

Chapter 8: Staff Employment

Sec. 1 Employment by SWCDs

Chapter 2 of this manual outlines the Duties, Responsibilities, and Compensation for a district supervisor. More specifically, it refers to the employment of office staff to carry out the function of the district. As such, the Soil and Water Conservation District supervisors bear the responsibility and accountability for the personnel management policies, supervision, and decisions needed to maintain an effective and productive staff. It is vital that district supervisors take an active role in formulating and administering personnel policies.

Principal Responsibilities

District supervisors should:

- Complete a **workload analysis**.
- **Set priorities**.
- Develop **written personnel policies**.

Workload Analysis

The Conservation Partnership, along with other cooperating entities (Farm Service Agency, County Surveyor, etc.), may provide information to be included in a workload analysis. A thorough analysis should indicate not only the types of positions needed, but also an approximate number of staff days that will be required. A thorough analysis will also provide a basis to discuss funding with county and state governing bodies, and information for setting priorities and guiding work assignments. Developing a district Business Plan (Long Range Plan) will aid in this process. Refer to Chapter 12, entitled “Developing Short and Long Range Plans for Your SWCD” for more specific information.

Setting Priorities

The workload analysis may reveal that there is more work to be done than resources available. At this point a district must set priorities. Decisions should be based on the public benefit gained for the cost incurred. Care should be taken that available resources are not spread so thin that none of the work assignments receive adequate attention. One way of setting priorities is to identify the activity or group of activities that should be carried out if resources were limited to only one activity or group. This then becomes priority number one. Other activities are then identified in the same manner until all activities have been placed in priority order.

Written Policy

Your county most likely has a county personnel policy handbook which addresses many potential personnel issues. The district should have a copy and be familiar with its contents. The district may want to establish additional written personnel policies specific to the district and are free to do so as long as they do not conflict with county personnel policy since nearly all district employees are considered to be county employees.

According to IC 14-32-4-18, “*an employee of the district is considered to be the employee of the county in which the employee works*”, so a copy of the County Policy Handbook should be accessible to the supervisors and staff. Individual policies of the district should be cleared through proper channels prior to being adopted by district supervisors. Once approved, individual policies should be included as addendums to this Handbook. The district should conduct an annual review to ensure that the County Policy Handbook and individual district policy remain consistent and current.

Sec. 2 Staff Positions

Once the decision has been made to hire an employee, qualification standards must be defined. In addition, the district should set specific performance standards. Supervisors must also become familiar with and adhere to the federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination in any aspect of employment.

Principal Responsibilities

District supervisors should:

- Create **position descriptions**.
- Conduct **annual performance evaluations**.
- Provide for appropriate **training**.
- Provide **supervision** to personnel (IC 14-32-4-18)

Position Descriptions

Verbal instructions cannot provide the mutual understanding that is provided by a written description of the duties and performance requirements. Written position descriptions assist in personnel management in a variety of ways, including:

- Outlining the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to perform the job
- Establishing equitable and consistent salaries
- Recruiting
- Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and working relationships

An effective position description will include qualification standards. Qualification standards are skills, knowledge, abilities and experience required for each position. Standards are based on the demands of the position and are invalid if not job related.

The following should prove helpful in writing brief, accurate descriptions.

- Outline a position, not a person.
- Create an overview, not detailed procedures.
- Using common terminology.
- Be concise.

Position descriptions should be kept up to date to ensure high productivity and to maintain communications.

Sec. 3 County Policy Handbook

The County Policy Handbook developed for your county includes specific personnel policy and should be used as a guide for district staff. County policy, at a minimum should cover work rules/conditions of employment, leave policy, benefits, sexual harassment, conflict of interest, etc. Addendums may also be attached to clarify policy for district employees.

Sec. 4 Hiring

The district must apply equal recruiting, hiring, promotion, and compensation opportunities to all qualified persons. The district must be committed to equal employment opportunity (EEO) and to the benefits that come from a diverse workforce, and strive to be consistent with federal, state, municipal EEO laws. Appointments, promotions, assignments, training and performance evaluations are to be based on individual qualifications and merit, and shall be equally available to all qualified applicants and employees. Refer to Chapter 9 for an in-depth discussion of the legal issues relating to nepotism, conflict of interest, harassment, and discrimination within the workplace. The *County Policy Handbook* should also be referenced for local EEO laws.

