendices. The appendices contain all of the most detailed information you might need (including the full text of Division 9, among other documents) and are thus designed to be used as reference materials much as in the original *Sourcebook*.

FUTURE CHANGES TO THE *GUIDEBOOK*

We hope you find the *Guidebook* useful, and the *Guidebook* team has worked hard to make it so, but the *Guidebook* is not intended to be a "finished" document. Because it is presented in a loose-leaf format, the design of the *Guidebook* allows it to be updated, corrected, and revised as new information is received (in particular, sections in Volume II will be added as training materials are developed). Please feel free make suggestions for improving both the usefulness and the contents of the *Guidebook* at any time by contacting the California Department of Conservation's Division of Land Resource Protection at (916) 324-0850.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS AN RCD?

Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), once known as Soil Conservation Districts, are "special districts" of the state of California, set up under California law to be locally governed agencies with their own locally appointed or elected, independent boards of directors. Although RCDs are established locally by the rules of a county's Local Agency Formation Committee (LAFCO), and often have close ties to county government, they are not county government entities.

There are numerous types of special districts throughout the state set up to administer needs of local people for pest control, fire fighting, water distribution, and a host of other services. Some special districts are "enterprise" districts and deliver services or products, such as water, to local customers on a fee basis. Other districts, "non-enterprise" districts, deliver services, such as fire or police protection, to all local residents. These are usually supported on a taxation basis. RCDs have characteristics of both enterprise and non-enterprise districts.

Under Division 9 of the California *Public Resources Code*,[1] RCDs are permitted to function to a certain degree as enterprise districts because they are empowered to charge reasonable fees for services rendered. At the same time, certain rules permit RCDs to draw on local taxes for revenues, though the passage of Proposition 13 in 1977 has made it much more difficult for RCDs to function in this way.[2]

Though not governed by the state directly, special districts, among them RCDs, are subject to state law concerning elections, responsibilities, legal meetings, and much more. RCDs, however, are given their primary authority to implement local conservation measures by Division 9. Step 1, How to be an Effective District Leader, sets forth the primary powers and authorities of RCDs as presented in Division 9.

HISTORY OF RCDs

In response to the national "Dust Bowl" crisis of the 1930s, when millions of acres of cropland were destroyed by drought and attendant soil loss, the federal government passed legislation in 1937 establishing the Soil Conservation Service (SCS). Conservationists soon realized that a federal agency in Washington may not be sufficiently responsive to local needs, so local counterparts of the SCS were set up under state law to be controlled by local boards of directors. Thus were born "Soil Conservation Districts," which began forming in the late 1930s and quickly spread throughout the 48 states. Soil Conservation Districts began to perform the functions originally envisioned by the formation of the SCS.

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[1] Throughout the *Guidebook* this government code is referred to as simply as "Division 9."

[2] The passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 significantly curtailed the ability of districts to derive revenue from new property-tax assessments. New assessments require two-thirds voter approval within the district. Districts receiving property tax revenues prior to Proposition 13 generally continue to receive county-collected property taxes that are proportionate to their pre-Proposition 13 share.

In California, Soil Conservation Districts have been formed in all parts of the state beginning in the 1940s, continuing up to the present. Many have been consolidated over time so that of the hundreds of districts that once existed in California, 103 now remain (see Figure I-1 for a map of current RCDs in California).

Under Division 9, Soil Conservation Districts were originally empowered to manage soil and water resources for conservation, but these powers were expanded in the early 1970s to include "related resources," including fish and wildlife habitat. This expansion of powers was reflected in the change of name from "Soil" Conservation Districts to "Resource" Conservation Districts in 1971.

Today, RCDs manage a diversity of resource conservation projects, including soil and water conservation projects, wildlife habitat enhancement and restoration, control of exotic plant species, watershed restoration, conservation planning, education, and many others. Since most RCDs receive very little regular funding through local taxation, they rely heavily on grants and other types of fundraising to stay in operation.

WHY DO WE NEED RCDS?

Until the formation of Soil Conservation Districts there was no organized mechanism for disseminating resource conservation information, expertise, and assistance. Farmers and ranchers often had no one to turn to for soil and water conservation information and assistance. It took a crisis of national proportions, the Dust Bowl, to bring this about. Farmers and ranchers still need up-to-date scientific information and techniques to manage the natural resources on their properties, and the need for ongoing conservation education and assistance among all sectors of the public is as great or greater than ever.

RCDs continue to render assistance to private landowners wishing to conserve soil and water and manage their resources on a sustainable basis. But RCDs also act as a focal point for local conservation efforts, and RCDs throughout the state now function as leaders in the conservation community, including a large amount of watershed groups such as Coordinated Resource Management Planning (CRMP) groups in California. RCDs continue to sponsor educational efforts to teach children and adults alike the importance of conserving resources.

Though there are growing contributions by other groups and organizations that raise public awareness of resource conservation, RCDs remain one of the primary links between local people and government on issues related to conservation. With an ever dwindling base of resources and environmental pressures from a host of human activities, the work of RCDs will continue to be needed far into the future.

ORGANIZATION OF RCDS

As stated earlier, RCDs are formed through the auspices of county-based LAFCOs, and county government often exercises limited oversight over RCD boards. At one time, RCD directors were elected on a local basis through county government. With rising costs for holding elections, most RCD directors are now appointed by county boards of supervisors. In many cases district boundaries cross county lines, so responsibility for organizing appointment or election efforts of district board members falls to the county

California
Resource Conservation Districts

1. Alameda County
2. Alpine
3. Amador County
4. Antelope Valley
5. Bard
6. Buena Vista
7. Butte Valley
8. Cachuma
9. Central Modoc
10. Chowchilla-Red Top
11. Coachella Valley
12. Coarsegold
13. Coastal San Luis
14. Columbia
15. Colusa County
16. Contra Costa
17. Dixon
18. East Lake
19. East Merced
20. East Stanislaus
21. East Valley
22. Eastern Kern County
23. El Dorado County
24. Elsinore-Murrieta-Anza
25. Excelsior-Kings River

26. Fall River
27. Feather River
28. Firebaugh
29. Florin
30. Georgetown Divide
31. Glenn County
32. Gold Ridge
33. Goose Lake
34. Grassland
35. Greater San Diego County
36. Guadalupe-Coyote
37. Gustine-Romero
38. Honey Lake Valley
39. Humboldt County
40. Imperial Irrigation District
41. Inland Empire West
42. Inyo-Mono
43. James
44. Kern Valley
45. Lava Beds
46. Loma Prieta
47. Los Banos
48. Lower Cosumnes
49. Madera
50. Marin County
51. Mariposa County
52. Mendocino County
53. Mission
54. Mojave Desert
55. Mono County
56. Monterey County
57. Napa County
58. Navalencia
59. Nevada County
60. Palo Verde

61. Panoche
62. Pit
63. Placer County
64. Pond-Shafter-Wasco
65. Poso
66. Riverside-Corona
67. Rosedale-Rio Bravo
68. San Benito
69. San Jacinto Basin
70. San Joaquin County
71. San Luis
72. San Mateo County
73. Santa Cruz County
74. Santa Monica Mountains
75. Shasta Valley
76. Sierra
77. Sierra Valley
78. Siskiyou
79. Sloughhouse
80. Sotoyome
81. Southern Sonoma County
82. Suisun
83. Surprise Valley
84. Sutter County
85. Tahoe
86. Tehachapi
87. Tehama County
88. Tranquillity
89. Trinity County
90. Tulare County
91. Tulare Lake
92. Ulatis
93. Upper Salinas-Las Tablas
94. Upper San Luis Rey
95. Ventura County
96. Vina
97. West Lake
98. West Stanislaus
99. Western Kern
100. Western Shasta
101. Westside
102. Yolo County
103. Yuba County

Areas of the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts

- North Coast
- Modoc Plateau
- Central Sierra
- High Desert
- Southern California Baja
- South Coast
- Central Coast
- Bay-Delta
- San Joaquin Valley
- Sacramento Valley

- Non-district areas
- County boundaries
- RCD boundaries

Resource Conservation District Areas are defined by the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) for the purpose of providing regional-level representation of Districts to the CARCD Board of Directors. The CARCD Board of Directors provides leadership for the Association as an instrument of its member Districts in carrying out state-level soil and water conservation policies. The Association also provides policy input to state and federal agencies and to other conservation and agricultural organizations. The boundaries of individual Districts and CARCD Areas represented on this map reflect all changes to January 1, 1998.

scale

0   100   200 km

Map compiled and produced by the California Department of Conservation, Land Conservation Unit. Sources for Resource Conservation District (RCD) boundaries and RCD Areas include the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service; Individual RCD offices; and the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts. County lines produced by the Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program from United States Geological Survey 1:100,000 scale topographic quadrangle maps. Copyright (c) 1998, California Department of Conservation. The Department of Conservation makes no warranties as to the suitability of this product for any particular purpose.

with the most district area within its boundaries. Some counties have more than one district within county boundaries.

District boards, however, function independently of county government, and they derive their powers and purposes from state law. Division 9 enables districts to have 5, 7, or 9 directors, who serve as voting members of the board of directors. Decisions or actions of an RCD board are approved by majority vote of the full board (see Step 2, How to Hold Legal and Effective Meetings, "Quorum," for more information on the board as a decision-making body).

Board members are appointed or elected on their strengths as active partners in the conservation community, and, most frequently, board members are private landowners within a district with interest in conserving resources on their own lands. Boards are meant, however, to represent a broad spectrum of resource conservation interests and perspectives. Board members often differ in their interests and conservation philosophies, yet the structure of a board offers a way for local districts to forge coherent conservation policies and programs that balance diverse interests and represent the broader spectrum of opinions within a community.

RCD boards, under state law, meet publicly once a month to debate about local conservation issues, and make decisions or take actions on these issues. Boards also frequently employ specialists and contractors to carry out board policies and projects, and, as mentioned earlier, these may address a broad array of conservation issues. Board members implement district policies and programs on a volunteer basis (board members cannot be paid for their services to RCDs). As such, district directors often serve as conservation educators to landowners, schools, and the public to raise awareness of conservation in the local community.

Directors also educate and inform state government representatives to rally support for resource conservation locally and on a state-wide basis. One of the primary means RCDs use to organize representation at the state and national levels is through the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD), a non-profit organization set up to serve the districts of California. Through CARCD *Areas*, districts coordinate their efforts to raise awareness of conservation issues on a broader geographic level by meeting with other districts in their area. They share information and coordinate representation to state and federal government entities (see Figure I-1 for a map of CARCD Areas).

CORE FUNCTIONS OF RCDS

RCDs are empowered to conserve natural resources within their districts by implementing projects on public and private lands and to educate landowners and the public about resource conservation. Beyond this, RCDs are given the right to form associations to coordinate resource conservation efforts on a larger level. The core functions of a district revolve around its right to use diverse means to further resource conservation within its district (see Step One, How to be an Effective District Leader, for more information).

A good example of an association of RCDs is CARCD, which coordinates assistance to RCDs in the state, offers a structure for RCDs to meet and set priorities, and represents the interests of California RCDs to state and federal representatives. CARCD's

governing board is made up of area representatives from each of the 10 California regions (see Figure I-1). The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) performs similar functions as CARCD for conservation districts (including resource conservation districts) at the national level.

DIVISION 9, THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION, AND RCDS

As a portion of the state Public Resources Code, Division 9 outlines the structures, powers, and authorities of RCDs under state law. It also provides for state-level support of RCDs through the state Department of Conservation.[3] The Department of Conservation does not have regulatory oversight of RCDs; the department serves districts through offering ongoing training on Division 9 and related government codes, providing technical assistance through education, as well as offering some financial assistance to districts through competitive grant awards.

RELATIONSHIP OF RCDS AND NRCS

The relationship between RCDs and the US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), formerly known as the "SCS," has been long standing. As noted above, the NRCS was originally formed to address the crisis of the Dust Bowl, and the legislation establishing local conservation districts was created shortly thereafter. Since then, NRCS and RCDs have had a close working relationship within districts, with NRCS appointing a local district conservationist to provide technical assistance to districts, as well as acting as a liaison between the district and federal programs. Local offices of the NRCS also frequently employ other specialists, such as soil conservationists and engineers, to provide technical assistance to the district.

RCDs and NRCS formally ratified their relationship through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed more than fifty years ago to establish a partnership and mutual roles between districts and the USDA. In 1994 the MOU was revised "to modernize and reinvent their historic partnership," and to add state conservation agencies to the agreement.

Recently, several new documents were created to supplement this MOU and to further define the roles of the partners. In line with this, a Mutual Agreement (set up under PL 103-354) was drafted to provide each district an opportunity to enter into a formal agreement with NRCS, state agencies, and tribes. It establishes a framework for cooperation between the various partners (for a sample Mutual Agreement, See Appendix D, Partnership Agreements).

Another tool California RCDs have for federal, state, and local partnerships is a Cooperative Working Agreement between the NRCS, individual RCDs, CARCD, and the California Department of Conservation. The purpose of the agreement is to supplement the Mutual Agreement and document "areas of common interest of the State, Federal, and Local partnership in natural resources conservation." It reinforces the idea of "locally led conservation," with individual districts being responsible for "exerting leadership to identify local resource needs, advocate for effective solutions and work with appropriate

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[3] Division 9 originally set up oversight of resource conservation in the state through a state Resource Conservation Commission, which was dismantled during the late 1970s. Responsibility for this role fell to the Department of Conservation thereafter.

parties on implementation." This agreement underscores in particular the relationships between a district and other government entities. RCDs are primarily responsible for providing leadership and local policies within districts, with assistance of many kinds coming from state and federal government (see Appendix D, Partnership Agreements, for a copy of this Cooperative Working Agreement).

Finally, provisions were set up for an Operating Agreement between individual districts and any local entities involved with natural resource concerns. The Operating Agreement can be developed at the local level to address local needs: "It is initiated by the district board, revisited annually, can replace annual work plans, defines roles and responsibilities at the local level, and provides opportunities to establish and review district priorities. It is signed by the district and others as deemed necessary by the district."[4]

RELATIONSHIPS OF RCDS TO OTHER FEDERAL, STATE, AND PRIVATE STAKEHOLDERS

RCDs in California as a whole have no formal relationship with other federal, state, and private entities, though Division 9 encourages individual districts to form partnerships with any entities it might need to. Typically, other agencies such the US Environmental Protection Agency at the federal level, or California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection at the state level, willingly enter into agreements with individual districts to collaborate on projects. A district's role regardless of potential partnerships is to identify resource conservation needs within a district and plan for solutions. Division 9 encourages districts to invite representatives of other entities to provide input during the strategic planning process and form partnerships to achieve conservation district objectives. Districts typically enter into contracts (grant contracts or cost share agreements) to accomplish work both partners in the agreement see as mutually beneficial to resources in the district. For a sample partnership agreement, see Appendix D.

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[4] From a fact sheet published by the USDA NRCS in July 1995 detailing the provisions of the revised MOU and associated documents discussed above. For a copy of this fact sheet, see Appendix D, Partnership Agreements.

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STEP 1
HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE DISTRICT LEADER

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INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the introduction, Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) derive their powers and authorities from Division 9 of the *California Public Resources Code.* RCDs are special districts, political subdivisions of the State of California. A full text of Division 9 can be found in Appendix B. You can gain an overview of the basic powers and authorities an RCD can use to develop its local conservation program by learning some of the primary roles outlined for RCDs in Division 9 and summarized in the paragraphs below.

POWERS AND AUTHORITIES OF RCDS UNDER DIVISION 9

Managing

Under the authority granted it by Division 9 an RCD may:

- *Manage District Operations*. This includes managing the day-to-day business of an RCD, including its budget and other financial matters.

- *Manage Projects Within Districts On Public And Private Lands*. Division 9 gives RCDs authority to oversee and manage soil, water, and other natural resource conservation projects on both public and private lands. RCDs are not regulatory agencies; they build cooperative, voluntary partnerships with landowners and land managers and enter into agreements to provide resource conservation services to the landowner or land manager. RCDs offer a valuable service to landowners and land managers by providing leadership and know-how to help them conserve resources.

- *Make Improvements on Private and Public Lands*. With consent of landowners and land managers, RCDs are granted authority to implement projects in order to conserve soil, water, and other valuable natural resources on both private and public lands.

- *Acquire Lands, Easements, and Property*. RCDs are also given authority under Division 9 to purchase and hold lands, easements, and property. An RCD can purchase land in need of extensive conservation treatments, especially when ownership of the land will help in managing it. An RCD can also purchase easements, such as riparian zones, to manage for the purposes of conserving resources. An RCD may also purchase and own structures, equipment, and tools in order to undertake resource conservation work.

Cooperating to Plan, Receive Funding, and Deliver Services

One of the primary ways an RCD broadens its ability to conserve resources is by forming partnerships with other districts, with the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD); CARCD Area members; federal, state, and local governments; and Indian Tribes.

- *Partner with other Districts, CARCD, CARCD Areas*. Forming partnerships strengthens district operations by giving an RCD access to information, knowledge, and skills. In addition, partnerships for the purposes of resource conservation planning can identify common interests between partners to facilitate sharing of expertise and resources. Often, funding agencies make grants to entities working in partnership with other agencies and organizations because they see this as a way of stretching limited grant dollars and achieving the most with limited funds.

- *Cooperate with Federal, State, and Local Governments and Tribes*. Division 9 gives RCDs the authority to enter into agreements with federal, state and local governments as well as Indian tribes to collaborate on resource conservation projects within districts. In addition, RCDs are empowered to receive grants and other funding from government agencies.

Coordinating Representation to Federal, State, and Local Governments

RCDs are given latitude to form partnerships with other districts, CARCD, and CARCD Areas to educate and inform government decision makers, such as legislators, about the strengths of RCDs for local conservation efforts. With the frequent turnover in legislative office holders, educating elected officials about RCDs is an ongoing effort. Important also is keeping government apprised of the latest developments in resource conservation programs, as well as the basic strengths of districts to promote sound conservation practices. RCDs are spoken of as "California's Best Kept Secret," yet the full potential of what an RCD can achieve will only be reached when elected officials become aware of what districts can do. A constant effort to keep RCDs in the minds of decision makers has been and will be an ongoing need both by districts and district associations.

Performing Education and Outreach

- *Conduct Surveys and Research, Disseminate Information*. Division 9 empowers RCDs to act as clearinghouses of conservation education and to disseminate this information to local government, schools, and the public. Part of this effort may be to conduct basic research, including scientific research and surveys of public knowledge and opinion, and to relay this information to the public.

- *Perform Education, Outreach, and Demonstration Projects*. In order to educate, RCDs are given the power to directly educate the public through any number of means, including media, publications, or public events such as demonstration projects.

Accepting Funding

In order to accomplish valuable resource conservation work RCDs need funding. Division 9 has given RCDs authority to receive monies from various sources and to spend it on resource conservation within districts. RCDs have latitude to accept funding or raise money in many ways. Division 9, however, prohibits RCDs from using water to generate electrical power: "The districts shall not conserve water for power purposes or

produce or distribute power for their own use or for the use of others" (§9001(c)).[1] Under Division 9 RCDs are allowed to:

- *Accept Grants and Gifts*. Grants come in many forms from many sources, but all provide districts with funding to execute resource conservation work within districts, either directly through funding for projects, or indirectly through capacity building funding or educational grants. RCDs may also receive gifts of money to undertake conservation work within districts.

- *Receive Funding through Federal, State, and Private Sources*. RCDs may receive federal and state funding through various governmental agencies and from private foundations who wish to support the work of RCDs.

- *Establish Fees for Services*. RCDs may charge reasonable fees for performing services, such as providing labor or equipment to assist with conservation projects.

- *Accept and Use Contributions*. RCDs may receive and use monetary contributions from individuals, charitable organizations, or other groups. Such contributions are usually made without connections to specific projects and an RCD may use such money to cover basic operations or to purchase equipment.

Acting as an Employer

RCDs can hire employees and others to perform district work. Under Division 9, an RCD may:

- *Employ Agents, Officers, and Employees*. RCDs may hire agents, officers, and employees to carry out the goals and objectives of the district. An RCD can hire permanent and temporary employees, and delegate some district functions to paid staff (see also below, "Employees and Contractors").

- *Employ Contractors*. An RCD may employ contractors to accomplish specific tasks associated with projects or district operations. Frequently utilized contractors include scientists, equipment contractors, registered professional foresters, and computer specialists (see also below, "Employees and Contractors").

Exercising Legal Powers

An RCD is a type of special district, organized under authority of the state and as such is subject to legal powers and conditions similar to other state entities. This means that an RCD may:

- *Sue and be Sued.* As a special district of the state, an RCD is not exempt from legal action. An RCD may be sued for its actions or the actions of individual board

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[1] Since most article references in the Guidebook are to Division 9, plain numerical article designations (for example, "§9151) refer to Division 9; other reference sources are stated with the code designation spelled out (for example, "Government Code §54151"). Except where noted, citations marked with the article sign (§) refer to Division 9 *(*included here in Volume III, Appendix B).

members. It may also bring lawsuits against individuals or entities (see also Step 8, How to Manage RCD Daily Operations, "Insurance and Liability").

- *Call upon District Attorney or County Counsel for Legal Advice.* Under Division 9 RCDs are given a right to have legal guidance, either from a local district attorney or county counsel.

Creating and Executing Conservation Plans

Planning is an important part of resource conservation, and Division 9 recommends that RCDs survey the conservation needs in their districts and devise plans to address them.

- *Develop Long-Range and Annual Plans*. Division 9 gives RCDs authority to survey resource conservation needs within a district and to create long-range plans to address them. They are further empowered to form partnerships with other government entities and other groups for the purposes of planning. The California Legislature has worked to encourage RCDs to create short- and long-range plans, and passed legislation requiring that districts do so by January 1, 2000 in order to qualify for state funding through the Department of Conservation.

THE ROLE OF A RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The role of an RCD is to "take available technical, financial, and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land user and local communities for conservation of soil, water, and related resources."[2]

THE OVERALL FUNCTION OF AN RCD BOARD

The overall function of an RCD board of directors is to provide resource conservation leadership to people and communities within the district. The primary role of an RCD board is that of a decision-making body to set policy, create and implement plans, and educate the public about resource conservation issues.

SPECIFIC ROLES OF AN RCD BOARD

The following list of items presents some of the primary roles of an RCD board to perform the functions of an RCD:

- Identify local conservation needs, and develop, implement, and evaluate programs to meet them

- Educate and inform landowners and operators, the general public, and local, state, and federal legislators on conservation issues and programs

- Supervise other volunteers and paid staff working with the district

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[2] From a fact sheet published by the National Association of Conservation Districts' (NACD) Capacity Building Center, Pullman, WA.

- Coordinate with other agency personnel

- Administer the district by delegating tasks through the structure of board officers and members, committees, and employees

- Raise and budget district funds

- Report on activities to the public

- Coordinate assistance and funding from federal, state and local government; district associations; and private groups

COMMON BOARD STRUCTURES

Division 9 states that "the board of directors of a district shall manage and conduct the business and affairs of the district" (§9401). The powers of a district thus reside in the board as a whole, not in individual directors: "the powers shall be exercised and the duties performed by the directors acting as a body and not as individuals" (§9023). The board as a whole makes decisions (by majority vote) on issues relating to resource conservation in a district, but individual directors or groups of directors in the form of committees may study issues and make recommendations to the full board for action or policy setting. To a certain extent, roles of individual board members and the use of board structures such as committees are left open for boards to determine, so long as decisions on actions and policies are decided by vote of the full board in a meeting that is open to public attendance and participation. [3]

The following paragraphs list board structures proven to be effective in the management of districts. These are outlined in publications such as Bader and Carr's *Board Leadership and Development: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Boards, Councils, and Committees*, a publication recognized by the National Association of Conservation Districts as providing guidance in board operations. Similar recommendations are made by the California Special District Association's *Sample Policy Handbook*. Information on acquiring copies of these publications is presented in Appendix W, Contact Information.

Size of the Board

Division 9 requires that an RCD Board consist of either 5, 7, or 9 members (§9301).

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[3] One recommendation for clearly outlining the roles of board members, committees, and employees is for the district to create a policy for these roles. An important component of director/employee policies is the need for directors and employees alike to treat one another with respect and to engage in the business of the district using high standards of professionalism. For more information on employee policies, as well as related subjects, such as position descriptions, hiring and firing, and standards of conduct, see Step 8, How to Manage RCD Daily Operations.

Officers[4]

President

The board president, or "chair," has these specific roles to play:

1. *Develop and Distribute Meeting Agendas*. The president oversees the development of the agenda for regular public board meetings (held, usually, once a month). S/he may do this with input from others such as directors, district conservationists, Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) directors, and district employees. The agenda is mailed to interested parties and board members, and it is posted publicly in advance of the meeting in accordance with the Brown Act (see Step 2, "How to Hold Legal and Effective Meetings," and Appendices F and G for discussion of the Brown Act).

2. *Preside at all meetings*. The board president presides over all board meetings unless absent. The vice president presides whenever the board president is absent.

3. *During meetings, to act as facilitator for orderly discussion*. The president or chair ensures that standard parliamentary procedure is followed during meeting discussions. The president usually keeps his or her comments to a minimum, but allows and encourages others to speak. Use of standard parliamentary procedure is presented in Step 2, How to Hold Legal and Effective Meetings.

4. *Suggest or ask for motions*. The board president may suggest that motions be made and may make them him/herself.

5. *Re-state motions, ask for votes on motions, and announce the outcome of votes.*

6. *Appoint committees, assign responsibilities, and ask for reports when due.*

7. *Train and inform new board members.*

8. *Provide direct supervision to district employees or to the district manager.*

Vice President

The board vice president has these specific roles to play:

1. *Preside at board meetings when the president is absent.*
2. *Assume the other duties of the president when asked by the president.*

Secretary

The board secretary has these specific roles to play:

1. *Oversee the preparation and distribution of meeting agendas under direction of the president.*

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[4] *Simplified Parliamentary Procedure*, a brochure by the National Association of Conservation Districts, was used to develop this section on officers.

2. *Keep a list of suggested agenda items for the president to use when developing the agenda.*

3. *Keep minutes for each meeting.* Guidelines for keeping meeting minutes are presented in Step 2, "How to Hold Legal and Effective Meetings."

4. *Record committee activities.* Keep records of committees and committee members both standing and special. Notify committee members of their appointment to committees if they were not present.

5. *Initiate correspondence on behalf of the board as needed.*

Treasurer

The board treasurer has these specific roles to play:

1. *Maintain complete and accurate records of receipts and expenditures for the district.*

2. *Issue receipts for all monies received and pay bills when authorized and approved by the board.*

3. *Make sure all authorized payments are recorded in the minutes.*

4. *Make a monthly financial report to the board.*

5. *Make an annual financial statement in the annual report to the public of all district funds.*

6. *Deposit checks in the district account.*

Directors[5]

The role of an individual RCD director is vital to overall board operations. Thus, the role of an RCD board member is to:

> *serve on a multi-member board that establishes and implements programs to protect and conserve soil, water, prime and unique farmland, rangeland, woodland, wildlife, energy and other renewable resources on local, non-federal lands.[6]*

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[5] §9352 requires that the following qualifications to be met by prospective directors and associate directors:
   (a)   Directors shall be registered voters in the state.
   (b)   Directors shall (1) reside within the district and either own real property in the district or alternatively have served, pursuant to the district's rules, for two years or more as an associate director providing advisory or other assistance to the board of directors, or (2) be a designated agent of a resident landowner within the district.
[6] From a fact sheet by the NACD Capacity Building Center, Pullman, WA.

An individual director's powers are based on his or her role as a board member: The board makes decisions, creates plans, and implements actions. Directors gather information and present recommendations to the full board, which the board can then discuss and take action on. Some responsibilities of a board may be delegated to committees to gather information and make recommendations to the full board. Often, boards appoint committees such as budget, education, planning, personnel, and fundraising committees. Such committees are not decision-making bodies: only the full board (or a at least a quorum[7]) can make decisions to take action or set policies.

Board members cannot be paid for work done on behalf of the board, nor can they be employed as contractors or other service providers while serving on the board. Board members may be reimbursed, however, for expenses incurred while travelling to carry out district business. Reimbursement amounts are set by the board in a board travel policy.

In line with the prohibition against payment to board members for services is the requirement for directors to avoid potential conflicts of interest and to disclose actual or potential conflicts before their appointment: "No director or other officer of the district shall be interested directly or indirectly in the sale of equipment, materials, or services to the district" (§9304). The degree to which directors must disclose assets or business interests in a conflict of interest statement is determined by each county. Typically, directors sign an agreement not to engage in conflicts of interest, and these agreements are kept on file by the county in which the district resides. For more information on conflict of interest disclosure, see Appendix E.

An RCD director has these specific roles to play:

1. *Attend regular board meetings*.

2. *Listen to, discuss, and vote on board motions to make decisions and take actions*.

3. *Assume duties and carry out tasks assigned by the president, including duties associated with membership in committees*.

4. *Assist other board members as required*.

5. *Be familiar with all board programs*.

6. *Be prepared to serve in one of the board officer positions*.

Associate Directors

Associate directors are not voting members of the board. The position of associate director has been established to allow members of the community opportunities to participate in RCD activities when they do not meet the stricter requirements for directors, such as owning property in the district. Under Division 9, however, associate

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[7] A "quorum" is a majority of board members, whether or not they are actually present (for example, three of five members voting for or against a motion). For more information on board voting procedures, see Step 2, How to Hold Legal and Effective Meetings, Part 1: Legal Meetings, "Quorum."

directors may qualify for board positions after they have served for a period of time as associate directors.[8]

An associate director has these specific roles to play:

1. *Assist with field days, field tours, annual meetings, contests, educational activities, and other special events*.

2. *Serve in advisory capacity to the board*. Associate directors may not vote on district business or assume the official responsibilities of board members.

Committees

Establishing committees is one way for a board to delegate work on some activities. Committees take the form of "standing" and "a*d hoc*" committees. Standing committees are formed to address the ongoing work of the district, and, though membership may sometimes change, they remain in existence to serve an ongoing advisory role for the board. The following is a list of common standing committees used by district boards:

- Education
- Budget
- Fundraising
- Public Relations
- Legislative

Ad hoc—or "special" —committees are formed in response to specific tasks, problems, or needs. Once a task is accomplished, the *ad hoc* committee is dissolved. An example might be an *ad hoc* committee formed to plan a field tour for a visiting government official. The committee plans the tour and associated events, directs the tour, but when the event is over, the *ad hoc* committee is dissolved.

Employees and Contractors

Under Division 9 a district board is empowered to hire employees and to contract with others on a limited basis to complete certain tasks: "The directors may execute all necessary contracts. They may employ such agents, officers, and employees as may be necessary, prescribe their duties, and fix their compensation" (§9404). Employees may undertake certain functions of a district under direction of the board, but employees may not perform the official duties of a board member such as make or vote on motions, preside over board meetings, call special meetings, or create agendas.

Employees may be delegated tasks associated with board secretaries and treasurers, and they may perform some of the activities associated with committees. For example, an employee may assume the roles an education committee might normally perform,

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[8] Division 9 **§**9352 states that associate directors must "serve, pursuant to the district's rules, two years or more" before they can become full directors. After this term of service associate directors are qualified for regular director under Division 9, if the board chooses to appoint them to this position, even if they do not own or manage property in the district. Associate directors moving to full director positions still need to meet the other requirements for directors in Division 9 such as being registered voters in the district.

which are to collect and evaluate information and make recommendations to the board on educational matters. The employee might also coordinate, oversee, or implement educational activities or programs the board decides are worthwhile. The same is true for district financial activities and record keeping: an employee may be assigned the role of preparing the monthly and annual budgets or, in turn, keeping and documenting minutes of board meetings.

Contractors differ from employees in the way that standing committees differ from *ad hoc* committees: while employees are hired to perform ongoing functions of a district such as record keeping or education, contractors are hired for a limited time in order to complete *specific* tasks; once those tasks are completed, the contractor is no longer employed by the district, at least until such time as they enter into another contract with the district. Care needs to be taken with contracting to meet requirements as defined by the Internal Revenue Service Code. For more information on contracting, see Step 9, How to Manage RCD Daily Operations, Part Three: Contracting and Subcontracting.

STEP 2
HOW TO HOLD LEGAL AND EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

INTRODUCTION

According to §9308, the board shall hold regular monthly meetings. Regular meetings help ensure that the district communicates its message consistently and that the public has a chance to participate in resource conservation decision making. At meetings, the board makes decisions about conservation policies and monitors implementation of resource conservation plans. The sections that follow summarize the legal requirements for meetings and offer suggestions for holding effective meetings.

