

Chapter 7: Office Operations and Staff Requirements

Sec. 1 Office Management

It is important that the entire office staff operate as a team, with a seamless appearance to the customer. Staff members should communicate with each other on a regular basis to make sure all are up to date on current and upcoming activities. All conservation partnership staff members should treat each other in a professional manner and with respect. All employees are critical to the success of the Conservation Partnership.

Each office may operate slightly different with local personnel determining the best method of office communications and coordination for their particular situation. No one partner or agency should completely control all aspects of office operations. Each individual, regardless of agency, should work hard to not disrupt or cause conflict within the office, and each must respect and follow the policies of the partner agencies.

Sec. 2 Filing System

A well organized filing system is critical to successful office operations. It is important that key documents and records be filed in a well organized manner, so that written information can be retrieved quickly when needed at a later date. The following are suggested filing categories and what might be filed under each category:

1. Activities (or projects)

- a. Conservation Farmer Award
- b. Master Farm Conservation Award
- c. Conservation Education Award
- d. Soil & Water Stewardship Week
- e. River Friendly Farmer Program
- f. Newsletter
- g. Tours and Field Days
- h. Youth Programs
- i. Schools
- j. Contests (poster, speech, etc.)
- k. Envirothon
- l. Others

2. Annual Reports

- a. Current Report
- b. Past Years' Reports

3. Catalogs

- a. NACD
- b. Others

4. Correspondence

- a. State Soil Conservation Board
- b. ISDA, Div. of Soil Conservation
- c. USDA/NRCS
- d. IASWCD
- e. NACD
- f. IDNR
- g. IDEM
- f. Others

5. Indiana District Employee Association (IDEA)

6. District Organizational Records

7. District Policies

- a. Employee Job Descriptions
- b. Employee Evaluations
- c. Operational Procedures/Guidance

8. District Planning

- a. Business or Long-range Plan
- b. Annual Plans

9. Equipment (Office or Field)

- a. District Owned
- b. Contracted

10. Financial Reports

- a. Current
- b. Past
- c. County Appropriations
- d. Contributions
- e. Grants

11. Agreements/Memorandums of Understanding

- a. USDA
- b. NRCS
- c. Purdue Cooperative Extension Service
- d. ISDA
- e. IDNR
- f. IDEM
- g. County Drainage Board
- h. Others

12. Landfill Inspections

13. Laws (SWCD Program-related)

- a. Indiana District Act (IC 14-32)
- b. Conservancy District Act
- c. Classified Filter Strip Act (HEA 1604)
- d. Small Watershed Act (PL-566)
- e. Rule 5 (327 IAC 15-5)
- f. Others

15. Minutes

- a. SWCD Board Minutes
- b. SWCD Annual Meetings

16. Supervisor Records

17. Clean Water Indiana Program

- a. CWI \$10,000 Appropriations
- b. CWI Special Grants Projects

18. EPA 319 Nonpoint Source Projects

19 Lake and River Enhancement

20 Stormwater/Sediment Control (Rule 5, MS4, etc.)

21. Other files needed to fit local demand may be inserted/added, such as non-LARE watershed projects, USDA projects (e.g., EQIP), foundation or corporate funded projects, other grant-funded projects.

Sec. 3 General Records Retention

(Please also see Chapter 6, Section 7 for financial record retention information.)

As subdivisions of state government, SWCDs must maintain records of their activities because; (a) records have historical value (clippings, etc.), (b) serve as evidence in legal actions (cooperative agreements, easements, etc.), (c) serve as a basis for making future decisions (cooperator plans, board minutes, policies, etc.), and (d) records, such as minutes, financial, and annual reports, are required to be retained by law.

General Statutory Requirements

The following statutes control the preservation and destruction of all public records (as detailed in IC 5-15-5, Indiana State Archives, and IC 5-15-6, Local Government Records Law):

1. These statutes must be carefully observed by all public officials. **Before any public records can be destroyed, the Indiana State Archives must give permission in writing for such destruction. County Records Commissions have been established in each county to make these determinations under the authority of the Indiana State Archives. More details on records retention is contained in chapter 6, section 7 as well as the Uniform Accounting Guide beginning on page 12-5.**

2. The term “public records” means any written or printed book, paper, document or map in or on which any entry has been made or is required to be made by law or which an officer or employee has received for filing.

3. Records may be destroyed, but only after approval by the Indiana State Archives, subject to the following conditions and limitations:

* No records shall be destroyed until a period of at least three years shall have elapsed from the time when they were originally filed.