Principal Responsibilities

District Supervisors should:

- **Recruit and advertise** the position.
- **Interview** candidates.
- **Select** a qualified employee.

Recruitment and Advertisement

Recruitment and advertisement may be as simple as “word of mouth” throughout the Conservation Partnership, cooperators and the local community, or as widespread as notices to the media, nearby college campuses and appropriate professional journals. Districts should remember, however, that the more widely advertised their position becomes, the greater their chances are that the most qualified person for their job will be made aware of the position and apply to the District.

Application forms are important because they provide a permanent record, information about the applicant, and serve as a screening device. In addition to an applicant’s name, address, zip code, phone number, and social security number, request only the information that is job related and useful. Federal and State laws prohibit requests for information that may result in discrimination. Be careful to avoid such requests. The *County Policy Handbook*, and the County Human Resource office should be consulted for Application Forms that have been developed specifically for employment within your county.

Conducting the Interview

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

one supervisor and at least one other person is advised. This could be the existing Office Manager, or an Associate Supervisor. The interview team should get as much information from the applicant as possible that will affect the decision to hire. The interviewers should provide the necessary information about the job and the district that will enable the applicant to make decisions. Be honest. Do not leave the applicant with any false impressions about the position duties, the pay, the advancement possibilities, etc. The interviewers are in control of the interview and are in a position to ensure its success.

Tips for interviewing:

- Prepare a list of 10 to 15 questions relating to the job.
- Ask the same questions of each applicant.
- Questions should not violate the Civil Rights Act.
- Encourage the applicant to talk.
- Ask open ended questions.
- Avoid controversy.
- Never interrupt an applicant.
- Make mental and written notes on each question.
- Be prepared to follow up on specific areas.
- Be objective in your evaluation.
- Give the applicant an opportunity to ask questions.
- Allow each applicant interviewed the same amount of time.

Selection and Follow-Up

District supervisors have the right and obligation to know about the employee's skills, work experience and abilities. They should not take hiring lightly. It is much easier to hire an employee than terminate an employee. Potential loss of time, training, and morale accompany a poor hiring decision; and legal problems may arise. When the interview team has made its selection, the team should check references provided by the applicant. In addition, it is recommended that the team request a criminal history records check through the Indiana State Police, at <http://www.in.gov/isp/3257.htm>. Be sure to follow up with all applicants. A letter should be sent to the applicant who has accepted the position as well as to those applicants who were not hired. (Exhibit 8.8)

Personnel Files

An individual personnel file should be established for each employee and maintained by the District Board. This file will include records such as the employment application, confirmation of acceptance letter, position description, duties and performance standards, Confidential Emergency Information, Acknowledgement of Receipt of Employee Handbook, performance evaluation, documentation of general performance and work record, report of personnel actions, accident reports, claims for Workers' Compensation, etc.

Legal and Liability Issues

A Soil and Water Conservation District is a governmental sub-division of state government. Therefore all regulations concerning Equal Opportunity, Nepotism, and

Conflict of Interest apply to hiring and employment practices. Legal and liability issues are discussed in depth in Chapter 9.

Sec. 5 Employee Benefits

Compensation

Referencing IC 14-32-4-18 “*an employee of the district is considered to be the employee of the county in which the employee works*”. The Board of Supervisors should work closely with the County, and within the attached *County Policy Handbook*, in the development of a benefit package for employees. Many times the County Budget may reflect the compensation per hour, or the County Committee may only put limits on yearly pay. Even if the SWCD matches County monies for the employee from their funds, the employee is still considered to be “*an employee of the county*”. County policies concerning use of funds will still apply.

Leave

The County Holiday schedule and Vacation, Sick and Personal leave policies will also apply. Most SWCD employees work in offices with Federal and State employees. Each Partner must be sure to follow their employers posted Holiday Schedule. There will be times that a County employee is not required to work, while others in the office must report. Likewise, there are also holidays where a County employee may be the only person in the office. Be sure to observe the posted holiday schedule for your County.

