



National Association of
Conservation Districts

Conservation District Guide: Tools for Recruiting Board Members

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This guide was adapted from a 2003 NACD publication entitled “Conservation District Board Member Recruitment and Community Outreach Guide.” Throughout this document, you’ll find space to write down ideas and considerations that will help you craft a board member recruitment strategy for your district and its specific needs. You will also learn how to identify your district’s needs, prioritize desired qualities and expertise in district board members, and develop a recruitment prospectus and job description for board members.

Chapter I. Analyzing the Needs of Your District

Before you begin to look for someone to serve as a district board member, your board should first identify what the needs of your district are for human resources. This is an opportunity for your board to expand the membership of the district and to find people who can help the district expand its programs. Use this worksheet to assess the current culture of your district.

1. List major programs and activities of your district:

2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your district?

Strengths –

Weaknesses –

3. What programs and activities would you like to do, but because of a lack of resources (human and other), have been unable to accomplish?

4. Identify types of people that have knowledge, experience, or skills that can help you meet these accomplishments:

5. List skills, abilities, knowledge, and experience provided by each current board member:

6. Who does your district serve? List your clients:

7. What new types of board members could help diversify your board, accomplish your mission, and better serve your clients?

Board member recruitment of qualified and talented individuals requires looking beyond just your current circle of friends, relatives, and business associates. It means actively seeking ideas and prospects from outside your inner circle. Local organizations that represent minorities and women should be invited to recommend a candidate based on your district's needs. Your local board should develop a list of potential groups, organizations, and individuals to contact when recruiting a new member. Some examples to consider include:

- Community groups that represent minority cultures and women
- Conservation and environmental special interest groups
- People on boards of key organizations – banks, charities
- Advertising agencies and marketing firms
- Teachers and college professors
- Researchers and writers
- Accountants, bankers, and investment managers
- Timber harvesting contractors and professional foresters
- Horticulturists, nursery operators, and tree farmers
- Farmers and ranchers
- Hobby and part time farmers
- Former legislators and public board members
- Retired local, state, or federal employees
- Consumer activists
- Public relations professionals
- Geologists and engineers
- Professional fund-raisers
- Agronomists and soil scientists
- Economists and social scientists
- Urban interests

A recruitment prospectus, detailed in the next chapter, should be provided to each entity included on the list developed by your local board.

Chapter II. Identifying Desired Qualities and Qualifications for Board Members

Good district board members need to have a strong conservation ethic, skills, and knowledge in conservation, as well as management skills and leadership abilities. Recruitment of potential board members begins with identifying the qualities needed and desired by the local community. District board members should be recruited on the basis of identified qualities and qualifications and not on the criteria of “who’s available that we know.”

Some desirable qualities and/or qualifications for district board members could include:

- Open minded
- Strong leadership skills
- Innovative
- Likeable
- Professionalism
- Understands conservation issues
- Good speaking skills
- Progressive
- Always learning
- Fundraising abilities
- Personnel Management
- Legislative understanding skills
- Leadership network in the community

In addition to these, other desirable qualifications could include:

- Individuals that can devote adequate time to the job. Some districts have a written policy dictating removal of a board member for a certain number of consecutive absences from board meetings.
- Effective communication skills and the ability to get along well with other district board members, staff and assisting agency staff.
- The ability to tolerate the inevitable criticism of leadership. An individual’s judgment and integrity are most important.
- The ability to represent their own constituencies and avoid conflicts of interest.

What additional qualities do you want your district board members to have?

Chapter III. Recruitment Prospectus

In order to get people interested in becoming involved with your district, they need to know what the district does and the programs and services it offers. One way to inform prospective members is to develop a recruitment prospectus, which may include:

- Mission and vision statements
- Your district's primary goals and objectives
- Legal authority
- Major issues
- Major programs and activities
- Funding sources
- Expectations of district board members
- Benefits of being a district board member

Model Recruitment Prospectus and Standard Form

Becoming a Board Member of _____
Name of Conservation District

Concerned citizens in _____ County can help conserve natural resources by serving on the _____ Conservation District Board. If the issues and programs stated in this document interest you – please call _____ at _____.

