



10-Minute Supervisor Trainings

Kentucky Soil and Water Conservation Commission

JANUARY 2012

Connecting with Elected Officials

Conservation Districts have a responsibility to protect the natural resources of our state and nation. In order to effectively carry out these responsibilities, it is often necessary to deal with local, state, and even federally elected officials. During these tough economic times, effective communication is essential for districts to get their priorities noticed.

Contacting Your Elected Official

- Send a letter (a fax is preferable)-Use your conservation district letterhead.
- Send an e-mail-This is the most common way to get in touch with your elected officials.
- Call on the phone-Even though you may not talk to your official directly, leave a message on the issue. It is definitely documented and accounted for.
- Meet at their office- Person to person contact is always better than faxes, e-mails or phone calls.
- Participate in Local Meetings-Elected officials hold public meetings locally, so check their website for dates and times.
- Make a speaking invitation-Ask them to speak at your board meetings.
- Respond to a survey-Officials want their constituents views on many issues.
- Get to know their staff-Many of the staff of the law makers focus strictly on certain topics. This makes them excellent points of contact on the specific agenda of conservation districts and agriculture.

Make Your Case Effectively

- Be factual-Make your case with facts and figures and know opposing sides of the issues.
- Be clear and concise (Each year, KACD creates a 1 page list of their legislative priorities, this could be useful in your conversation and as a handout to leave behind with the official or their staff.)
- Be personal-Bring the topic down the officials own district.
- Be inclusive-Bring those along that share your views.
- Be constructive
- Be informed about the legislative body involved (i.e. General Assembly, Congress, etc.)
- Be a listener-This allows you to learn more about the officials position on the topic.
- Be courteous-Disagree without being disagreeable. Do not make personal attacks.
- Be aware of rules-Know what they can and can't receive from the public.
- Be open to compromise-Recognize progress towards your goal rather than getting nothing

- Be patient
- Be persistent-Follow up your visit and reinforce your message.
- Enjoy yourself

Basic Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Schedule your appointment well in advance
- Be punctual for your meeting
- Dress appropriately for the occasion
- Prepare adequate materials, handouts and a brief to leave behind. Be sure to leave a business card or contact information with the materials.
- Stay focused on the issues
- Provide relevant, specific examples from the elected officials home district.
- Follow up after the meeting to answer any questions or unresolved issues

Don't:

- Show up late
- Wear out your welcome
- Talk about unrelated topics
- Bring everyone you know to the meeting
- Get upset if you only meet with staff
- Mix personal and professional agendas

Consider Hosting a Conservation Tour

- Plan tours during the "off times "of elected officials
- Send a written letter of invitation to lawmakers and staff, offering multiple dates
- Confirm the visit
- Engage local, state and national conservation association representatives
- Invite local news media
- Invite local government officials
- Develop an agenda and a briefing on the issues
- Prepare handouts for officials and their staff throughout the tour
- Take pictures
- Send a thank you note
- Visit local producers who have utilized the services of the district
- Showcase demonstration projects

Develop Relationships with the Elected Officials

- Invite them to a district board meeting
- Invite them to your annual banquet
- Request their attendance at State functions as well (KACD Legislative Receptions, KACD Convention, etc.)