PART ONE: LEGAL MEETINGS

Part one of this chapter outlines the legal requirements for district meetings as expressed in Division 9 and the California Open Meeting Law. As public agencies, Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) are required by law to conform to standards set for all government entities. These requirements pertain to meetings where a majority of the board meets to make decisions. Typically, these will be monthly board meetings or special board meetings, although other instances apply (see Appendices F and G for more information). In addition, the basics of these requirements, as well standard procedures for parliamentary proceedings based on *Robert's Rules of Order,* are outlined in the paragraphs that follow.

Quorum

A quorum is the minimum number of board members who must be present for formal actions of the board to be valid. According to §9312 a majority of directors on a board constitutes a quorum (e.g., three members of a five-member board). In order to pass a motion, at least the number constituting a quorum must concur (e.g., if three, four, or five members of a five-member board are present, at least three members must concur in order to pass a motion). Notwithstanding this restriction, a number less than a quorum may adjourn a meeting. Table 2-1 presents requirements for quorums depending on board size.

Figure 2-1. Quorums for Corresponding Board Sizes

Number of Board Members	Number Needed for Quorum	Number Yes Votes Needed to Pass Motions
5	3	3
7	4	4
9	5	5

California Open Meeting Law (Brown Act)

The Ralph M. Brown Act, known as the "California Open Meeting Law" or the "Brown Act," is intended to ensure that decisions affecting the public are made publicly. Under the Brown Act (Government Code §54950 et seq.), state government exists to serve Californians, and cannot decide for the public what information is good and what

information is not good for them to know. The people must remain apprised of government's activities to retain control over the agencies that serve them. The Brown Act protects citizens from potential abuses by local and state public agencies. It safeguards the people's right to observe and comment on local governmental decisions that may affect themselves, their homes, businesses, organizations, and communities (*Open and Public II,* 1994[1]).

The Brown Act underwent revisions in January 1999. Appendices F and G contain a summary of the Brown Act, compiled by Michael Jenkins,[2] as well as the full text of the most recent revision of the Brown Act. A user's guide to the Brown Act entitled, *Open and Public II* (Capital Inquiry 1993), explains the Brown Act in plain language. This publication includes hypothetical examples of common situations where the Brown Act may apply.

The following paragraphs summarize the Brown Act's key statutes. They are intended to illustrate the general purposes of the Brown Act. However, other aspects of the Brown Act may also be important. Therefore, RCD board members and staff are advised to read the present information as a primer and refer to the summary or the actual text of the Brown Act for more specific information.

Public Notification of Meetings

The Brown Act is intended to protect the public, the district, and district employees. Local officials must make public any decision made, policy enacted, topic discussed, or project funded that affects a community, city, county, school, or local organization. This allows people to monitor public agencies for abuses that could adversely affect them or society at large.

Notifying the public is only required by the Brown Act if a quorum of board members is present. A quorum is the minimum number of members that must be present for business transactions to be valid (see also "Quorum" above). If this quorum requirement is not met, then the Brown Act does not apply to the group meeting. However, if two members meet privately to discuss a policy, then one of the members meets with a third member to discuss the same issue, and then the third meets with a fourth, and so on, the Brown Act applies. Such closed, serial meetings are in violation of the Brown Act because a quorum is eventually involved.

Also, public notification applies to standing advisory committees comprised solely of board members even if they number less than a quorum (Government Code §54952). To be a standing committee, a group must have "continuing subject matter jurisdiction" or a regular meeting schedule formally adopted by the board.

Public Access to Meetings

All meetings of the legislative bodies of local agencies shall be open and public (Government Code §54953). §9313 *also* requires districts to ensure that meetings, as well as records, remain open to the public. However, certain exceptions to this open

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[1] Full citations for publications mentioned in Volume I are listed under "References Cited" at the end of this volume.
[2] Used by permission of Richards, Watson, and Gershon, Attorneys-at-Law.

meeting requirement do exist to protect the district (see below, "Closed Sessions" and "Privacy for Employees"). Furthermore, no conditions shall be placed on a person's attendance at a meeting (Government Code §54953.3). For example, the district cannot insist that a person wishing to attend a meeting register his/her name, provide information, or complete a questionnaire. However, this information can be requested on a voluntary basis. To ensure that people have the opportunity to attend, the district shall indicate the time and place for holding regular meetings (Government Code §5495). This information shall be provided by ordinance, resolution, bylaws, or whatever rule is required for the conduct of business.

The Brown Act also ensures that the public is informed of decisions by requiring the district to allow anyone to speak during meetings (Government Code §54954.3). Usually this opportunity is provided during an open-discussion period at the end of the meeting. Topics must be within the jurisdiction of the district (e.g., creek restoration is appropriate, but school busing is not). In addition, the board cannot prohibit public criticism of the board or the district (Government Code §54954.3). The Brown Act does not exempt lunch, dinner, social events, or retreats where the board discusses or takes action on district business. The public must be informed any time such matters are discussed, *wherever* they are discussed, even if no action results.

The Use of Agendas

The district must create and post an agenda for any regular meeting, including closed sessions (Government Code §54954.2). The agenda must include a brief, general description of each item of business to be transacted or discussed at the meeting. The board must post this agenda at least 72 hours before each regular meeting.

The district cannot take action or discuss any items not on the agenda (Government Code §54954.2), except for board members responding to statements or questions posed by persons addressing the board. If an emergency or a need to take immediate action on an item came to the board's attention after posting of the agenda, the board may take action on necessary non-agenda items for reasons of emergency, but these must be properly motioned, seconded, and approved.

Closed Sessions

Certain district activities, such as litigation, security maintenance, and personnel performance reviews, may need to be discussed in private. Therefore, the Brown Act allows districts to conduct closed meetings where confidential topics are discussed (Government Code §54956.8, §54956.9, §54957). Circumstances when the board may hold a closed session include: negotiating government-property transactions; conferring with its legal counsel regarding pending litigation against the district; discussing a threat of the security to public buildings or to the public's right of access to public services or public facilities; or considering the appointment, employment, evaluation of performance, or dismissal of a public employee.

However, the board must disclose the items to be discussed in a closed session (Government Code §54957.7). Prior to holding the closed session, the board shall convene an open meeting to disclose the items to be discussed in the closed session. Also, after the closed session, the board shall reconvene an open session prior to adjournment to disclose any actions taken during the closed session.

The district must disclose certain closed-session discussions or actions. The board must publicly report certain actions taken (Government Code §54957.1). These include approval of an agreement concluding real estate negotiations; approval given to legal counsel to defend, seek, or refrain from seeking litigation; approval given to legal counsel to settle pending litigation; disposition of claims discussed in closed session; an action which affects the employment status of an employee; and approval of an agreement concluding labor negotiations. The district may report this information orally or in writing.

A district that meets unlawfully can be penalized. If board action is taken in violation of the Brown Act, the district can be found guilty of a misdemeanor (Government Code §54959). If no action was taken during an unlawful meeting, the district could face civil rather than criminal proceedings. There is no specific agency responsible for enforcing violations of the Brown Act. Violations are enforced by threat of litigation against the offending public body. An RCD should be aware that if it is sued and found to be in violation of the Brown Act, the district may be required to pay for the plaintiff's attorney fees and court costs. Successful civil charges have either changed an illegal practice or opened access to meetings which had been previously closed.

Violations of the Brown Act may not necessarily invalidate an action taken (Government Code §54960.1). An action will not be considered void if it was taken in substantial compliance with the Brown Act.

Privacy for Employees

The Brown Act protects an employee from a public examination of his/her job performance. The board must provide written notification to an employee of his/her right to have complaints against her/him heard in an open session (Government Code §54957). The notice must be given at least 24 hours in advance of such a meeting. If the notice should not be given, any action taken against the employee would be null and void, and could be the basis for litigation against the board.

Rules of Order in Meetings

The following rules of order are adapted from Policy 5070 of the *California Special Districts Association Sample Policy Handbook* (1992). They should be applied to action items brought before and considered by the board. Rules of order in meetings are based on standard parliamentary procedure as presented in *Robert's Rules of Order*.[3] These rules are not inflexible; they may be amended at any time during a meeting if certain procedures are followed (see "Changes to Procedure," below).

Decorum

Decorum means both propriety and good taste in conduct as well as orderliness. Both should prevail in public board meetings. During board meetings and public hearings, the president takes whatever actions are necessary to ensure that decorum is preserved. The president may eject any person making personal, impertinent, or slanderous remarks. Any person refusing to abide by a request by the president or disrupting the

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[3] Summarized in an NACD brochure, "Simplified Parliamentary Procedure."

meeting or hearing may also be ejected from the meeting.

Procedures for Discussing Action Items

Before a subject is open for debate, three steps must be completed. First, a board member must make a motion. Any board member may do so. A motion is a formal proposal that suggests that the district take an action desired by the person making the motion. Next, another board member must "second" the motion. Again, any board member, except the person who made the motion, may do so. Seconding a motion means that the member regards the motion appropriate for consideration by the board. Last, the president must state, or announce, the motion to the assembly.

Once the president has stated a motion, it is open to discussion and debate. Any board member desiring to speak regarding the subject under discussion addresses the president. The member then waits for recognition by the president before speaking. After the board has fully debated the matter and the public has had an opportunity to comment, the president will call for a vote. A yes vote is in support of the proposed action. As an alternative to fully debating the matter, any board member may make a motion to close debate and bring the matter to an immediate vote. The motion must be seconded and then approved by a majority vote of the board for it to take effect.

Normally, the board can only consider one motion at a time. It must dispose of the motion before any other business is considered. As an exception, a secondary motion that concerns the main motion, such as moving to close debate and vote, may be considered before voting on the main motion.

Types of Motions

Six specific motions help to guide meeting activity:

1. *Motion to Amend.* To amend a main motion before it is voted on, a member motions to amend it. This motion must be seconded. Alternatively, the main motion can be amended with the consent of the members who have moved to close debate and have seconded.

2. *Motion to Table.* To table a main motion (to suspend it from consideration until some future *unspecified* time), a member motions to table it. This motion to table must be seconded and approved by a majority vote of the board. Once a motion is tabled, consideration of and voting on the motion are indefinitely suspended.

3. *Motion to Postpone.* To postpone deliberation on a main motion until some *specified* time in the future, a member motions to postpone it. This motion must be seconded and approved by a majority vote of the board. After a main motion has been postponed, deliberation will continue at the specified time.

4. *Motion to Refer to Committee.* To refer a main motion to a board committee for further study, a member motions to refer it to committee. This motion must be seconded and approved by a majority vote of the board.

5. *Motion to Close Debate and Vote Immediately.* To end the debate about a main motion, a member motions to close debate and vote immediately. This motion must

be seconded and approved by a majority vote of the board.

6. *Motion to Adjourn.* To adjourn a meeting, a member motions to adjourn. This motion must be seconded and approved by a majority vote of board members present.

Changes to Procedure

The procedural rules outlined above can be amended or suspended during the course of a meeting if a board member or members feel(s) it would be more productive to do so. Before the rules of order can be suspended or amended, however, certain procedures need to be observed:

1. At any meeting, a board member can propose that the board temporarily suspend and/or amend these rules in whole or in part. For this action to take effect, this proposal must be approved ("seconded") for discussion by another member and then approved by a majority vote of the board.

2. The president uses his/her discretion when applying the rules. Formal meetings with extensive public participation and meetings with heated debates require a more strict application of the rules than informal, more sedate meetings.

3. If a board member believes that these rules are inadequate or that someone has violated these rules, the member raises a point of order to the president. The president then rules on the point of order. If s/he agrees with the observation, s/he corrects the violation. If s/he disagrees, s/he explains the decision. The member who made the motion can appeal an unsatisfactory ruling to the board. A majority vote by the board then determines the point of order.

Recesses

The president may declare a short recess during any meeting.

Meeting Minutes

The board secretary keeps minutes of each regular and special meeting. The board secretary may be either a designated board member or other volunteer or an employee a board appoints. A video- and/or audio-tape recording of the meetings of the board of directors may be made with the approval of a majority of the board. The president or meeting chair announces the use of a recording device. To the extent possible the device is placed in a position observable by all attendees.[4]

Typically, the secretary records these items at each meeting:

1. The date, place, and type of meeting
2. The names of the directors present and absent
3. The names of visitors and delegations present who wish to be identified in the written record. It is not legal to require that visitors be identified in the record.

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[4] *California Special Districts Association Sample Policy Handbook, Policy 5060*

4. The call to order (the time at which the meeting formally begins)

5. The names of tardy directors

6. The names of directors departing before adjournment or absent during action taken

7. The adjournment (the time at which the meeting formally closed)

8. A special meeting notification

9. Items being considered at special meetings

When the board takes action, the secretary typically records:

1. The subject of deliberation

2. The roll-call record of votes on motions, resolutions, and ordinances (some districts only record the names of directors making and seconding motions)

3. Board resolutions and ordinances

4. Contracts into which the board enters

5. The employment, resignation, and termination of employees

6. Bid procedures

7. Warrants approved for payment

8. The adoption of an annual budget

9. The presentation of financial reports

10. The presentation of important correspondence

11. The presentation of the district manager's and other staff reports

12. The approval of policies and regulations

The board retains all minutes and recordings of meetings on file. The board distributes one copy of the minutes to each director prior to the next scheduled regular board meeting. Minutes of open meetings become public records and are open to inspection during business hours (§9313). However, minutes taken during closed meetings are not public records (Government Code §54957.2).

PART TWO: EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Introduction

To make sure your meeting is not only legal but accomplishes what you want it to do, there are other issues to consider, and they can be grouped into what should happen before, during, and after the meeting. Typically, monthly board meetings have standardized agendas and the purposes of these meetings are for the board to discuss and make decisions on policies and other actions. Part Two outlines suggestions for other types of meetings, such as committee, strategic planning, or program development

meetings. These meetings often include a wider spectrum of participants and seek equal participation from all attending. These are ideas that may turn your simply legal meeting into something more: an *effective* meeting. For a handy meeting planning tool, see figure 2-1. The following paragraphs detail some issues you might wish to consider as you plan your meeting.

Purposes of Meetings

The design of your meeting will depend on the purpose of your meeting. A meeting to receive public input on a plan or report will likely have a different design than a training workshop. Consider your purpose when designing a meeting (see Appendix I for sample meeting agendas). The following list identifies some of the more common types of meetings:

- Monthly Board Meeting

- Strategic Planning Meeting

- Public Meeting to Get Input on Plan, Report, etc.

- Public Informational Meeting

- Training Workshop

Audience Considerations

Depending on the purpose of your meeting, your audience or pool of participants will vary. Some types of meetings will have an identified roster of participants to whom you can send meeting minutes or other pieces of information ahead of time. Examples of this type of meeting are technical trainings or strategic planning sessions. In other meetings, particularly those for which special emphasis is placed on public participation, you cannot predict who will attend and must prepare for an unspecified number of attendees (extra copies of the agenda and other handouts, extra refreshments, etc.).

Also, anticipating the "mood" of an audience can be vital to the outcome of a meeting. If there is potential for hostile or negative reactions to information or ideas, you must be ready to channel negative emotions or behavior into a productive working climate. Handling extreme instances of hostility is a skill that can only be acquired with practice, and this is not the place to detail strategies for coping with these situations.[5] The important thing is to be ready for this and have a plan in cases where this is likely to happen.

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[5] NACD Capacity Building Center has several publications you can send for to help you with facilitation skills, such as, conflict management. Refer to Appendix W, Contact Information, for the address and phone number of the NACD Capacity Building Center.

Figure 2-2. Effective Meeting Checklist

BEFORE THE MEETING

❑ What is the *purpose* of the meeting?
❑ Who will participate? (Who is the *audience*?)
❑ Who should *facilitate* the meeting?
❑ What is the *goal* of the meeting?
❑ *Where* should the meeting be?
❑ Does the meeting need any *special equipment* (overhead projectors, tables, etc)?
❑ What kinds of *activities* should the meeting include?
❑ What *outcomes* do I want for the meeting?
❑ What should I include on the *agenda*?
❑ Agenda *sent* to all who will participate?
❑ Input solicited from agenda recipients?
❑ Have I planned the sequence of ideas/activities thoroughly and do they lead naturally to my desired outcomes?

DURING THE MEETING

❑ Have I started the meeting on time?
❑ Have the attendees introduced themselves?
❑ Have I initiated a short warm-up activity to "break the ice"
❑ Have I explained housekeeping: breaks, lunch, restrooms, refreshments, etc.?
❑ Have all participants reviewed and accepted the agenda?
❑ Have I involved all participants?
❑ Have I stuck to the agenda?
❑ Have I accurately captured questions and comments?
❑ Have we firmed up decisions, identified actions and people to accomplish them?
❑ Have we set a next meeting date if needed?
❑ Have I reflected on meeting processes and outcomes: did the meeting achieve desired outcomes? Did participants feel positively engaged in the meeting?

AFTER THE MEETING

❑ Have I prepared minutes and sent them to participants?
❑ Have I followed up with people identified for assignments: Are they making progress? Will they meet deadlines? Do they need assistance? What can I do to help people follow through ?

Another thing to consider about your audience is the present state of their knowledge. Do they have the knowledge necessary to understand the issues and ideas before they attend the meeting, or do you need to provide them with background information so that they can understand the discussion or activities to follow? Even if participants have the prior knowledge, it is a good idea to build a bridge to it at the beginning of the meeting. One way to accomplish this is to refresh participants' memories and check for audience understanding by soliciting questions or asking for perspectives on the issues.

Participants also have physical and psychological needs. People need to know where basic services can be found, such as restrooms, water, coffee, food. They also need to know when breaks and lunch are scheduled so they can pace their attention and level of input. People are used to a certain level of control over their own behavior, and meetings frequently require them to give up this control, at least in part. People are thus more comfortable with giving up some control if they know when certain events are going to happen.

People also need to feel comfortable with the social situation in which they find themselves at a meeting. Gatherings of people can be tense situations for some, and they need to be put at ease if they are to participate fully. The facilitator, through his or her manner, speech, and body language, can make participants more comfortable when participating.

Establishing an atmosphere where all participants are willing to take risks and participate is something to consider carefully. One technique for doing this is to hold a brief warm-up activity to introduce participants to each other and create a feeling of group cohesion: "We are all in this together to share and cooperate, not to compete." (For more information on breaking the ice at meetings, see Step 7, How to Inform and Educate the Public, "Direct Instruction").

Meeting Facilitation

Facilitating a meeting is almost an art: a good facilitator leads the discussion and guides outcomes, yet presents the feeling that s/he is merely acting as an assistant to the group. The focus should be on the group and what the group decides, yet in practice group interactions sometimes can be chaotic. The facilitator acts as the gatekeeper: keeping the group on task, staying with the topics and timeframes of the agenda, yet guiding the group toward decisions and planned actions to carry out the goals and purposes of the group.

A good rule for facilitators to follow is to set up a discussion or activity and get out of the way to let participants interact, stepping in as needed when s/he perceives the discussion getting off track.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency for facilitators to dominate proceedings: some meetings turn out to be nothing more than one speaker presenting information verbally to a passive audience for hours at a time. This approach may ensure that control is maintained and there is no risk of the proceedings getting off the topic, but the role it puts attendees in is one that quickly grows tiresome. If much information needs to be given, lecturing *is* one way to do this, but not the *only* way. Lectures are most effective if

you provide lots of visual aids or other media such as video or slides, provide for audience input through question and answer sessions, and provide frequent opportunities for the audience to get up and stretch.

But information merely delivered to an audience through speaking is no guarantee people are understanding or even listening. Strive for maximum audience participation. This takes the burden off of the facilitator to carry the work load, provides the facilitator with feedback about participant understanding, and allows participants time and opportunity to forge their own understanding through speaking or participating in activities (see also "Activities" below).

Setting Goals

Before you schedule a meeting, before you invite participants, or even before you create an agenda or outline possible meeting activities--you should be very clear about what you hope your meeting will accomplish. A clear set of goals is the core around which you will build the meeting. Some examples of meeting goals are as follows:

- As a group we will decide on the best strategy for educating the public about healthy riparian areas.

- By the end of the presentation I should have board approval for my proposal or a clear idea about how I should modify it to gain their approval.

- I hope to recruit at least five volunteers to help with the project.

There are thousands of possible goals to have for a meeting, and a single meeting may have more than one goal. To keep a meeting focused, however, it is best to limit the number of goals you might have for a meeting, and, if possible, to group these goals so that they are related. If you have too many goals and in particular goals that are unrelated to one another, it might be best to hold two or more meetings so that each meeting can stay focused and generate clear outcomes in line with your goals.

Meeting Facilities

In our concern to have the ideas and activities for a meeting planned we may not take the time to consider the type of facility needed. Is the planned meeting place close to most participants? Are space, heat, air, lighting adequate? Are there enough chairs? Are there adequate parking, bathroom facilities, water, food, beverages? Is this meeting place accessible to everyone who might wish to attend? Will everyone be able to find it?

Special Equipment

Many a meeting has instantly run into trouble because of the lack or failure of equipment. Ask yourself whether you will need any special equipment such as:

- *Flip charts*. Do I have enough paper and felt-tip pens?

- *Overhead projectors.* Is the electrical outlet located close enough to the projection screen or surface?

- *Slide projectors.* Are my slide trays ready? Is the prepared slide tray compatible with the projector? Do I have an extra projector bulb ready if the old one burns out suddenly?

- *Video Cassette Player.* Is the video rewound? Do I know how to operate the equipment?

As obvious as these questions may seem, they are often overlooked in our rush to prepare for meetings. Make sure you also pay as much attention to these details as you do to goals and objectives when planning your meeting.

Activities

Unfortunately, most people think of meetings as occasions when either a speaker talks to an audience for a period of time and then field questions at the end, or when a leader presents topics or issues which a group then discusses. Both of these strategies can be useful, but they are not the only choices you have when planning the activities of a meeting. Alternatives to "lecturing" for two types of purposes are presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Activities for Conveying Information

When many people think of ways to convey information in a meeting, they immediately envision a speaker before an audience. The speaker speaks, uses visual aids, perhaps, and answers questions either as s/he goes along or at the end. This "lecture" approach to conveying information has several advantages: it is efficient in terms of how much information can be conveyed, it demands very little from an audience, and it is very predictable in terms of outcome (because the speaker is in control at all times, there is a reasonable guarantee that the meeting will go as planned).

However, these "advantages" have hidden costs. A speaker may be able to deliver a large amount of information in a short time and therefore seem to be more efficient, but in reality, people do not tend to learn well by passively listening. Educational research has shown that people retain very little (around 20%) of what they hear in lectures. So even though a large amount of information as been "delivered" in a lecture, very little has been "received" in all likelihood. This is because people need to *do* something while they learn: talk, take notes, answer questions, solve problems, etc. People are not only more likely to understand something when they immediately get a chance to use it in some way, they are more likely to retain it and feel excited about having learned it. The most important recommendation for imparting information to people is this: *Give concise information and then let participants wrestle with it in some way.*

Suppose you wish participants to understand the complex interactions of various ecosystem elements (water, soil, vegetation, wildlife, insects) in a riparian environment. In a lecture approach you could simply tell your audience this and provide examples, and details and evidence for this. Another approach, perhaps more powerful from a learning standpoint, would be to have audience members meet in small groups and brainstorm all the possible interactions of ecosystem elements in riparian zones (for example, tree roots provide nutrients to trees but also provide bank stability and prevent soil erosion as well as provide habitat for insects and fish).

Such an approach accomplishes several things:

- It brings people together

- It draws people into the materials by getting them actively involved (it also keeps them awake and paying attention)

- It prepares them to understand any further information you might provide that they did not anticipate (the importance of complexity in stream morphology, for instance)

- It provides them with a sense that the information is *their* information, not the speaker's, and therefore they are much more likely to *do* something with it (such as teach others, restore riparian habitat, seek funding for riparian restoration, etc.)

Activities for Discussing Ideas with a Group

In situations where a group has met to discuss certain ideas or issues, the usual method is for the leader or facilitator to announce the topic or ask a question, and then lead a discussion. Although this approach can be effective, other actions might accomplish the same purpose. Suppose you wanted a group to give feedback on an outline you had developed for an informational publication. The traditional approach would be to make copies of the outline and explain it, asking for feedback at the end.

Other approaches might be to ask participants to spend a few minutes drafting an outline of their own to share. You could post these outlines around the room and look for commonalties or conflicts. Or you might pass out your outline to the group but have them meet in pairs to discuss it and report back to the group what they have agreed on.

The point of offering alternatives is to find ways to get the maximum involvement of each participant. When people are actively engaged at meetings they are more likely to provide insights and useful perspectives and ideas, and they are much more likely to commit to further action if they are involved because they develop a sense of ownership in the group and its goals and are, therefore, more likely to work toward common goals. Another advantage of utilizing many activity strategies for meetings is variety: lots of different types of activities during a meeting help to keep the meeting interesting.

Outcomes

Once you have set a goal or goals for a meeting, the next question you might ask is what outcomes will I seek to tell me I've reached my goal? If you set the goal of creating a strategy for educating the public about healthy riparian areas several outcomes might be:

- *Times and places for public workshops*

- *A plan for advertising the workshops such as newspaper ads, mailings, etc.*

- *People identified who will develop various sections of the workshop*

- *An outline for the workshops themselves*

The most important outcome for a meeting is knowing where to go and what to do next. This should never be in doubt at the end of a meeting. If outcomes are not developed and there is no clear idea among participants about what needs to done next, continue the meeting after a short break or schedule another meeting to take place soon. It should be clear to all what the purpose and goals of a meeting are and what steps might be taken next to reach your objectives.

Forming an Agenda

Once you have a clear picture in your mind (or on paper) of what the purpose, goals, activities, and outcomes of your meeting might be, then you can create an agenda to send to participants. By documenting your ideas in an agenda, you are summarizing the thought process in your planning. Planning the agenda and scheduling amounts of time for each activity also gives you another chance to ask yourself whether you are trying to accomplish too much. If so, you might consider breaking your outline into two or more meetings.

A good agenda gives only an outline of the meeting's events. It leaves room for developments to take place during the meeting. An agenda is a plan of actions centered around certain ideas or issues; it is not the result of those actions. Another important consideration is providing meeting participants an opportunity to review, comment on, or modify the agenda—either before the meeting or at the beginning of the meeting itself. Meetings will be much more effective if participants feel it is *their* meeting and have the right to determine its content and form.

An agenda also frequently allots a certain amount of time for each activity or item. Each individual activity should not exceed about an hour, and meetings are most effective when large blocks of time are broken up with smaller blocks in between.

STEP 3
HOW TO PLAN STRATEGICALLY

WHY PLAN STRATEGICALLY?

Strategic Planning Identifies Priorities

There is no tool more useful in helping you find your way around an unfamiliar location than a road map. An organization's strategic plan is like a road map: it allows you to locate where you are, where you want to go, and the best way to get there. The first step is identifying where you are: what are the resource conservation needs in your district? The second step is identifying where you want to go: what are the possible solutions to resource problems in your district? The last step is planning your route to resource solutions in your district, your strategic long-range plan.

Above all, strategic planning helps you set priorities. With limited economic, technical, and human resources it is impossible for a district to address every possible resource conservation need. Priority setting helps a district determine which needs deserve attention first and enables it to focus its limited resources on addressing those needs. District priority setting is accomplished through creating a mission statement, identifying goals that support its mission, and then crafting objectives that help the district reach its goals.

Strategic Planning Rallies Support from Others

Also, having a clear mission, goals, and objectives—a strategic plan—helps you identify shared interests you may have with other groups, agencies, or individuals. If, for example, your Resource Conservation District (RCD) and the local county planning commission both have identified controlling erosion on private roads as a goal, you may be able to work together by sharing personnel, data, equipment and tools. You might also be able to collaborate on grant proposals in order to increase your chances of receiving funding. Funding agencies often favor projects that are collaborative in nature and take advantage of existing infrastructure.

Identifying common goals also helps you to avoid duplicating the efforts of other groups or agencies that, unknown to you, may already be working on plans to solve the same problem you are seeking to address.

Strategic Planning is Part of a District's Mandate Under Division 9

Beyond these practical reasons for planning strategically in your district is the fact that long-range planning is one of the provisions outlined in Division 9 for the administration of a resource conservation district. The authors of Division 9 have specifically stated that long- and short-range plans will be an integral part of district functioning: starting in the Year 2000, districts wishing to take advantage of state grant programs through the California Department of Conservation will only be able to do so if they create long- and short-range plans and publish annual progress reports ("annual reports").

This chapter seeks to provide you with all of the information you will need to craft long- and short-range plans through the strategic planning process, and it can be used as a

reference tool for strategic planning. In addition, it provides you with a means to translate your strategic planning process into finished planning documents, both long range (five year) and short range (annual) plans. Volume II, Step 3 provides you with materials to use in the strategic planning process itself.

Since writing annual reports to summarize progress toward strategic goals is also a provision of Division 9, a separate chapter, How to Write Annual Reports, is presented in Step 9.

WHAT A LONG-RANGE PLAN SHOULD INCLUDE UNDER PROVISIONS OF DIVISION 9

§9413 discusses the scope of a district strategic plan: each RCD will take account of "the full range of soils and related resource problems found to occur within the district." Division 9 further states that a strategic plan will "identify all resource issues within the district for local, state, and federal resource conservation planning." Figure 3-1 summarizes the provisions for strategic planning in Division 9.

Districts should collaborate with other agencies, individuals, groups, tribes, and others during the planning process in order to identify as many resource needs as possible and to discover commonalties and chances for collaboration between districts, agencies, and other groups.

According to Division 9, a long-range plan will be a 5-year plan, the standard length of time covered in public planning documents and include a framework for setting annual priorities (annual plans) as outlined in the long-range plan.

A long-range plan must also include a means for conveying ideas contained in the plan to the public and other public agencies. One means for doing this might be to publish a summary of the plan in a district newsletter distributed to the public and other stakeholders (for more information on information strategies, see Step 7, How to Inform and Educate the Public).

Lastly, Division 9 states that a long-range plan must include a basis for evaluating progress made toward goals and objectives outlined in the plan. This provides the district with a means of determining if and when a particular objective or goal has been met. Division 9 does not state explicitly how this must be accomplished, but a means for evaluation can be built into the strategic planning process, and outcomes reported in the district's annual report. For more information on the relationship of the planning process to the reporting process, see Step 9, How to Write Annual Reports.

Figure 3-1. Provisions for Long-Range Plans in Division 9

LONG-RANGE PLANS SHALL:

- Establish long-range goals

- Be 5-year plans

- Address the soil and related resource problems found to occur within the district

- Identify resource issues within the district for local, state, and federal resource conservation planning

- Involve other agencies in the strategic planning process

- Provide a framework for setting annual priorities

- Create a basis for evaluating annual work plan achievements and allocating state funds to the district

- Provide for disseminating information concerning district programs and goals to local, state, and federal government agencies and the public

STEPS TO CREATING A FINISHED LONG-RANGE PLAN

A long-range plan is a document kept on file in a district, and, for the purposes of receiving state funding through the state Department of Conservation, sent to the state office during every 5-year planning cycle. The process through which a district creates a finished plan involves many steps and is referred to in this *Guidebook* as the "strategic planning" process. This chapter explains in detail how to undertake the strategic planning process in order to create finished long- and short-range plans. A summary of the steps involved in the strategic planning process is as follows:

1. *Identify stakeholders interested in participating in district strategic planning.* From this list of identified stakeholders, form a local work group made up of key individuals involved with resources. It is important to be inclusive in order to get as wide a range of viewpoints as possible. One important member of the local work group is the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) district conservationist, who can provide input on federal programs available for locally led conservation.

2. *Set a strategic planning meeting date(s).* Strategic planning sessions such as the one outlined in Volume II, Step 3 take approximately 8 hours to complete. Plan your strategic planning session to occupy one full day or, if necessary, several partial days.

3.   *Invite representatives of identified stakeholders (work group) to the strategic planning meeting(s).*

4.   *Send potential participants a brief letter confirming the meeting time, and outline the goals of the strategic planning session in the letter*. You might also send an agenda for the meeting to clarify the goals and activities of the strategic planning session.

5.   *Since conservation districts are public agencies, meetings must be open to the public and meeting dates published in advance.* See Step 2, How to Hold Legal and Effective Meetings for details on the Brown Act. Post an agenda for the strategic planning session at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting.

6.   *Hold the strategic planning meeting on the date(s), time, and place posted.*

7.   *Write minutes of the strategic planning meeting to summarize the major decisions reached by the planning group.* Send copies of the minutes to all participants for review.

8.   *Revise the minutes according to corrections and suggestions provided by participants, as applicable.*

9.   *Draft the long-range (5-year) plan in accordance with the outcomes of the strategic planning session as recorded in the minutes*.