1. **Mission:** *(insert your district's mission statement)*

2. **Vision:** *(insert your district's vision statement)*

3. **Goals and Objectives:**

- Establish soil and water conservation policy for the district
- Assess resource needs
- Develop strategies to address these needs
- Provide quality conservation education to county school children
- Provide land users with technical assistance
- Develop programs to address local natural resource problems
- Serve as focal point for addressing natural resource issues and coordinating various programs to help identified concerns

4. **Legal Authority:**

_____ *(conservation district enabling law number)* of the Code of _____ *(state name)* defines a conservation district as a political subdivision of the _____ *(state name)*

5. **Major Issues at this Time:**

- Water resources/water quality
- Failing septic systems
- Erosion from cropland
- Erosion from construction sites
- Land users needing technical assistance

6. Major Programs and Activities:

- Agricultural cost-share program
- Conservation equipment program
- Tree seedling sales
- Publish quarterly newsletter
- Approval of conservation plans
- Review of county planning proposals
- Educational programs for schools, youth, adult, and civic groups
- Review erosion and sediment control plans.

7. Funding Sources:

- Local governments (board of supervisors, city councils, county departments...)
- State government (department of conservation, conservation commission...)
- Grants (district funding raising activities)
- Federal grants, agreements...
- District educational seminars and programs

8. Expectations of Directors:

- Take advantage of training opportunities to develop abilities
- Attend board and committee meetings
- Participate in district programs and activities
- Serve as chair of one committee
- Be involved & responsible for district program direction
- Develop policies and programs
- Promote soil & water conservation in the community
- Help manage staff
- Represent district in public
- Help secure financial resources
- Promote district

9. Benefits of Being a Director:

- Being a voice for the citizens of your county/city
- Self satisfaction of providing your time to improve the environment
- Being actively involved with assistance and educational programs for citizens
- Providing leadership in community resource conservation
- Development of leadership skills

Additional information is available by calling the district office at _____
or by contacting a current district board member.

Recruitment Prospectus

Mission:

Vision:

Goals & Objectives:

Legal Authority:

Major Issues:

Major Programs & Activities:

Funding Sources:

District Board Member Expectations:

Benefits of Being a District Board Member:

Chapter IV. Recruitment Strategies and Materials

Once you have identified your district's needs, prioritized desired qualities and expertise in district board members, and developed a recruitment prospectus and job description, it is time to develop your recruitment strategy.

The sample strategies that follow are only the beginning of what your district can develop. There are advantages and disadvantages to each. Choose the ones that best suit your needs. Ongoing recruitment using a variety of strategies normally produces a greater number of potential nominees who represent more diverse skills, interests, and backgrounds.

Sample Strategies:

- **Assemble a Board Development Team:** An important first strategy would be to form a board development team charged with the responsibility of examining board member needs including recruitment, orientation, and development of board members. The team should include representatives from underserved communities to help identify potential candidates in those communities. The board development team should be broader than a simple nominating committee.
- **Develop a Referral Network:** Build a third-party referral system for recruitment by developing long-term relationships with minority and women-owned businesses and organizations that represent women and minority communities. These relationships can yield valuable contacts for potential board members that have qualifications needed on your district board.
- **District Board Members Information Form:** A nomination form describing qualifications the district board has identified can be distributed to minority and women-owned businesses and organizations that represent women and minority communities.
- **Letter to Organizations:** Direct correspondence to organizations that represent women and minority communities about potential nominees for district board member positions is an effective way to attract qualified individuals. The letter should include qualifications the board is looking for in potential nominees.
- **Public Service Announcements:** Radio and television stations run free public service announcements for community organizations. In many areas of the country there are Spanish-language stations. Many educational channels feature alternative programming in a number of different languages.

- **News Releases:** Another method of reaching a wide audience regarding a district board member vacancy is through news releases in newspaper, radio, television, and other media that serve minority communities.
- **Newspaper Advertisements:** Well written and attractive advertisements in newspapers that target underserved populations may help create interest in a district board member position.
- **District Recruitment Brochure:** An effective way of informing potential candidates about district programs and activities, and about the powers and authorities of a district board member, is through a well developed, clearly written informational brochure. Create interest by distributing the informational brochure through women and minority-owned businesses and organizations that represent them.
- **Recommendations from Staff and Cooperating Agencies:** Staff that have provided direct services to clients are a source of ideas for potential candidates that have qualifications being sought by a district board. Staff also have contacts throughout the community that may be different from the current board members' contacts.
- **Recruitment at Annual/Special Meetings:** Make a special point to advertise your annual and special meetings in the media discussed above that target women and underserved communities. Keep an attendance list at events to save the names and addresses of people who come.
- **Job Description and Recruitment Prospectus Distribution:** Make sure you distribute your district board member recruitment prospectus and job women and minority-owned businesses and organizations that represent them.
- **Personal Contacts:** Personal contacts with a variety of community and organization leaders by district board members can be an effective method to create a pool of candidates different from that of a current circle of friends and relatives. Efforts to personally contact organizations that represent women and minorities could pay off through the development of joint projects between your district and those organizations.