

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

**PRODUCED BY THE CALIFORNIA CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP  
AND THE  
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION**

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**VOLUME I**  
**AN RCD HOW-TO GUIDE**



## **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 be 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-site 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,<sup>1</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> §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<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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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<sup>3</sup> 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<sup>4</sup>), 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<sup>5</sup>. 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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<sup>4</sup> See below: Employee Fringe Benefits

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

## **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<sup>7</sup>**

### **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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<sup>6</sup> 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.*

<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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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<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>
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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<sup>9</sup> 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.

<b>Figure 8-1. Checklist for Developing a Personnel Policy</b>	
<b>Task</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
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 for 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. *Outplacement*. 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 as 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**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Questionable</b>	<b>Acceptable</b>
<b>Name</b>	Ask applicant for maiden name, previous names of relatives, etc.	Ask for other names used for reference purposes only (previous employment or education).
<b>Arrests</b>	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.
<b>Address</b>	Limiting geographical area in accepting applications.	Ask applicant for address. Inform applicant of any residency requirements, if any.
<b>Birth Place/ Ancestry</b>	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.
<b>Age</b>	Ask applicant's age.	Ask applicant to state age only to meet minimum age standards for employment.
<b>Religion</b>	Ask applicant for information on religion (creed, holidays, preference).	Tell the applicant the requirements for workweek.
<b>Race/Color</b>	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.
<b>Citizenship</b>	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.
<b>Education/ Experience</b>	Ask applicant in what country s/he attended school.	Ask applicant about work and educational experience.
<b>Relatives</b>	Ask male applicants the maiden name of wife or mother.	Ask for names and addresses of persons to be notified in case of emergency.
<b>Military Service</b>	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
<b>Memberships</b>	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.
<b>Child Care</b>	Ask applicant about child-care arrangements.	This question is unnecessary.
<b>Marital status</b>	Ask applicant about marital status, spouse's name or occupation, prior married name, use of "Mr.", "Mrs.", etc.	These questions are unnecessary.
<b>Salary</b>	Ask applicant for lowest salary acceptable.	Ask applicant for salary history or salary desired.
<b>Credit</b>	Ask applicant for credit information.	This question is unnecessary.
<b>Height/Weight</b>	Ask applicant for height or weight when it is unrelated to job.	Ask applicant for height or weight only if legitimate occupational qualification.
<b>Weekend Work</b>	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<sup>10</sup> 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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<sup>10</sup> 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).

<b>Figure 8-3. Sample Benefit Cost Worksheet</b>		
Average monthly salary (all permanent employees): <u>\$2000</u>		
<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Formula</b>	<b>% of Salary</b>
Vacation time	$\frac{\text{No. of Vacation days/year}}{\text{No. of Working days/year}}$	6.9
Holidays	$\frac{\text{No. of Holidays/year}}{\text{No. of Working days/year}}$	2.3
Sick Leave	$\frac{\text{No. of Sick days/year}}{\text{No. of Working days/year}}$	7.0
Bereavement Leave	$\frac{\text{No. of Leave days/year}}{\text{No. of Working days/year}}$	0.4
Medical Insurance	$\frac{\text{Average monthly employee contribution}}{\text{Average monthly employee salary}}$	3.7
Life Insurance	$\frac{\text{Average monthly employee contribution}}{\text{Average monthly employee salary}}$	0.5
Social Security Insurance	$\frac{\text{Average monthly employee contribution}}{\text{Average monthly employee salary}}$	6.13
Disability Insurance	$\frac{\text{Average monthly employee contribution}}{\text{Average monthly employee salary}}$	0.65
Unemployment Insurance	$\frac{\text{Average monthly employee contribution}}{\text{Average monthly employee salary}}$	1.0
Workers' Compensation	$\frac{\text{Average monthly employee contribution}}{\text{Average monthly employee salary}}$	1.2
Retirement	$\frac{\text{Average monthly employee contribution}}{\text{Average monthly employee salary}}$	4.1
<b>Total Benefit Cost as a Percentage of Salary</b>		<b>33.88%</b>

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 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 31<sup>st</sup> 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 be 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,<sup>11</sup> 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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<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