* No records shall be destroyed within a period of three years if the law provides that they shall be kept for a longer period of time or if the law prohibits their destruction.

* No financial records or record relating thereto shall be destroyed until the audit of such records by the State Board of Accounts has been completed, report filed, and any exceptions set out in such report satisfied.

* State records having historical value shall be transferred to the Indiana State Archives.

* A copy of any order to destroy local records shall be delivered to the Director, Indiana State Archives, and shall be made available for 60 days to any active historical society of the county or the Indiana State Archives, subject to the provisions in IC 5-15-7.

The above general statutory requirements are quoted from “Guide to Preservation and Destruction of Local Government Public Records,” prepared by the Indiana State Archives for permission to dispose of records from their files. In the absence of an official ruling, it is generally felt that, since district boundaries are the same as county boundaries and the records of districts are more closely related to the county than to the state, it is more logical that districts apply to the County Commission of Local Government Public Records rather than the State Archives.

“Records” are classified as: administrative, legal, fiscal, and research (historical). Most district records are fiscal, although some are administrative and some could be classed as both fiscal and administrative. Minutes, topographic maps, and soil or other descriptive surveys are examples of historical records that should never be destroyed.

Certain materials are regarded by the Indiana State Archives as being “non-record.” Examples would be catalogs, duplicate files (e.g., extra photo copies, second carbons), items for distribution, and books or published materials. Disposal of these types of materials is at the discretion of the office concerned. The conditions and limitations quoted earlier leave some room for question in regard to certain records. Guidelines for the disposal of specific records known to be in SWCD files are set forth below. All records must have been audited before permission can be given for their disposal.

Employee Service Records Form	99A	Permanent
Employee Earnings Records Form	99B	Permanent
Financial/Disbursement Records	(Approved form)	Permanent

Memoranda of Understanding		Permanent
Meeting Minutes		Permanent
Canceled Checks		10 years
Carbon Copies of Checks		6 years
Contracts		10 years after completion
Payroll Schedules and Vouchers	Form 99	6 years
Mileage Claims	Form 101	6 years
General Receipts (carbon)	Form 352	6 years
General Claims	Form 354	6 years
Accounts Payable Vouchers	Form 17	6 years
Annual Financial Reports (Approved form)		6 yrs. or until admin. value ends
Bank Statements		6 years
Cooperator Agreements		6 years after termination

Sec. 4 Staff Meetings

It is important for local office staff to communicate on a regular basis. Routine staff meetings are a good way to insure everyone is informed about what is happening in each agency and among the individual employees. Staff meetings should be scheduled in advance. It is a good idea to set a regular meeting time each week or every other week, so each staff member knows to hold that time open. It is important that all local office staff participate.

Sec. 5 Dealing with the General Public

(Please also see Chapter 13 – Marketing and Public Relations)

The quality of district office service perceived by the public will greatly influence the extent of clientele participation in district programs. It may also have an impact on how the district is thought of within the community, which could affect future funding. Thus, all district office personnel should respond to public contacts—whether by phone, by letter, or in person—with as much promptness and courtesy as possible. Here are a few suggestions on how to provide this type of service.

Greeting Office Visitors

- Greet visitors with a friendly smile, and look them in the eyes
- Acknowledge visitor presence promptly. If talking on the telephone, excuse yourself from the phone call briefly, greet the visitor, and tell them you will be with them shortly. If helping another office visitor, use the same procedure.
- Always use a pleasant tone of voice. Even if the visitor is critical, emotional, or impolite, don't reflect the same behavior. Don't argue. Don't contradict. Do be tactful.
- Be a good listener and show genuine interest in visitor problems. Courtesy shows in the tone of voice, body position, and choice of words.
- Learn the names of those who visit the office regularly. Every person feels important when called by name. Introduce a visitor by name when referred to any other staff member. Use the name when talking with them. Keep an accurate record (by name and by date) of those who telephone or visit the office.
- Communication within the office is as important as communicating with customers. Know the schedules of the other staff members, even if this means asking them as they leave the office. It is not necessary to tell a visitor or caller the specific location of an employee who is out of the office, but one should convey when the absent staff member is expected to return.
- If all staff will be out of the office, leave a note on the door telling when someone will return or where someone can be contacted. Leave notepaper and a pencil to receive messages. A dry erase board and pens work well for this too.

