

Effective Communication with Staff

District board members are responsible for employing and managing staff. Effective communication is essential to the running of a conservation district and for employee retention.

Set Expectations Early

Whenever an employee is hired, standards should be set early. It's also important to have at least one board member available for questions and office training. This does not have to be the board chair. The treasurer should also meet one on one with any staff responsible for paying bills, managing financial software, preparing treasurer's reports, and other financial responsibilities.

Each employee should:

- Have a defined job description
- A job description for each employee should be kept on file at the district with other relevant records.
- At a minimum this description should include:
 - Hourly wage
 - Office hours
 - Benefits
 - Overtime or compensation time expectations
 - Daily work expectations
 - All basic job duties
- Know where the policy and procedures handbook is located
 - The policy and procedures handbook is a legally binding document
 - This handbook should include:
 - All PTO guidelines including holidays
 - All compensation or overtime requests
 - Chain of command
 - All office policies including equipment use, dress code, passwords, etc.
- Be aware of reporting requirements including:
 - Reporting deadlines for Division of Conservation, Department of Local Government, and any other agencies.
 - Where do reports need to be submitted?
 - What needs to be included in reports?
 - What fiscal reports need to be submitted and when?
 - Where can old reports be found for reference?

Board Meeting Preparations

Every district structures their board meetings differently. It's important that the board reviews board meeting expectations. These expectations are fluid as board meetings will change throughout the year. The Division of Conservation provides a calendar with important dates, but that calendar doesn't include due dates for other agencies or taxes.

10 Minute Supervisor Training

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At the minimum board meetings should have:

- An agenda
- A copy of the most recent meeting's minutes
- A treasurer's report
- Bank statements for all accounts
- Timesheets for all employees
- Any correspondence
- Copies of any reports that are due or have been submitted

District staff are typically responsible for setting up materials for board meetings, but it should be a collaborative effort. For example, does your board have a shared Google Drive or other service where documents need to be uploaded online? Does the board want a running budget comparison every meeting? The board should be in active communication with staff when planning board meetings.

Maintaining Healthy Communication

Conservation district staff and board members will change over time as will how conservation districts run. It's important to evaluate the best way to communicate. Attached to this 10 Minute Training is a communication types assessment. It's recommended that the board members and the employees take the assessment. Assessments like this are a fun tool that can be used to strengthen communication between the board and employees.

Evaluation Time

Employees should be evaluated at least once a year. During this time, the board should reflect on strengths and areas for improvement. Areas for improvement should be constructive and not just a critique. People are resistant to criticism, even when constructive. It's important to offer or work out solutions. For example, if there is a question or concern about the budget a constructive conversation could look like:

Board Member – Hi Jane, I've noticed at the last few board meetings we haven't received an itemized bills to be paid summary, would it be possible to include that in the treasurer's report moving forward?

Jane (employee) – I didn't realize that was something that should be included, I will update my records and make sure to include that moving on.

The critique is that Jane wasn't including a report the board needed, but instead of approaching the situation as a negative, the board member simply communicated needing that report in the future. Clear and concise directions with a measurable outcome, in this case including a bills to be paid summary, is necessary to keep conservation districts running. If the employee receives directives from the board and doesn't follow through, it can be time to sit down and reevaluate the roles and expectations. Having directives and goals written down for both employees and board members to track can be a great tool in maintaining good communication.