

CHAPTER XIV: TRAINING AND BOARD DEVELOPMENT

PART I: TRAINING

Section I: Director Training Certification Program

In December of 2008, the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) State Council approved a resolution to establish a certification program with training requirements for new and existing Conservation District board members and staff using guidelines developed and sponsored by MACD and the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) within 12 months of initial service. The following is a copy of the approved resolution:

Michigan Association of Conservation Districts

Resolution 1-2008

Resolution to establish a certification program, with training requirements for new and existing Conservation District board members and staff

Whereas, the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts is an organized body representing the 79 Conservation Districts representing 83 counties in Michigan, and

Whereas, each Conservation District belongs to the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD), and

Whereas, the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) is guided by a number of basic principles as follows:

1. Conservation Districts serve their communities as "Gateways" to Natural Resources Management. Districts provide linkages between land managers and conservation service providers. Districts also continuously scan the needs of their local communities; work in partnership with others to develop local priorities, and develop action plans to solve natural resource problems.
2. Effective support for all 79 Conservation Districts is necessary - in government, industry, labor and commerce; in farm, civic and conservation organizations; among educators, publishers and the clergy; and in all other segments of American society.
3. We supply reliable information about the purposes and activities of Conservation Districts to the press, radio, and television; to national, state and local legislative bodies; and to all responsible organizations, agencies and leaders concerned with these purposes and activities.
4. We work closely with and assist public agencies concerned with the conservation, use and development of renewable natural resources to provide more effective service to the people of Michigan.
5. We seek assistance for conservation work that is in the public interest and which landowners and land users cannot perform adequately with their own capabilities or authorities. We encourage all people to participate in programs of Conservation Districts.

Whereas each Conservation District is governed by a group of five publicly elected or appointed persons and employs personnel to represent each District in matters affecting all citizens.

Therefore be it resolved that newly elected or appointed directors and newly hired District staff participate in strongly recommended training, both leadership and Conservation District business management, using guidelines developed and sponsored by MACD and the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) within 12 months of initial service.

Therefore be it further resolved that existing Conservation District directors and staff participate in these trainings sponsored by MACD and MDA biennially with the goal of all board members and staff to receive a Conservation District Training Certification. Districts may have the option of locally tailored training approved by MDA in lieu of training offered by MACD and MDA.

Submitted by Marquette Conservation District
Approved as amended – MACD 2008 General Assembly, December 11, 2008.

While the certification curriculum guidelines are still in development, it is imperative that District Directors and staff take advantage of the training opportunities presently available to them. This section will discuss the training responsibilities of the District as well as outline the various partner organizations/agencies that currently provide professional development training and the different venues in which such training is provided. This section will also cover the necessities of ongoing leadership development within a Conservation District Board.

Section II: Identifying Staff Training Needs

It is the District Board's responsibility to provide a newly hired employee with an orientation as outlined in *Chapter V* of this Manual. The District board is also responsible for providing position descriptions for EVERY employee of the District. District Directors must also assist staff in creating individual development plans that suit the unique training needs of the employee.

It is also strongly recommended that District employees must complete a Training Needs Assessment as well as an Employee Development Plan at the beginning of each fiscal year documented in writing and placed in the employee's personnel file.

Training Needs Assessment

A Training Needs Assessment is not the same as the formal employee evaluation. The formal evaluation is intended to determine the work ethic and attitude of the employee, and gauges the knowledge and skills of the employee only as a component in the greater scale of the employee's overall performance in the District.

A Training Needs Assessment, on the other hand, aims to exclusively evaluate the employee's knowledge and skills as a means of determining his/her proficiency in their chosen trade by weighing the criteria found in the table below against the technical requirements outlined in the position's description.

Level	Aptitude	Description
A	Awareness	Employee has a limited knowledge of the tasks required of the position but cannot yet perform tasks to employer satisfaction.
B	Understanding	Employee has knowledge of the basic principles and procedures of the position but can only perform tasks with assistance.
C	Applicable Knowledge	Employee is able to perform the required tasks to satisfaction, but requires moderate supervision.
D	Proficiency	Employee can carry out duties independently with minimal supervision unless unique problems are encountered.
E	Expertise	Employee is skilled and practiced in all areas of the position and possesses authoritative knowledge; and is capable of training others.

This assessment may be conducted by a District supervisor through a variety of means including but not limited to; general day-to-day observations, a personal interview, or administering a performance test.

Employee Development Plan

The purpose of an Employee Development Plan is to use the findings taken from the Training Needs Assessment and create a general timeline from which the employee can be expected to receive the training necessary to meet the position's aptitude standards set by the District. The table below is a suggested model that details District employee professional development standards.