Sec. 6 Employee Orientation and Training

Orientation

New employee orientation should be provided within the first week of the employee’s start date. If no SWCD staff is available to conduct this orientation, a district supervisor should provide, at a minimum, the following information:

- Introduction of local Partnership staff
- Outline of the Indiana Conservation Partnership
- Work schedule
- Pay period calendar
- Information on the field office (work stations and equipment, parking, security procedures, etc.)
- Travel and training procedures
- Additional written work rules, policies and procedures not included in the County Policy Handbook.

Initial orientation should **not** be delegated to other Partnership staff. District employees are hired, and their workload is defined, by district supervisors. It is important that a new employee not be confused concerning chain of command by delegating this task to others.

It is also beneficial to establish who new employees should direct questions to in the first few months of employment. As with any new position, employees will likely have a lot

of questions and Supervisors should help guide the employee to the best source of information.

Training

Training that is offered by the Indiana Conservation Partnership should be utilized to the full extent possible. Supervisors should verify that all training requested is job related. ISDA and NRCS consistently prepare training. Some will apply to all Partnership Staff, and other sessions will be applicable only to specific subjects. Regional Partnership Specialists are also available for scheduled one-on-one training for all employees.

Examples of structured training sessions are: Boot Camp, ARC-View GIS, Cultural Resources, Certified Conservation Planning, etc.

Regional Specialists: Tech Team Leader, Grazing Land, Soil Scientist, Computer, Engineer, Stormwater, Resource Planning, etc.

Sec. 7 Employee Evaluation

There should be a time when the district supervisor (or an appointed committee) and the employee get together for the specific purpose of reviewing performance. In the same respect as the initial orientation, the evaluation should not be delegated to other Partnership staff. This should be a private session and not part of a board meeting. Although evaluation of an employee's performance is a continuing process, a formal discussion with the employee should take place once a year, at a minimum. The evaluation should be a culmination of numerous informal observations and discussions made throughout the year. The following benefits may be realized from a formal performance evaluation system.

- Individual performance will improve.
- Supervisor-employee relationships will improve.
- Employee accomplishments and good work will be recognized.
- Personnel actions, such as pay increases, promotions, removals, and re-hires, will be based on sound, objective criteria and will be documented.
- Employees and supervisors will be more aware of job requirements and needed changes in job duties.
- Employees will be more aware of their supervisor's judgment of their performance.
- Training needs will be identified.

A formal review of an employee's performance should also take place at the end of any probationary period of employment. A checklist that will allow the supervisor to prepare for a Performance Evaluation is included as Exhibit 8.9.

Steps in a Formal Evaluation

Prepare for the discussion. Effective evaluations don't just happen - they are planned. Gather facts; review the job description and performance standards.

Pick a good time and place. Arrange to hold the discussion where it will not be interrupted. It may be appropriate to provide other office staff to cover phone messages and walk-in clients. Allow ample time for the discussion. Pick a time when both you and the employee can be relaxed. This should be a private session, not during a board meeting.

Create a comfortable atmosphere. Tailor the approach to each individual. Let the discussion develop naturally.

Ask the employee to review their responsibilities. 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. Ask where problems have appeared. Encourage the employee to talk and don't interrupt unnecessarily. This can provide clarity for both the employee and the Supervisor concerning job responsibilities.

Discuss each job duty. Review the performance of each job duty with the employee and let them know how well they performed each duty.

Jointly develop the next year's performance standards. This gets the employee involved and promotes mutual understanding. Make any needed 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.

Additional Strategies for Evaluating Employee Job Performance

Don't rely on gimmicks. Even the best performance evaluation form won't relieve the supervisor of the responsibility of making decisions about an employee's competence. The best way to judge competence is to work with the employee one on one, to make observations during moments of routine, and stress in a variety of assignments.

Admonish when necessary. Tell an employee when they have done well and when they have not. They won't resent correction handled in a natural manner. However, it is hard for both supervisor and the employee if this is lumped all together in a single, grueling session held once or twice a year.

