

DISTRICT EMPLOYEES

Many district employees serve as the initial contact between the general public and federal, state and local programs and activities. As such, well-trained, knowledgeable employees with abilities that cover a wide range of skills are important to daily district operations.

Volunteer board members often have limited time. Conservation District employees can help you implement your programs and policy more efficiently. They can also:

- Help coordinate board activities
- Provide objective input and professional expertise
- Provide information and data as requested
- Serve as an agent of the district to contact landowners, other agencies and others regarding district business
- Provide technical assistance to landowners

There are a variety of paid positions that may be filled: **District Manager, District Education Coordinator, Administrative Assistant, and District Technical Personnel.**

Employment Procedures

Before hiring, you should identify your needs for an employee. Analyze the tasks that need to be accomplished. Develop and/or revise the position description and establish minimum qualifications. Know what the position will cost the district and where the funds are coming from to support the position.

After deciding what the district needs and how the funds will be acquired, fill the position. This is the responsibility of the district board and only commissioners may authorize the hiring of an employee. Before starting active recruiting, the board needs to consider the following items:

- Details of employment
- Whether the position is full or part-time
- Probationary period
- Supervision
- Pay range
- Term of the position (permanent or temporary)
- Amount of sick and annual leave and other benefits
- Other facts important to the position



Prepare an application form and a position announcement. Advertise the position and take applications, check references and interview the applicants. The entire board, if not on the interview team, should be briefed on applications and interviewers' recommendations so it can make its choice.

After a candidate has accepted, notify the other applicants and establish a starting date. Make sure a new employee understands his or her responsibilities and how to carry them out.

Salaries and Benefits

Just as natural resources must be stewarded with care, so should conservation district employees. Staff turnover can be very costly in time and dollars. Benefits are an excellent way to retain quality employees.

Provide employees with a fair salary, professional development opportunities and benefits. Legally required employee programs include social security, state and federal income tax and workman's compensation. The district must also adhere to equal employment opportunity and other laws that must be followed by any employer.

Supervision

People are the primary resource of a conservation district. Part of your board responsibility is to supervise the paid district staff, associate commissioners, committees, and volunteers. You must also coordinate with agency personnel so everyone can carry out the conservation district mission effectively.

Staff Evaluations

Conservation District employees should be evaluated yearly to clarify expectations, identify continual professional development needs, and share concerns. This is the immediate supervisor's and the chairman's responsibility. The evaluation should be in writing and discussed with the employee. You can reasonably expect the following from staff:

- Attention to details of meetings
- Complete, concise, and accurate information
- Honesty in individual and organizational relationships
- Judicious use of time
- Meeting agreed-upon deadlines with notification if deadlines cannot be met
- Prompt response to requests for information
- Prompt return of phone calls
- Excellent quality of service to the public

In return for this, staff working for your board can reasonably expect of the board:

- Fulfillment of commitments within the agreed-upon deadlines
- Proper training
- Knowledge of district organization and programs
- Candid performance appraisal and assistance in meeting performance goals
- Support in controversial situations
- Easy access to commissioners by phone or visitation
- Loyalty, confidentiality, and sensitivity
- Incentives and rewards to promote and recognize accomplishments

District employees should have the opportunity for grievance at any time, if the need arises.

Board and Staff Relationships

Relationships between your board and staff must be effective. It can be very difficult for a district employee to have “five bosses at once,” especially if they offer conflicting input. The Board Chairman or his designee is normally the board member who works directly with the staff and is the supervisor of the district employee. He or she should maintain a keen awareness of employee concerns and initiate evaluations, salary increases and other personnel actions. The District Manager (if your district has one) should supervise the other district employees and the Board Chairman should work through the manager.

The types of tasks performed by board members and staff should be very clear. The board sets the policy and the staff implements it. Let the staff do their respective jobs and don’t expect them to do your job, too. Keep your respective roles as clear as possible at all times.

Volunteers

Most people involved in your district are volunteering their time and energy as commissioners, associates, and committee members or in other roles. For these volunteers to feel their service is worth contributing, they must see concrete achievements, and to do this they must be supervised and coordinated.

In many ways, supervising volunteers is similar to supervising paid staff. Develop position descriptions for volunteers just as you would for paid employees. This will help you focus on concrete needs for the position and assure the volunteer that you need someone to do a real job. The position description also acts as a written agreement, legally protecting the volunteer and the district. The district jointly sponsors the Earth Team Volunteer program with NRCS, which automatically provides these benefits.

Do everything you can to make volunteers feel comfortable and fulfilled in the service they are rendering to conservation. Volunteers are motivated by a variety of factors such as self-expression, philanthropy, and many others. The board should encourage these. Treat volunteers as coworkers, provide good working conditions, and promote them to greater responsibility as appropriate. Let them know how much you appreciate them, personally and professionally.

Commissioners and other conservation district volunteers serve without monetary compensation, but if they incur other expenses in the service of your district, try to reimburse them.