Development Phase	Phase Objectives and Training Requirements	Aptitude Level	Completion Date
Introductory	The employee should understand where his or her specialty fits into the total District program and be able to use technical guides, handbooks, manuals, and bulletins and know the basic requirements of his or her position. The employee should receive a basic orientation, introductory technical training, and on-the-job training administered by District supervisors and Directors.	B	Six Months from Start Date
Developmental	The employee should be able to perform the job for his or her aptitude score unless special problems are encountered. Only general verification of work should be required by the supervisor. The employee should receive intensive on-the-job training and slightly more advanced formal technical training.	C	Six Months - Three Years
Advanced	The employee should possess advanced skills that are required in the employee's position to be performed independently without supervision that meets all District expectations. The District should provide training and experiences needed for the employee to increase competency specific to their particular position.	D	Three Years - Six Years
Expert	The employee should have exceptional institutional knowledge of the District, a proficient understanding of the interconnected network of District partner organizations and agencies, and highly specialized skills beyond those normally required of the position. The employee should accumulate advanced formal training relating to specific job assignments that may include certification or higher-learning education.	E	Ten Years

Whenever possible, training should be accomplished through self-development and on-the-job training. Self-development is the primary method of training and should be considered and encouraged first. Training objectives can be achieved through such self-development activities as reading, home study, independent research, and networking with District partner professionals.

On-the-job training should be considered if the training objectives cannot be achieved through employee self-development. The following is a list of recommended procedures by which District supervisors may administer on-the-job training to their employees. District supervisors must remember to:

- Set clear training objectives.
- Instruct, explain, demonstrate, and evaluate employee duties and responsibilities. The instruction process requires two-way communication and an effort on the part of trainer and trainee.
- Give ongoing feedback on employee progress and should specify how to reach the required level of proficiency.

In addition to employee self-development and on-the-job training, District employees may find it necessary to engage in formal training designed to develop advanced specialized skills. The formal training should come from a variety of public and private sources in order for Conservation District employees to develop a broad perspective. In addition to the MACD-sponsored training as previously discussed in this section, other sources for training available to District employees.

Section III: Training Opportunities Available to Districts

MACD-Sponsored Training

The Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) in partnership with the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), Michigan Department of Natural Resources, (MDNR), Michigan State University Extension (MSUE), Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), and the Michigan Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE) provides professional development training for Conservation District Directors and staff. In the past, these trainings have typically been conducted once in the summer through the MACD Annual Summer Conference, once in the winter through the MACD Annual Winter Convention, at regional meetings, and in “New Directors” training, when offered.

Training session topics at these events vary from year to year based on: feedback from previous session participants, the changing nature of District staff, and Director training needs. While the specific training topics are subject to change yearly, MACD consistently offers professional development courses focused in District Leadership/Board Development, Administrative Skills, and Technical training for employees performing grant work.

Training offered through MACD as previously discussed in this section must be used to the fullest extent possible. District Directors should verify that all staff training is consistent with the requirements of each position’s description. While some MACD-sponsored training may apply to all District staff and Directors, most training opportunities will be position-specific.

For more information concerning the training offered through MACD, please refer to the MACD website at www.macd.org.

AgLearn Through NRCS

The USDA AgLearn system is an internet-based training tool used by NRCS to collect and review training needs for NRCS and Conservation District employees. The AgLearn system includes Michigan in-state training course modules and has an extensive library of available online courses. The system also includes a training needs inventory system which NRCS utilizes to determine which educational courses to provide during a given fiscal year. Each spring, NRCS staff and Conservation District employees as partners, are asked to review personnel training needs and submit training requests so that course needs across the state can be determined and scheduled.

Conservation Districts interested in participating in NRCS courses need to review their training needs with their District Conservationist and submit their approved training requests to the Learning Plan in AgLearn. The process is as follows:

1. Review the course catalog and course descriptions online at: www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/course_catalog.html and choose the courses best suited to the District's training needs.
 - a. **NOTE:** Training needs are identified by completing the Training Needs Assessment and Employee Development Plans at the beginning of each fiscal year as discussed earlier in this Chapter.
2. Contact your District Conservationist to discuss all of the District's the training needs for approval.
3. If you have not already done so, obtain a Level 2 eAuthorization account through your District Conservationist. (Refer to the section of this manual entitled "Technology Information for Conservation Districts)
4. Login to AgLearn by visiting <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov>
5. Select your District Conservationist as the supervisor in your AgLearn Profile Summary. (This selection is a requirement in order to request enrollment and receive approval to take Michigan courses once sessions are scheduled in AgLearn)
6. Add desired courses in AgLearn. For instructions on how to complete this step, contact your District Conservationist.