10. *Send the drafted long-range plan to strategic planning session participants for review.*

11. *Revise the long-range plan in accordance with input from participants*. Resolve any potential conflicts between participants. If necessary, schedule a meeting with strategic planning partners to discuss the draft. Once the draft is finalized it must be approved by board vote.

12. *Summarize the major points of the plan and print this publicly (in a press release, newsletter article or other form)*. You may also wish to make copies of the plan available for public review or hold a public meeting to receive input, or both.

13. *Create an annual work plan (annual plan) for the first year of work based on the long-range plan's provisions for annual planning.* Send copies of the drafted work plan to interested reviewers (members of the RCD board of directors, strategic planning participants, other members of the public).

14. *Revise the annual plan in accordance with reviewer suggestions or comments.*

15. *Publish a summary of the annual plan using the same means to publish outcomes of the long-range plan, or publish summaries of both simultaneously.*

The above strategic planning process may seem long and complex, yet, the rewards of planning strategically and obtaining approval and "buy in" from the resource conservation community and the general public are yielded over the long term.

Strategic planning is an investment. It lays the foundation for all that you will do to conserve resources over the long term. It also ensures that the public is fully informed and that all potential stakeholders are involved in the process from the beginning.

Not all of the recommended steps outlined above are covered under the provisions of Division 9, but, taken as a whole, the steps above outline a logical process for fulfilling the spirit of Division 9 regarding long-range and annual planning for resource conservation districts.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION: AN OVERVIEW

It is important that you consider carefully whom you will invite to provide input into the long-range plan. Division 9 asks districts to represent as broadly as possible the groups and individuals involved in resource conservation within a district. Typical participants in a district strategic planning session include district board and staff members, US Department of Agriculture (USDA) personnel (both Natural Resources Conservation Service and Resource Conservation and Development Council employees), county supervisors, and members of the county planning commission.

Members of a strategic planning team might also include representatives from other federal, state, and local government agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management; US Environmental Protection Agency; California Departments of Fish and Game, Forestry and Fire Protection, and Water Resources; or any others with a stake in resource conservation issues in your district, such as Indian tribes.

A strategic planning session might also solicit input from local non-profit groups such as a watershed planning group, Coordinated Resource Management Planning (CRMP) group, or individuals strongly involved in resource issues in your area. For more information on identifying key stakeholders in your district, see Step 4, How to Strengthen Community Involvement.

Not only does casting such a wide net provide you with information and perspectives you might not otherwise gain, it promotes "buy in" from a diverse array of groups and agencies who may then see the efforts of the district as supporting their own priorities and objectives.

Once you have assembled your strategic planning team you are ready to begin the strategic planning process. What follows is an overview of a typical strategic planning session. Including this overview is not meant to imply that this is the only way to hold a strategic planning session, but this overview is collected from a number of strategic planning approaches and tailored to suit the needs of resource conservation districts. For a more detailed look at a strategic planning session, see Volume II, Step 3).

Introductions and Expectations

The opening minutes of the strategic planning session are a good time to familiarize participants with your expectations for the session by providing an agenda or outline of the session and to give them an opportunity to get to know one another. You might also invite a brief discussion on their expectations for the session.

District Powers, Authorities, Roles, and Responsibilities

All members of the strategic planning team may not be familiar with the nature of resource conservation districts. Even if all participants *are* familiar with the roles and responsibilities of districts, it is a good idea to refresh their memories. It is not necessary to go into great detail about the provisions for RCDs in Division 9 in this section, but a brief overview of district functions will set the stage for the events to follow in the strategic planning session.

Mission Statement Development

A mission statement is the umbrella under which all organizational activities take place. It defines the work of an organization, in this case a resource conservation district, at its broadest level. Every activity your district engages in should fit comfortably within the bounds of a district's mission as defined in its mission statement. This portion of the workshop gets the participants started on writing a mission statement for the district.

Identification of Resource Issues and District Needs

As stated above, Division 9 states that identification of all potential natural resource problems or issues is central to the strategic planning process. It is also important to identify potential needs your district might have in order to perform identified resource conservation work over the next five years.

Establishing Goals and Objectives

After the group has identified natural resource concerns in the district, as well as district capacity building goals for the planning period, the lists generated from the previous activities will be used to set goals for the district over the next five years. The next activity draws on the group's findings on both resource issues and district needs.

Multi-Year Timeline: Identifying Actions, Personnel, and Resources Needed

Once the group has established goals and major objectives for each goal, district activities over the next five years can be outlined. Timelines for each goal will be created and appropriate partners and personnel identified who will implement each action in the timeline.

Mission Statement Development Review

Mission statements are deceptively simple. What makes writing them so difficult is that they must be broad enough to encapsulate all the district's activities and represent a number of different viewpoints of constituents. For this reason mission statement development can be revisited at the close of the strategic planning session. The length of time needed for this second look will vary depending on whether the group successfully crafted a mission statement at the beginning of the session or whether they had difficulty doing so. If possible, try to have a draft mission statement agreed on by all by the close of the workshop.

Closure

You can wrap up the strategic planning session very quickly by thanking attendees for their hard work that day and repeat the next steps for developing the long-range plan. As facilitator you may or may not be developing the final plan. Inform participants that minutes for the meeting will be drafted, and their input on these minutes will be sought to help capture all of the important points of the meeting. The flip charts and other recording materials (such as copies of action plan worksheets) can be used to develop the minutes of the meeting. You might also inform participants that you will be seeking their assistance and advise on the final long-range and annual plans you will develop based on the minutes of the meeting.

FROM STRATEGIC PLANNING TO LONG-RANGE PLAN

The strategic planning process provides your district with the raw material necessary to create a finished long-range plan. The most valuable aids to writing the long-range plan are the minutes from the strategic planning meeting and the goals and objectives worksheets created by the strategic planning work group.

As stated earlier, Division 9 presents certain expectations for what a long-range plan might include, (see above, "What a Strategic Plan Should Include Under Provisions of Division 9"), but it is not explicit about the format in which the plan is presented. The suggested outline in Figure 3-2 is based on several examples of strategic plans by various groups and agencies and may serve as an outline for your strategic plan. For a sample long-range plan, see Appendix J.

Figure 3-2. Sample Outline of a Long-Range Plan

Executive Summary
District History
District Mission
Physical Setting and Resource Issues
Summary of Goals for the 2000-2004 Planning Period
Major Objectives for Goals

        Goal 1
              Objective 1   Performance Measure
              Objective 2   Performance Measure
              Objective 3   Performance Measure
        Goal 2
               Objective 1   Performance Measure
               Objective 2   Performance Measure
               Objective 3   Performance Measure
        Goal 3
               Objective 1   Performance Measure
               Objective 2   Performance Measure
               Objective 3   Performance Measure
        Etc.

Timeline for Objectives 2000-2004

        Goal 1:
              Year 2000
                    Objectives
              Year 2001
                    Objectives
              Year 2002
                    Objectives
              Year 2003
                    Objectives
              Year 2004
                    Objectives
        Goal 2, etc.

Appendices

        Map of Planning Area
        Strategic Planning Committee Members
        Partnerships
        Staff Organizational Chart
        Glossary

Note: Often agencies and groups will present goals and objectives in matrix or table formats and include columns for Goals, Objectives, and Performance Measures (evaluation criteria).

Refer to Appendix J for a sample long-range plan.

ANNUAL PLANNING

Relationship of Long-Range and Annual Plans

Once a long-range plan is in place, annual planning is straightforward, since timelines for goals and objectives are already written as part of the long-range plan.

An annual plan (also known as an "annual work plan" or simply, "work plan") reiterates each of the goals and its associated objectives identified during the strategic planning process and identifies those actions scheduled to be undertaken during the forthcoming year of work. To continue our example from the strategic planning outline, suppose that your district had identified controlling erosion in the Friendly Creek watershed as one of its goals for the 5-year planning period covered in its long-range plan. The timeline developed to undertake the various objectives identified as part of this goal might unfold like this:

Goal: In five years sediment delivery to Friendly Creek will decrease by 80 percent as measured by sediment catchment basins in Friendly Creek.

Year 1:
- Obtain funding for watershed restoration/revegetation
- Install sediment catchments in Friendly Creek
- Monitor sediment to establish baseline data and parameters for trend monitoring

Year 2:
- Create a system for mapping the watershed, particularly critical sites, in Geographic Information System (GIS) software
- Identify critical erosion sites, site characteristics and potential causes of erosion in the GIS database to document findings on erosion sites
- Continue trend monitoring of sediment in Friendly Creek

Year 3:
- Create a revegetation plan for the watershed based on GIS mapping, and include a plan for monitoring results of revegetation
- Send revegetation plan out for review by partners, stakeholders
- Revise revegetation plan per reviewer comments
- Begin implementation of revegetation plan
- Begin monitoring results of revegetation
- Continue trend monitoring of sediment in Friendly Creek

Year 4:
- Continue implementation of revegetation plan
- Continue monitoring results of revegetation
- Continue trend monitoring of sediment in Friendly Creek

Year 5:
- Finish implementation of revegetation plan
- Continue monitoring results of revegetation
- Continue trend monitoring of sediment in Friendly Creek

- Summarize results of revegetation and sediment trend monitoring in a report that assesses the degree to which target sediment reduction of 80 percent was reached and make recommendations for any additional efforts to continue sediment reduction efforts.

Setting Annual Objectives

The excerpt from the long-range plan above outlines work for one goal and provides a rough overview of the project over a five-year period. Real world demands (lack of or delayed funding, employee turnover, etc.) often make it necessary to revise plans as you go to account for unforeseen situations. For this reason long-range plans do not go into as much detail as an annual plan might. In writing the annual plan for the first year of work, the brief outline in the long-range plan can be used as a good starting point.

The annual plan would list all of the objectives planned for that year under each goal and add detail that might not be appropriate in a long-range planning document. Thus for the above 5-year plan, one goal in the annual plan for year one might look like this:

Year 2000 Work Plan:

Goal 1: In five years sediment delivery to Friendly Creek will decrease by 80 percent as measured by sediment catchment basins in Friendly Creek.

Objective 1:   Obtain funding for watershed restoration, revegetation, and monitoring

             Actions:

- Research grant opportunities through the Grant Center, partners, partner web sites, government agencies
- Contact partners (other local agencies, county government, private groups) willing to participate in project
- Write grant(s), with partners if possible, and follow up with funding agencies

Objective 2:   Install sediment catchments in Friendly Creek

             Actions:

- Publish need for and plan for the project in district Newsletter and/or newspaper(s)
- Solicit volunteers for projects in newsletter/newspaper articles
- Enlist help of volunteers
- Create a design for sediment catchments and plan for data collections
- With volunteers, install catchments

Objective 3:   Monitor sediment to establish baseline data and parameters for
                 trend monitoring

             Actions:

             - Create a design for data collections and information storage
               and retrieval (database)
             - Train volunteers in data collection and data entry
             - Begin collecting and inputting data into database
             - Create means for summarizing raw data into reports
             - Summarize initial data and publish in a baseline study for
               future trend monitoring.

It is not vital that the outline of objectives initially envisioned in the long-range
plan be rigidly adhered to throughout the following years. Modifications due to
new insights or information or unforeseen developments should be folded into
the overall design of the project and annual plans made to accommodate such
changes.

Organization of the Annual Plan

Each of the goals identified in the strategic planning process and documented in
the long-range plan will be included in the annual plan with more detailed plans
for each objective associated with the goal, as shown in the above example.
Annual plans for subsequent years will continue in a similar matter, incorporating
any unfinished work from the previous year(s).

Since the purpose of the annual plan is to set objectives for the year's work, the
bulk of the annual plan presents detailed objectives for each goal identified in the
long-range plan.

Division 9 does not state how the annual plan should be organized, but it does
describe some of the things an annual plan should do:

- Be adopted before March 1st of each year

- Identify high-priority actions to be taken during the coming year

- Identify person(s) responsible for actions listed above, as well as how and when they
  will be performed and completed

- Demonstrate a relationship between annual plans and long-range plans

- Assist local NRCS in adjusting staff and priorities to match district goals

- Inform the public of district goals for the upcoming year

- Involve other agencies in the annual planning process

Figure 3-3 shows a sample outline for an annual plan.

Figure 3-3. Sample Outline of an Annual Plan

I.   Executive Summary
II.   Mission Statement
III.   Summary of Long-Term Goals
IV.   Year 2000 Work Plan:

- Goal 1:
  Objective 1:
  Action 1   Person(s) responsible NRCS Roles Other Partner Roles
  Action 2   Person(s) responsible NRCS Roles Other Partner Roles
  Action 3   Person(s) responsible NRCS Roles Other Partner Roles

  Objective 2:
  Action 1   Person(s) responsible NRCS Roles Other Partner Roles
  Action 2   Person(s) responsible NRCS Roles Other Partner Roles
  Action 3   Person(s) responsible NRCS Roles Other Partner Roles

- Goal 2:
  Objective 1:
  Action #1   Person(s) responsible NRCS Roles Other Partner Roles
  Action #2   Person(s) responsible NRCS Roles Other Partner Roles
  Action #3   Person(s) responsible NRCS Roles Other Partner Roles

- Etc.

V.   Annual Budget
VI.   Tools for Information, Education, and Outreach
VII.   Appendices:

- Directors and Associate Directors
- Staff Organizational Chart

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For detailed recommendations for holding strategic planning session(s), see Volume II, Step 3.

For examples of long-range and annual plans, as well as annual reports, see Appendix J.

For more information on writing annual reports, as well as the relationship between the planning and reporting process, see Step 9, How to Write Annual Reports.

STEP 4
HOW TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

"Outreach" refers to an organization's efforts to raise public awareness of the organization, provide information about opportunities and services the organization offers, and, most important for Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), increase public involvement in the organization's activities. RCDs rely on all these facets of outreach to carry out a district's mission. Because so much of what constitutes "outreach" can also be considered education, methods for raising public awareness and providing information to the public are discussed under Step 7, "How to Inform and Educate the Public." The present chapter focuses on increasing public participation or community involvement in resource conservation.

Over the years the focus for many districts has broadened from concern with soil and water conservation on individual landowners' properties to broader geographic perspectives. The current emphasis on watershed-level planning expresses an increased awareness in the interactions of various ecosystem elements (soil, water, wildlife, vegetation, human uses) on this broader scale. Conservationists have found that examining a localized soil erosion problem in a larger context may reveal causes or related problems elsewhere that will need to be examined if the specific erosion issue is to be fully addressed.

In order to gain this larger perspective, districts and other conservationists have begun to involve landowners, land users, residents, and other stakeholders in a watershed in addressing resource issues of mutual concern. A diversity of participation and viewpoints, however, does bring with it challenges a narrower focus might not involve. Nevertheless, understanding various viewpoints and seeking common ground among stakeholders may at times be the only way to effectively address resource conservation concerns over the long term so that all may benefit.

The discussion below takes an in-depth look at one of the most common methods for increasing community involvement in resource conservation planning at the watershed scale: Coordinated Resource Management and Planning (CRMP). Many CRMP groups throughout California have been formed, and a diverse array of similar groups, such as Watershed Councils, operate similarly. Since RCDs frequently provide the impetus for forming CRMP groups--and frequently provide meeting space, office equipment, and other resources to ensure their success--the CRMP process is discussed below in detail to serve as a model for the formation of new CRMPs or other groups that seek to involve their local communities in addressing resource concerns on a watershed scale.

COORDINATED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

For over a decade, the California CRMP Program has been supporting and assisting locally based cooperative resource management throughout California. There are nearly 100 registered CRMP groups in the state. The vast majority of these groups are watershed oriented, and a large number of these groups are supported in part by their local RCD.

Experience has shown that people with diverse viewpoints who *voluntarily* meet together as a planning team will find common ground as they interact with one another and have a chance to observe resource problems firsthand. Through discussion, landowners, land users and resource managers learn to understand and respect each other's viewpoints. Although each member of the group may have different interests in the land, the collaborative process can help them realize they also have a *common* interest: the continued health and productivity of the land and its resources. The end result is constructive problem solving through cooperative resource planning.

A *CRMP Handbook* is available to help people carry out CRMP projects. It is available free from the CRMP program director's office (see Appendix W, Contact Information, for information on contacting the program director's office)[1]. After reading the *CRMP Handbook*, you still may have many questions about the processes involved in starting and running a CRMP group. The paragraphs that follow will attempt to answer some questions commonly asked by RCD staff about the CRMP program:

- *What is CRMP?*

- *How Does CRMP Work?*

- *What Defines a CRMP?*

- *What is the Relationship Between CRMP Groups and RCDs?*

- *What is an RCD's Role in Setting Up and Supporting CRMP groups?*

- *Where Can an RCD Get Support for Its Role in CRMP?*

- *How Many CRMP Groups are There? How Do I Find Them?*

- *How Do CRMP Groups Obtain Funding?*

What is CRMP?

CRMP is a community-based process used for resource planning, problem solving, and management. The CRMP process emphasizes direct participation by everyone concerned with natural resource management in a given planning area. The concept underlying CRMP is that coordinating resource management strategies will result in improved resource management and minimized conflicts among land users, landowners, governmental agencies, and interest groups.

The term, "CRMP" is often applied to a group of people working together to improve a watershed, which may include improving fish and wildlife habitat, reducing erosion, or working with a variety of other natural resources. CRMP, however, does not refer to the group itself, rather it is the *process* that members of the group use to increase understanding, communication, and involvement to reach agreement about the resource improvements that are wanted or needed. The purpose of using CRMP is to solve

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[1] More complete information on the CRMP process and Program is available through the *CRMP Handbook*, CRMP web site, or by asking the CRMP program director. You may call the program director during office hours with any questions relating to the program, the process, agency contacts, specific resource issues in your area, referrals to experts in resource management, facilitation, or legal issues. For assistance in contacting your local RCD office, look for the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts on the web at http://ceres.ca.gov/carcd/index.htm, or contact the CRMP program director.

problems and achieve objectives through consensus. CRMP is the process that leads to a product: better resource management. The following four statements define the CRMP process at its broadest level.

- *CRMP is a resource planning, problem solving and management process that encourages direct participation of everyone concerned with natural resource management in a given area.*

- *CRMP results in improved resource management and minimizes conflict among land users, landowners, government agencies and interest groups.*

- *The end result of CRMP is constructive problem solving through cooperative resource planning with the ultimate goal being to protect, improve, and/or maintain natural resources.*

- *CRMP operates on a local level, but may stimulate policies at higher levels.*

CRMP is a model process, which can be used and adapted by a wide range of groups to best address their particular resource interests. A group may meet to discuss broad resource issues, such as the health of a watershed, or a more narrow resource issue. The result is that each CRMP is unique. Whether the process is initiated by an individual, group, or agency, local participation and control are what distinguishes CRMP from other planning efforts and are the keys to success.

The CRMP process can be effective in practically any resource management situation-- for example, to bridge gaps among government agencies, private landowners and other resource users. It is particularly appropriate for areas where local resource management issues involve lands under more than one ownership or jurisdiction and where there are existing or potential conflicts among land and resource uses. The process also helps sustain a healthy natural resource situation.

The ultimate goal of CRMP is to protect, improve and maintain natural resources. The objective of each CRMP effort is to develop and carry forward a unified program of action for resource use and management that minimizes conflict. Actions should be consistent with land and water capabilities and supported by people whose interests are affected.

How Does CRMP Work?

The CRMP process is used to enhance resource management. The process is very flexible. The goals of the participants determine how simple or complex the process will be. Figure 4-1 presents a step-by-step outline of the CRMP process and represents a starting point and guide for groups. Many variations are successful, although most CRMP efforts include a majority of the steps.

Figure 4-1. Twelve Steps to a Successful CRMP

1. *Identify the opportunity and get organized.*

2. *Define the planning area.*

3. *Define the planning group.*

4. *Gather information on the planning area.*

5. *Call the first meeting of the planning group.*

6. *Identify the major resource issues and planning objectives.*

7. *Identify the actions proposed to accomplish each objective.*

8. *Develop and review a draft CRMP plan.*

9. *Seek funds to implement the CRMP plan.*

10. *Sign the final CRMP plan.*

11. *Implement the plan.*

12. *Monitor implemented activities for success.*

What Defines a CRMP?

Is a group a CRMP if it includes many, but not all stakeholders? Is it a CRMP if it includes just a few, primary stakeholders, with just two or three interests represented? Do cooperators have to follow every step in the *CRMP Handbook* to be considered a CRMP?

There is no set of rules that define a CRMP project or group. CRMP is a model process, which can be used and adapted by a wide range of groups to best address their particular resource interests. A group may meet to discuss broad resource issues, such as the health of a watershed, or a more narrow single resource issue. The result is that each CRMP group is unique.

Obviously, there are many degrees to which stakeholder involvement and cooperation can be carried. Any form of cooperation and increased communication between interested parties is likely to produce benefits for the management of the resource. The CRMP model strives to induce *all* willing stakeholders to participate in the planning, implementation, and monitoring phases of projects, in order to build solutions which best meet the needs of all resource users, and to avoid late-arising conflicts.

Groups that operate using the basic principles of cooperative management outlined in the *CRMP Handbook*, that bring diverse stakeholders together to develop consensus-based management decisions, are CRMP groups.

What is the Relationship Between CRMP Groups and RCDs?

RCDs provide a means for local people to access federal and state service programs and a forum for communication between themselves and government. As such, RCDs are in an excellent position to bridge the gap between agency staff/programs and landowners. The CRMP process is also aimed at bringing these stakeholders together over specific resource issues.

As signatories to the CRMP Memorandum of Understanding, the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) is committed to supporting the CRMP process. Because of the closely related goals of the CRMP Program and CARCD, especially the importance placed on local citizens' participation in resource planning, the two naturally fit together. Likewise the local CRMP group and RCD often share similar resource and public participation goals.

CARCD provides in-kind contributions of office space and financial accounting services for the CRMP Program. CARCD's executive director serves as a member of the CRMP Program's Technical Advisory Council, which determines program direction and provides assistance to local CRMP groups. Similarly, CARCD helps to connect local CRMP groups with local representatives for assistance, particularly with RCD directors and staff.

What is an RCD's Role in Setting Up and Supporting CRMP Groups?

Many CRMP groups receive substantial technical and financial assistance from their local RCD. RCDs can be sources of information on other CRMP projects, local agency representatives, government programs and officials, grant programs, and much more. RCDs commonly assist CRMPs with the following important tasks:

Initial Coordination

RCDs may be able to offer CRMP groups help with big questions or fine details of contacting stakeholders, publishing meeting notices, obtaining meeting space, and other sometimes difficult hurdles for new groups.

Watershed Coordinators

Some RCDs obtain funding to hire an employee with the specific mission of coordinating (or initiating) watershed management efforts in the district. These watershed coordinators can be valuable resources to a CRMP group, especially a newly formed one, which lacks the funding to independently hire staff.

In-Kind Services

Some offices may be able to supply use of workspace, office equipment (for example, copy machines), or meeting space.

Custodian of Grant Funds

Many grants can only be distributed to organizations with non-profit tax status. Obtaining this tax designation can be difficult or impossible for new groups. Many CRMPs instead turn to another tax-exempt organization to act as their "fiscal agent," frequently, the local RCD. Because they are government agencies, RCDs can file under federal tax-exempt status. An RCD can serve as the fiscal agent to receive grant disbursements and administer funds for the non-designated group. This is a formal arrangement with requirements for financial accountability on both sides. It is a frequently used means for small groups to receive and manage grant funding. In some cases, grants specifically require that grantees have Federal tax-exempt status as not-for-profit entities--a "501 (C) (3)" tax status. Since RCDs are government entities, they cannot qualify for 501 (C) (3) status.[2] In cases where CRMP groups need assistance managing grants from an entity with 501 (C) (3) status, the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) can act as grant manager (see Appendix W, Contact Information, for the latest address and phone number for CARCD).

Sponsor of Grants

When applying for grants, it is especially helpful for new groups to have the support or sponsorship of established organizations. RCDs commonly "sign on" to grant applications for groups if they have been involved in the planning process and support the goals and methods proposed.

Technical Advice

Staff with a wide variety of expertise can be found both in the RCD office and through RCD contacts.

Access to Contacts

The local focus of the CRMP process makes community support essential. RCD offices generally maintain mailing lists for the local area and may have lists of landowners or other stakeholder groups. These can be extremely helpful for CRMPs conducting outreach and stakeholder involvement efforts.

Outreach, Publicity, Information, and Education

The RCD offices have experience in many other programs and processes which may be helpful to a CRMP group, including outreach, publicity, information dissemination, and education.

Where Can an RCD Get Support for Its Role in CRMP?

CRMP Program Director

One available resource for RCD support for CRMP is the CRMP program director. The Program Director is available to answer questions, provide referrals to experts in

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[2] As government entities, special districts can be exempt from taxation normally applied to for-profit businesses and can request to have IRS 170 (c) tax-exempt status.

resource management and meeting facilitation, and set-up local workshop and meeting events. CRMP workshops offer participants the opportunity to:

- *Meet and network with each other*

- *Learn about resource management issues*

- *Gain consensus building and meeting facilitation skills*

- *Learn about new and continuing assistance and grant programs*

- *Discuss common problems and various solutions*

- *Observe field work and restoration projects*

- *Enjoy social events at the workshops*

Workshops are held in different locations throughout the state in response to requests received (and sometimes in conjunction with other training events). For information on upcoming workshops, or to request one in your area, contact the program director.[3]

Government Agencies

The California CRMP Program is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting community efforts in Coordinated Resource Management and Planning. Six California state agencies and seven federal agencies are officially signed on to the CRMP Memorandum of Understanding as sponsors of the program. See Figure 4-2 for a list of these agencies.

CRMP signatory agencies are a good source of information on the CRMP process, other CRMPs in the area, and technical issues in resource management. Each of the signatory agencies has committed time and resources to the development of the CRMP program and has a vested interest in supporting and participating in the cooperative resource management and planning process. The professionals at the state and federal resource management agencies have access to and knowledge of large amounts of publicly available information and resource data, and they are paid to help.

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[3] The CRMP Technical Advisory Council also maintains an informational web site at http://ceres.ca.gov/cacrmp, publishes a quarterly newsletter: *CRMP Connection,* and provides the *CRMP Handbook: background and procedures for CRMP groups from getting organized to monitoring results*. All of which is available free of charge from the program director's office. For current program director contact information, see Appendix W, Contact Information.

Figure 4-2. Government Participants in CRMP	
State Agencies	**Federal Agencies**
California Department of Conservation	USDI Bureau of Land Management
California Department of Fish and Game	USDI Bureau of Reclamation
California Department of Food and Agriculture	US Environmental Protection Agency
California State Lands Commission	USDA Farm Services Agency
California Department of Water Resources	US Fish and Wildlife Service
California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection	USDA Forest Service
	USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

As participants in the CRMP process, resource managers meet on equal terms with other participants. They often bring with them extensive experience with local resource issues and related policies. This experience and knowledge of previous research and data collection help the CRMP process get moving and can help to avoid unnecessary delays or duplication of effort. As representatives of the member agencies, resource managers have some ability to help the CRMP "negotiate" cost sharing and other types of agreements with agency decision makers. They can also carry back recommendations from local landowners to those involved in setting public land policies.

Contacts at individual agencies can be made directly. For assistance making contacts or locating individuals with experience in particular resource issues or geographic regions, contact the CRMP program director.

Connecting with Other CRMPs

The *CRMP Handbook* contains step-by-step instructions for CRMP groups, from getting organized to monitoring results. Though this is a good place for all new groups to start, questions may still remain about *how* to accomplish a specific goal, step, or outreach activity. The best resource available to newly forming groups is the body of knowledge accumulated by those groups that have successfully gone through the same or similar processes.

Connecting with a representative from another CRMP group in your area (or one with similar resource goals) may provide some of the answers. Your local RCD or University of California Cooperative Extension office can be another excellent resource, as many offices have had experience with one or several CRMP groups in the past. For information on contacts in your area, go to the CRMP Inventory in the University of

California Davis Information Center for the Environment's Natural Resource Project Inventory (NRPI) [4], or contact your local RCD office.

How Many CRMP Groups Are There? How Do I Find Them?

The number of CRMP groups and projects is unknown. The counting of groups is dependent on several factors, and especially hinges on the definition of a CRMP group. It is estimated that there are 300 groups across the state using a CRMP-like process. The CRMP Technical Advisory Committee maintains a list of all projects and groups that have sent their contact information sheets to be included on the CRMP mailing list and receive information about upcoming events, workshops, and funding opportunities. That list includes nearly 100 projects and groups dealing with a wide variety of resource issues.[5]

How Do CRMP Groups Obtain Funding?

The majority of time and effort that goes into starting and running CRMP groups and implementing their projects is contributed by unpaid, dedicated volunteers. Much of the field work and restoration efforts involve at least some volunteer labor and in-kind contributions of materials and expertise. But large restoration and planning efforts, and even large public outreach efforts, cost money. The *CRMP Handbook* gives some brief suggestions as to how a CRMP organization can raise financial support.

Most groups will eventually seek grant awards for support of their operations and project implementation. There are numerous sources of grant monies available for these kinds of projects, so many in fact, that it can be difficult and confusing to try to locate the appropriate funding organizations and grant programs. The application process can be time consuming and tedious, and the competition tough. However, there are sources of assistance available, and strategies that can help show your project in the best light.

The Non-Profit Resource Center, with offices in Sacramento and Redding, is an assistance program with the resources to help you find and successfully apply for grants. The center has information on thousands of grants and can help you research those your group qualifies for, what the applications require, and when the deadlines are. To get in touch with the Non-Profit Resource Center, refer to Appendix W, Contact Information.

State and federal resource agencies also have many programs to help fund restoration or preservation activities. Check with local offices, and make sure to ask any agency representatives who are stakeholders in your group. There may also be opportunities for cost sharing, where agencies agree to pay for some portions of the project if other funding can be found (this most commonly happens if some of the restoration occurs on public lands). Including cost-sharing opportunities, volunteer work, and in-kind contributions in your grant applications can make your project more attractive to funding

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[4] http://endeavor.des.ucdavis.edu/nrpi

[5] For a complete look at all the registered CRMP projects, visit the University of California Davis Information Center for the Environment's Natural Resource Project Inventory (NRPI) at: http://endeavor.des.ucdavis.edu/nrpi and click on "Query," then "Programs." Next, select, "CRMP." You will get a list of all the projects with contact information and descriptions of their location, goals, cooperators, and achievements.

organizations or agencies. This allows you to present your project as a good "restoration investment."

The CRMP Technical Advisory Council may also be able to help you find the funding you need. Information on upcoming "requests for proposals" (RFPs) that are particularly applicable to CRMP groups and projects is posted quarterly in the CRMP newsletter, *CRMP Connection.* Quarterly articles about CRMP group successes often include good examples of fund raising, volunteer organization, and solicitation of in-kind contributions. Current and back issues of the *CRMP Connection* are posted on the CRMP web site. For a current Web site address or if you have any other questions, contact the CRMP program director, see Appendix W, Contact Information.

STEP 5
HOW TO USE PROGRAMS TO IMPLEMENT PLANS

INTRODUCTION

Step 3, How to Plan Strategically, provided detailed information on crafting a district long-range plan. Included in this process were identifying key stakeholders, forming a local work group for resource conservation planning, and identifying priority resources needs in the district. Division 9 states that locally led conservation planning should be resource driven, not program driven, but once you have identified resource conservation needs in your district and formed plans for addressing them, the next step is identifying sources of assistance for carrying out your long-range plans.

Assistance varies from direct assistance, such as the technical assistance your local district conservationist or soil conservationist can lend, to various types of cooperative agreements, including grant assistance. This chapter provides you with information on how to identify government programs that might help you meet your conservation goals, a list of government programs—including federal and state programs--and a discussion of the various types of agency partnerships your district can enter into with other agencies in order to receive assistance. Step 6, How to Raise Funds and Write and Manage Grants, provides more specific details on how to get funding for district plans.

IDENTIFYING GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Federal and State Grant Programs

It would be nearly impossible and very cumbersome to include a list of all possible government programs that a resource conservation district (RCD) can participate in to carry out locally led conservation. Nevertheless, there are some common programs that are widely used by districts throughout California, and it is important that you and your partners become familiar enough with these programs to determine whether they fit your district's plans. There are both federal and state programs, and, in some cases, programs that are both (the Cal-Fed Bay Delta project is a case in point). Figures 5-1 and 5-2 provide brief summaries of some of the most common federal and state assistance programs.

Further Information on Government Programs

Because there are so many programs--some being phased out, new ones coming in to being, and funding levels change from year to year—it is impossible to provide a complete list of available government programs. One good way to keep up to date is by tapping into World Wide Web sources for program information. For a list of funding agency contacts and World Wide Web sites see Appendix W.