Be self critical. Before an employee is admonished for inadequate work, ask yourself frankly, "Has leadership contributed to this deficiency in any way?" "Was too much expected?" "Did the employee understand the duty?" "Did the employee have proper training to do the job?" "Is the criticism absolutely fair, or is it influenced by bias?" Objectivity enables 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 shoulder responsibility.

Sec. 8 Exit Interviews

A face to face interview with an employee that has resigned offers an opportunity for feedback. When a district employee leaves employment for whatever reason, it is a good

idea to have them complete an Exit Interview. Some businesses do not recommend a face to face interview, reasoning that useful and candid information is seldom obtained by interviews, especially if the employee may be hostile or vindictive toward management authority or other employees. They prefer to use a questionnaire. Exhibit 8.11 contains a sample Exit Interview Form. The district should also send an exit letter to the employee. Copies of all correspondence should be retained in a file at the SWCD office.

Exhibit 8.1 - Checklist for Position Description Development

1. Complete a workload analysis.
2. Develop a list of items or duties to be accomplished by this position.
3. List the skills and abilities necessary to perform the duties of the position.
4. Assign responsibility for writing the position description.
 - a) Check with partner agencies for position descriptions that may be similar for reference and guidance.
5. Define title and purpose of the position, and where job is to be performed.
6. Identify who will provide supervision of the position (i.e. Chair)
7. Clarify how employee will be evaluated and by whom.
 - a) Establish when the performance reviews are to take place.
8. Provide copies to the full SWCD board for approval.
9. Provide a copy to the funding source when requested.
10. Develop objective performance standards in qualitative and quantitative terms.
11. Each position duty should have a corresponding performance standard.
12. Standards should be reviewed and agreed to by the district Board of Supervisors.

Exhibit 8.2 - Position Description Format

TITLE: The title should be based on the function of the position. This title may vary from Office Manager, District Secretary, and Education Coordinator, all depending on the need that has been identified.

INTRODUCTION: The introduction section should reflect broad general functional areas of the position for the District (e.g., clerical).

DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES: This section should lay out, in broad terms, the duties and responsibilities of the position. The tasks should be unique to this position and should not reflect detailed action.

SUPERVISION: This statement clarifies that the district supervisors shall have oversight of the district employee.

CIVIL RIGHTS REQUIREMENTS:

Each employee has the right to work in a professional environment that promotes equal opportunities and prohibits sexual harassment and harassment based on race, color, creed, religion, sex, national origin, age, sexual orientation or gender identity, and physical or mental disability, hereinafter referred to as protected status or protected class.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW: This section states who does the performance evaluation of this position, what is evaluated, and when.

Exhibit 8.4 – District Manager Position Description

TITLE: District Manager

INTRODUCTION:

The incumbent provides managerial, administrative, supervisory, educational, and technical support to the _____ County Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors in carrying out the District's program in conformance with the purpose of the District as defined in the Indiana District Law (IC 14-32) This professional position requires skills and experience in program development and administration, communications and financial management. The position may also require supervision of other District employees. The incumbent must also possess technical knowledge and/or work experience in agriculture and urban natural resources management.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. **Program Development/Management/Administration:**
 - a. Understands the purpose, powers, programs, and responsibilities of the District.
 - b. Seeks information and keeps Supervisors informed about local, state and federal regulations, laws, programs and/or activities that may impact the District.
 - c. Assists in coordinating District programs with the programs and activities of personnel from NRCS, ISDA, IDNR, CES, FSA and other agencies involved in the conservation of soil, water and related natural resources.
 - d. Works with the District Finance Committee to draft an annual program budget.
 - e. Prepares grant applications and other funding proposals as opportunities arise to enhance the District's program and/or accelerate the application of best management practices and technologies to improve soil and water quality and related natural resources in the county.
 - f. Serves as the day-to-day manager/administrator for all conservation program grants received.
 - g. Assists the District chairperson in planning and conducting monthly board meetings.
 - h. Assists the Supervisors in planning and conducting the District's Annual Meeting.
 - i. Assists the Supervisors in developing their 3-5 year business plan, annual plan of action and publishing a report on the District's mission, priority resource concerns, goals, planned actions and accomplishments.
 - j. Assists District Supervisors in developing closer working relationships with local units of government as well as local, state and federal elected officials.
 - k. At the request of the Supervisors the incumbent may be required to supervise other District employees; prepare and update job descriptions, conducts evaluations, and recommend needed training, disciplinary action, and recognition of employee efforts.