General Telephone Etiquette:

Project a pleasant telephone personality. The safe rule is - treat telephone callers as if they were present. Have a warm and pleasant voice; get a "glad to hear from you" ring into it. The voice and the manner reflect an interest in the caller and a willingness to help.

- Speak clearly and distinctly.
- Always answer promptly, preferably on the first ring. Adopt a standard greeting which may vary from one district to another.
- When the call is for another person in the office, ask the caller to wait a moment, then promptly transfer the call to the other person or call the other person to the telephone. In case of a delay, return to the telephone promptly to advise the caller; offer to have the call returned if convenient.
- When the person called is not available, ask if someone else may take the call. If not, offer to take a message or have the call returned.
- When the conversation is finished, hang up gently.
- *Keep local personal calls placed or received to a minimum.*
- *Do not charge long distance personal calls to the office telephone.*

Preparing Written Correspondence

Any written information leaving or being sent from the office is a reflection of that office. It is important for letters to be professional. Accumulate a file of reference aids, including a manual on grammar, manuals used for certain computer programs, and a dictionary. Whenever in doubt, check! Keep a file of sample letters that the district uses on a recurring basis. Good grammar and appearance are important aspects of any correspondence.

A good letter has a pleasant tone and concisely provides the needed information. A good guide is to imagine yourself as the addressee, and consider whether or not you would have a question. Make the sentences and paragraphs short, but don't overdo it to the point that your letter sounds choppy. Don't delay in getting to the point either; just answer what was asked and give the information necessary.

Most of the correspondence from offices today is completed on the computer. To save time and make work easier, you can create style sheets, glossaries, and other shortcuts that can be very helpful. With glossaries, you can store pieces of text that you use frequently. Become proficient with your word processing program, and make the computer work for you.

Always proofread and utilize the spell-check program. Take advantage of mail-merge when doing several letters that are the same.

Sec. 6 SWCD Policy Manual

The SWCD should establish a policy manual as a place to maintain standard policies established by the SWCD board. A manual of this type will make it easy for existing and new staff to determine what the SWCD board's position is on a particular issue. The Policy Manual must be maintained current for it to be useful and effective. Policies established by the SWCD board during their monthly meeting should be added shortly after the meeting by the SWCD staff member in charge of its maintenance. These policies should be reviewed periodically for accuracy and continued relevance.

It is important to realize that the SWCD Policy Manual may not supersede or contradict established County or State policies or laws. The SWCD Policy Manual should be considered as a supplement to these to track policies and issues pertinent to district operations that are not covered by these other sources.

Sample SWCD policies are available on ISDA's Conservation Link site.

As well, the Indiana State Board of Accounts has a list of suggested policies in Chapter One of the Special Districts Manual: [https://www.in.gov/sboa/files/Special Districts Manual Chapter 1 \(2017\).pdf](https://www.in.gov/sboa/files/Special%20Districts%20Manual%20Chapter%201%20(2017).pdf).

Sec. 7 Timeline of Required Responsibilities

An SWCD office has a number of both statutory as well as historic deadlines to follow. A list of the basics is included; your SWCD may have additional items to add to the list or may need to adjust items. It

is recommended that each office establish their own list of deadlines and post it in a conspicuous and convenient location to act as a frequent reminder for forthcoming deadlines. The office list should be consulted during the preparation of agendas for both staff and monthly SWCD board meetings; adding items to the agenda as appropriate based on upcoming deadlines and activities.

- January
 - Meet with Local agencies to coordinate year's end conservation activities and events
 - SWCD Annual Meetings in first quarter of the year
 - Employee Performance Appraisals (Annual)
- February
 - SWCD Annual Meetings in first quarter of the year
- March
 - SWCD Annual Meetings in first quarter of the year
- April
- May
 - Develop and use SWCD Leveraging Form with local officials
- June
 - River Friendly Farmer
 - Evaluation of district employees
 - Evaluation of district operations and programs
 - Conservation Contest Deadline
- July
 - Conservation Farmer of the Year
 - Master Farm Conservationist
 - Development of annual budget
- August
 - Submission of employee salaries to county
- September
 - Submission of entire budget to county
- October
 - Election Committee Appointment
- November
 - 1st Appointed Supervisor name(s) to SSCB
 - 1st Election Committee members names to SSCB
- December
 - 1st Elected nominees names submitted to SSCB
 - SWCD Review and up-date of Business Plan (on- going)
 - Complete next year's Annual Plan