Figure 5-1. Federal Assistance Programs		
Agency/Contact Information	**Program**	**Description**
USDA **Natural Resources** **Conservation Service** (530) 792-5646	**EQIP** Environmental Quality Incentives Program	Provides technical, financial, and educational assistance to address significant natural resource needs and objectives
Helen Flach (530) 792-5602	**WHIP** Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program	Provides technical assistance and cost sharing to help establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat.
Helen Flach (530) 792-5602	**WRP** Wetlands Reserve Program	Provides landowners an opportunity to sell easements to the USDA and receive cost share assistance to restore and protect wetlands.
JR Flores (916) 792-5603	**FPP** Farmland Protection Program	Purchases conservation easements on land with prime, unique or other productive soils for the purposes of protecting topsoil by limiting non-agricultural uses of the land.
Jim Koscis (530) 792-5605	**RC&D** Resource Conservation and Development Program	Assists local people in initiating and carrying out long-range programs of resource conservation and economic development, conducting grant searches, and coordinating multi-county planning.
USDA **Farm Service Agency** (530) 792-5520	**CRP** Conservation Reserve Program	Provides annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term resource conserving covers on eligible cropland.
USDI **Bureau of Land** **Management** (916) 979-2858	Land Exchange Program	Provides funds to convert private land into public lands.

Figure 5-2. State Assistance Programs		
Agency	**Program**	**Description**
California Department of Conservation (916) 324-0850	**RCD** Grants Program	Provides competitive grants to RCDs throughout the state to undertake a wide range of projects, include watershed restoration projects, district capacity building, and support for creation and sustenance of Coordinated Resource Management Planning (CRMP) groups.
(916) 324-0850	**ALSP**[1] Agricultural Land Stewardship Program	Provides incentives to protect productive agricultural land from development pressures. ALSP provides funding for cities, counties, and non-profit land trusts to purchase development rights, known as agricultural conservation easements, from farmland owners. Beginning in January 2000, RCDs will be able to apply for technical assistance and acquisition grants to fund easements through CFCP.
(916) 323-3836	**DOR** Division of Recycling	Offers grants that are awarded to nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies, including school districts, individual schools, special districts, and joint power authorities to implement beverage container recycling projects.
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (707) 576-2935 (559) 243-4108 (909) 320-6120	**FIP** Forestry Incentives Program	Funds restoration of forest ecosystems devastated by natural disasters such as catastrophic wildfires, drought, and insect and disease infestations.
(707) 576-2935 (559) 243-4108 (909) 320-6120	**CFIP** California Forest Improvement Program	Provides grant assistance for local landowners wishing to undertake forest improvement practices on their property; support for local organizations for planning, outreach, and education; and for organizing restoration projects in watersheds.

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[1] Beginning January 1, 2000 the ALSP program name will be changed to California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP).

Figure 5-2. State Assistance Programs--Continued		
Agency	**Program**	**Description**
1-800-738-TREE (916) 653-8286	**FSP** **Forest Stewardship Program**	Provides funds to assist communities with watershed projects involving multiple ownership and agencies.
1-800-738-TREE (916) 653-8286	**SIP** Stewardship Incentive Program	Provides cost share dollars to landowners to develop management plans that meet landowner objectives and protect and enhance resources.
California Department of Fish and Game (916) 654-6505	**Fisheries Restoration Grant Program**	Provides grants to improve or restore salmon and steelhead populations through fishery habitat improvement projects, cooperative fish-rearing programs, and public education.
CalEPA/ **State Water Control Board** (916) 657-0876 (916) 657-0793	**CWA 319(h)** Clean Water Action Plan Grants- *Projects*	Provides assistance for projects mitigating non-point source pollution.
(916) 657-1031	**CWA 205(J)** Clean Water Action Plan Grants- *Planning*	Provides assistance for water quality and natural resource planning.
(916) 657-1043 (916) 657-0673	**Proposition 204** Safe, Clean, Reliable Water Supply Act	Provides for rehabilitation of watersheds tributary to the San Joaquin/Sacramento Rivers

INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS, MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING, COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS, GRANTS, AND COST-SHARE PROGRAMS

Receiving assistance from other government agencies requires entering into formal relationships with these entities. The type of relationship your district will forge with funding agencies depends on the type of program you participate in. Generally, you and the government agency enter into a legal agreement called a *contract.* A contract is defined as "an agreement to do or not to do a certain thing. It gives rise to an obligation or legal duty enforceable in an action at law. It sets forth terms, conditions, and the statement of all work to be performed."[2]

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[2] State Contracting Manual, 3rd edition. (Sacramento: California Department of General Services) March, 1998.

The paragraphs below summarize the chief features of various district-to-agency agreements. For the sake of completeness (and so you learn what they are) these include agreements that RCDs do not usually enter in to. In the following paragraphs, "agency" will refer to a government agency such as the Bureau of Land Management or the Department of Conservation, and "outside group" will refer to other entities such as an RCD.

Interagency Agreements

Interagency agreements are used when one agency is providing payments, goods, or services to another agency. Interagency agreements can only be entered into by state agencies. Local government or special districts such as RCDs do not sign interagency agreements with government agencies.

Memoranda of Understanding

Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are most commonly used to establish partnerships and document specific responsibilities; signatories agree to work toward mutual goals, perform joint work, or share research results without the exchange of funds between them. For a sample MOU see Appendix K.

Grants

Grants allow an agency to transfer money, property, services or anything of value to an outside group for a project of mutual interest where substantial agency involvement is not anticipated. For a sample grant contract see Appendix N.

Cooperative Agreements

Cooperative agreements allow an agency to transfer money, property, services or anything of value to an outside group for a project of mutual interest where substantial agency involvement *is* anticipated. The difference between a grant and a cooperative agreement is that with a grant there is very little direct involvement on the part of the agency in the project, whereas with a cooperative agreement, there is an expectation the agency will be more directly involved in the work.

Cost-Share Agreements

Cost-share agreements, like cooperative agreements, are made when there is expectation that the agency will have direct involvement in the project, but they differ from cooperative agreements in that cost-shares require matching funds or in-kind services[3] from the outside group, frequently in a one-to-one ratio. For example, if an agency agrees to give your district a $5,000 cost-share to carry out a project, the district

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[3] "In-Kind Services" means contributions a grantee makes toward the project that are not cash contributions. For example, when a district pays overhead costs such as rent and telephones out of other income sources, or when it utilizes volunteer help with projects, these are considered "in-kind" contributions and their worth in dollars is calculated and added to the grant as part or all of the RCDs cost-share contribution. Some grants that are not cost-share agreements also ask for evidence of other sources of funding or in-kind services as part of the grant requirement.

would have to contribute the equivalent amount of $5,000 in money, property, labor, materials, equipment, or land or water. Cost-share agreements are typically entered into with federal agencies (and called "Challenge Cost-Sharing"), such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service, The USDI Bureau of Land Management, and the USDA Forest Service. Beginning in the year 2000, however, the state Department of Conservation will also require that grant recipients contribute a 25% cost-match to the grant award.

Procurement Contracts

Procurement contracts are instigated by an agency when it wishes to acquire goods or services for its own direct use. In these cases there is no "mutual benefit" with the contracted party (except for fees paid). Procurement contracts are not normally entered into with RCDs.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PARTICIPATING IN GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Because government agencies support locally led conservation, they frequently enter into contracts with districts to fund needed conservation at the local level. Such assistance, however, does not come to districts without stipulations. It is important that your district become aware of legal and other requirements of funding agencies and be prepared to answer questions such as those shown in figure 5-3.

Figure 5-3. Considerations When Participating in Government Programs

- Does the program allow your district to carry out the plans envisioned in its long-range plan? Or, does the program substantially alter the plans you have created and "pull" the district in another direction?

- Is your district ready to undertake the work contracted? Does it have the expertise?

- Is your board of directors prepared to sign a resolution authorizing the district to enter into the agreement, accept funds, and spend district money to cost-share the project?

- What is the length of time between signing the contract and the arrival of the first payment (this can be up to two years)?

- Is the contract set up for reimbursement or advance payment? Most agencies will provide payments toward grant obligations only after expenses are incurred by the district. Sometimes, a percentage of the entire grant award may be requested "up front" in the form of an advance.

- If payments are reimbursements, how often can you request payment? Contracts vary, but frequently reimbursements are quarterly.

- If payment toward expenses is expected to be substantially delayed, how will you pay for up-front costs for implementing the project? In other words, how will your district "stay afloat" until the money arrives?

- Does you district have sexual harassment, drug-free workplace, and civil rights policies in place? (See Step 8, How to Manage RCD Daily Operations, for more information).

- Does your district have liability insurance in the case of on-the-job accidents? (See Step 8, How to Manage RCD Daily Operations, for more information).

- Is your accounting system able to keep track of grant funds separately from other sources of income? (See Step 8, How to Manage RCD Daily Operations, for more information).

STEP 6
HOW TO RAISE FUNDS AND WRITE AND MANAGE GRANTS

INTRODUCTION

Many special districts in California--such as water, fire, or hospital districts--are organized to bring specific services to residents within their districts. Because they deliver services directly to affected residents they can charge for those services in order to cover the costs of delivering them. Though this approach works well in the case of a water district, resource conservation districts (RCDs), because of the nature of their activities, do not have a consistent and regular product (e.g. water) or a service (e.g., fire protection) to deliver.[1]

Most RCDs have to rely on other means to raise money to provide service, chief amongst these being funds from various private, local, state, and federal funding sources in the form of grants. Even though grants constitute one of the primary sources of district funding, there are in addition a variety of strategies for raising money for your district.

This chapter outlines a number of these strategies in addition to grant writing that districts throughout the state and country have used to raise money for district operations. In addition, the second half of this chapter presents an extensive "How-To" manual on grant writing, and it concludes with instructions for how your district can manage grant awards effectively once they are awarded.

SOURCES FOR CONSERVATION FUNDING AND IN-KIND SUPPORT[2]

Across the state and even across the country, districts have found a multitude of ways to fund conservation activities. The following paragraphs describe some of the strategies your district may use that are allowable under the provisions of Division 9.

Donations and Memberships

One successful way to raise funds for RCD projects is to develop a supporting membership program. In this program, members would make yearly contributions to the district. One group to target is district cooperators. Farmers and other landowners who have been served by the district are most likely to appreciate the value of conservation district work.

A letter to this group announcing your supporting membership program should include information on major accomplishments of the district. It is also helpful to mention future projects that deserve support. Point out that district officials volunteer their valuable time to administer the business of the district. This may encourage support from those that

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[1] Information on special districts in this section is from, "What's So Special About Special Districts? A Citizen's Guide to Special Districts in California," published by the California State Legislature, Senate Local Government Committee.
[2] Much of the information for this section was summarized from *More Dollars For Your District, A Publication of the National Association of Conservation Districts.*

the district serves. A membership fee plan can be recommended, but note that any and all support is valued.

Institutions or prominent individuals interested in resource management may also be interested in supporting memberships. These may include local banks, farm supply businesses, community leaders, politicians or educators.

The ways in which you approach individuals or companies for support are important in how you and your district is perceived. Here are a couple of tips:

- Make personal contacts with individuals or companies from whom you wish to receive support by phoning or visiting. Mailings, even if addressed to individuals by name, are much less successful.

- Prepare for potential members a district program overview, which should include details about specific programs which need funding assistance.

Sponsorships

Sponsorships differ from *donations* in that money is given to a district by an organization or individual in exchange for advertising or other benefits. Sponsorships differ from *memberships* in that they are usually event-specific: a sponsoring donation is given on a particular occasion (e.g., financial support for an event), rather than in an ongoing fashion as in a membership, where dues are paid by an individual or organization on a regular basis. A good example of a sponsorship is providing a sponsor with advertising space in a district newsletter in exchange for payment.

Fees for Services

Division 9 provides for districts to charge reasonable fees for services. Providing cooperators and others with services costs the district money, so it is reasonable for the district to charge for these services when they are not covered by a grant or other program. When deciding how much to charge for services several things need to be weighed. Costs for implementing conservation services are a way for districts to remain in operation, but charging more for services than most can afford will make the service unattractive or unattainable for some, so the opportunities to implement conservation work are diminished. Normally, a district would charge fees to simply cover the costs of rendering services, though this is not always easy to calculate. How much, for instance, should a district charge for the rental of a no-till drill for planting? The district had to buy the drill initially, but it is hard to know in advance how much the drill will be used in order to determine how to recover the costs of the initial outlay.

Here are few example of the types of services a district can offer to the public for fees:

- Educational programs
- Grant management
- Water and other kinds of testing
- Pond management service
- Rental of equipment
- Brush and fuels treatments

- Subdivision and other plan reviews in urbanizing areas
- Timber stand improvement
- Workshops or seminars on topics such as landscaping with native plants
- Tree planting
- Implementing a recycling program
- Seeding of road cuts

There are, however, some important issues to be aware of when considering if the district should charge fees for services.

- A district cannot charge for services rendered by Natural Resources Conservation service (NRCS) employees, who often provide technical assistance to landowners in partnership with the RCD.

- Services should be related to the conservation goals of the district.

- Services should not conflict with any federal, state, or local mandates or priorities.

- In contracting to perform services, districts may be liable to legal claims if the services are not performed properly or if damages occur in connection with such services. Legal advice and appropriate insurance are vital parts of a service program.

Sale of Conservation-Related Items

Districts have raised funds for many special projects by selling conservation-related products. Among these are:

- Bird seed
- Bumper stickers
- Calendars with local scenery
- Conservation-related materials such as irrigation equipment
- Firewood
- Fish for stocking farm ponds
- Grass seed
- Hats or T-shirts with conservation themes
- Native plants
- Nesting boxes or other wildlife items
- Tree and shrub seedlings

District tax-exemption status under federal law as 170(c) government agencies does not exempt them from being subject to state and local sales taxes. Districts must pay state and local sales taxes on sale of conservation-related items.

Fundraising Events

If fundraising events are well planned, they can raise money, take the district message out to the community, and involve supporters in a worthwhile and enjoyable project.

They can also build conservation sprit. Here are some fundraising events other districts have held:

- Barbecue with local produce and meat
- Boat trips
- Car washes
- Celebrity dinners (charging a per-plate fee)
- Equipment auctions
- Sale of fireworks during 4th of July season
- Fish fry
- Harvest dinner
- Hunting and fishing clubs (fees for memberships and trips)
- Nature hikes
- Raffle of conservation-related items
- Run (or hike or bike or skate) for conservation with sponsors for each participant
- Wine tasting with wine from local wineries

Appropriate insurance is advisable for these events. Insurance coverage for a special event can normally be obtained at a reasonable cost.

Volunteer Support

Another source of support that is not directly financial but is considered "In-kind" support, is volunteer support.

Volunteers can assist a district in many ways. They can help with the office workload, increase the number and range of contact hours possible for professional staff, and provide the extra assistance necessary to make special projects possible. The key to good volunteer programs is developing clear objectives about the work volunteers will do, gaining commitment from the volunteers, and rewarding them. For more information on volunteers, see Step 8, How to Manage District Daily Operations, Part Five: Volunteers.

State and Local Government Support

State and local government support of locally led conservation takes the form of grants from various state agencies (see Step 5, How to Use Programs to Implement Plans). An ongoing effort to secure regular funding for all districts relies on the continuing effort of districts and district associations, such as the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD), which seeks to educate legislators about the need to strengthen the locally led conservation effort.

This effort is supported by the fact that state and local governments have a lot to gain by supporting RCDs, either through grants or regular appropriations for districts:

- Districts can design and deliver conservation education programs—to children or adults, in schools or out—that are geared specifically to the resource issues in the area.

- Districts can help protect soils from erosion and save government funds otherwise spent on dredging sediment from rivers, cleaning up ditches or purifying polluted water for public consumption.

- Districts can provide flood prevention structures that reduce damage to roads, hydroelectric operations and other public facilities.

- Local conservation efforts contribute to county and state goals for environmental quality and economic growth.

- District personnel salaries contribute to local economies.

- The added value of well-cared-for properties maintains the local tax base and helps build prosperous communities.

- Volunteer time in district work (including time spent by district officials) makes all these district programs available at low cost.

Grants

There are two primary sources for conservation-related grants: governments and private foundations. Both government and foundations look for opportunities to spend money on local conservation projects (including education) that are in keeping with the agency's or foundation's goals.[3] Step 5, How to Use Programs to Implement Plans, presents some of the more common grant programs of which districts can take advantage. Finding appropriate private foundation and government grant programs may require research, but there are many Websites and grant assistance centers (such as the Grant and Resource Center of Northern California, located in Redding) that may shorten the time spent on research. The important thing to remember is that although grant research and grant writing may be time consuming and at times discouraging, hard work usually pays off, for agencies and foundations *want* to lend assistance to local conservation. For a useful list of grant sources, see Appendix O.

Contractual arrangements to perform surveys, studies or other resource-related projects for city and county governments can also generate revenue.

Maximizing the Use of District Funds Through Partnerships

Although not a direct source of funding, strategies such as those described below can help your district get the most from the dollars it does receive.

Working with groups rather than individuals, for example, maximizes the use of staff time. In organizing conservation education work, some districts plan teacher workshops rather than sending staff members into individual classrooms. When dealing with erosion

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[3] Care must be taken when entering into contracts with funding entities that grant requirements also meet goals established by the district. As noted earlier, districts should only enter into agreements with funding entities on projects that match district goals. Districts should also be aware that inefficient management of grants can cost the district money. Sound budgeting of grant funds is needed to ensure that losses are not incurred by the district.

problems, an area meeting of landowners can save many staff hours over making individual site visits.

In all cases, "helping people help themselves" can effectively multiply the staff time of districts. Reaching out to influential community leaders can also multiply the impact of district programs and affect large projects or multiple sites through a single contract. Additionally, developing contacts with the local news media can multiply the conservation message.

Districts can maximize the use of funds by cooperating with neighboring districts or other local organizations on projects. Districts have, for example, cooperated with each other in activities ranging from sharing county fair booths to jointly sponsoring a publication.

For more information on the advantage of and methods of building partnerships, see Step 4, How to Strengthen Community Involvement.

EFFECTIVE GRANT WRITING

Preliminary Steps (Strategic Planning)

Before you can begin your grant seeking process you must have a pretty good idea of where your district is heading. Grants are usually given on a project basis, so in order to identify potential projects your district needs to establish resource conservation priorities and create long-term goals. This is the strategic planning process, which is discussed under Step 3. Through strategic planning, your district, along with input from partners such as the NRCS, landowners, and other stakeholders, identifies priorities for the following 5-year period. Once your priorities are in place, you can begin to develop goals for addressing priority resource issues. Goals are then broken down into a set of concrete objectives that could be expressed as individual projects. Once you've identified objectives that are expressed in terms of concrete actions you can "package" them as a series of projects for which you can then seek funding. The following sequence roughly outlines the actions you might take to prepare yourself for grant writing:

- Identify Resource Goals
- Set Priorities
- Set Goals
- Create Objectives
- Outline Projects
- Seek Funding For Projects

Once you've identified projects and how they fit into a larger scheme of goals and priorities, you are ready to "sell" your project idea to a funding agency or organization, which may agree that your priorities, goals, and objectives are worthwhile and thus worth funding.

Steps to Becoming a Grantee[4]

Undertaking a successful grant process involves more than writing a grant proposal and submitting it to a funding agency. There are many steps to be taken to initiate, write, submit, follow up, and perhaps revise a grant before it is accepted for funding. The "nine steps to getting a grant" are included in the paragraphs that follow and include the following:

1. Identify Your Program or Project
2. Research Funders
3. Talk With Your Co-workers
4. Contact the Funder
5. Write Well
6. Follow Directions
7. Use Copy Editors
8. Follow Up
9. Be Persistent

Identify Your Program or Project

As discussed above under, "Preliminary Steps," funding agencies usually want to see how your proposed project fits into district long-range plans. Sometimes they even request copies of your strategic long-range and annual plans. If you have firm plans in place based on major goals and objectives, it is usually easy to identify which projects you would like to undertake and the order in which you will undertake them. Once you have identified specifically what you would like to accomplish, you can begin the grant research process.

Research Funders

There are many avenues for researching grant opportunities with state, local, and federal agencies, private foundations, banks, or other organizations.

For RCDs, funding sources that commonly support conservation work, both on-the-ground and educational, are state and federal government agencies, including the NRCS, the US Environmental Protection Agency, the California Department of Conservation, and others.[5] One way to find out which grant funds are available from government agencies is to consult their web pages on the internet. Many will post grant fund availability and include requests for proposals (RFPs) that you can download or print from the internet.

You can also read about government agency grant opportunities in quarterly newsletters such as the California Conservation Partnership (CCP) News and the Forest Stewardship News. You can usually receive these free of charge by calling or writing to the agencies and asking them to put you on their mailing list (see Appendix W, Contact Information, for agency contacts to receive newsletters.)

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[4] The "Steps to Becoming a Grantee" is quoted in large part from "The Nine Steps to Getting a Grant" and is reprinted with permission from the Grant and Resource Center of Northern California.
[5] See also Step 5, How to Use Programs to Implement Plans.

Other ways to research grants are to use the services of non-profit grant research and educational centers such as the Grant and Resource Center of Northern California, the Non-Profit Resource Center, and other grant foundations. Such organizations often have data bases of funding agencies, reference libraries, and staff to assist you in your search for funding. Such organizations may also offer courses in grant writing and research at low cost.

Also, one of the best ways to hear about grant opportunities is through personal contacts. Your NRCS district conservationist may know of grant opportunities through the NRCS, and you can also talk to representatives from other government agencies by attending CARCD meetings. Every year CARCD hosts an annual meeting and conference, which is attended by districts, agency representatives, and other members of the conservation community. CARCD can also give you dates and locations to other meetings in your area that you might attend in order to become familiar with grant opportunities for your district.

Discuss the Project with Your Co-Workers

Once you have decided on a project idea and you have identified potential funding sources for your project, talk to directors, staff, and related agency personnel in your district about your project idea. Be prepared to change your idea when people give you good advice or insights about what you are trying to achieve. Enlist the help of others who are interested in the project and who may play important roles in the grant writing process at first, and perhaps during project implementation later.

Contact the Funder

Although a funding agency will decide to grant money to you based mostly on the strength of your proposal as written, it helps if they become familiar with you and your organization before they ever see your proposal. Funding agencies and organizations *want* to provide grants—that is part of the reason they are there. They also *want* to help you succeed in your attempts to secure funding for your projects. To the extent that time allows, establish rapport. Ask the funding agency for clarification and guidance on how you may best meet their requirements.

Write Well

This step cannot be overemphasized. No matter how much networking you have done with the funding agent, they will still decide to fund—or not to fund—your proposal based on the strength of its ideas, and ideas are best conveyed through good writing. This means that your proposal must be complete (include all the requested portions in the RFP), well organized (the writing flows logically: main ideas are presented sequentially; details are used to support main ideas), and clear.[6]

One way to ensure that your writing is communicating well is to have several people read your proposal. It is helpful to have both knowledgeable and less knowledgeable

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[6] An excellent and concise guide to good writing for almost any purpose is Strunk and White's *On Writing Well,* which conveys the basics of good written communication in a minimum number of pages. You can usually find copies of this small volume in new and used bookstores.

readers review your draft. Knowledgeable readers can provide missing information and correct technical errors; unknowledgeable readers provide a glimpse into how a non-technical audience might view your project, whether it is written plainly and comprehensively to a layperson. Not all granting agents will be familiar with the technical specifics of your proposal. You will need to make such points clear to them by explaining difficult concepts or defining terms. A lay reader will help you to do this.

Follow Directions

Every piece required in your proposal should be spelled out clearly in the RFP. If you have any questions about the RFP, be sure to contact the funding agency for clarification. One of the most important things you can do in writing a proposal is following the specific directions given in the RFP (see Appendix L for a sample RFP). Leaving out requested sections, not responding to specific questions, not following guidelines, submitting late proposals—may result in your proposal being refused. Remember, you are competing against other proposals and many of these will be just as good as yours AND they will have followed the directions in the RFP closely: this will give their proposal an advantage over yours when they are compared side by side.

Use Copy Editors

Copy editing or "proofreading" is another important step in the writing process. It is helpful to have an experienced copy editor read your final draft before you send it out. If you lack an experienced copy editor, you can do this yourself with some special techniques.

One useful technique is getting away from your draft for a few days–letting it "rest." Sometimes errors "jump out" at you when you take a fresh look at a draft after a few days. Another tool is to read the text several times, each time looking for specific things. One reading might be to determine logical flow of ideas; another reading might be for good grammar at the sentence level; another reading might be for spelling; another for consistency of typeface and headings; and another for mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, etc.). Using such approaches usually allows you to notice mistakes or deficiencies you might not otherwise notice if you try to proofread for everything at once.

Follow Up

Once you have submitted your proposal (by the deadline) it is often a good idea to follow up with a phone call or letter. This communication might do several things:

• Confirm that the funding agency received your proposal by the deadline.

• Allow you to thank them for consideration of your proposal.

• Let them know you are willing to work with them on revisions to the proposal if need be, especially if they generally like your idea but question some of the details.

• Continue the good rapport you established in your initial contact(s) with the funding agency.

Each time a funding agent has a positive impression of you they gain a little more confidence in your ability to follow through on your plans once (if) they decide to fund them. They also learn that they can communicate with you honestly and trust that you are willing to listen to advice or suggestions. All of these may give you an advantage over other grant seekers who remain unknown or "faceless" to the granting agency.

Be Persistent

Grant writing, especially if you are new to it, can be disheartening. No one takes rejection well, particularly if they are new to something and lack confidence. When your proposal is rejected, it is easy to give up and to think that perhaps you were not cut out for grant writing after all.

Not true! Like anything, grant writing takes practice, and you learn along the way. Failure is often the first step toward success because you can learn a great deal by it—but only if you ask questions.

If your proposal is not accepted the first thing you might do is find out why. Granting agencies strive to make their decisions fairly and to base them on reasoning. If your program was not accepted then there is a reason or are reasons why. Ask them. If the funding agency gives you a vague answer such as, "There were so many proposals and though yours was excellent we just couldn't fund them all." Don't settle for this. Probe deeper. In trying to be nice to you they are doing you a great disservice. As hard as it may be to take criticism (and rejection), you are far better off if you ask for it and listen carefully to it because this information will be very useful to you the next time you submit a grant, either to this particular funding agency or to others.

If your grant is not accepted there are thus several things you can do:

- Revise it (to correct weakness stated by funding agent) and re-submit it to the same agency, if possible.

- Revise it and submit it to another agency in accordance with another RFP.

- Continue looking for grant opportunities that might fund your project as conceived.

- Re-examine the project to discover why it cannot be funded as conceived.

In short, *keep trying*. Many people find they must write several grants or more until they are successful, and they are not always successful no matter how many times their projects have been funded in the past.

Elements of a Typical Grant Proposal

Requests for proposals are not all alike. Because of the differences between funding agencies or organizations and even differences in the types of projects each funding agency is looking for from year to year, separate proposal requests often seek different information. Still, there are some commonalities in the type of elements requested in proposals that can be usefully summarized here. Typically, a proposal will include the following:

- *Summary.* This is a short paragraph that gives an overview of the project by summarizing the main ideas in each of the parts of the proposal.

- *Introduction.* This portion introduces the qualifications of your agency to undertake the work you are proposing. Here also is where you can show how the proposed project fits into your district's mission and long-range plans.

- *Problem or Needs Statement.* This continues the discussion started in the Introduction, adding reasons for why this particular project is needed to further the aims of your strategic plan and/or address resource or environmental needs.

- *Objectives.* These are the specific outcomes you expect to achieve through your project. Objectives should be measurable. For example, you state that you want to reduce erosion in the Friendly Creek watershed as an overall goal. To do so, you are requesting funds for revegetating certain critical slopes in the watershed. It may be difficult to measure actual rate of erosion, but you can keep track of how many trees you will plant and how many acres you will treat with a seed-mulch-fertilizer combination. You state that you will treat 60 acres in the watershed with a seed-mulch-fertilizer combination and plant 300 ponderosa pine seedlings and 200 willows.

- *Evaluation.* At the end of the project you evaluate whether you reached project objectives or not. You might, for instance report that because of seedling availability you only planted 280 ponderosa pines and 180 willows, but you treated over 65 acres with a seed-mulch-fertilizer combination. You might add more refined outcomes to this if you can: for instance, you might monitor the percentage of trees that survived over the course of the project (60% of trees survived) or that certain signs indicate erosion is decreasing (cubic yardage of sediment removed from catchment basins was 45% lower than the previous year, even though rainfall for the year was roughly the same). Because of the variables (rainfall, other human activities up- and downstream of the project site, etc.) you can only conjecture that the latter result is directly due to your project. You can, however, state unequivocally the number of trees and acres planted.

- *Future Course of Action.*[7] Even if your project is successful, it was still probably a part of a larger effort or long-term goal. This section of the proposal, if included, might discuss next steps for meeting a specific long-term goal, or ways in which the results of the present project may be continued, improved, or monitored (i.e., tree survival over a ten-year period, erosion rates over time, fish counts in streams impacted by the project, etc.). Most of the time one project leads to another in a continuing search for ways to restore a watershed or improve conditions on the land. These long-term objectives should be embodied in your district's long-range plan.

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[7] The source document for this section, "Proposal Components," created by the Grant and Resource Center of Northern California, named this item, "Future Funding." From the standpoint of non-profit foundations, most projects are ongoing and will require continued funding. In these cases foundations want to know if there is a plan in place for making programs pay for themselves once they are up and running. In the case of RCD projects, the situation is usually different and may likely involve monitoring of completed work or plans for similar work elsewhere.

- *Budget.* One of the most important elements of your proposal, a budget provides the funding agency with an estimate of how much your project will cost, broken down into relevant budget categories. Typical budget categories are:

  1. *Personnel Costs* (salary and benefits) for each project participant for time spent on the project.

  2. *Contractor Costs* (costs to employ independent contractors for the project).

  3. *Materials Costs* (materials and supplies that will have to be purchased or rented specifically for the project).

  4. *Travel Costs* (airfare, lodging, meals, etc. if travel is involved).

  5. *Overhead Costs* (the ongoing district expenses such as rent, phones, computers, etc.) Typically, 10% of the amount of all items above is added to the grant request to cover overhead.

For a sample grant proposal, see Appendix M.

Other Proposal Elements Specific to Resource Conservation

Although the elements discussed above are what typically comprise a grant request, the type of grants RCDs frequently apply for often necessitate including additional information such as maps of project areas; letters of support for the project from partners, congressmen, county government, or any applicable partners or participants; or copies of district long-range plans. The RFP will include information on any special elements you may need to include with your submission. The rule, as always, is to follow the directions in the RFP closely and contact the funding agency if you have any questions.

GRANT/CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

In your effort to secure grant funding for your district you may not have taken time to think about what you will do when you actually receive a grant. There are two major tasks involved in implementing a project with grant funding:

1. Carrying out the project itself (project implementation)

2. Managing cash-flow and managing the information flow and other administrative tasks associated with the grant

The first part, project implementation, is discussed under Step 8, How to Manage RCD Daily Operations. Managing cash flow and other administrative tasks, are discussed below. For the purposes of the following discussion, "grant management" refers to the actions necessary to secure payments once a grant or contract is received (Invoicing) and keeping the funding agent up to date on your activities (Reporting).

Invoicing

Funding agencies differ in their policies on grant payments to districts. Some agencies will allow a district to request a majority of the grant award in advance to purchase materials and equipment to get started on the project. In this case a written justification for the advance is usually required.

Normally, grant or contract funds are dispersed quarterly and granting or contracting agencies are billed after the fact for purchases, travel expenses, and contract hours worked. Districts thus need to plan for cash-flow requirements until quarterly payments are received. If the district will need funds in the interim, while waiting for cash reimbursements, they might consider options such as applying for an advance against the amount awarded or short-term loans. Typically, however, you would bill the agency or foundation at the end of the first quarter of your project for all items purchased during the first quarter (with receipts or other evidence of payment submitted), all travel expenses incurred (with receipts and other documentation submitted), all employee/contractor hours worked, etc.

Note that all of these expense items must have been included on the final approved budget if you are going to charge these expenses to the grant. Granting agencies also have other requirements for invoicing that must be carefully considered when you are trying to secure quarterly payments (see Appendix P, Sample Grant Invoicing and Reporting Forms, for more information).

Reporting

Progress Reports

Requests for payment, usually on a quarterly basis, generally must be accompanied by progress or status reports that detail work on the grant to date. Grant and cost-share contracts usually spell out requirements for progress reports. The progress reports usually must reflect the expenses covered in the invoice. For example, if you requested funds to reimburse an employee's travel expenses (and included all necessary documentation with the invoice), then details of and the reason for the trip must be documented in the quarterly report.