In addition to AgLearn, NRCS also provides position-specific training curriculum, certification expectations, and employee development plans for certain Conservation District positions. Information may be found by visiting <http://www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/training.html>.

Michigan Nonprofit Association

The Michigan Nonprofit Association offers a wide range of training events statewide throughout the year, many of which Districts could find practical. These training events focus on such pertinent topics as: project management, fundraising, volunteer management, advocacy development, media relations, grant-seeking, board development, and accounting software. Districts interested in taking advantage of these formal professional development opportunities may find out more by visiting <http://www.mnaonline.org/conferences.asp>.

PART II: BOARD DEVELOPMENT

Section I: General Overview

Ongoing development activities should be part of the plan for every board and for every director. It is important to attend state and national conferences, take part in directors' workshops, and keep up with pertinent literature. But that is not enough. It is also essential that the Board make the time to evaluate - on a regular basis - how it is working, both as a team and as individual directors. Failure to take seriously the mission of the District will result in the natural resources as well as constituents of the District not receiving the full benefit and access to the many technical and financial resources available today as well as those that may become available in the future. *Appendix G* contains an assessment tool to test your Board's effectiveness.

Appendix G contains a copy of "A Code of Ethics for Board Members" and a set of additional evaluations that will assist in testing a board's effectiveness and the effectiveness of a Director. These materials were developed by the Cain Consulting Group. Learn and follow the code. Make several copies of both the individual and group evaluations so that they can be reviewed as a group on a regular basis. Make it a routine part of the board function.

Contact the Michigan Department of Agriculture's Environmental Stewardship Division or the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) for more information on Board development opportunities.

Section II: Associate Directors

An important component of realizing a long-term vision for the District is the continual recruitment of new District Board members. Anyone who the Board feels may be a good candidate for running for a Director's position should be invited to attend District Board meetings in advance of the election. By doing this, the District Board has the opportunity to familiarize the prospective candidate with the District and its governing process. These prospective Board members are referred to as Associate Directors, and their informal inclusion in Board meetings provides a unique "on the job training" that is designed to prepare them for their term if elected.

Before an individual can become an Associate Director, the District Board must first identify quality candidates through a thorough recruitment process. 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 one's inner circle that possess the specialized knowledge, skill, abilities, and contacts which the Board needs to take the District program to the next level of effectiveness. Local organizations that represent minorities and women should be invited to recommend a candidate based on the District's needs.

Local Boards 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

Analyzing the Needs of the District

Before it begins recruiting District board members, the board should first identify what the human resources needs are of the District by following the guidelines below. This is an opportunity for the board to expand the District's membership and to find people that can help the District expand their program.

1. List the major programs and activities of the District. This will help in identifying individuals in the community who have demonstrated - either in their personal lives and/or their careers - a similar interest in what the District wishes to achieve.
2. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the District. By understanding what the District excels at, and what areas the District could improve upon, Directors will be better able to recognize individuals who possess the knowledge, skills, and experience to take on the leadership role of a Director.
3. Identify the programs and activities that the District would like to accomplish but - due to lack of resources, human or other - has been unable to accomplish. By doing so, the Board will gain a better understanding for which key community leaders are best suited to fill these voids through their influence and networking opportunities.
4. List the skills, abilities, knowledge, and experience provided by each board member. This will provide a reference for what qualities future board members should possess and what unique qualifications would be necessary in developing greater board diversity.

Identifying Qualities and Qualifications of a District Board Member

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 for District board members would include:

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

In addition to these, other qualifications to look for could include:

- Individuals who can devote adequate time to the job. Some Districts have a written policy requesting that the board member resign if Director absenteeism is determined to be a problem. (*Refer to Appendix D for an Example Policy on Board Member absenteeism.*)
- 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.

Recruitment Strategies and Materials

Once the District has identified its needs, the qualities it is looking for in good District board members, and has developed a recruitment prospectus and job description, it is time to develop its recruitment strategy. Whether the District has a resignation/retirement, or an election, the following may be helpful in your recruiting efforts.

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

Recruitment Prospectus

In order to get people interested in becoming involved with a 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
- 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
- Past major accomplishments of the District

Sample Strategies

Assemble a Board Development Team: An important first strategy would be to form a board development team charged with responsibility to examine 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.

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 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.

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.

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 information brochure.

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. Keep an attendance list at events to save the names and addresses of people who come.

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.