- l. Assures that all funds are received and disbursed according to guidelines in the District Operations Manual and as per instructions from ISDA-Division of Soil Conservation and/or the Indiana State Board of Accounts.
- m. Assures that a monthly written financial report is prepared for the Supervisors' review and approval. The report includes beginning and ending balances of all accounts, all receipts and disbursements, claims for approval, and status of all investments.
- n. Responds to telephone calls, emails and walk-in requests for assistance and/or directs the requests to the appropriate SWCD, NRCS, ISDA or DNR personnel for assistance.
- o. Assures the inventory of office supplies and publications is sufficient to allow operations to continue efficiently and cost-effectively.
- p. Performs other duties as requested by the District Supervisors.

SUPERVISION: This position is under the supervision of the district supervisors. This position does not supervise other employees.

CIVIL RIGHTS REQUIREMENTS:

Each employee has the right to work in a professional environment that promotes equal opportunities and prohibits sexual harassment and harassment based on race, color, creed, religion, sex, national origin, age, sexual orientation or gender identity, and physical or mental disability, hereinafter referred to as protected status or protected class.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW: Performance of this position will be reviewed annually by the District Supervisors and the employee.

Signature _____

Date _____

copies to:
Employee
Personnel file

Exhibit 8.5 - Sample Technical Position Description

TITLE: District Technician

INTRODUCTION: This position provides technical assistance under policies established by the _____ Soil and Water Conservation District.

DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES:

- 1 Provides technical and engineering assistance to district cooperators.
- 2. Provides technical information for district policy.
- 3. Develops and maintains resource inventories.
- 4. Assists with report writing and conservation plan development.
- 5. Prepares and presents conservation programs as part of public outreach.
- 6. Coordinates the district equipment rental program.
- 7. Maintains personal contact with district cooperators.

8. Maintain valid state driver's license.
9. All duties and actions taken by the incumbent of this position while on official duty will be performed in a safe and healthful manner and will be of a nature to reflect favorably on the _____ Soil and Water Conservation District.

SUPERVISION: This position is under the supervision of the district supervisors. This position does not supervise other employees.

CIVIL RIGHTS REQUIREMENTS:

Each employee has the right to work in a professional environment that promotes equal opportunities and prohibits sexual harassment and harassment based on race, color, creed, religion, sex, national origin, age, sexual orientation or gender identity, and physical or mental disability, hereinafter referred to as protected status or protected class.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW: Performance of this position will be reviewed annually by the District Supervisors and the employee.

Signature _____

Date _____

copies to:

Employee

Personnel file

Exhibit 8.6 - Simple Announcement

APPLICATIONS ARE NOW BEING ACCEPTED for a **(position title)** at the **(County)** Soil and Water Conservation District in **(location)**. Duties include **(insert a brief position description)**. Applications are available from the **(County)** SWCD, **(address)**, or phone (). Applications will be accepted until **(date)**.

The (County) SWCD is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Exhibit 8.7 - Detailed Announcement (Technical)

Vacancy Announcement

Position Title: Conservation Technician (permanent full-time)

Location:

Contact: ,Office Administrator

(Address)

Job Description: This position involves providing technical assistance to landowners and operators in (County), as it relates to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Incumbent works in-office and in the field on the promotion, documentation, contracting, installation and maintenance of conservation practices of the CRP. Assists other field office staff with surveys and layout of conservation practices, and performs status reviews and follow up with landowners on CRP contract sites. Reduces field notes and

prepares data sheets and other documents, primarily for the Continuous CRP. Assists district in preparing CRP documents for state cost-share programs (CREP, LARE). The successful candidate will assist with engineering surveys, designs, seeding plans and practice checkout for the various conservation practices. These practices include grassed waterways, shallow water areas for wildlife, windbreaks, grass filter strips, riparian forest buffers and others. One-on-one assistance will be provided to landowners to ensure that procedures are followed to receive cost-share funds and that practice construction meets specified standards.