Beyond providing a justification for spending, however, a progress report narrates interim findings or successes that the project has demonstrated to-date. Depending on the needs of the granting agency (and what must be included in your progress reports is generally provided to you) the contents of a progress report might include:

- A summary of the work completed during the reporting period.

- Interim findings or success stories to date.

- Challenges or opportunities encountered in executing the project.

- Percentage of project completion (in other words, is the progress on schedule for completion by the end date?).

- Narrative of how costs submitted in the invoice are justified by work accomplished or undertaken, including discussion of any deviations.

- Project photographs. If possible photos of pre-project, in-progress, and completion should be made for comparison.

(For more information on completing progress reports, see Appendix P, Sample Grant Invoicing and Reporting Forms).

Final Reports

Final reports are usually required in the grant/contract process. Requirements for the final report are generally included in the original contract you sign with the granting agency. This will include exact expectations for the contents of the final report. It is a good idea to become thoroughly familiar with these requirements at the beginning of the granting process because you will need to incorporate the requirements of the final report into the design of your project if you are to be able to report about it successfully once it is completed.

Even though final reports may be *required* by a grant contract, they also provide the grantee a chance to summarize the accomplishments or to state findings of the project. The final report you submit to the granting agency can be used when you write annual reports, newspaper and newsletter articles, or other publications, so they can be quite useful to you as well. *Note: whenever you publish reports or articles about projects receiving grant funds, you must be sure to mention the funding source for the grant in the text of the article or report.*

Requirements for final reports will vary from grant to grant but they usually include items such as the following:

- A brief summary of the organization, its mission and goals, the objectives of the project, and how these objectives were accomplished.

- A discussion of the amount awarded and how the funds were used.

- A discussion of any problems and/or concerns that may have arisen during the course of this project, and the corrective actions taken.

- Any findings, conclusions, or recommendations for follow-up or ongoing activities that might result from successful completion of the project.

- A statement, if applicable, of future intent of public and/or private support to maintain or further develop the project.

- A summary of project successes.

- Copies of all news articles and any other media coverage, as well as all promotional and educational materials produced as a result of the grant agreement.

• A request for final payment, which accompanies the final report but which is separate from the report itself.

The request for final payment is kept separate from the final report because the latter is often reproduced for other purposes, such as providing information to other interested parties. In line with this, funding agencies often require that all materials developed during the course of a grant project be subject to use by the granting agency and thus reproducible by the granting agency at will.[8] This pertains especially to final reports, which can contain important or relevant findings or a conclusion that might be widely disseminated and useful to others.

For information on issues related to writing final reports see Step 9, Writing Annual Reports. For a sample grant contract which includes requirements for final reports, see Appendix N.

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[8] In addition, granting agencies often require that all materials the grantees produce for distribution be reviewed by the grant agency before they are distributed. Also, statements crediting the granting agency as funding source for the project are usually required to be included in any publications, news articles, press releases, flyers, evaluation forms, etc.

STEP 7
HOW INFORM AND EDUCATE THE PUBLIC

INTRODUCTION

Education from the standpoint of Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) is multifaceted, and often it includes adult and community outreach and education, child or youth education programs, and legislative actions or educational efforts. Educational needs and programs may vary from district to district.

Although some districts have staff hired to perform educational duties for their district, many districts do not have employees specifically assigned to this task. In many cases directors fulfill this role. Regardless, education is an important component of district activities, for it heightens awareness of district activities, educates people about the need for resource conservation, makes the public aware of district programs and opportunities. Education can also create a positive image for the district in the community, instill in children the values necessary for sound resource management later in life, and help youth become aware of career opportunities in natural resources. In addition legislative activity that is beneficial to natural resources can be viewed as a part of a district's educational efforts.

Because these educational efforts differ in terms of the situations in which they are usually performed, this chapter addresses each as an independent effort, even though many times these efforts may overlap or be used in tandem to promote the idea of resource conservation and the scientific concepts underlying it.

ADULT EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Adult education is a broad arena in conservation outreach and education. Target groups for educational efforts can vary considerably depending on the goal or need. Education programs can be intended for landowners or general members of the public, other professionals in the field, local government officials, or members of various local organizations.

Awards

Awarding local members of the public who have demonstrated an active participation in resource conservation is one way to heighten awareness of district programs and establish a positive image both for the district, participants in programs, and others who have shown they care about conserving natural resources.

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) organizes and sponsors several yearly awards for members of the community to be recognized for their efforts.

Cooperator of the Year Award

A candidate for the Cooperator of the Year Award is chosen by the district from amongst those individuals who have worked closely with the district on resource conservation issues. Often it is a landowner who has participated in district programs or sought a district's help with a resource issue on their lands. When private landowners invite

district personnel onto their properties to give advice or assistance, they are often directly benefiting resources. A landowner who agrees to build livestock fencing to prohibit cattle or other livestock from damaging riparian areas is one example. Each year your district can select a cooperator to receive the honor.

The awards process has two levels. Each chosen cooperator receives a plaque with their name and the name of the district which recognizes the role they played in conservation within a district. Presenting the plaque can also provide an opportunity for the district to raise public awareness of district activities in the form of published photographs, press releases or other media. All candidates receive the plaque for their cooperation with the RCD, and one candidate is chosen from all entrants to receive the national award, which includes special recognition and cash and travel awards.

Teacher of the Year Award

Similar to the Cooperator of the Year Award, the Teacher of the Year Award can be bestowed upon the teacher within a district who has invested time and effort in resource conservation education, and who might have participated closely with the district in educational projects such as Adopt-A-Watershed or the Envirothon. The award process is similar to the Cooperator Award, with the selected teacher from each district receiving a plaque and one chosen at the national level for special recognition.

Direct instruction

Direct instruction takes place when a conservation educator or other professional meets face to face with an intended audience and supplies information, skills, or ideas to participants. This is perhaps the most effective means of educating people because it allows for feedback, invites participation, and includes opportunities to take stock of how well people have grasped information presented. In addition, a positive public image can be created by a conservation educator or professional being present and interacting with people in an informed, congenial, and professional manner. This is also one of the more challenging approaches because when people give their time to you, you assume a certain measure of responsibility for their needs, which might be as simple as providing food and water or (as is sometimes the case) difficult as addressing their fears, concerns, or suspicions. A considerable amount of tact and general goodwill are needed when working directly with people.

Field Tours

Field tours are one of the best ways to "get the word out" and educate people about conservation issues in your district. Field tours have the advantage of taking people to the sites where district work is implemented, and they provide concrete examples for the information and ideas presented. Also, field tours give your district a chance to interact directly with the public and answer questions about technical specifics or general district policies and opportunities. At some times or in some areas there is a great interest and response to field tours, and in others, less. Generating interest in the tour can be abetted by effective advertising (posters, articles, direct mailings), as well as by special incentives such as barbecues or free lunches offered during or after tours.

Personal Contacts

Although not often seen as a part of a district's educational effort, personal contacts can be important, if spontaneous, opportunities for education. Because public education and outreach is so often directed at a larger, anonymous public, we often overlook how important our dealings with individuals might be, particularly in cases where an individual or representative of a group contacts the RCD for information or assistance. Much effort and money can be expended trying to reach out to the public to get, usually, a small number of interested respondents. An individual who contacts an RCD is *already* interested and is in a much better position in many instances to listen and learn. Cultivating such contacts is an important part of what an RCD does, so taking advantage of times when people seek out the RCD for information or assistance is vital.

Personal contacts can also occur when an RCD contacts individual members of the public who are known to have an interest in an issue at hand. Some RCD's keep extensive data bases of individuals with their addresses and phone numbers that are categorized according to specific topics or issues. When information needs to be disseminated on a particular topic, these individuals can then easily be contacted by phone or mail and informed of the event, issue, or development.

Public Meetings

Your district can announce and hold public meetings, either on general matters or specific issues. One regularly recurring public meeting of a general nature is the monthly board meeting which is, by law (in most instances) a *public* meeting (see Step 2, How to Hold Legal and Effective Meetings for information on meeting the legal requirements for meetings).

Districts also hold public informational meetings to present policies or plans to the public or interested conservation professionals on a diverse array of topics. Usually such meetings are focused on specific issues, such as receiving public comment on a district plan or publication.

Workshops

it is sometimes hard to determine the difference between a meeting and a workshop. If a difference is to be made then it might be that a workshop is more directly educational in nature and the focus is on imparting skills or useful knowledge that participants can themselves use, rather than the presentation of information about a district or its practices. A meeting seeks to inform or to solicit input; a workshop seeks to teach or impart useful concepts, knowledge, and skills.

in a workshop, specific knowledge and skills are taught to participants. Because of this, much more active participation of attendees is necessary. People learn best by *doing,* by interacting with ideas and knowledge directly, during the workshop itself. Much educational theory suggests people who are actively engaged with their learning- -who have to verbalize, construct, solve problems or otherwise *do* the skill being taught--will best retain the information presented.

Because of this, the "lecture" approach (with or without visual aids such as photographic

slides) should be kept to a minimum. This is not to say this method cannot be used for some parts of a workshop, but merely delivering information does not ensure that people are learning it. Typically, people can listen attentively, though relatively passively, for about 20 minutes. It is therefore best to keep "lecture" portions of a workshop to 20-minute segments, and these followed by activities or interactions such as questions fed back to the participants, a problem they have to solve (either alone or in large or small groups), or any other kind of demonstration that they have understood what was presented and are thus ready for more.

People are often more comfortable in low-risk situations (when they only have to sit and listen) but they can quickly become bored. The solution is to "break the ice" by establishing a safe environment where participants can take risks, be "wrong," or even fail without social consequence. This is a step in the teaching process that many ignore or gloss over, but it is perhaps the most important step in the whole process. Once people get over their fear of participating (fear of failing or being wrong) they are usually very eager to participate, for it is far more interesting to participate and belong than sit back and passively watch things happen.

Frequently, planned ice breakers, such as a group interaction problem, are a good way to loosen up an audience. It is not enough to have people introduce themselves and tell why they are there (though this can happen after the ice is broken) because this may only make people more uncomfortable. The best techniques remove the teacher-audience barrier and get people to interact as equals. The best instructors manage the delicate balance of presenting themselves as leaders--but equals--and not authority figures, which often makes people afraid to speak and interact.

Because a workshop should be action-oriented, with lots of opportunities for participants to speak or perform tasks, planning has to be in place before the workshop is held: Concepts and skills have to be identified and sequenced in a logical manner; activities that will teach skills or knowledge or reinforce them must be planned; measures of student learning in the form of informal feedback from participants, demonstration of their newly acquired skills or learning, or written evaluations given. It is also a good idea to solicit feedback from participants on the strengths and weakness of the workshop itself, in order to refine it for future use or apply what is learned to later workshops.

Media-Based Outreach and Education

Direct Mailings

Direct mailings can take the form of mass mailings or mailings to targeted individuals or groups. When an issue is of importance or interest to the general public, mass mailings of information or announcements may be feasible, especially if your total population base is not large. In one district, the entire county consists of a population of around 14,000 and all mail delivery is to post office box holders. Each box receives a quarterly newsletter published by the district, and if there are special events or issues that need publicizing, inserts can delivered along with the newsletter. Having a bulk mailing permit keeps the cost of such mailings down.

Sometimes only specific individuals or groups are known to share an interest or concern with a topic. In this case, a mailing list can be developed and maintained and utilized

whenever public outreach on this topic needs to occur. Keeping a data base that can be updated and modified is an excellent tool for this purpose.

E-Mail

Though gaining popularity, e-mail still may not be widely used enough to reach a large segment of the population (and there are yet to be phone directories that include peoples' e-mail addresses). Still, it is a good idea to learn the addresses of people who regularly use e-mail and utilize this form of communication whenever possible. Except for the small cost to maintain an account, e-mail is free.

There are also e-mail distribution networks set up to disseminate communiqués to all members on the list. If people on this list are a good audience for information or announcements on a certain topic, this is one way to reach them at little cost.

Exhibits, Posters, and Displays

There are numerous opportunities for districts to inform and educate the public and other conservation professionals through exhibits, posters, and displays. One good venue for an exhibition of district activities, accomplishments, and projects is county fairs, but other opportunities should not be overlooked. Displays set up in banks, grocery stores, or other public places are also a good way draw attention to your district and inform the public. One district displayed its work in a bank lobby; the display presented the work of a local trails group that included maps, photographs and information on the trails.

The California Association of Resource Conservation District's (CARCD) Annual Meeting every November is another common place to publicize district activities and disseminate information. Every year, the Annual Meeting includes a Conservation Exposition ("Expo") that includes posters and displays by private vendors as well as many RCDs and other agencies. The California Organization of District Employees (CODE) sponsors the Conservation Expo, and proceeds from the Expo help the RCD employees' organization carry out its mission, which includes holding educational workshops for RCD employees statewide. To participate in the Conservation Expo, contact CODE (see Appendix W, Contact Information).

Posters prominently displayed in public places are one way to advertise special district programs, meetings, or activities. Small handbills or larger posters are easily created using desktop publishing software (or hand-drawn and copied), and these can be posted throughout the community at relatively small cost. Although this method does not guarantee people will read and respond to the posters, they are a good way to supplement other outreach efforts like newspaper articles and direct mailings.

Internet Sites

Many RCDs have developed internet "home pages" for their district which include information on district activities, programs, employment opportunities and much more. Such sites can also be set up to monitor how many visitors view the site and this can be a useful, if rough, gauge of general interest in the district's activities. In time both internet and e-mail information dissemination may increase in importance as the user base for these tools expands.

Newspaper Articles and Press Releases

An excellent way to announce events or to publicize projects is to write short newspaper articles and submit them to your local newspaper. Many newspapers are happy to print such "stories" and the result is free advertising for your district. Press releases are even more effective when they are accompanied by publishable photographs, which can attract attention to the information being published. Newspaper publishers in small rural communities tend to print press releases readily, but competition for people's attention increases as the population base grows. If you are not sure how to present news articles to your local newspaper, contact them and see if you can set up an appointment with a representative to review how the newspaper might be able to assist you.

Press Coverage at Events

Sometimes interest in an event is large enough that newspapers, television, or radio stations may want to "cover" the event. Some RCDs deal with "hot" topics in their areas, or are engaged in activities that are considered unusual enough to warrant interest from media. In one case, a workshop on vineyard development was packed to capacity and a newspaper based in a nearby city found the event interesting enough to send a reporter and photographer to the event. A nearly full-page article with numerous photographs resulted, effectively publicizing the district's success with the workshop. It is important in these instances that readers know whom to contact if they have questions or a continuing interest in the issues or ideas conveyed by the workshop.

Radio and Television

Both radio and television are highly used media. As important as print media is, many people do not get information through newspapers or other written formats. A district can publicize its activities, advertise events, or otherwise garner interest in its projects via radio and television. Contact your local TV or radio station with your ideas, they may be interested and willing to help.

Video Production

When an issue or program is of an ongoing nature, and a message may need to be repeated to different individuals or groups, a video can be produced to capture the message or event and played as needed to interested groups.

Video production can be as simple as videotaping a workshop, presentation, or meeting using relatively inexpensive video equipment or as expensive and complicated as hiring a video production company to create a video on the issue or event.

Videos are particularly effective in classroom or workshop situations where the same information has to be repeated for different groups on separate occasions. Like the suggestions discussed above under "workshops," however, it is best to strive for audience involvement. Showing a video does not eliminate the need for this, but strides must be taken to get the audience to interact with the material shown in the video.

One technique to facilitate this is to ask the audience to use "active" viewing or listening: ask them to listen or watch for certain key ideas or ask them a question that the video might answer. When people actively search for information, they are more engaged and therefore learn better. A video can be followed up by a discussion of the video's contents, the answer to the question raised before the audience watches the video, or a problem solving situation wherein the information contained in the video was necessary or provided insights.

Another point to remember is that entire videos need not be shown. You should feel free to use only those portions that you need to make your point. It is all too easy to try to let videos do the teaching for you. In actuality, videos are only a tool to use in *your* teaching. Videos themselves can teach to only a limited degree. It is what you do with them that counts.

Publications

Newsletters

Newsletters are one of the most common means to disseminate information about districts on a regular basis. This regularity has advantages and disadvantages. To those who have an active interest in conservation, the regular arrival of a semiannual or quarterly newsletter can be something they count on for information and ideas. Others, less interested, may decide they are not interested, remember the "look" of a newsletter, and simply throw it away.

Getting people not directly involved in resource conservation to read a newsletter may be difficult. It is therefore vital that the newsletter have an attractive appearance and utilize articles and photographs on the cover that can help to draw readers in (or keep them from throwing it away when they find it in their mailboxes). It is possible to go too far with eye-catching gimmicks and render the newsletter insulting to those readers who really *are* interested. The best approach is to make it pleasing to the eye, informative and interesting, and professional in appearance.

Informational Brochures

Many districts receive frequent inquiries about particular topics. When there are frequently asked questions about a particular topic, it is possible to address these questions in a brief brochure. In Trinity County, landowners frequently wrestle with star thistle, an invasive exotic plant, and seek ways to control or eradicate it. A brochure providing information on the spread of starthistle in the west and various means of controlling it was created to give to landowners dealing with this problem. This is not to say additional information and assistance should also not be given, but a brochure may provide the landowner with the information to address this problem themselves.

Brochures can also familiarize the public with the district's roles and the types of assistance the district can lend to landowners and others who have resource conservation needs. The best way to publish brochures is with in-house desktop publishing programs, which can allow you to modify the brochure as needed and print only the number of copies needed.

Professional Journals

Districts frequently engage in important scientific work, and their findings can be published in professional journals to inform the larger public of issues or solutions to problems with which a district is dealing. Professional journals have specific guidelines for content, style, and format for articles. It is best to get in touch with the journal's editor early on in the research and writing phase to discuss the possibility of publishing your article and determine the journal's needs for content and style. The journal, *Land and Water: The Magazine of Resource Management and Restoration* is a publication that will print reports on practical projects. Academic journals have more stringent requirements for scientific rigor and peer review and may be more difficult to contribute articles on restoration projects unless they are designed as scientific projects as a primary purpose.

Technical Publications

Districts can print reports on their projects or studies in the form of technical publications, which are usually used by other resource professionals when conducting similar work. Publications can be created in-house using simple word-processing or desktop publishing programs and duplicated in quantity for distribution. Such reports are sometimes required by funding agencies who oversee projects, but many other professionals are interested in the results of long-term restoration or other projects.

Reports

Final project reports (which may be technical publications as discussed above) or quarterly reports to funding agencies are important ways for districts to disseminate information about specific projects to funding agencies or other interested agencies or individuals. A district's annual report also discloses information about projects, as well as progress toward goals and objectives. An annual report is one way a district can summarize its achievements for a project or all of its activities during a year. For information on writing annual reports (as well as general guidelines for good report writing) see Step 9, How to Write Annual Reports.

CHILD AND YOUTH EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Contests

The Envirothon

In the early 1990s, California began participating in the National Envirothon by holding its own state-wide contest during spring. Winners of the California Envirothon are sent to the National Envirothon, held each summer and hosted by a different state every year. The California Envirothon, like its national counterpart, tests teams of five high-school-age students in resource management issues, including soils, forestry, aquatics, wildlife, and each year a special issue such as watershed management or pest control.

Typically, RCDs sponsor teams from high schools in their district. An RCD can take a very active role in preparing students for the contest or merely provide funding for teams

to participate in the contest held each spring at varying locations in the state. Frequently, an RCD does more than provide funds for students to attend the Envirothon. Sessions to train students about soils, forestry, aquatics, and wildlife are taught by employees of the RCD or related agencies, and the RCD takes an active role in organizing the training sessions. Each team, however, must have a designated on-sight high school mentor (often a science or agricultural science teacher), and provide a place where students can meet to train for the Envirothon. Some teams begin weekly sessions in September and train until spring. Other times scheduling prohibits such an exhaustive approach and teams do not begin preparing until late in the fall or early winter. Teams that have scored the highest in the Envirothon have typically invested the most time in preparation, and they are frequently teams that have participated regularly over the years. For more information on the California Envirothon contact the Envirothon Committee (see Appendix T, Contact Information).

Speak-Off Contest

Each year at the CARCD Annual Meeting in November high school finalists of local speech contests sponsored by local districts compete in a Speak-Off contest. Approximately ten students prepare and deliver speeches on a resource conservation topic at a special session of the annual meeting. The winner is chosen by a panel of judges consisting of directors from around the state.

Finalists for the annual meeting are chosen for each district that participates by agreement of the district board of directors. Contestants deliver speeches that the board judges and from which it makes its selection. The district sponsors that student's participation in the final Speak-Off at the annual meeting, providing funding for the student's meals, lodging, and travel (see appendix W, Contact Information).

First-, Second-, and Third-place winners of the state contest receive special recognition, a plaque, and cash prizes of $300, $200, and $100, respectively. Contact CARCD for rules and necessary forms for a student to participate in the Speak-Off.

Extracurricular Activities

Clubs and Organizations

Clubs and organizations are another way to sponsor resource education activities for children. The Boy and Girl Scouts, the Cub Scouts (and even "Tiger Cubs"--the youngest scouting group) have sometimes wished to have opportunities to earn merit badges by performing resource conservation work. In one case, a group of Tiger Cubs learned about the importance of using native plants to restore a watershed which had highly erosive soils. Sedimentation to creeks was adversely affecting anadromous fish habitat and revegetation using native plants was the solution. The six and seven year-olds learned (and demonstrated understanding of) these concepts and gathered, planted, and watered native plant seed to participate in this project.

Other groups that might wish to incorporate resource conservation education in their activities may include boys and girls clubs, summer youth camps, civic youth organizations or groups specifically organized for the purpose of resource conservation education, that could include backpacking trips, restoration work, trail maintenance, or

many other possibilities.

Range Camp

Each year Elkus Youth Camp in Half-Moon Bay hold a week-long "Range Camp" where qualified students (usually high school agriculture or science students) can learn about and participate in agricultural and other resource education activities. Local districts can sponsor high school students to attend the camp (for more information, see Appendix W, Contact Information).

In-School Programs

Schools are a natural place for resource conservation education to take place. Many times this is a neglected area of the school curriculum and administrators and teachers are willing to provide time and opportunities to conduct school-based learning in resource conservation. There are many ways to teach conservation in schools, many of them based on well-established curricula and methods.

Assemblies and Special Events

Many school districts and individual schools welcome the idea of holding special events and assemblies devoted to resource conservation, environmental education, or related subjects. Your individual creativity and ability to "sell" the idea to school administrators are probably the only limitation here. In one district, AmeriCorps members organized and created a traveling "Insect Fair" that taught the importance of insects to ecosystems, the types of insects that can be found, and the ways in which different cultures view insects. The event was staged as a participatory learning environment, with activities and information for all elementary grades. Activities included songs and stories about insects, games, a puppet play, edible insect booth, live and specimen insect displays, and insect art activities. The schools that hosted this event were very supportive and teachers seemed to enjoy learning about bugs as much as the children.

Classroom instruction

Classroom instruction can be as simple as one-time classroom visits to present ideas on resource conservation or, depending on the willingness of teachers to participate, be multifaceted and multi-year educational efforts. Programs such as Adopt-A-Watershed, Project Learning Tree, Project Wild, and Wild On Watersheds present curricula for implementing sequential lessons centered on various aspects of resource conservation. For a listing of these programs and contacts for receiving information, see Appendix V, Educational Resources.

Field Trips

Teachers and students alike appreciate opportunities to get outside and study nature directly or perform restoration tasks such as planting trees. Because resource conservation is applied science it gives students opportunities to learn concepts while participating in real world activities. Oftentimes, field trips are integral to larger resource conservation units and lessons, but they can be one-time learning events as well.

Field trips do require a lot of organization, with teachers and resource conservation specialists working together to coordinate transportation and scheduling. Field trips also require planning for food, water, and restroom facilities. Students with special needs also need to be considered. Despite the high degree of planning necessary, field trips can be memorable experiences for children, providing an opportunity to make learning fun and exciting.

LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION

Informing state and federal political representatives of the work and needs of districts is an ongoing educational effort. Groups and interests with greater visibility at the state and federal levels of government can more easily influence decision makers in the policy and lawmaking process than the more "grass-roots" orientation of local conservation groups. It is therefore important for districts to maintain a presence in larger governing bodies in order to have a voice in policy issues and how money is allocated. Two not-for-profit associations in particular can be of assistance to districts in educating legislators about the merits of districts.

California Special Districts Association

Many RCDs belong to the California Special Districts Association (CSDA) and receive legislative updates, training, and other services through CSDA. In particular, CSDA sponsors a Governmental Affairs Day in Sacramento, which focuses on pending legislation and public policy decisions impacting special districts. CSDA brings together influential people in Sacramento for presentations to the attendees. Participants schedule visits with their legislators and attend a hosted reception for decision makers and their staffs. This is an ideal opportunity for special district representatives to continue to build relationships with their legislators, which are vital to special districts being heard in the Capitol. For more information on CSDA, see Appendix W, Contact Information.

California Association of Resource Conservation Districts

"Action Alert" Letters

From time to time RCDs are called on to support (or rally against) pending legislation on issues related to resource management and conservation. Since districts are locally driven and focus more on on-the-ground work with small landowners, they tend to have low visibility at larger governing levels. This is why it is important for districts to strive to make their needs known to state and federal elected officials. There are, however, participants in state and local government who are alert to issues that potentially have impacts on districts and they occasionally call for letters of support from districts on legislative issues.

Such calls take the form of action alert letters, which can be communicated to districts via fax, post, or e-mail. Action alerts generally contain background information on pending bills and sample letters for or against such legislation. It is important that districts participate in this effort through a "show of force" so that lawmakers do not overlook the needs and interests of the large (but usually silent) group of local

conservation advocates.

The Day in the Capital

in California, the yearly "Day in the Capital" provides districts with an opportunity to interact directly with members of the California State Assembly. California has a legislative advocate for resource conservation who meets with district directors on the morning of the Day in the Capital to familiarize attendees with current legislative issues. Directors then have the opportunity to meet face to face with representatives to discuss issues of concern and make the needs of districts known with members of the California Assembly at the annual Day in the Capital. To participate in the Day in the Capitol, contact CARCD (see Appendix W, Contact Information).

STEP 8
HOW TO MANAGE RCD DAILY OPERATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Issues related to the daily operation of a Resource Conservation District (RCD) become crucial once a district has established plans for the future, knows how to combine forces to implement conservation work, and has secured funds to run programs. What happens on a day-to-day basis within a district can be a complex set of functions that needs expertise in order for the district to run smoothly. Sometimes the events leading up to the need for sound management on a day-to-day basis do not fully prepare a district to take on the responsibilities associated with becoming an active partner in the conservation community. This chapter seeks to provide practical information on running a district on a daily basis, and because each of these issues is extensive and multifaceted, this chapter is divided into several parts covering issues ranging from creating board policies to finding office space; hiring contractors and employees; insuring vehicles, directors, and employees; managing district fiscal operations; and implementing projects.

PART ONE: THE IMPORTANCE OF DISTRICT POLICIES

Introduction

One important management tool to provide guidelines and directions for RCD daily operations is the creation of district policies. As noted earlier, one of the primary responsibilities of district directors is to provide guidance to the resource conservation community, RCD staff, and volunteers through decision making and policy creation. Division 9 does not *require* that districts implement policies on matters such as personnel administration or budgeting,[1] but Division 9 does state that one of a district board's primary responsibilities is to "manage and conduct the business and affairs of the district" (§9401). One way for the board to do so is to exercise leadership in resource conservation, and one important tool of leadership is through the creation of board policies.

Even though Division 9 does not set forth detailed guidelines for board policy making, districts are responsible for implementing approaches to district operations that abide by state and federal law. For example, Division 9 does not state that a district must have a personnel policy or what such a policy might include. However, the district must abide by laws such as the Equal Opportunity Employment Practices Act in its management of personnel activities. A board policy on personnel administration is a tool that can provide guidance to management that will not only enable the district to hire and oversee the work of qualified employees but ensure that its decisions and practices conform to legal guidelines.

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[1] §9457, however, defines policy creation requirements for procurement by districts of goods and services. This article in Division 9 refers to Government Code §54201 through §54204, which requires that local agencies, including special districts, adopt procurement policies for the purchase of supplies, services, and equipment in accordance with Government Code, including other articles outlining procedures for procurement.

Through board policies, routine matters of district operations can be delegated to individual board directors, committees, or staff and guidelines for such operations governed by district policies created and approved by the board. Policies on such matters as personnel administration, fiscal operations, fees for services, safety, and other matters are important tools directors have for managing the district. Many of the topics in this chapter dealing with the daily operation of district business are presented with recommendations for and examples of board policies. For examples of board policies, see Appendix Q. General board policies that apply to directors, employees, contractors, and volunteers alike are outlined immediately below.

Fee-for-Service Policy

Under Division 9 districts are empowered to charge fees for services rendered, so long as charges for services do not exceed the actual cost of rendering them (§9403.5). Beyond this, districts also need to consider the potential impact of district competition on any businesses within the district who offer similar services. Districts may assist the local community by providing various services such as Geographic Information System (GIS) assistance, brush clearing and chipping, or any other services of which the district has knowledge or technical expertise. The following list includes items you may wish to consider including in a district fee-for-services policy.

1.   The fees charged for services will be based on the actual cost to the RCD, including employee hourly rate of pay, benefits, and overhead for each project.

2.   All proposals for the RCD to provide services and charge fees pursuant to this policy must be approved by the district board of directors through a contract. However, the district sometimes receives requests for services on short notice. To enable the district to respond and take action on a request under a tight time frame, agreements for Fee-for Service projects for less than $1,000 and less than 40 hours of staff time may be approved by the district manager or board president.

3.   The RCD's services are provided on a non-discriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, religion, marital status, medical condition, or physical handicap.

Drug-Free Workplace Policy

Many grant contracts require that grantees certify compliance with the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1990 (Government Code Section 8350 et seq.). Since most districts in California depend heavily on state and federal grants to carry out conservation work, it is a good idea for districts to enact drug-free workplace policies in order to qualify for such grants. Grantees must be in compliance with the terms of the act in order to receive government grants. The terms of the Act specify that grant recipients will do all of the following[2]:

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[2] These guidelines are quoted from a Department of Conservation grant contract agreement for fiscal year 1998/99. The terms outlined above summarize the major provisions of the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1990.

1.   Publish a statement notifying employees that unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensation, possession, or use of a controlled substance is prohibited and specifying actions taken against employees for violations, as required by Government Code Section 8355(a).

2.   Establish a Drug Free Awareness Program as required by Government Code Section 8355(b) to inform employees about all of the following:

   a) the dangers of drug abuse in the workplace;
   b) the person's or organization's policy of maintaining a drug free workplace;
   c) any available counseling, rehabilitation and employee assistance program;
   d) penalties that may be imposed upon employees for drug abuse violations.

3.   Provide, as required by Government Code Section 8355(c), that every employee who works on the proposed grant:

   a) will receive a copy of the company's drug-free policy statement; and,
   b) will agree to abide by the terms of the company's statement as a condition of employment on the grant.

In order to document employee and volunteer receipt of the district policy it is recommended that provisions be made for employees, volunteers, and any others working for the district sign forms verifying their receipt of the policy.

Non-Discrimination Policy

Many grant contracts require that grantees certify compliance with the provisions of the California Fair Employment and Housing Act.[3] The act requires that employers do not discriminate against any persons seeking employment (including contractors and volunteers) because of race, color, religion, age, sex, national origin, political affiliation, ancestry, marital status, disability, or sexual orientation.

Although a district need not publish a separate document on nondiscrimination, its policy should appear on related personnel and volunteer documents, such as job announcements, job and volunteer applications, personnel and volunteer policies, and other related documents.

Sexual Harassment Policy

Title IX of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits any employee or volunteer from sexually harassing another employee or volunteer, a prospective employee or volunteer, or member of the public while on duty. In order to ensure that a district is in compliance with the Act, it should create a policy prohibiting sexual harassment, inform employees and volunteers of behavior that constitutes sexual harassment, of the discrimination complaint process, of the right to file complaints without fear of reprisal, and of the nature of disciplinary action should such behavior occur.

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[3] Government Code, Section 12900 et seq. and the regulation promulgated thereunder (California Administrative Code, Title 2, Section 7285.0 et seq.), the provisions of Article 9.5, Chapter 1, Division 3, Title 2 of the Government Code (Government Code, Sections 11135-11139.5).