<b>Figure 8-5. Guidelines for Retaining Employee Records</b>	
<b>Type of Record</b>	<b>Retention Period</b>
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

<sup>12</sup> 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<sup>13</sup>, though districts must contact the IRS for a federal employer ID number (you can download 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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<sup>13</sup> 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 upcoming 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 has 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 Manage 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 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"<sup>1</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> 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

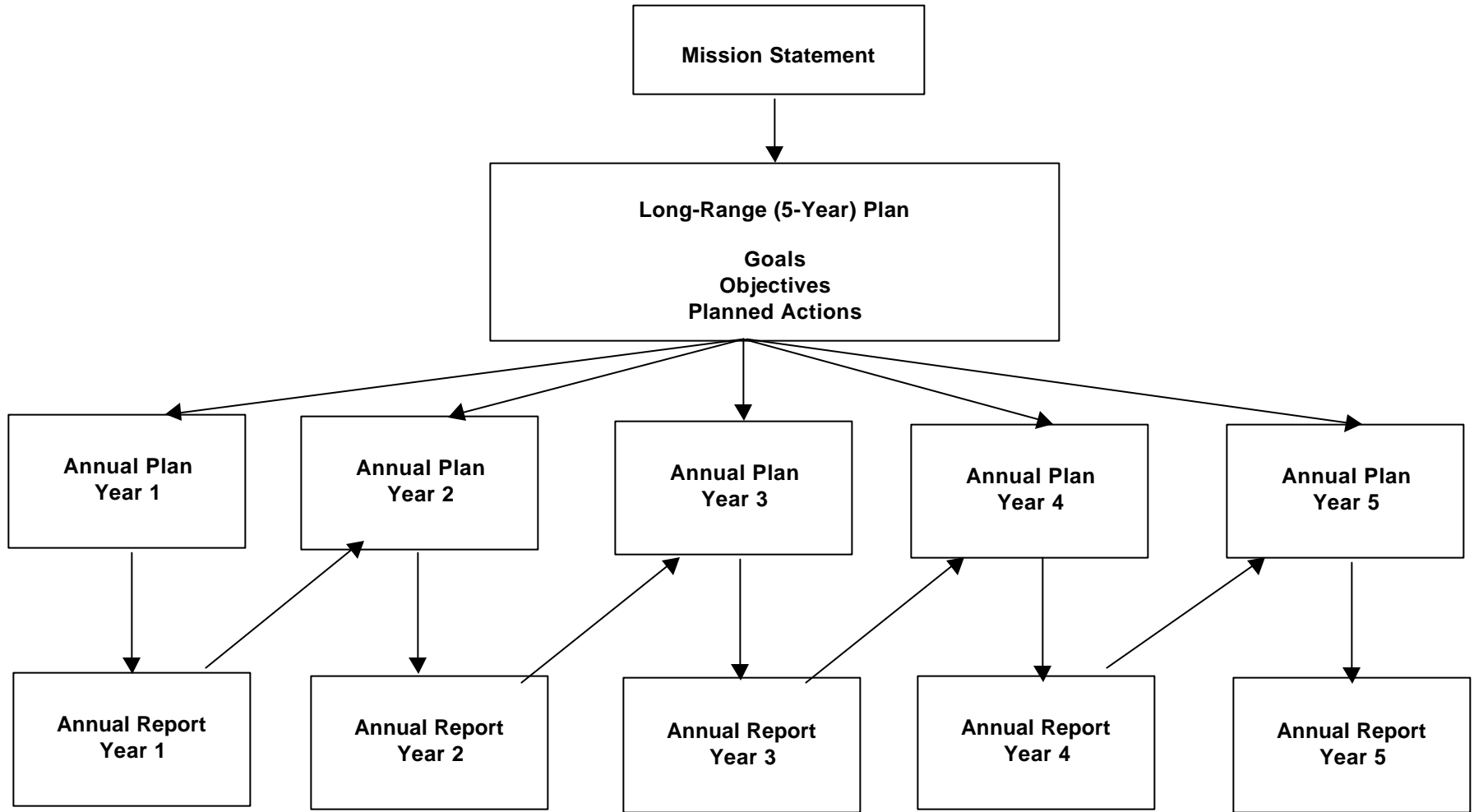
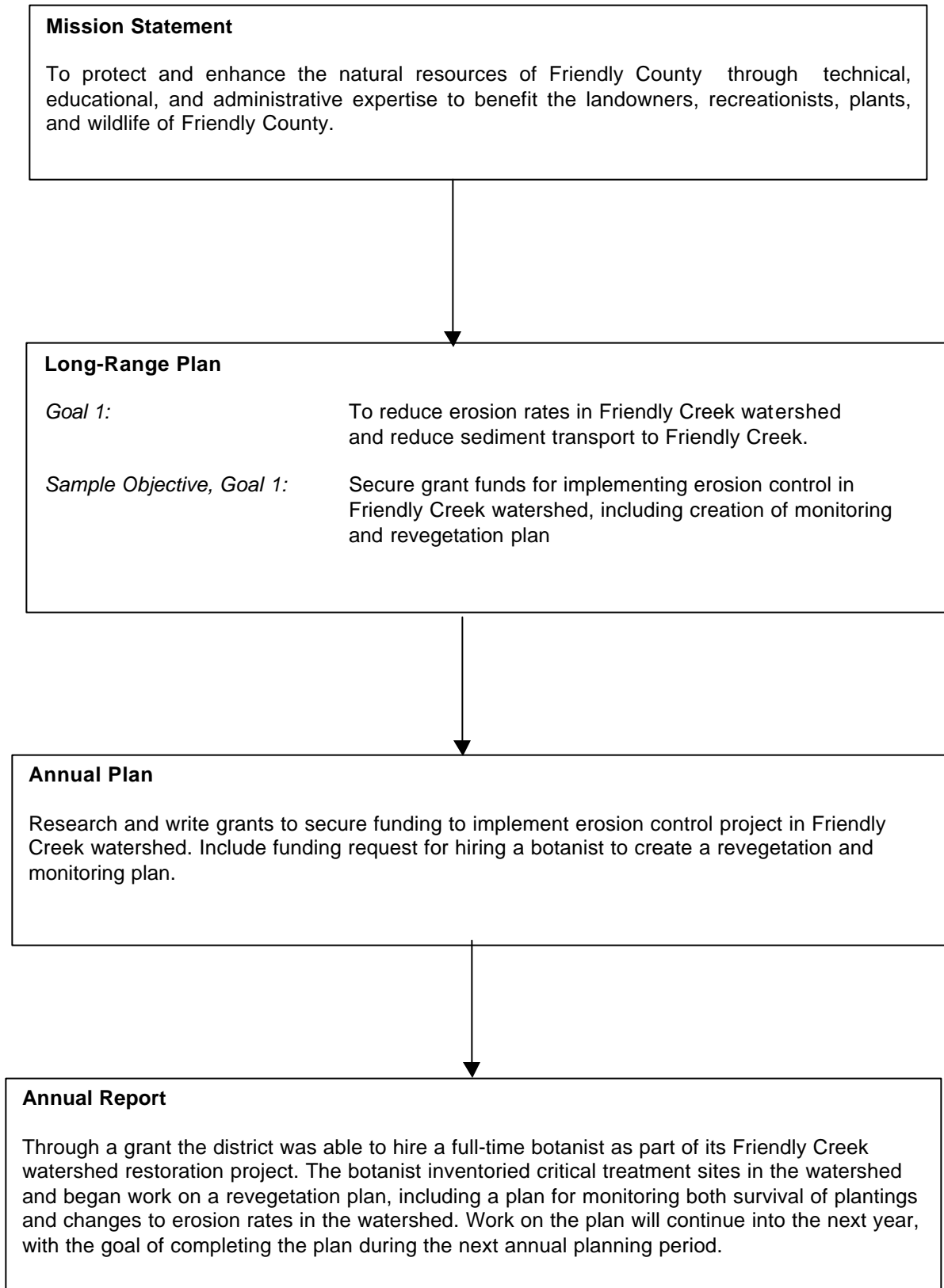


Figure 9-2. Sample Relationship of Planning to Reporting



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.<sup>2</sup> The disadvantage to this approach is that one project may

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<sup>2</sup> §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