Required Education: High School Graduation is required.

Wage: Commensurate with experience (not less than \$ /hour)

Job Qualifications and Experience: Meet educational requirement and provide evidence of ability to assist with fieldwork. A valid driver's license is also required.

Hours: Variable, approx. 30 hours per week.

Number of openings: One (1)

Method of application: Submit resume and application to the contact person above by (date)

The (County) SWCD is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Exhibit 8.8 – Sample Interview Questions

- Please explain your familiarity with Soil and Water Conservation District programs.
- What education and work experience have you had, and how would it relate to this position?
- Have you had any jobs where you have had to answer questions for people who might be angry or upset and how did you handle such situations?
- Have you ever had to decide what work should be done first?
- How would you go about setting priorities if you have five jobs that people wanted finished immediately?
- Have you had any experience in paying bills and keeping budget records? Describe.
- Tell us about current jobs or past jobs that qualified you for this job, and describe the level of responsibility, duties, etc.
- Explain to us how you have worked independently in the past?
- Share experiences you have had working in a team atmosphere.
- Have you had any experience speaking before groups? Share an experience.
- Share your writing samples with us.
- Are you aware this position may occasionally involve working hours other than normal standard work week?
- How does this job fit in with your long-range career goals?
- If you were selected to fill this position, how soon could you begin work?
- Is there anything you would like to tell us that you think would help us make a decision on employment?

- Do you have any other questions about the job?

Exhibit 8.9 – Applicant Letter (Hire/Not Hire)

(SWCD letterhead)

Dear _____ :

I am pleased that you have accepted the position of **District Clerk** with the () Soil and Water Conservation District offered to you on **(date)**. Your appointment is effective **(date)** at a rate of **(\$)** per hour, based on availability of funds designated for this purpose. Your position will serve a probationary period of **90 days**. Please report to work at () **Soil and Water Conservation District located at** _____ . The necessary documents will be completed regarding your appointment. We will discuss with you The Benefits Package attached and any concerns you may have in regard to your employment with the district. We look forward to having you as part of our staff.

Sincerely,

_____, Chair

() Soil and Water Conservation District

cc: District Conservationist

Personnel file

The SWCD is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Not Hire Letter

(SWCD letterhead)

Dear _____ :

Thank you for applying for the District **Manager** position with the () Soil and Water Conservation District. We had many qualified applicants making the decision difficult. The position has been offered to and accepted by another applicant. We hope that you will continue to show an interest in future conservation opportunities. Best wishes in your employment search.

Sincerely,

_____, Chair

() Soil and Water Conservation District

The () SWCD is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Exhibit 8.10 – Checklist for Evaluation

1. The designated evaluation team is assembled.
2. Performing the evaluation:
 - Review job description and performance standards.
 - Arrange a time and place for the evaluation.
 - Create a friendly, comfortable atmosphere.

- Ask the employee to discuss their responsibilities.
- Discuss each job duty in detail, giving necessary praise and admonition.
- Develop jointly, the next year's performance standards.
- Develop jointly, plans for improvement.
 - a) Allow the employee to respond to writing.
- Document the results of the evaluation and place a copy in employee's file.

Exhibit 8.11 – Exit Interview Form

Employee Name:

Date of Employment:

Date of Separation:

To help us improve the quality of the district's services and to improve employee job satisfaction and working condition, we would like you to complete this questionnaire. Your candid remarks are vital. Responses will be shared only with the Supervisors unless you request otherwise.

- Do you have another job?
- Why did you decide to seek other employment?
- Would you consider reemployment with the district?
- Were you given complete and accurate information regarding job duties prior to your acceptance of your job with this district?
- Were you provided the necessary orientation, training and tools to successfully carry out your job duties here?
- Do you feel supervision given you was effective and impartial?
- What did you find to be most enjoyable about your job?
- What did you like the least or find most frustrating about your job?
- What changes would have made your job more desirable?
- Were your working conditions satisfactory?
- Additional comments about the field office or about the district in general:
- Would you like a copy of this given to anyone?

Employee Signature
Supervisor Signature

Date
Date