It is recommended that a sexual harassment policy include definitions of sexual harassment, examples of what constitutes sexual harassment (examples of visual, verbal, or physical harassment), procedures employees and the district can and should undertake when such instances occur, and provisions for ensuring that all employees are informed of the policy: in order to document employee and volunteer receipt of the district policy it is recommended that provisions be made for employees, volunteers, and any others working for the district sign forms verifying their receipt of the policy.

Safe Practices and Operations Policy

Another important aspect of district operations is safety. Employees, volunteers, and others participating in district activities need to be aware of the importance of on-the-job safety. A district policy on safe practices and operations is one way to inform employees, volunteers, and others of the importance of and procedures for safe operation of equipment and tools and maintaining a safe and healthy work environment.

The components of a district safety policy might include, but are not limited to:

- Provisions for prevention of accidents

- The cooperative nature of a safe working environment

- Procedures for reporting accidents and seeking medical assistance

- The importance of project and work planning to account for safety

- Provisions for reporting unsafe situations to management

- Appropriate clothing and footwear for the type of work performed

- Mandatory participation in safety meetings or trainings

- Process for reporting known or suspected drug or alcohol use on the job

- Procedures for safe practices associated with specific tasks frequently performed by staff and volunteers (such as lifting, transporting heavy materials, running of machinery, etc.)

- Prohibition against horseplay or other acts which tend to have an adverse influence on the safety or well-being of employees

- The need for water to be supplied, especially when working under conditions of heat

- Prohibition from picking up or handling wildlife unnecessarily

- Cautions about poisonous reptiles or insects

Vehicle Policy

Another policy a district might implement is a vehicle policy. Districts who make vehicles available to directors, employees, or volunteers might need to create clear directions for their use. District vehicles are intended for district business only, so employees and volunteers must be informed about potential violations of appropriate use of district vehicles. A district vehicle policy might include the following:

- Statement that vehicles are for to be used for district business only.

- Provisions for maintenance of vehicles, including checking oil and other fluids and scheduled inspections

- Procedure for reporting accidents, mechanical failure, suspicious noises or other indications of malfunction

- Procedure for assigning vehicles to drivers

- Prohibited uses for some or all vehicles

- Requirements for approved drivers

- Times and places for vehicle arrival or departure, including where vehicles must be parked overnight and on weekends

- Procedures for recording driver mileage and other data

- Procedures for fueling vehicles

- Any other vehicle-related needs specific to district operations

PART TWO: FINDING AFFORDABLE OFFICE SPACE, FURNITURE, EQUIPMENT, AND SOFTWARE

Office Space

Districts have wide latitude to find affordable office space. Across California districts have adopted diverse strategies for housing their activities while keeping overhead costs down. In order to keep costs down, districts may share office space with anyone that will share. There are, however, some logical choices for districts wishing to keep costs down by sharing office space. Here are some suggested entities you might consider sharing an office with:

- County Government Offices
- County Fairgrounds
- USDA Service Centers
- NRCS Field Offices
- Resource-Related Business Offices

- Resource-Related Non-Profit Organization Offices
  (For example, Land Trust Offices)
- State and Federal Agency Field Offices
- University of California Extension Offices
- County Farm Bureau Offices
- Farm Services Agency Offices

Furniture and Equipment

Districts operating on a budget may want to take advantage of a program through the
California department of General Services, which enables them to acquire furniture and
office equipment such as computers at relatively low cost. The Surplus Property
Program receives surplus materials and salvaged items that federal programs and
agencies donate and reissues them to qualified organizations. Organizations that may
receive this property are state and local public agencies and non-profit institutions. For
information on obtaining surplus items, see appendix W, Contact Information, for the
website, address and phone of the California Department of General Services.

Software

Several organizations offer computer software for free or at reduced cost for non-profit
organizations and government agencies. One of these is Gifts in Kind, which provides
software applications and software training as gifts or at reduced prices. To obtain these
services you must be a member of Gifts in Kind. For further information or instructions
for registering with Gifts in Kind, see Appendix W, Contact Information, for the Gifts in
Kind Website address.

Another organization that offers software and assistance to conservation and
environmental non profits s Hewlett Packard's Conservation technology support
Program (CTSP), which specializes in providing Geographic Information Systems
software and training to non profits. Equipment and training is provided by CTSP in the
form of grants and to date it has awarded over $5 million in donated equipment and
grants to over 250 applicants. For more information on this program, see CTSP in
Appendix W.

PART THREE: CONTRACTING AND SUBCONTRACTING

Importance of Procurement Policies

There are several reasons why it is important for districts to create policies on the use of
contracted labor for RCD projects. One of these is to set guidelines for the appropriate
use of contractors. Typically, a contracting, or "procurement," policy excludes the use of
contractors for services the RCD can itself perform. Conditions for use of contractors,
including types of work that can be contracted, may also be set forth in the policy.

Another reason for establishing a procurement policy is to outline requirements for
competitive bid processes. Requirements for competitive bid requirements differ from
grant contract to grant contract. To be in compliance with contract requirements, ensure

that you read the contract language carefully on competitive bid requirements for subcontracting and the purchase of materials and equipment required for the project. A general statement in the board policy on subcontracting that project management adhere to all grant contract requirements would be one way to establish policy on the use of subcontractors.

A third reason for a board contracting policy is to set forth requirements for contractors on matters such as insurance and liability, sexual harassment, and other matters governing conduct in the workplace. Such guidelines not only provide clear policies for the recruitment and performance of contractors, but provide a measure of protection for districts which need to comply with state and federal standards of conduct and business practices. For sample district procurement policies for both construction and professional services, see Appendix Q, Sample District Policies.

Employee or Contractor?

Sometimes it is difficult to decide whether to hire an employee or a contractor to do a job. Hiring a contractor has the advantage of keeping expenses down because contractors do not need to be paid benefits (benefits can add up to 34% to the cost of maintaining an employee[4]), provided with office space, or provided with vehicles and equipment. A basic rule in deciding whether to hire a contractor or an employee is this: is the person working for the district assigned to a one-time project or will their work be ongoing? The advantages of hiring employees who work on an ongoing basis is that they can be called upon to keep regular hours, develop knowledge and skill over time that can benefit the district, and be asked to handle a much broader range of duties than contractors.

In addition, the courts have laid out clear guidelines for what constitutes employees versus contractors[5]. Districts should avoid hiring a contractor who works in the manner of an employee. Four ways to ensure that the district does not risk legal action when hiring contractors are:

1. *Don't exercise too much control over the contractor*. The more the person works on his own, the stronger the evidence of true independent contractor status.

2. *Make sure the contractor maintains his or her own place of business and supplies*. If the district gives the contractor an office on its premises, which the contractor uses a great deal, and it provides office equipment and support staff, this will count heavily as evidence that the person is an employee and not an independent contractor.

3. *Make sure the contractor's opportunity for profit and loss are independent of the district's.* If the bulk of a contractor's pay is tied to the district this is evidence of an employment relationship. The contractor must have other clients besides the district; otherwise, the contractor is working solely for the district and this will count against independent contractor status.

4. *Make sure that the contractor performs work not performed by the district.* For example, if a district has had a secretary for years as an employee, terminates the

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[4] See below: Employee Fringe Benefits
[5] Frankel v. Bally, inc., 1993

secretary, then signs an independent contractor agreement with the secretary whereby he or she continues doing the same work on exactly the same terms for similar pay, chances are the courts will find the "contractor" is in reality an employee.[6]

Subcontracting

In many cases when a district hires a contractor to do work for the district they are really *subcontracting,* because the district itself may be the contractor for a local, state or federal grant. Subcontracting, also known as "outsourcing," is when a contractor, such as an RCD, fulfills the terms of its contract or agreement with a funding agency by enlisting outside assistance to provide labor or services. Although a district may hire a contractor to fulfil some or all of the requirements of a grant agreement, the district remains responsible for the quality and timeliness of work performed. If a subcontractor fails to meet his or her obligations, the district is still responsible for meeting them. Terms and procedures for employing subcontractors to meet the needs of a grant are usually spelled out in the grant contract the funding agency signs with the district.

PART FOUR: PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION[7]

Importance of a Personnel Policy

Conservation districts are public agencies, and district officials are public officials. As such, they are responsible for administering district programs in the most effective way. Whether the district has one part-time clerk or a large staff makes little difference. District officials still bear responsibility and accountability for the personnel management policies and decisions needed to make that staff effective and productive. It is, therefore, vital that district officials take an active role in formulating and administering personnel policies.

Principle Responsibilities for Personnel Administration

The principle responsibilities of personnel management lie with district officials. These responsibilities should not be delegated to others outside the district, though seeking the advice of other districts and affiliated organizations is encouraged. District officials should:

1. Develop written personnel policies.

2. Ensure that personnel management is conducted according to written policy.

3. Ensure that personnel policies and decisions are based on merit principles (see below, "Merit Principles").

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[6] The four points are quoted from George D. Webster, "Independent Contractor or Employee?" *Association Management*, December 1994, pg. 116. *Note: Some phrases have been changed to match district issues, rather than broader association applicability.*
[7] This section is based in large part on a National Association of Conservation Districts' (NACD) publication, *Personnel Management Reference Book For Conservation District Officials.* For copies of this and other NACD publications, contact NACD. Addresses for acquiring this and other resource materials can be found in Appendix W, Contact Information.

4. Be certain personnel policies are adequate and current.

5. Conduct annual performance evaluations for all district employees (or as a minimum, review past evaluation results and take action as directed by the evaluation).

6. Ensure that employees are well trained.

The district board is responsible for the administrative supervision of personnel. Where districts have employed district managers, district boards may choose to have them responsible for much of the administrative supervision, and, in some cases, the technical oversight of other district employees. The district manager should be directly responsible to the district board, not to any federal or state employee. Day-to-day supervision of the district manager by the board is normally not practical or necessary. The district board chair or the board's designee should, however, periodically review the performance of the district manager. This will give the district manager insight regarding the direction the board desires to take in managing district programs.

Technical guidance of district employees varies according to the technical skills of the employee. Conservation district boards should consult with the state Department of Conservation (DOC) or the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) to determine the best method of providing technical guidance. Once decided, the policy on technical guidance must be clearly understood by all employees and agency personnel who will be working together.

While NRCS can provide technical guidance to ensure quality control of the assistance rendered to cooperators, the district should maintain administrative control over the district employee. This will ensure that district priorities are given proper consideration. Complete supervisory responsibility for a district employee by NRCS or any other agency representative is not appropriate.[8]

The following paragraphs provide suggested contents of a district personnel policy. The board may adopt any policy it desires. In a few cases, however--such as issues surrounding sexual harassment, civil rights, or drug-free workplace rules—districts must abide by state and federal laws concerning these issues, and it is wise for a district to include them in a district personnel policy.

Duties for administrative supervision of employees include:

1. Ensuring district employees and those providing guidance or direction to them understand district personnel policies.

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[8] See USDA NRCS Bulletin No. 360-8-21, which outlines roles for which district boards, not NRCS staff, are alone responsible. These include personnel administration issues such as hiring and firing and evaluating employees, workload assignments, or decisions for the district to enter into working relationships with other agencies or entities.

2. Developing job descriptions and ensuring that current duty requirements match job descriptions.[9]

3. Establishing a work schedule.

4. Setting priority of work.

5. Determining training needs; ensure that training is provided and followed up to ensure that performance is satisfactory.

6. Reviewing and evaluate performance.

7. Considering and recommending pay increases to maintain pay that is commensurate with duties performed.

8. Authorizing employees to attend meetings.

9. Approving leave, vacation time, holidays, and other fringe benefits.

10. Commending exceptional work.

11. Responding to employee grievances.

12. Establishing and maintaining satisfactory working arrangements and conditions.

13. Deciding disciplinary actions if necessary.

Duties for technical supervision include:

1. Reviewing work to ensure that it meets technical standards and specifications.

2. Ensuring that employees are provided quality technical training according to their training plan.

3. Resolving questions on standards and specifications.

4. Providing input to the district board on technical competence of employees.

5. Coordinating scheduling of day-to-day technical assistance.

6. Recommending engineering approval authority.

Developing a Written Personnel Policy

Numerous personnel management problems can be avoided if each district establishes written personnel policies. Once a district board has written personnel rules and procedures, these policies should be provided to all employees. Where district

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[9] Over time the kind of work that an employee does may evolve. It is important that if duties change that position descriptions are updated to reflect this or that an employee's current duties are re-evaluated in light of the approved job description.

employees are governed by the rules and regulations of other jurisdictions, copies of those regulations should be secured for the employees and become addendum to the policy manual. Having written policies will simplify the delegation of responsibility for the day-to-day operation of a personnel system.

When developing a written personnel policy, study other existing policies (See Appendix Q for a sample personnel policy). Review policy statements of county, city, and private industry. If possible, secure the services of a personnel specialist in developing the policy statement. The following checklist contains items that are basic to any policy statement. Other items can be added as necessary:

Employment

1. Definition of employment classes (permanent full time or part time, temporary)
2. Length and conditions of any probationary period of employment
3. Statement of nondiscrimination (see also "Merit Principles" below)
4. Qualification requirements for employees
5. Who has the authority to hire, set salaries, and conduct reviews
6. Job descriptions
7. Terminations and their effect on benefits
8. Statement of employment of relatives and conflict of interests

Compensation

1. Working hours, overtime, paydays, paid holidays
2. Methods of salary progression
3. Listing and general explanation of benefits, including who is eligible to receive them

Employer/Employee Relations

1. Grievance procedures
2. Administration of discipline
3. Code of conduct

Performance Evaluation

1. How employees are evaluated and by whom
2. Effects of evaluations on salary

Employee Training

1. Orientation of new employees
2. How training needs are determined
3. Training plans
4. Policy training

Employee Services

1. Safety on the job, including procedures for reporting accidents and seeking medical attention (if the district does not have a separate safety policy)

2. Awards program and other recognition for significant contributions of employees

Implementing the Personnel Policy

Personnel administration should be the expressed responsibility of an individual district official or a personnel management committee appointed by the board chair. This individual or committee should:

1. Ensure that the personnel policy statements are adequate.
2. Review the personnel policy annually.
3. Ensure that policy statements are adhered to.
4. Conduct annual employee evaluations and compensation reviews.
5. Provide administrative supervision of district employees.

Many districts delegate actual employee supervision (though not policy development) to district managers, who report to the board chair or designee, a personnel committee, or to the full board. For a sample personnel policy, see Appendix Q, Sample District Policies. Figure 8-1 provides a checklist for developing a personnel policy.

Figure 8-1. Checklist for Developing a Personnel Policy

Task	Completion Date
1. Assign responsibility for development of a draft to personnel committee or designee.	_____
2. Meet with NRCS, DOC, county representative(s), or others who can provide input about the general content of the policy.	_____
3. Examine policies of other boards, agencies, or private businesses for guidance on structure of the policy (ensure that any materials used meet local, state, and federal personnel laws).	_____
4. Create an outline of the policy by determining major headings.	_____
5. Develop a draft policy and have the district board review it.	_____
6. Provide opportunity for draft review by employees, NRCS, DOC, and others.	_____
7. Present policy to full board for adoption.	_____
8. Meet with affected agencies to review policy.	_____
9. Meet with employees to fully discuss the adopted policy.	_____

Merit Principles

The foundation of good employee relations, development, and standards of professionalism is basing personnel policies and actions on merit principles. The federal Office of Personnel Management has defined a series of merit principles on which to base employment:

1. Recruitment, selection, and advancement of employees will be based on ability, knowledge, and skills, including consideration of qualified applicants for initial employment.

2. Compensation for initial employment will be equitable and adequate.

3. Employees will be trained as needed to ensure that high-quality performance is achieved.

4. Employees will be retained based on the adequacy of their performance; provision will be made for correcting inadequate performance, or removing employees when adequate performance is not maintained.

5. Applicants and employees will be treated fairly in all aspects of personnel administration, without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, political affiliation, age, handicap, or other non-merit factors and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights.

6. Employees will be protected against coercion for partisan political purposes and will be prohibited from using their official authority for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the end result of an election or a nomination for office.

Developing Employee Position Descriptions and Qualification Standards

Setting valid and realistic qualification standards is the first task when needing to efficiently secure a productive employee. Qualification standards are skills, knowledge, abilities, and experience required or each position. They are based on the demands of the position and are invalid if not related.

Creating a Position Description/Job Announcement

Position descriptions provide potential job candidates with the major qualification standards and description of duties for a job. A job announcement usually includes a summary of the position description and a time frame for application or a closing date and, often, application procedures. (See Appendix S for a sample position description and job announcement).

Developing Qualification Standards

Once a position description is developed, qualification standards for the position can be developed. The following guidelines ensure that your qualification standards for various positions are founded on merit principles as outlined above:

1. Qualification standards should be based on a thorough and realistic appraisal of the job requirements.

2. Non-job-related items, such as race, sex, religion, etc. must be excluded.

3. Experience, education, knowledge, skill, legal minimum age, valid driver's license, and physical condition are the major areas where selection standards can be set with reasonable objectivity. Other areas, such as personality, attitude, and judgment, are more difficult to assess but should be considered when establishing qualification standards as they are important to successful job performance.

4. Only those qualifications necessary for proper job performance should be included.

5. Requirements should be restrictive enough to weed out applicants not suited for the job but not so restrictive as to exclude qualified applicants.

Qualification standards should include all conditions of the appointment. For example, if selections are subject to the satisfactory results of a medical examination, that condition becomes part of the final selection procedure and should be made known to prospective applicants.

Written qualification standards can be used to develop job announcements. They can also be used as the basis for interviewing applicants and for developing position descriptions. See Appendix S for a sample position description.

In the event a recruitment effort fails to find a suitable applicant, it may be necessary to revise standards or make arrangements to provide the training necessary to for a candidate to meet the requirements. For example, if an applicant for a secretarial position that requires computer operations does not have those skills but has excellent qualifications otherwise, arrangements may be made for the applicant to enroll in a computer course. This could be done either at the district's or the applicant's expense. In each case, a determination has to be made whether to waive the requirement, provide the training, or search for another applicant.

Lowering qualification standards for a particular candidate should be avoided except in instances such as the above example. Standards should never be compromised in order to hire a friend or an associate, or for any reason that is not job related.

Employment Procedures

In order to ensure that employment practices are fair and based on merit principles, following the guidelines for selecting, hiring, and maintaining employees is recommended. The following paragraphs provide descriptions of these procedures.

Recruiting New Employees

Once qualification standards and a position description have been created, the district can set out to find the employee best suited for the job. The first step is to advertise the availability of the job in one or various ways. Depending on the available market for potential employees, the district will need to advertise the position in a way most suited for receiving a sufficient number of applications from qualified individuals. The typical

procedure is to advertise the position in a newspaper, trade journal, or other publication and mail position descriptions, application procedures, and job applications to respondents. However, many methods exist to identify qualified candidates. The following list provides some suggestions for locating qualified applicants.

1. *Agencies*. Contact local, state, and federal agencies for lists of qualified applicants.

2. *Publications*. Publish a job announcement in professional and trade association publications, such as newsletters.

3. *Colleagues*. Talk to colleagues and district cooperators. Peers may know of potentially qualified candidates.

4. *Meetings*. Post a job announcement or verbally announce the availability of a position at meetings, seminars, and conventions.

5. *Employees*. Talk to current employees who may know of qualified candidates.

6. *Educational placement offices*. Colleges and universities are a good place to post position announcements for conservation-related employment.

7. *Job services*. Employment agencies can make available job announcements and position descriptions to qualified persons.

8. *Newspaper advertisements*. Classified advertisement is the most commonly used method, but small ads in the body of a local newspaper are also possible.

9. *Outplacemen*t. Other employers assisting laid-off employees find new positions may be able to recommend candidates for positions. Newspaper advertisements are one way to identify which employers are providing outplacement services to laid-off employees.

10. *Posters*. Your district may also advertise a position by simply posting it at local businesses or in other public places.

11. *Media*. Radio and television may also be a source for advertising available positions.

12. *Schools with appropriate majors*. Colleges and universities who offer courses or majors for conservation- or other-related fields may also be contacted to post position announcements.

13. *California Organization of District Employees (CODE).* The state employees' association (CODE) might also be able to help identify potential job candidates or assist with advertising positions.

14. *Transfers.* Another possibility for finding a suitable candidate is to talk to existing district or county employees about the possibility of transferring position. If an existing employee is interested in making a career change, they may be a highly qualified candidate.

15. *Veterans Recruitment Sources*. Job placement services for veterans may also be a source of qualified candidates.

16. *Employment Development Department (EDD).* The local office of the EDD may be an appropriate place to post a position announcement; they may also have a list of potential candidates that they can recommend to you.

Employment Applications

Employment applications serve two purposes. They identify potential candidates for positions; they can also be permanent records of employee information (social security number, etc.) once an employee is hired.

Employment applications vary, but typically they include places for the applicant to provide the following information:

1. Name, Address, telephone number, and social security number.
2. Education and training.
3. Work experience.
4. Military service.
5. Any crime convictions.
6. Emergency notification information.

Avoid including too much on an application. Request only information that is job related and useful. It is vital that you do not violate federal and state and local laws prohibiting requests for information that may result in discrimination.

Standard employment application forms are widely available. Districts should feel free to develop their own job applications. It is important, however, that the district's policy regarding non discrimination be included on job announcements and applications.

Resumes

In addition to an application for employment you may request a resume of a job seeker's work experience, education, and other accomplishments such as any awards received. If appropriate for the job, a resume is a good way to determine a candidate's attention to detail and verbal skills in addition to the information provided.

Evaluating Applicants

After the application period for the posted job has closed you can begin to evaluate the applications received. If, during review of applications, you find that you have received few or no qualified applicants, other avenues may need to be explored (see above, "Employee Qualification Standards" and "Recruiting New Employees" for additional ideas).

When reviewing applications, it is important to have qualification standards for the position in front of you and refer to this often. Subjective elements can creep into the application review (and interview) process, so it is a good idea to remind yourself what the objective standards for the position are.

If you have received a number of qualified applicants, as well as some less qualified applicants, then you can begin to narrow down your selection to a manageable amount of individuals to interview. There are no rules regarding the number of people you might interview. Remember that you are seeking the most qualified person available for the position, so you will need to interview as many as you can to identify that individual.

Preparing for Interviews

A personal, face-to-face interview is an important part of recruitment. It provides time to exchange information and assess communication skills.

Effective interviews are based on the qualification standards for the position. As in evaluating job applications, it is important to constantly strive for objectivity and to base judgements upon a candidates qualifications as related to the qualification standards set for the job.

The interviewer(s) should get as much information as possible that will affect the decision to hire the applicant. In turn, the interviewer should provide the necessary information about the job and the district that will enable the applicant to make good decisions. *Be honest.* Do not leave the person with any false impressions about the duties, pay, advancement possibilities, etc. for the position.

Fairness dictates that all candidates are asked the same set of questions. In order to ensure that interview questions are appropriate, the questions should be based on the employee position description. A written set of interview questions is used to ensure that all persons interviewed are asked identical questions. It is acceptable, however, to follow up with additional questions based in information the candidate provides during the interview. For the purposes of the interview, scoring sheets can be made up for use by interviewers to record comments and reactions to a candidate's responses during the interview. A simple scoring system may also be employed in order to ensure that applicants are interviewed in as objective a manner as possible.

For example, when interviewing for a district manager, one of the qualification standards you might have set for the position is knowledge of government assistance programs for resource conservation. An interview scoring sheet might provide guidelines for evaluating interview responses, such as, any experience the applicant might have had working with government agencies, any grants written and received, and the knowledge of programs the candidate demonstrated. Responses can be noted and a numerical score (for example, between one and five) given to each response to a question. At the end of the interview the candidate's score can be tallied and compared to other candidates.

It is impossible to be completely objective in the interviewing process, but it is important to strive constantly to evaluate candidates based on the qualification standards set in advance.

Conducting Interviews

The interviewer is in control of the interview and in a position to ensure its success. Tips include:

1. *Encourage the applicant to talk*. Ask opening questions such as "Tell me (us) about your last (or present) job."

2. *Avoid questions with simple "yes" or "no" questions*. Aim for questions that provide you with an opportunity to evaluate the candidate's communication skills.

3. *Avoid conflict.* Avoid putting the applicant on the defensive by arguing or displaying authority, but do not avoid difficult questions.

4. *Avoid leading questions such as, "Doesn't your present job call for considerable planning?"* Instead phrase such a s questions as, "What planning responsibilities do you have in your present job?"

5. *Make written notes on key items*. Follow up on specific areas that have bearing on the job applied for.

6. *It is best that only applicants suitable for the job be interviewed*. If, however, it becomes apparent that the candidate is not suited, you have the choice of saying so as diplomatically as possible and concluding the interview, or to finish the interview as professionally as possible. If you have a chance at some point for discussing the interview with the applicant, be honest. Rejection is hard to bear, but the truth is ultimately more useful to job seekers than evasiveness.

7. *Allow for questions*. During the interview give the applicant an opportunity to ask about the district and the position applied for.

8. *Be objective in your evaluation.*

Application forms and interview questions should not violate the Civil Rights Act. Figure 8-2 provides guidance for formulating interviewing questions that follow the spirit of the Civil Rights Act.

Figure 8-2. Guidance for Application/Interview Questions

Topic	Questionable	Acceptable
Name	Ask applicant for maiden name, previous names of relatives, etc.	Ask for other names used for reference purposes only (previous employment or education).
Arrests	Ask if the applicant has ever been arrested.	Ask if applicant has been convicted of a crime. If so, ask for details. Explain that this is not automatic disqualification.
Address	Limiting geographical area in accepting applications.	Ask applicant for address. Inform applicant of any residency requirements, if any.
Birth Place/ Ancestry	Ask applicant for birthplace of self or relatives. Ask applicant to disclose ancestry or that of relatives. Ask applicant to disclose national origin.	These questions are unnecessary.
Age	Ask applicant's age.	Ask applicant to state age only to meet minimum age standards for employment.
Religion	Ask applicant for information on religion (creed, holidays, preference).	Tell the applicant the requirements for workweek.
Race/Color	Ask applicant for a photograph before hiring. Ask applicant for eye or hair color.	If necessary, tell the applicant a photograph may be required after hiring.
Citizenship	Ask if applicant or relatives are naturalized or native born citizens. Ask for citizenship dates.	Ask if applicant is a US Citizen or intends to become one.
Education/ Experience	Ask applicant in what country s/he attended school.	Ask applicant about work and educational experience.
Relatives	Ask male applicants the maiden name of wife or mother.	Ask for names and addresses of persons to be notified in case of emergency.
Military Service	Ask applicant about foreign military experience. Ask applicant to produce military discharge papers before hiring.	Ask applicant about military experience in the US Armed Forces or State Militia
Memberships	Ask applicant about memberships in organizations which would indicate religion, race, or national origin.	Ask applicant about memberships in organizations which do not disclose race, religion, or national origin.
Child Care	Ask applicant about child-care arrangements.	This question is unnecessary.
Marital status	Ask applicant about marital status, spouse's name or occupation, prior married name, use of "Mr.", "Mrs.", etc.	These questions are unnecessary.
Salary	Ask applicant for lowest salary acceptable.	Ask applicant for salary history or salary desired.
Credit	Ask applicant for credit information.	This question is unnecessary.
Height/Weight	Ask applicant for height or weight when it is unrelated to job.	Ask applicant for height or weight only if legitimate occupational qualification.
Weekend Work	Ask applicant if religion will conflict with weekend work.	State job may require weekend work but reasonable effort will be made to accommodate personal needs.

Types of Employment

Permanent Full-Time Employment

A permanent, full-time employee is one who has been hired to fill a continuing position requiring a minimum of 40 hours a week of work and who has successfully completed a probationary period. The employee is entitled to all fringe benefits offered.

Permanent Part-Time Employment

A permanent, part-time employee is one who has been hired to fill a continuing position requiring less than 40 hours per week on a regular and recurring schedule and who has successfully completed a probationary period. The employee may be entitled to all fringe benefits on a pro-rated[10] basis.

Seasonal and Temporary Employment

A temporary employee is one who has been hired to fill a position of limited duration, serves no probationary period, is paid an hourly wage for the hours actually worked and receives no fringe benefits. Seasonal employees are a specific type of temporary employee that is hired on a limited basis during times of greater need. For example, districts that plant trees and vegetation typically have a planting season where a high volume of work is needed in a short time. The use of temporary (seasonal) employees addresses this need without the need to hire permanent employees, which would then have to be released when the work season ended.

A board personnel policy should include provisions for seasonal or temporary work if it anticipates a need for such labor. The district can create its own standards for the hiring and release of temporary workers, but such policies typically outline the terms for compensation (usually hourly) and any benefits included (employees might be compensated for holidays if they occur during the course of their employment). Temporary and seasonal employees are not usually provided fringe benefits such as medical insurance, sick leave, and vacation time. Employers are required, however, to pay Worker's Compensation benefits to any employees (or even volunteers) injured while working on the job. For more information on Worker's Compensation benefits, see Part Four, "Insurance and Liability," below.

Non-Traditional Employment: Telecommuting

With the increase of traffic congestion in cities, shortage of available work space, and potential for carrying out work responsibilities at home, many employers have found it worthwhile to allow some employees to work at home, at least part of the time. Employees who adopt to use such a non-traditional workplace to carry out district work must be able to work independently, be responsible for their work, and be willing to make arrangements with their employer for supervision of work performed off-site.

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[10] Pro-rated means, for example, that if an employee who works half time is entitled to receive half the benefits a full-time employee might receive. For instance, they might accrue half the amount of vacation and sick-leave benefits or half the amount of employer contributions to a retirement plan.

This approach has many advantages for employees such as eliminating daily commuting and making outside arrangements for child care, at least part of the time.

Employee Compensation and Fringe Benefits

Introduction

Compensation is one of the areas of greatest interest to employees. Regardless of other factors such as job satisfaction and good working relationships, employees are primarily concerned with their own welfare and that of their families. For this reason, pay and fringe benefits must be competitive if districts are to attract and retain highly qualified personnel.

An employee compensation package consists of both salary and benefits. For comparability purposes, the value of benefits should be included with the salary when discussing compensation. In designing a compensation package, the employer should make every effort to provide employees with a fair and equitable return for their work.

Pay and benefits can be administered in at least three ways. First the district can administer its own program. It can establish pay scales, purchase group insurance, enter into agreements for social security coverage, etc., and keep all the necessary records. Second, where allowable, district employees can be covered under the pay plan and receive the benefits of county employees, with the county providing the administrative support. Third, there can be a combination of the two approaches. For example, employees may participate in a county group health insurance plan, but the district might administer payroll and payroll record keeping.

Determining Compensation

Districts should make a continuing effort to assess the pay and benefits prevalent in their communities. This should be done on a yearly basis. One way of determining comparable compensation for employees is by a salary and benefit survey of the area or employment market. The survey can be done by personal visit or by a phone or mail survey. It is important that a large enough sample of employee compensation be collected to make the survey valid.

The salary or hourly wage for a district employee should be set by the district board based on the position, experience, and qualifications of the employee. It is recommended that the compensation of employees be set at a level which is comparable with other positions located within the respective county having similar duties and responsibilities.

Cost-of-Living Increases

Cost-of-living increases are given by some employers as a separate salary increase designation and are normally based on the increase in living expenses for the previous year. The most common method of determining cost-of-living increases is to identify a cost-of-living increase percentage figure obtained from the state department of labor, the local Chamber of Commerce, or a business administration school of a local college or university. A cost-of-living increase should apply to all employees at all salary levels.

Merit Salary Increases

All salary increases, except cost-of-living increases, should be based only on the quantity and quality of work performed. Basing salary increases on such items as longevity with the district should be avoided. A merit personnel system by definition means that the salary of employees is based on the responsibility and difficulty accorded to the position and to the merit of the individual in that position, as evidenced by a job-related performance evaluation. A merit salary increase may also be given when required training has been completed.

Determining Fringe Benefit Packages

Employee benefits include all compensation received by the employee in excess of the base salary. Benefits are available in a broad range, from which districts may choose. In deciding which benefits to provide, custom and competition are the primary factors. For example, it is customary for employers to provide health insurance, even though this is not required by law. In addition, competitive factors (an employee may choose to work elsewhere where health benefits are provided) make this benefit virtually mandatory for districts to provide if they are to attract high-quality employees.

Determining which benefits to offer may depend on the prevailing benefits offered by employers in the area. For sample employee benefits packages, contact the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Capacity Building Center (See Appendix W, Contact Information, for current information).

Figure 8-5 shows a sample benefits cost worksheet. It can be used to determine current costs as well as the cost of various combinations of benefits. It can also be adapted for use as an aid in explaining benefits to employees.

Types of Fringe Benefits

Very few employee fringe benefits are required by law. Most benefits are offered to make positions attractive to potential employees and make service with the district comfortable and rewarding. One guideline for districts to use when deciding which benefits to offer permanent employees is the typical benefits package offered for similar positions in the area. It must be emphasized, however, that some benefits—such as State Workers' Compensation Benefits—are *required* by law. Discussion under each item in the benefits described below includes information on whether or not a specific benefit is required by law, and what some of the limiting factors for each benefit might be.

Vacation Leave. Paid or unpaid vacation leave may or may not be offered as a benefit to permanent employees, but paid vacation leave typically is offered to full-time employees, and often it is offered to part-time employees on a pro-rated basis. Some things to consider when designing vacation benefits include the following:

1.   Vacation leave may be earned at specific rates (according to number of hours or days worked).

Figure 8-3. Sample Benefit Cost Worksheet		
Average monthly salary (all permanent employees): <u>$2000</u>		
Benefit	**Formula**	**% of Salary**
Vacation time	<u>No. of Vacation days/year</u> No. of Working days/year	6.9
Holidays	<u>No. of Holidays/year</u> No. of Working days/year	2.3
Sick Leave	<u>No. of Sick days/year</u> No. of Working days/year	7.0
Bereavement Leave	<u>No. of Leave days/year</u> No. of Working days/year	0.4
Medical Insurance	<u>Average monthly employee contribution</u> Average monthly employee salary	3.7
Life Insurance	<u>Average monthly employee contribution</u> Average monthly employee salary	0.5
Social Security Insurance	<u>Average monthly employee contribution</u> Average monthly employee salary	6.13
Disability Insurance	<u>Average monthly employee contribution</u> Average monthly employee salary	0.65
Unemployment Insurance	<u>Average monthly employee contribution</u> Average monthly employee salary	1.0
Workers' Compensation	<u>Average monthly employee contribution</u> Average monthly employee salary	1.2
Retirement	<u>Average monthly employee contribution</u> Average monthly employee salary	4.1
Total Benefit Cost as a Percentage of Salary		**33.88%**

2. Accrual rate may increase after a specified length of employment (for example, three years, five years, etc.).

3. Payment may sometimes be made in place of taking time off.

4. A maximum of accruable time (for example, four weeks) may be set.

5. Payment for unused vacation time accrued may be made at time of severance.

6. Vacation leave usually requires prior approval of designated manager or supervisor.

7. Vacation leave may require minimum period of employment before vacation time can be used (can be related to probationary periods).

8. Sometimes sick, vacation, and bereavement leave are combined into one "leave" account that an employee may use for any purpose.

Sick Leave

Most employers offer paid or unpaid sick leave for permanent employees to use when need arises. Sick leave, however, is not required by law. Some issues to consider when designing a sick leave policy include the following:

1. Temporary employees are not usually granted sick leave benefits.

2. Sick leave is often pro-rated for part-time employees.

3. Sick leave is usually accrued based on a percentage of actual time worked.

4. May have maximums for accruable time.

5. Compensation for unused sick time at the end of employment may be made.

6. May require a physician's statement after a certain number of consecutive days used.

7. May be applicable to a range of health-related leaves, including personal illness, family illness ("family" must be defined), maternity leave, medical appointments for self and family, death in the family, off off-the-job injury, etc.

8. May be combined with vacation and bereavement leave to create undefined "leave time" to be used at the employee's discretion.

9. May require employment for a minimum period of time before usable.

Family Medical Leave Act of 1993

Under a 1993 law most full-time employees qualify to take up to 12 weeks unpaid leave for personal or family medical reasons. Included in these reasons are the birth of the employee's child (fathers and mothers both); care for a seriously ill spouse, child, or parent; or medical leave due to serious illness of the employee him- or herself. To qualify employees must have been employed with their present employer for 1 year and have worked 1250 hours during the preceding 12 months.

Holiday Leave

Holiday leave is not required by law. Typically, major holidays (such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the Fourth of July) are provided as paid holidays. Employers may determine which holidays they wish to provide as paid leave. Depending on employees' wishes, other holidays may be substituted or honored, but the employer must take into account the cost of paid holidays, by determining the maximum number of days per year it can afford to pay for as paid holidays. A list of paid holidays is usually included in the personnel policy.

Bereavement Leave

Sometimes separate bereavement (or "funeral") leave is offered to employees. It may be paid or unpaid, and it may have maximum number of days that can be taken per year.

Limitations on what constitutes legitimate bereavement may be defined (family, friends, coworkers, etc.).

Court (Jury Duty) Leave

Districts must offer this benefit to employees as prescribed by law, but stipulations on whether an employee is permanent or temporary, full time or part time, may affect the kind of benefit offered. Typically, permanent employees serving jury duty are paid their normal salary up to a specified number of days as long as they forego (pay to the employer) the small stipend paid by the court for serving (often as low as $5 per day).

Although not required by law (as is jury duty leave), leave to testify as a witness may also be granted by an employer.

Military Leave

Military leave is required by law, but it need not necessarily be paid leave. The employer may set compensation in its personnel policy. The employer may also set maximum allowable times for military leave as long as they abide by the law. If the employer offers paid leave for military service, terms for payment may be set by the employer.

Return from Military Service

The Vietnam Era Veteran's Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 amended legislation on the books since 1940, and now protects the employment rights of an employee who leaves to perform military training or service with the Armed Forces of the United States. This Act is applicable to employees of states and their political subdivisions released from military training or service on or after December 3, 1974. The Act guarantees that an employee who enters military service, either voluntarily or through the draft, may return to his or her former job with the same compensation, benefits, seniority, and status they would had achieved if they had not left. Similar rules apply for reservists. For more information on military leave and the Readjustment Act of 1974, contact the US Department of Labor Veterans Employment Training Service.

Leave without Pay

Some employers allow employees to take time off without pay as long as arrangements are made in advance. Maximums may be set by the employer, and also which employees (permanent, temporary, etc.) are qualified to use unpaid leave.

Unemployment Insurance

See Part Eight, "District Liability and Insurance," below.

Worker's Compensation Insurance

See Part Eight, "District Liability and Insurance," below.

Social Security

See "Employee Payroll Deductions," below.

Group Life Insurance

Group life insurance is another benefit employers may or may not offer to employees. The choice to do so may depend on job market factors in your area.

Medical Insurance

Employers offer a wide array of medical and health coverage plans, group medical plans, health maintenance organizations, or personal medical expense coverage. What determines which insurance benefit you offer your employees may depend on the range of services available in your area and the amount you and/or your employees are willing to pay for this coverage. Medical insurance through employment, however, continues to attract interest from prospective employees because the cost for medical insurance paid by an individual is much higher than what an individual must contribute to a group health plan for coverage. Medical insurance is still so commonly offered by employers that it might be hard to attract qualified applicants without it, even though these benefits are not required by law.

Retirement Plans

Districts may or may not offer individual retirement plans as a benefit to employees. Because retirement plans are complex and expensive to administer the district should consult with an attorney and actuarial scientist before deciding to offer employee retirement benefits.

Personal Days Off

The addition of one or two paid days off per year in addition to sick and vacation leave benefits can allow employees a small amount of discretionary time off that that is neither sick nor vacation time. Full-time workers especially feel the need at times to take a day to catch up on personal business or other matters. As with many employee benefits, districts are not required to provide personal days off. A decision to do so must be weighed against the expense involved, allowing for the need to make district positions attractive to prospective employees in the current job market.

Employee Payroll Deductions

There are several mandatory payroll deductions for employees that employers must implement. For each pay period, the taxes listed below must be deducted from the employees' gross income to meet the demands of state and federal laws.

Federal Income Tax

Federal income tax deductions from payroll checks are not optional; they are required to be withheld from the wages of all district employees. Federal income tax must be withheld on all district employees and deposited in a Federal Depository Banking institution. Each employee must have on file a current W-4 form. This designates the withholding rate. To obtain a federal tax number, the district should complete an SS-4 form. The amount of tax to be withheld from each employee's wages is determined by matching exemptions claimed, amount of wages, marital status, spouse's employment if

applicable, and wage period. Income tax tables are found in "Circular E – Employers Tax guide." Districts are responsible for completing and distributing W-2 forms for each employee by January 31st for all wages paid to employees during the preceding calendar year. Additionally, quarterly reports, such as form 941, which summarizes the amount of wages paid and taxes withheld, will be required to be submitted each quarter. If a district contracts with an individual for $600 or more in any one calendar year, form 1099 must be completed and circulated for each contractor in this category. "Circular E –Employers tax Guide" can answer most questions for items covered under Federal Income Tax. For Federal Income Tax contact information, see Appendix W, Contact Information.

State Income Tax

California requires state income tax to be withheld from the wages of all district employees. For information on state withholdings, contact the Franchise Tax Board.

Social Security Taxes

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990 contains certain provisions which expanded social security retirement benefit coverage to employees of districts and other public agencies who are not already covered under a retirement program. Under prior law, state and local government entities including districts were not previously required to offer social security benefits for their employees. The law illustrates the intent of Congress to expand retirement plan participation by extending social security coverage to all employees of state and local governments including special districts whose employees are not already covered under alternative retirement plans.

Therefore, any district employee which you have, including temporary part-time and seasonal employees, must be covered under social security if they are not already members of a retirement system offered as a result of their employment with the district. The social security rate changes often. Check with the local Social Security office for further information regarding specific provisions of the social security program.

Employee Relations

Introduction

This section deals with procedures for handling the problems that inevitably arise in any personnel system. The suggestions below for establishing employee grievance procedures, standards of employee conduct and ethical behavior, procedures for performance evaluations, and guidelines for implementing disciplinary proceedings will help minimize the loss in productivity and the general unpleasantness associated with conflict between employees, between employees and supervisors, and between employees and the district board. Handling such conflicts in a fair and speedy manner will greatly increase the morale of district employees and minimize adverse effects to the district.

Employee Grievances

It should be the policy of all districts that employees be treated fairly and equitably in all respects. Those employees who feel they have not been treated in this manner should have the right to present their grievances to the appropriate officials for consideration.

Employees should have the right to present their grievances in their own behalf or through representatives of their choice. A system should be developed that will permit employees to present formal and informal complaints. The filing of grievances should not be considered as reflecting unfavorably on an employee's performance or loyalty.

The following procedure is suggested for processing formal and informal grievances:

1. Whenever possible, grievances should be resolved informally. Every effort should be made by the employee and supervisor to come to an agreeable resolution of the grievance within a reasonable period of time (two weeks). Complaints for which the supervisor does not have the authority to resolve should be referred to the district board immediately.

2. Unsuccessful attempts at an informal resolution of a complaint should be followed by a formal grievance. The employee should prepare a written statement which details the grievance, describes the remedial action being sought, and provides all information available in support of the complaint.

Upon receipt of a written grievance the supervisor should make all reasonable efforts to resolve the complaint. If the grievance is not resolved, it should be forwarded to the chair of the district board or their designee, within seven days of receipt, along with a statement of the efforts made to resolve the problem.

The district board should make its decision on the grievance within 15 working days of receipt or, if not possible, at the next scheduled board meeting.

Standards of Conduct and Ethical Behavior

A district program cannot be effective unless it is carried out by a district staff which, in addition to being technically competent, demonstrates professional integrity in its conduct. All district employees have a responsibility to perform their assigned duties, to support their supervisors and district board and to uphold the public trust in resource conservation districts. One of the best ways of maintaining these standards is by the examples set by district directors.

All employees should be expected to maintain high standards of ethics and personal conduct. The following minimum requirements should be considered.

1. *Attendance.* Employees are expected to report for work and leave work at the time designated by the district. Planned lost time is to arranged with the employee's supervisor in advance. Unexpected lost time is to be reported promptly to the supervisor prior to the beginning of the employee's work period.

2. *Diligence.* Employees are expected to perform assigned duties during the entire schedule for which compensation is being received, except for a reasonable time provided to take care of personal needs.

3. *Performance.* Employees are expected to meet established performance standards. Any conditions or circumstances in the work environment which prevent an employee from performing effectively are to be reported to the supervisor.

4.   *Outside Employment.* Employees should not engage in any outside employment or other activities which interferes in any way with the full performance of duties and responsibilities of their position.

5.   *Financial Interest.* Employees should not have a direct or indirect financial interest that conflicts substantially, or appears to conflict substantially, with the duties and responsibilities of a district employee or engage in a financial transaction that results from information obtained through employment.

6.   *Property Usage.* Employees should not use or allow the use of district, state, or federal property of any kind for other than officially approved activities.

7.   *Official Information.* Employees should not use or allow the use of official information gained through employment, which has not been made available to the public, for furthering private interests.

8.   *Employee Debts*. Employees should not fail to pay just debts, since creditors frequently involve employers in attempts to make restitution.

9.   *Sexual Harassment.* Employees should expect a workplace free from sexual harassment. Sexual harassment may include a wide range of behaviors. For information on the development of a board sexual harassment policy see Part I, above, "The Importance of District Policies."

10. *Criminal Conduct.* Employees should not engage in criminal, infamous, dishonest, immoral, or notoriously disgraceful or other conduct prejudicial to the district.

11. *Acts of Violence.* Employees should not engage in acts of violence or cause danger to property or injury to persons.

12. *Drug-Free Workplace.* Use of alcohol, narcotics or other drugs in the workplace should be strictly forbidden. For more information on the development of a drug-free workplace policy, see Part I above, "The Importance of District Policies."

Performance Evaluations

All employees want and have a right to know what is expected of them in their jobs and how well they are performing. A performance evaluation based on objective criteria, should help achieve peak performance from employees.

The following benefits of performing employee evaluations may be realized:

- Individual performance improves
- Supervisor employee relations improve

- Good work will be recognized

- Personnel actions, such as pay raises, promotions, removals will be based on sound, objective criteria and will be documented

- Employees and supervisors will be made more aware of job requirements and needed changes in job duties

- Employees will be more aware of their supervisor's judgement of their performance

- Training needs will be identified

The standards by which an employee must perform each duty should be communicated to the employee in terms of quantity and quality. Any evaluation of performance should in turn be based on these objective, job-related criteria. Objectivity is the basic and most essential element in setting these standards. Figure 8-4 provides an example of a duty description and the objective performance standards by which they can be evaluated.

Figure 8-4. Sample Objective Performance Standards

Duty Description: The employee types correspondence, conservation plans, district newsletters, newspaper copy, reports, and other written materials.

Performance Standard: There should be no typographical errors in word-processed texts. All texts should be grammatically correct. All word processing is to be completed by set deadlines.

Setting Performance Standards. The following should be considered in setting performance standards:

1. Standards should be mutually agreed upon by supervisor and employee. It is essential that employees know and understand the performance standards against which they will be measured.

2. Standards should be realistic and achievable.

3. Standards should be set slightly above the employee's present capabilities. They should be achievable but set to make the employee strive to reach them.

4. Standards should be flexible. It should be possible to amend the standard if unforeseen circumstances arise that make the standard unachievable.

Formal Performance Review. Most supervisors are aware of the quality of an employee's performance, but this awareness is not enough. There should be a time when supervisor and employee meet for the specific purpose of reviewing performance. This periodic, formal review is essential in maintaining a high standard of employee performance.

Although evaluation of an employee's performance is a continuing process, a formal discussion with the employee should take place at least once a year. The evaluation should be a culmination of numerous informal observations, checks and discussions made throughout the year. The formal discussion with the employee should take place prior to, and be the basis for, decisions made regarding merit salary increases.

Who Performs the Evaluation. An employee's performance should be evaluated by the person who is most familiar with the employee's work and who was involved in setting the performance standards. In most cases this is the employee's immediate supervisor. In a situation where the employee is under technical supervision of an NRCS field office, the NRCS employee should contribute to the evaluation. The primary responsibility for the performance evaluation is the district manager or district director assigned to personnel. Where district clerical staff work for both the district and NRCS, a mutually agreeable system for performance evaluations should be established by the district. Employee evaluations are the responsibility of the district manager or board designee and should not be delegated to other agency personnel. Evaluation of the district manager's performance should be the responsibility of the board chair or designee.

Steps in the Formal Evaluation Process. A formal evaluation is conducted with certain guidelines and steps in the process:

- *Disclosure of rating criteria.* Allow the employee time to review the criteria by which s/he will be evaluated

- *Employee self evaluation.* A good suggestion is to have the employee evaluate him- or herself using the same criteria as the formal evaluation prior to the formal evaluation

- *Prepare for the discussion.* Effective evaluations do not just happen—they are planned. Gather facts, review the job description, and performance standards and decide what you want to accomplish.

- *Pick a suitable time and place.* Arrange to hold the meeting where it will not be interrupted. Allow ample time for discussion. Pick a time when both you and the employee can be relaxed and unharried by other responsibilities.

- *Open the discussion in a friendly manner.*

- *Explain the purpose of the discussion.*

- *Ask the employee to review his or her responsibilities.* It is not unusual that clarity is lacking concerning some aspects of the job. Ask the employee to give a general review of their major assignments. Ask which assignment they consider the most important, which efforts have produced successes, and where difficulties have occurred. Encourage the employee to talk and avoid unnecessary interruption.

- *Discuss each job duty.* Review the performance of each job duty with the employee and let him or her know how well they have performed each one.

- *Jointly develop the next year's performance standards.* By collaborating on performance standards mutual understanding is promoted. Make necessary adjustments in duties and responsibilities.

- *Jointly develop plans for improvement.* Discuss with the employee ways in which performance can be improved. Discuss areas where additional training is needed.

Guidelines for Evaluating Employee Job Performance. A supervisor may find the following suggestions helpful in evaluating employee performance:

- *Forthright Praise and Criticism*. Tell an employee when he or she has done well and when they have not. Employees need praise to know when their efforts have been recognized, but they also need critical feedback in order to improve. Both of these sometimes difficult types of statement are made possible when evaluation is based on the work, not the person.

- *Emphasize Strong Points*. The skillful leader emphasizes the strengths of employees. Precede any criticism with frank acknowledgement of an employee's strengths. Willingness to correct deficiencies will increase to the extent that an employee's strengths and accomplishments are recognized.

- *Supervisor Self Criticism*. Before an employee is admonished for inadequate work, ask yourself honestly, "Have I contributed to this deficiency in any way? Did I fail to provide effective leadership, direction, training? Did the employee understand the expectations? Objectivity enables the discussion of the employee's mistakes to be constructive. Willingness of the supervisor to accept accountability for mistakes will make the employee more willing to share responsibility for correcting them.

- *Make Sure The Employee Shares the Same Understanding of the Job*. An employee's job performance cannot be judged fairly if the employee has not understood the duties of the position. Let the employee talk. It may be found that the employee was unaware of responsibility for certain job duties.

- *Site Specific Cases*. Vague generalities do not work. Be specific. Explain in precise language where the employee is falling short and what can be done to correct mistakes.

- *Avoid Mixing Humor and Criticism*. Some supervisors try to hide criticism behind humor. This is a mistake. If confrontation is necessary to improve performance and competence then the seriousness must be conveyed as well. Supervisors who confront with constructive criticism will often earn the respect of their employees.

- *Comment on Improvement*. If an employee corrects a shortcoming that has been criticized, comment on the improvement. This will encourage the employee to continue to improve and respond to future criticism.

- *Do not Debate*. The supervisor is the final judge of an employee's performance. This is not to say that employees should not be given a chance to state their point of view, but arguing over performance is to be strictly avoided.

- *Do Not Compare*. Base evaluations of employee performance on standards, not the work of others. It is the *employee's* performance, not the strength or weakness of others that is to be evaluated.

The Value of an Evaluation Form. Because employee performance evaluations are important, use of an evaluation form is advisable to make the task as systematic as

possible. Evaluation forms should be tailored to fit individual job descriptions. Completion of evaluation forms provides a record of employee job performance and documents employee improvement over time. It also records the date on which an employee was evaluated, for future reference.

Discipline

District employees are expected to perform and to conduct themselves in a creditable manner. For the most part, this is what occurs. However, in some cases it may be necessary to correct an employee who has not observed some standard of performance or conduct. Generally, correction is accomplished through constructive recommendation or verbal admonishment, but occasionally an employee does not respond to verbal correction and a more serious form of administrative action is needed.

Employees respect, even *prefer*, a supervisor who is firm yet fair all dealings with them. Discipline, if administered in a just, prompt, and consistent manner can actually *boost* morale. Although the major purpose of discipline is to create better habits and standards of work among employees, at times separation is required in the interest of public service.

A personnel system based on merit provides the right of management to take necessary disciplinary action. The philosophy of merit also requires that there be "just cause" for administering discipline. To better understand the term, "just cause," consider the following statements,[11] which act as a check on hasty disciplinary action without consideration of the total situation:

1. Provide employees with foreknowledge of the possible disciplinary consequences of the employee's conduct.

2. Before administering discipline, make an effort to discover whether the employee did, in fact, violate a rule or order of management.

3. Conduct a fair and objective investigation into the misconduct.

4. As a result of investigation, determine whether substantial evidence was obtained as proof of employee misconduct.

5. Apply rules, orders, and penalties evenhandedly and without discrimination to all employees.

6. Match disciplinary action to the degree of severity of the misconduct and take into consideration the employee's previous performance.

Written Notifications. Simple justice requires that employees who are to be disciplined be given advance notice of such action and be given the opportunity to reply in advance of the imposition of penalty. It is a principle of good management that employees clearly understand the reason for discipline. This understanding can best be accomplished by a

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[11] Paraphrased from guidelines developed by the Denver Regional Office of the Office of Personnel Management.

written notice of disciplinary action. The following guidelines provide direction for management and supervisors about what should be included in a written notification:

1. Specify the rule, regulation, or policy violated.

2. Clearly state that an employee may present a defense and provide procedural guidelines for doing so.

3. Give the employee sufficient time to respond (at least 10 working days).

4. State to whom the employee's defense be addressed.

5. State the effective date of the disciplinary action.

To ensure that the notification is received by the employee, deliver it by hand or send it "Certified Mail-Return Receipt Requested."

Maintaining Employee Records

Districts will find it necessary to maintain certain personnel records to meet legal requirements and promote effective district operations. Systems should be designed to avoid duplication and unnecessary collection of data.

Districts should contact state employment agencies to determine which records are required. Suggested records and retention periods are included in figure 8-5.[12]

Figure 8-5. Guidelines for Retaining Employee Records

Type of Record	Retention Period
Employment application	3 Years and current
Report of accident or occupational disease	6 Years and current
Retirement records	Permanent
Payroll vouchers	Permanent
Employee earnings record	Duration of employment
Employee W-2 forms	6 Years and current
Quarterly wage report	6 Years and current
Position descriptions	3 Years and current
Performance evaluations	3 Years and current
Disciplinary actions taken	3 Years and current
Training records	Permanent
Vacation and sick leave	Permanent
Written personnel policy	Permanent

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[12] From an NACD publication, *Personnel Management Handbook for Conservation District Officials*

PART FIVE: VOLUNTEERS

Importance of a Volunteer Policy

As in other matters of district operations, it is best that the board adopt a policy on volunteers to assist with the daily management of volunteers, including grounds for recruitment, guidelines for work and training, need for insurance for operating motor vehicles, and guidelines for safe working practices and equipment operation. In virtually all matters except payroll and fringe benefits, volunteers must be viewed as employees. As with employees, volunteers must be informed of all district policies and sign a statement that they have received such policies.

The Work of Volunteers

One way for districts to supplement the efforts of directors and employees is to recruit and train volunteers to implement district programs and activities. Many districts have relied on unpaid volunteers to do a wide range of conservation-related duties. Volunteerism has been gaining ground in recent years and many people find the rewards of helping their local communities are worth the time and energy donated to the cause of conservation.

Managing Volunteers

It is important that districts who use volunteers enable them to grow and learn and make increasing contributions to the district and receive recognition for their efforts. Even though volunteers are not paid for their work, they should be treated with the same respect as others who are lending time, energy, and skill to conservation work. Volunteers who work for the district, though unpaid, have the same rights and needs as employees, and it is important that districts see volunteers not only as a source of assistance, but as valuable assets that must be treated with all the respect accorded district employees.

In addition, volunteers must be administered in many of the same ways as employees: it is best that districts maintain personnel files on volunteers, including volunteer applications (volunteer personnel files can be distinguished from employees' by using folders of a different color), develop qualification standards and job descriptions for volunteer positions, and ensure that volunteers conform to the same legal and ethical standards of behavior as employees. Like employees, volunteers must be provided policies and/or training on sexual harassment, Equal Opportunity Employment, and a drug-free work place. Volunteers require training as do employees. Volunteers' working schedules and tracking of time worked must be recorded in the same way as for employees. Volunteers must be covered by Workers Compensation insurance if they are to perform work for the district.

PART SIX: DIRECTOR, EMPLOYEE, AND VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Importance of a District Training Policy

Employee training is in constant demand, especially among RCDs because of the complexity of the work districts do and the high turnover among employees. Districts, however, often lack the resources for a systematic and comprehensive training program for directors, staff, and volunteers. Nonetheless, it is essential that districts identify those areas of training employees need and seek avenues for providing them.

A district training policy can be incorporated into the district's personnel policy, but since directors and volunteers also need training, the district might consider the creation of a district training policy that will outline training strategies for directors, employees, and volunteers alike. A training policy might outline the ongoing and specific training needs for the entire board and staff as well as specific needs of certain positions. The policy might thus constitute a training plan that would account for the scarcity of fiscal resources and prioritize training needs to maximize training dollars spent. The components of a district training policy or plan might include the following:

- An outline of training needs
- Prioritization of needed training
- Creation of training objectives
- Identification of strategies to meet training needs
- Methods for identifying effectiveness of training and ongoing training needs

Types of Training Needed

There are two broad categories of training needed by directors, employees, and volunteers across the state: administrative training and technical training. The *RCD Guidebook* aims to provide basic information on RCD administrative operations, as well as the powers and authorities of districts under Division 9. Much of this information remains true from year to year and it is hoped that the information contained in the *Guidebook* will remain accurate and useful for many years. When substantial changes occur the *Guidebook* will be updated through providing revised portions to all districts.

Technical training, however, changes, as advances in technical tools and information are constantly revised. The increased use of computers, particularly data collection and processing and presentation via visual imaging using Geographic Information System (GIS) software, has rapidly changed the way land managers have approached land use inventory and planning. Setting forth such detailed technical information would not only warrant a volume in itself, it might likely become outdated as soon as it was completed. Nevertheless, opportunities for training employees in technical matters abound through workshops, classes, and seminars.

Since the *Guidebook* focuses on administrative training and related matters, trainings developed by the California Conservation Partnership (included in Volume II of the *Guidebook*) are one means to provide directors and staff with administrative training in basic RCD operations. Refer to Volume II for materials for providing administrative training to your district.

PART SEVEN: DISTRICT LIABILITY AND INSURANCE

District Liability

It is not universally known among districts that California special districts can be held financially liable for actions that adversely impact others. Under §9407 resource conservation districts can "sue and be sued," though it has not been clearly established by the courts the circumstances under which individual directors or the entire board would be held liable in legal suits. Regardless, districts are wise to insure against losses by purchasing liability coverage from an insurance provider.

The California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) offers a low-cost group policy to all California RCDs that includes liability insurance paying for accidental loss of property up to $ 1 million per accident, with a maximum amount set for multiple claims at $3 million (known as a "Policy Aggregate"). The policy covers monetary damages levied both against the district and individual directors. The same CARCD group policy includes indemnity coverage for accidents that occur when directors, employees, or volunteers are driving non-district vehicles such as rental cars. The insurance policy also insures against liability claims when loss is sustained to property due to accidents, crime, or employee transgressions.

For more information on group liability insurance policies contact CARCD (see Appendix W, Contact Information, for current address and telephone numbers).

District Insurance Policies

Accident Insurance: Workers' Compensation

By state law all employers are required to carry worker's compensation insurance to cover on-the-job accidents to employees and volunteers (this would include district directors). Employees who are injured or become ill due to work are entitled to the following workers' compensation benefits:

Medical Treatment . There is no deductible or dollar limit for claims. The claim administrator (insurer) pays fees directly to the doctor or health care facility, so employers do not receive a bill. Employees may elect to be treated by their own physician for workers' compensation claims.

Payment for Lost Wages. If a worker cannot work due to temporary disability because of a work-related injury or illness, the claim administrator will pay salary compensation (two-thirds of normal salary) of benefits until a doctor approves the worker's ability to return to work.

Death Benefits. If you die as a result of a work-related injury or illness, your surviving dependent will receive benefit payments.

Vocational Rehabilitation. If you cannot return to work because of a work-related injury or illness, and if your employer does not offer modified work or an alternative job, you may qualify for vocational rehabilitation. The claim administrator will pay all vocational rehabilitation costs up to a maximum set by state law.

If you have any questions about workers' compensation contact the State Compensation Insurance Fund office in your area.

Unemployment Insurance

Unemployment Insurance is a nationwide program created to provide partial wage replacement to unemployed workers while they conduct an active search for new work. Unemployment Insurance is a federal-state program, based on federal law, but executed through state law. Employers finance the unemployment insurance program by tax contributions. In California, the Employment Development Department (EDD) administers the unemployment insurance program according to guidelines established by the unemployment insurance Code and the California Code of Regulations, Title 22. For more information on unemployment insurance, contact your local office of the EDD.

The unemployment insurance program benefits both the individual and the local community. Payments made directly to the individual ensure that at least some of life's necessities such as food, shelter and clothing can be met while looking for work. For the most part unemployment insurance benefits are spent in the local community, which helps sustain the economic well being of local businesses.

Property Insurance

In addition to liability and workers' compensation insurance, your district is also advised to insure against property loss due to theft, accident, natural disasters or other causes. You may elect to cover property such as equipment, structures, or tools separately or purchase an umbrella policy that will insure all district property against loss.

Vehicle Insurance

It is especially important that district vehicles are covered by insurance. State law requires that all drivers carry liability insurance, but protection against property loss or damage is also recommended. Contact your local insurance agent about covering all district vehicles under one policy (called "fleet" coverage). This may be more cost-effective than insuring vehicles separately.

A district insurance policy for vehicles may also cover employee liability and injury, but it is a good idea that the district also require individual drivers (employees, directors, volunteers) to provide proof of valid California driver's licenses.

PART EIGHT: DISTRICT FISCAL PROCEDURES

Introduction

A resource conservation district cannot be successful without a plan. Plans must include descriptions of all programs and activities to be performed by the district and descriptions of the financial resources that will make the programs and projects work.

This section summarizes the basic tools of district fiscal procedures, starting with broad goals and objectives outlined in a district's long-range and annual plans, moving to yearly, monthly, and daily fiscal procedures that can help translate district goals into actual work accomplished.

Importance of a District Financial Policy

Like other aspects of district management, financial matters are multifaceted and require clear policies for district operations to run smoothly. RCD boards can provide ongoing guidance to staff and others by creating a district financial policy. Such a policy can anticipate daily operational needs and potential problems a district might encounter and provide procedures for managing these situations. In unusual circumstances the board can meet and make decisions about how to handle novel situations, but for those operations that routinely arise, management and staff can find answers to their questions in a district financial policy.

Typical subjects a financial policy might present include procedures for the following:

- *Assignment of accounts*. Separate account numbers are created for items such as travel, transportation, insurance, etc. in order to ensure that expenditures for these items are tracked separately. Similarly, separate account numbers are assigned to sources of income, including grants, fees, tax receipts, etc.

- *Cash receipts and deposits*. Income must be documented and procedures created for accounting for receipts, as well as documentation of bank deposits.

- *Purchasing authorization, disbursements, and check processing*. Procedures for authorizing board or staff to make purchases, methods for disbursing payments, and protocols for writing and signing checks need to be established. In addition, amounts of petty cash to be kept on hand, what this money can be used for, and methods for handling and accounting for petty cash need to be established.

- *Staff and director travel reimbursement*. Procedures for authorizing and paying for director and staff travel need to be created.

- *Managing district property*. During the course of its work a district often purchases tools and equipment. Procedures for purchasing, labeling, and inventorying district property need to be established.

- *Contracts and subcontracts*. Procedures for determining the need for contractors and subcontractors, methods for selecting them, and guidelines for reviewing contractor work all need to be documented in a district financial policy or in a separate district procurement policy.

- *Purchase of Supplies*. Procedures for the purchase of supplies and other low-cost materials may be incorporated into the policy.

- *Documenting telephone calls*. How fees for long-distance calls will be assigned to budget categories, such as the use of a telephone log, should be established.

- *Insurance policies*. The types of insurance policies needed, procedures for claims, and proof of insurance on non-district own vehicles used for district business must be established.

- *Rentals and lease of property and equipment*. Methods for managing rental and leased properties and equipment should be established.

- *In-kind contributions*. Methods for accounting for in-kind contributions can help the district record receipts of volunteer labor, donations of equipment, or donated services. This is useful for demonstrating to granting agencies other contributions toward projects, particularly when such are required to fulfill the terms of a grant contract.

- *Loans and advances*. Conditions under which loans or salary advances may be made need to be set forth, and who has the authority to grant them.

- *Grants and contracts*. Methods for administering grants or contracts and maintenance of associated documentation need to be established.

- *Financial reports*. Frequency and content of financial reports and persons responsible need to be determined and incorporated into the policy.

- *Budgets*. Budget procedures need to be established, and these might include frequency of budget review, persons responsible, and methods for creation and amendment of budgets.

- *Audits*. Location and maintenance of financial and related records, who maintains them, and provisions for periodic (usually annually) audits of accounts need to be established.

Tax Status of Resource Conservation Districts

An issue frequently raised by districts is the tax filing status of RCDs. A common misconception is that districts are not-for-profit entities filing under federal 501 C (3) tax exemption status. Since districts are government agencies, they cannot apply for and receive tax-exempt status under 501 C (3). Districts can, however, be exempt from federal taxes on the basis of their status as government entities under IRS category 170 C[13], though districts must contact the IRS for a federal employer ID number (you can down load Form SS4 from the IRS website for this) and request tax exemption under 170 C.

Financial Planning

From Strategic Planning to Financial Planning

In order to be successful, a resource conservation district must have a process for determining financial priorities and allocating resources to meet those priorities. The best plans, unless adequately funded, will never come to pass. Money, unless properly allocated and budgeted, will sit idle or be spent without regard to the results or to the goals of the district.

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[13] A search of the IRS website turned up nothing on 170 C tax-exemption for government entities; however, a representative of the IRS at their Los Angeles office stated that this was the category under which special districts can apply for federal tax-exempt status.

The financial planning process allows the conservation district staff and directors to attach dollar amounts to the goals in their long-range and annual plan. The board can then approach fulfilling the goals of the plans based on the resources available to the district. Establishing a sound budget will help ensure that the goals of the district are met and will demonstrate the commitment of the board to the effective running of the district.

Financial Planning Operations

The following list of actions enables you to record anticipated revenue (income) and expenditures (expenses), develop annual budgets based on these projections, and create monthly cash flow statements based on budget projections:

1. List all revenue sources for the planning period (usually one year). Include anticipated dollar amounts for each revenue source. Some dollar amounts may be known, others may need to be estimated.

2. List all expense categories for the planning period. Regular expenses such as employee salaries, rent, insurance, telephone and energy bills may be reasonably estimated based on the previous year's budget. New or project-specific expenses need to be anticipated as accurately as possible. It is nearly impossible to account for all future expenditures, but the more one successfully anticipates future expenditures the more accurate and useful a budget will be.

3. Based on anticipated revenue and expenditures for the planning period, establish a budget that shows sources of income, categories of expenditures, and a yearly balance subtracting total expenditures from total income for the planning period. This last item is often called the "profit/loss" statement.

4. Develop a monthly cash-flow statement (see below) to determine the month-to-month variations in income and expenditures.

Budgets Vs. Cash-Flow Statements

Budgets may be drawn up for any period of time, but usually they are yearly. Monthly budgets can be based on annual budgets by dividing the yearly total by twelve. However, income and expenditures may vary from month to month, so a yearly budget broken down into equal monthly amounts may not reflect the realities of income and expenditures throughout the year. To account for monthly variations, a cash flow statement is established for the budget period. A cash-flow statement details each income and expense item and shows exactly what the amounts will be for each budget period—usually per month. Some budget items—rent, for example—will be exactly the same for every month of the year (unless it is known that rent will change in the upcoming year). Other budget items may vary from month-to-month throughout the year. For example, insurance expenses might be $1200 per year, or shown as $100 per month in the budget. However, insurance premiums might be paid only twice a year, so the district would need to set aside $600 in January and $600 in July, for instance, to pay insurance bills. Budgets don't show when the money is needed; cash-flow statements do.

Types of Budgeting

Foretelling the future can be a tricky matter. Most of us are skeptical about the merits of foretelling the future based on the lines of one's hand, horoscopes, or tea leaves. The future is unknown, but fortunately one can foretell one's financial future with somewhat greater accuracy than palm readers. When it comes to business and the business of a resource conservation district, the future will likely unfold in a fairly predictable manner because it is possible to know what income the district likely will receive and what expenses it likely will incur.

There are two primary ways to use this information to foretell the district's future (usually for the upcoming year): the *incremental* approach and the *zero-base* approach.

Incremental Budgeting. The incremental approach is founded on the idea that the upcoming year will most likely resemble the past year, so expenditure and income amounts from the preceding year can be used to predict the coming year.
The advantages to this budgeting approach are that it is very quick and easy to do, and it capitalizes on what one has learned from the past. As previous years' budgets were refined to more greatly reflect reality, this knowledge gained is incorporated into future budget predictions. The disadvantages to this approach is that it does not allow for unforeseeable or anomalous fiscal activities and it does not account for new programs or innovations.

Zero-Base Budgeting. Zero-base budgeting makes no assumptions about the upcoming year based on the past. It assumes that all income and expenditures for the coming year must be re-examined for validity. Zero-base budgeting is budgeting "from scratch" every year, and it allows a district to re-examine its programs and activities from year to year and decide whether they are worth continuing. It also allows for creativity in planning the next year's activities because it makes no assumptions about what the district will do, where its money will come from, and what expenses it will likely incur. Zero base budgeting may be a useful approach for a district that is just starting out or one that is re-examining its priorities and making a fresh start. In zero-base budgeting, everything is "on the table," and the district has the freedom to make decisions from year to year about whether it is actually addressing its priorities through its efforts.

The Combined Approach. In reality, most districts make use of a combination of incremental and zero-base budgeting. Many items of income and expenditure are stable from year to year (such as rent, payroll, etc.), and these can be fairly well assumed to resemble those of previous years. On the other hand, the fact that districts survive in large part from grant funds means that there is a high potential for fluctuation from year to year. Using the combined approach, the district can start with an incremental budget as a base and build on this by examining priorities for new projects and anticipated income and expenditures associated with new projects, which might include grant projects, novel fund-raising approaches, and new services to the community.

Annual Cash-Flow Statement

Once a budget has been prepared and it has withstood the scrutiny of local government officials and the RCD board and employees, and it has been shown to reflect the district's priorities and the wishes of its constituents, an annual cash-flow statement can

be prepared to anticipate the month-to-month income and expenditures for the coming year.

Treasurer's Reports

A district's examination of its financial affairs is not completed for the year once an annual budget and cash-flow statement have been created. These predictions for the up coming year are refined on a month-to-month basis by making detailed records of actual transactions and summarizing them in a monthly treasurer's report, which shows what actually transpired during the previous month. Ideally, the treasurer's report closely resembles that month's budget as predicted in its cash-flow statement. Major departures in the report from the cash-flow statement will need to be incorporated into the cash flow statements for coming months to account for the loss or gain of money during the reporting periods. Knowledge gained by examining actual income and expenditures is fed back into the budgeting process to continuously update the cash-flow statement to reflect the actual situation.

Similarly, a yearly treasurer's report is drafted to account for all of the district's financial activities of the previous year (this is included in the district's annual report for the preceding year--see also Step 9, How to Write Annual Reports). As the monthly treasurer's report was compared to the financial predictions embodied in the annual budget and cash-flow statements and adjustments made accordingly, so the entire year's treasurer's report is compared to the budget and cash-flow statement to determine the extent to which the prediction matched reality. This is useful in planning the upcoming year's budget and cash-flow statement.

Accounting Procedures

Note: Unfortunately the deadline for completing the *Guidebook* did not allow time for research on this important topic. The original intent of this section was to outline complete procedures for district accounting, including how to handle multiple-fund accounting procedures, since districts usually are funded through numerous grant sources. Rather than developing an unusable and incomplete set of procedures, the *Guidebook* team decided to add this as an addendum to the *Guidebook* once these are developed. They will be sent out separately to be included as Appendix T in the *Guidebook*, once they are developed. Included will be samples of district accounts ledgers and step-by-step financial procedures for district bookkeeping.

Audits

At the close of every fiscal year the district should conduct an audit of fiscal activity for the preceding year. Generally, audits are performed by an independent certified public accountant to be acceptable. Procedures may vary from district to district but audits are usually undertaken according to the terms set forth by the local or county government body that oversees the district.

A typical financial audit procedure includes the following:

- *District's conformance to standard financial procedures*. The auditor establishes that the district follows standard budgeting, accounting, and reporting methods. All

appropriate transactions go through a checking account. The district uses press printed, pre-numbered checks and receipts.

- *Use of standard check writing protocols*. The auditor ensures that checks require two signatures. One signer is a district director, usually the president or secretary/treasurer. All potential signers are bonded. Checks are signed only after they have been completed in full.

- *Creation of monthly treasurer's reports*. A complete treasurer's report listing beginning and ending balances and all deposits and checks by number, payee, and purpose is reviewed at every monthly district board meeting; approved by the board; included as part of the district minutes; and forwarded with the minutes each month to the county overseeing entity.

- *Annual internal audit*. The district performs an annual internal audit. The results of the audit are submitted with the annual report.

- *Financial audit*.

- *Supporting document files*.

- *Required financial reports*.

PART NINE: PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Introduction

RCD projects vary widely, typically including educational projects, erosion control projects, fuels reduction projects, road maintenance and improvements, and many others. It is impossible to provide a recipe for carrying out such a diverse array of projects, but all share some general features that can be summarized as a sequence of actions to be undertaken in order to identify, plan, carry out, monitor, and report on projects. The following sequence of steps for managing projects is offered as an overview of typical project management.

Identify a Need

A project begins with an identified need for taking action. Often, projects will be identified during the district's strategic planning process, when district goals and objectives are formulated. A district's annual plan might further refine these goals and objectives and set rough timelines for work to be undertaken (See also Step 3, "How to Plan Strategically" for more information on planning). Often, more investigation is required, either in the form of data collection (such as establishing base-line data for stream sediment loads) in order to determine specific project goals and objectives. Once the need as been established, necessary data collected, and project objectives set, the next step is to create a plan or "scope of work" for the project.

Create a Plan, Including Provisions for Monitoring

Projects usually unfold over many steps. A plan may start with collection of data such as names and addresses of potential project participants (in the case of an educational project) or scientific data such as erosion rates (in the case of an erosion-control project).

After data is collected, it may need to be analyzed and summarized and specific project locations identified.

For example, suppose that your district wanted to reduce sediment delivery to a stream by addressing erosion conditions on roads in a watershed. The plan might start with collecting information on the road network in the watershed by identifying critical erosion sights, road conditions, inadequate drainage methods, or other potentially erosive conditions. This road inventory might summarize the conditions of the roads and prioritize sites where road work is critical. Once critical erosion sites are identified treatments can be prescribed for each of the sites. A list of sites, conditions, and treatments is then created, and materials, equipment, and personnel identified that will be needed to carry out work at each site.

Before work is undertaken, however, provisions must be made for monitoring project success. This can take the form of comparing before and after photos of sites or comparing baseline data with data to be collected during or after the project is implemented. It is important to prescribe the type of monitoring to be used *before* the project is started because present conditions need to be understood before any improvements can be measured.

Once all of this information has been identified and an outline of work drafted, the overall project plan can be written. At this point the plan is most likely still a draft, as funding for the project may need to be secured before any work is undertaken.

Secure Funding

Most districts do not have regular sources of funding for carrying out projects. Many RCD projects in California rely on grant funding for execution. Securing grant funds is a challenging but not impossible task. Numerous sources of funding from government and other funding organizations exist to assist districts with on-the-ground work, and education projects (for more information, see Step 6, How to Raise Funds and Write and Manage Grants).

Set Up Project Accounts

Once project funds have been secured, it is vital that provisions be made to account for grant funds separately from other district funding. Project accounting is typically set up with a separate budget code and separate entries in the district's bookkeeping system. Grant funds for individual projects should be accounted for apart from other district accounts, so that funds received and spent can be easily tracked. Also, receipts and invoices for expenditures must be retained and organized separately from other district

expenses (for more information on managing grants, see Step 6, "How to Raise Funds and Write and Mange Grants" and Part Seven, above, "District Fiscal Procedures").

Update the Plan

The process of writing grants sometimes entails making changes to the initial project plan. Sometimes grant funds secured are not sufficient to cover the entire scope of work as initially envisioned, so the plan might need to be amended to account for funding at a lower level. Other times, funding agencies may wish to expand the project by encompassing a larger planning area, combining the project with other projects, or modifying other elements of the plan. It is important that you remain flexible when working with funding agencies, who may sometimes offer valid (or valuable) suggestions or changes to the project. Once the district and the funding agency have agreed on a plan (often called the "Scope of Work"), this becomes the guiding document for implementing project work.

Identify Participants

Depending on the project, the district may need to rely on volunteers, cooperators, contractors, or employees to execute the plan. It is important that the project manager identify all sources of labor that will be needed to carry out the plan and identify individuals to do the work. Participants need to be briefed about project goals, methods, and monitoring techniques, as needed, and trained to carry out the work as specified. The project manager may need to be resourceful and flexible in identifying and training individuals to carry out project actions.

Execute the Plan

Once provisions have been made for carrying out work and monitoring progress, actual work can begin, with the project manager setting the schedule for project actions, scheduling employees and others to execute work, or hiring contractors, as needed. During the period of project implementation, thorough record keeping must occur to account for money spent on labor, materials, equipment, and transportation. Also, monitoring that needs to occur during the course of the project must also be undertaken, and data collected and stored for analysis.

Monitor Success

Once all work on the project has been completed, final data collection or provisions for future monitoring must be implemented. This data aids in evaluating the success of the project and interpreting results for a final project report to be published, made available to the public in the form of newspaper articles or newsletters, or sent to the funding agency for their review. For data collected during monitoring it is important that a monitoring plan be developed, data collectors trained, and data entered into a data base or other method of storing, sorting, analyzing, or retrieving data. Data alone may not be meaningful, it is important also that reliable means of analyzing data be established so that findings and long-term trends can be usefully interpreted.

Sometimes the success or failure of a project may not be known for a long time after the project has been implemented. Means for continuing to collect data or monitor the site for changes over time may need to be created. The use of landowners, community

volunteers, or school children are all valuable means for continuing to monitor project sites for change. Also, projects may be only a beginning. Future data collection and analysis may indicate the need for ongoing work or future actions to be undertaken to maintain or improve work implemented.

Report on the Project

Most grants require regular reporting on project progress and/or the writing of a final project report. The requirements for such reports, including their timing and frequency, are usually documented in the contract the district signs with the funding agency. For more information on reporting, see Step 6, "How to Raise Funds and Write and Manage Grants." A final grant report might also include steps for future work, including any ongoing monitoring that will need to occur to further evaluate the success of the project. For some useful tips on writing reports in general, see also Step 9, "How to Write Annual Reports."

STEP 9
HOW TO WRITE ANNUAL REPORTS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to accomplish several objectives in discussion annual reports. First, it explains why annual reports can be an important district tool. Second, it explains the connection annual reporting has to a district's long-range planning effort. Third, it offers suggestions for designing your annual report, as well as tips on making your annual report both visually appealing and readable. In addition, a useful planning tool for printing your annual report for wider distribution is presented in Appendix U.

WHY WRITE ANNUAL REPORTS?

Large corporations or companies routinely publish annual reports to keep shareholders and the public apprised of the company's achievements and activities of the previous year. Such reports are also useful for people considering in investing in a company. But why should a Resource Conservation District (RCD) print or publish an annual report when it has no shareholders and already keeps its public informed through newsletters and other means?

Annual Reports Sum Up Work Accomplished

The first reason why a district should write and "publish"[1] an annual report is that it provides a district an opportunity to sum up the work accomplished over the previous year and set priorities for the coming year based on this. Districts often publish reports of specific activities or projects throughout the year—in newsletters or newspaper articles—but do not necessarily report on their activities as a whole.

This can be very useful for several reasons. First it can be a helpful way to track district activities from year to year, and be used as a reference later on when the district wants to know when a particular project, for example, was undertaken or completed. They might also be used in long-range planning, as a series of annual reports from past years indicates the direction a district has been going and might offer up insights into where it might go next.

Also, an annual report can give a district insight into its progress over the previous year and enable it to set priorities for the coming year. An annual report can go hand-in-hand with annual planning and with tracking progress of projects over multi-year time periods.

Annual Reports Allow You to Present the District's Strengths

Second, an annual report can be a useful introduction to a district for new employees, incoming board members, or members of the public interested in supporting the district. An annual report might also be included with grant proposals to funding agencies as a way of informing them of district programs and goals. Highlighting a district's accomplishments and strengths in an

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[1] The term "publish" here is used loosely. Publishing can the form of including an annual report as part of a district newsletter or it might merely mean printing copies and making them available to the public or others upon request.

annual report is one way to "sell" the district to people who may not know what a resource conservation district is and what it can do.

Annual Reports are Mandated Under Division 9

Another reason why a district should publish an annual report is that Division 9 asks that districts do so. Recently, Division 9 was revised to include a requirement for districts to publish annual reports and create long- and short-range plans if they are to receive grant funding through the state Department of Conservation (DOC). Put simply, the law asks that RCDs set long-range goals, create annual plans to address these goals, and each year write an annual report summing up the district's progress toward meeting them (§9413).

Though required by law In order to receive DOC funding, an annual report is also a chance for a district to highlight its strengths and its accomplishments of the previous year. There is a degree of flexibility in its presentation--an annual report can be straightforward or elaborate-- but to be effective it must accurately, logically, readably, and concisely convey information to a general reader.

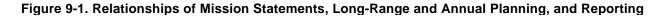### ANNUAL REPORTS AND LONG-RANGE PLANNING

A district's annual report summarizes its achievements during the previous year. As a document, an annual report should ideally relate back to the district's annual plan for the previous year, and thus show evidence of the district's progress toward implementing the specific actions planned. The annual plan follows the long-range plan, which in turn reflects the district's mission as embodied in its mission statement. Figure 9-1 shows the relationship of the planning and reporting processes.

The mission statement, long-range plan, annual work plan, and annual report thus form an unbroken sequence, from relatively general ideals and goals down to actual on-the-ground work that supports those goals. A mission statement is a vision of what an organization will achieve through its efforts. All subsequent actions and decisions should reflect this vision.

If the groundwork has been laid for an effective work strategy by careful planning, then the content and form of the annual report will be largely in place, and its design will closely follow the sequence of planned actions outlined in the annual plan. For example, if your district decided that its mission was to reduce erosion in a key watershed, but it had no funding to do so, then one of the objectives in your strategic plan might be to secure funds to hire staff and purchase necessary equipment and materials. The annual plan would then list securing funding as a specific objective to be pursued that year. The district annual report would then outline the success with--or progress toward--this objective (see Figure 9-2).

In Figure 9-2, there is a clear connection between a district's mission, its long-range plan, its annual plan, and its annual report. Although the example only lists one goal under the long-range plan, there might be many goals that relate to the district's mission in the long-range plan. Similarly, there may be multiple objectives underlying each goal in the strategic plan. The goal of reducing erosion in the watershed may entail several separate, and often sequential, objectives. A second objective for this sample goal might be installing sediment catchment basins in Friendly Creek in order to establish baseline sedimentation rates. In the example above, notice that Objective 1 was only partially fulfilled: the new botanist did not complete the revegetation and monitoring plan for the watershed. The annual report might state this and the following year's annual plan include this as an objective for the next year.

Figure 9-1. Relationships of Mission Statements, Long-Range and Annual Planning, and Reporting

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│Annual Report │   │Annual Report │   │Annual Report │   │Annual Report │   │Annual Report │
│   Year 1     │   │   Year 2     │   │   Year 3     │   │   Year 4     │   │   Year 5     │
└──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘
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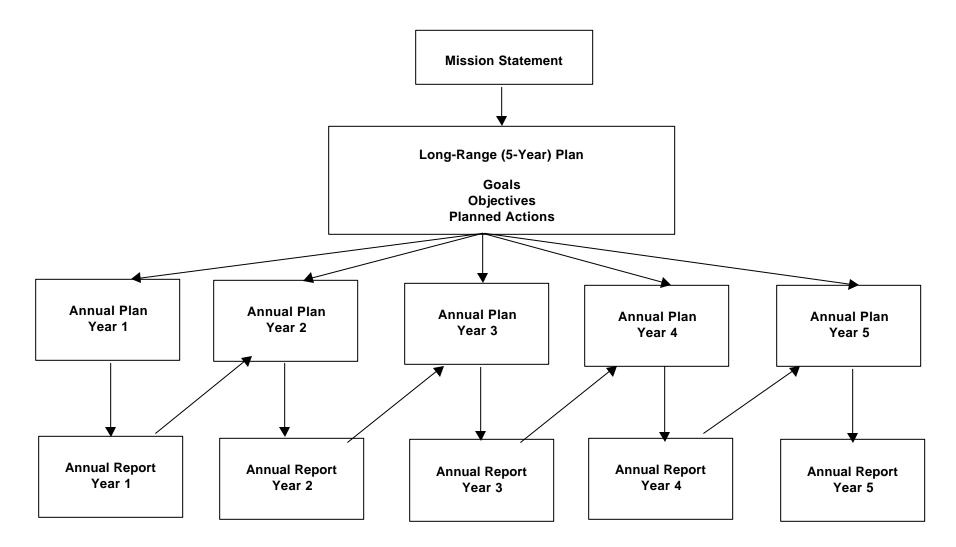
Annual Reports

Figure 9-2. Sample Relationship of Planning to Reporting

Mission Statement

To protect and enhance the natural resources of Friendly County through technical, educational, and administrative expertise to benefit the landowners, recreationists, plants, and wildlife of Friendly County.

Long-Range Plan

Goal 1:   To reduce erosion rates in Friendly Creek watershed
                                            and reduce sediment transport to Friendly Creek.

Sample Objective, Goal 1:   Secure grant funds for implementing erosion control in
                                            Friendly Creek watershed, including creation of monitoring
                                            and revegetation plan

Annual Plan

Research and write grants to secure funding to implement erosion control project in Friendly Creek watershed. Include funding request for hiring a botanist to create a revegetation and monitoring plan.

Annual Report

Through a grant the district was able to hire a full-time botanist as part of its Friendly Creek watershed restoration project. The botanist inventoried critical treatment sites in the watershed and began work on a revegetation plan, including a plan for monitoring both survival of plantings and changes to erosion rates in the watershed. Work on the plan will continue into the next year, with the goal of completing the plan during the next annual planning period.

You might state at this point that the logical progression from mission to goals and objectives to planned actions to reporting is a little too clear-cut for what really happens in the push and pull of everyday affairs. True, opportunities arise that may not have been foreseen when the district's long-range plan was put in place; alternatively, you may discover that what had been perceived as a priority may in retrospect fall way down on the list, as the district grows and takes stock of new information. In the first case, having a clearly formulated mission statement could help the district determine if a new opportunity fits In with its mission and goals. It might be that the "opportunity" takes the district too far afield from its mission. If however, the opportunity is promising, fits in with the district's mission, but was not foreseen in its long-range plan, the long-range plan could be amended to allow for this new development. This would be true also for the second situation, wherein what was once a high priority was reevaluated and seen as less important. A long-range plan should be a flexible document, clear enough to give firm guidance to the district when it plans its future actions, but fluid enough to allow for change. For more Information on long-range planning, see Step 3, How to Plan Strategically.

The example above serves only to point out how closely a district's reporting process Is tied to its planning process. Reporting should be a natural outgrowth of planning.

ORGANIZATION OF ANNUAL REPORTS

Overall Design

The basic structure of an annual report can vary depending on many circumstances. An annual report often has several basic components: A cover and title page, a list of district board members and associates, a Table of Contents, summaries of the previous year's accomplishments, and a report on the district's financial activities for the previous year. The bulk of the report lies In the summary of the district's accomplishments the previous year, and this may be augmented with photographs, illustrations, tables or graphs, depending on the most effective means of conveying information.

A basic problem encountered when writing annual reports is that specific projects conducted during a year may reflect several or many of the objectives in the long-range and annual plans. For example, a major goal of the district might be to reduce erosion impacting streams in various watersheds. A specific objective might be to inventory critical erosion sites in various watersheds. However, one single source of funding may not be received to inventory erosion sites in all of the target watersheds, so separate projects might be undertaken in different parts of the district, perhaps with separate funding sources. The projects may also include objectives from other goals, such as education.

When one project reflects many goals and objectives a choice has to be made when reporting on it in an annual report: Do you organize the report to follow the objectives stated in the planning process or do you organize the report to discuss projects as a whole?

The advantage to the first approach is that your annual report closely reflects the organization of long-range and annual planning documents, and progress toward specific objectives easily discussed in terms of the objectives.[2] The disadvantage to this approach is that one project may

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[2] §9314 (d) states that the annual report should be "in a format consistent with the long-range and annual plans, so that progress made during the reporting period towards district goals can be readily determined."

be discussed in several places--under different objectives--and it might be difficult to gain an understanding or "picture" of the project as a whole.

In the second approach, projects are discussed in their entirety so that a clear picture emerges of their parts, which may embody separate objectives in the long-range and annual plans. The disadvantage to this approach is that it makes it hard to evaluate how successfully a district achieved the objectives spelled out in planning documents.

The nature of a district's work may clearly dictate which organizational approach you take for an annual report. On the other hand, the very nature of funding more often than not dictates that a district think in terms of projects rather than the objectives in its strategic plan when implementing actual work. This is not to say the long-range plan should be written to reflect this project orientation, for projects come and go and objectives must remain the same if a district Is to establish continuity in following its mission.

One solution to this organizational dilemma in the annual report is to account for *both* an objective- and project-orientation in its structure. An annual report could therefore have a discussion of the district's achievements in terms of its objectives, wherein many projects will be discussed, and these will be presented under separate objectives. Another section of the document could then discuss projects as a whole so that a clear picture of the scope and sequence of the work is presented.

Paragraph Subordination

When reported information is fairly complex, then the relationship of subordinate ideas to larger ideas must be clearly presented. A section on a district's educational activities, for instance, might have several subdivisions such as adult education programs, in-school programs, and public outreach. Each of these might also have several activity areas below it. A district's public outreach effort, for example, may utilize a quarterly newsletter, press releases, conservation tours, and displays in public places. Each of these would be clearly set off by presenting them in separate paragraphs with individual headings.

Showing the relationship of parts to the whole in a section can be helped by the use of separate type faces in headings for each levels of subordination. A main heading, for Instance, might be in bold capitals, subordinate paragraphs in bold lowercase letters, and paragraphs subordinate to these in italics. Headings typically are separated from following text so they can easily be seen when a reader scans through the document. The present chapter utilizes three levels of indenture to show subordination of ideas: **BOLD ALL-CAPITAL** letters for the chapter heading or title, **Bold** Initial-Capitals for main subdivisions, and *Italicized Initial Capitals* for subordinate paragraphs. When many levels of indenture are to be presented it often takes some inventiveness to clearly show the relationships of ideas.

The technique of using differing type faces to indicate levels of subordination is also useful in outlines and tables of contents. A table of contents can also utilize visual indentation and line spacing to show the relationship of parts to wholes. See the *Guidebook's* Table of Contents for an example of type faces used to indicate subordination in tables of contents.

Another means to promote ease of readability is to keep the quantity of text within each subheading to a minimum, with frequent use of headings to indicate content and the overall relationship of ideas to each other. This approach can be overdone, but it is often more inviting

to a reader if ideas are presented in manageable "chunks" rather than lengthy streams of words. This approach also ensures that each paragraph or short section is clearly focused. Headings should be as short as possible yet remain descriptive.

If you have difficulty titling your paragraphs and short sections, it might indicate that your paragraphs lack clearly defined controlling ideas. For example, it would be very difficult to provide a meaningful title to the following paragraph:

> *Revegetation of barren hillsides is one way to reduce erosion by promoting the water-holding capacity of the soil. Vegetation has been used for this purpose for thousands of years. Other methods include installing erosion blankets in erosion-prone areas. It is difficult, though, at times to convince the public of the importance of controlling erosion. The most damage to hillslopes occurs during heavy storms.*

All of the sentences in this paragraph may indeed be true, but it is hard to determine what the main point of the paragraph is. Is it the importance of revegetation as an erosion control method? Is it the causes of erosion on exposed hillslopes? Finding a title (other than the too-broad, "Erosion") would be difficult. The difficulty lies in the fact that this paragraph does not clearly indicate which are the main ideas and which are the supporting details. The following paragraph can be successfully titled because it is clear what the main idea is—using vegetation for controlling erosion; all other ideas clearly fit under this.

Revegetation For Erosion Control

> *Revegetation is one of the oldest ways to control erosion: vegetation has been used by people for this purpose for thousands of years. Although many methods are used to control erosion on bare slopes, such as installing erosion blankets in erosion-prone areas, revegetation is also one of the most effective methods because it not only stabilizes the soil as do erosion blankets, vegetation also decreases raindrop impact on soils, which during heavy storms can be considerable. Research has shown that most erosion occurs as a result of such storms. Revegetation of denuded slopes is an investment over the long term, because its effectiveness increases with time. Erosion blankets are effective for their design life but eventually wear out.*

Note that what is different about this paragraph from the one above is not so much its content but its organization and other factors which help establish what the main point of the paragraph is.

PRESENTATION ASPECTS

Besides being a logical and readable vehicle for conveying what a district has achieved, an annual report can also be a statement about what it values. If it values excellence--and Its on-the-ground work demonstrates this- -then its annual report can succeed or fail to convey this message by Its overall appearance and presentation. The pride a district has in its accomplishments should also be reflected in the pride it takes in the presentation of its reports

and documents. Also, readers are more willing to read a lengthy document if it is pleasing to the eye, and it is well illustrated with purposeful and Interesting photographs or illustrations.

Photographs and Illustrations

Although not absolutely necessary, photographs and illustrations can make an annual report more appealing and comprehensible. Several paragraphs describing the result of an important project may not come close to the visual impact a well-placed photograph may have. Studies have even suggested that people *retain* more of what they read when words are accompanied by pictures. Certainly all of us enjoy seeing tangible examples of what is being discussed; pictures lend a certain reality to the essentially abstract nature of printed words. Hand-drawn illustrations can be another appealing and attractive feature if appropriately used. The Important thing to remember when using photographs and illustrations is that they are most effective if they are *purposeful*, not merely "decorative." Also, people tend to find pictures most interesting when people are present, especially when they are shown "in action," perhaps doing the work that is discussed in the text.

Charts, Tables, and Graphs

Charts, tables, and graphs are also an important way to communicate ideas. Compare for example, the following statements with the chart in Figure 9-1, shown earlier in the chapter:

> A district's long-range plan is a vehicle to put a district's mission into concrete terms. A long-range plan takes the broad-based, general ideas of the mission statement and translates them into narrower goals, concrete objectives, and specific actions. The actions are embodied in each year's annual plan, which relates directly back to the long-range plan. The planned actions in the long-range plan are sequenced to be carried out over a five-year period, with initial actions taking place the first year, subsequent actions the second year and so on. When it comes time to report a district's accomplishments for the previous year, these should directly reflect the annual plan for that year. The annual report thus reports how well the district met its objectives for each year.

The above paragraph may be logically constructed, even comprehensible, but it cannot approach the clarity and effectiveness of the chart in Figure 9-1, which visually shows the relationship of part to whole--action to plan to mission--and enables the reader to grasp the ideas in a fraction of the time it takes to read the paragraph.

Thus, some information is best conveyed verbally--with words--some visually--with pictures--and some as a tabular or diagrammatic presentation using a visual arrangement of words, numbers or symbols.

CONCLUSION

If you have never written an annual report, or do not feel confident you can produce an effective one, you might look at a few examples of annual reports other districts have produced. Do not be afraid to model your annual report after another, particularly good example. For an example, see Appendix J, Sample Long-Range Plan, Annual Plan, and Annual Report.

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ACRONYMS

ALSP	Agricultural Land Stewardship Program
CAL EPA	California Environmental Protection Agency
CARCD	California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
CFIP	California Forest Improvement Program
CODE	California Organization of District Employees
CRMP	Coordinated Resource Management and Planning
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
CWA	Clean Water Act
DOC	Department of Conservation
DOR	Division of Recycling
EDD	Employment Development Department
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
FIP	Forestry Incentives Program
FPP	Farmland Protection Program
GIS	Geographic Information System
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NACD	National Association of Conservation Districts
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRPI	Natural Resources Project Inventory
RCD	Resource Conservation District
RC&D	Resource Conservation and Development Council
RFP	Request for Proposals
SIP	Stewardship Incentive Program
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USDI	United States Department of the Interior
US EPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
WHIP	Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program
WRP	Wetlands Reserve Program