

10 Minute Supervisor Trainings



October 2025

Conservation District Relevance

Has your district ever thought about how relevant or needed you are in your community? Why are your programs successful (or not)? Is the district having trouble gaining popularity and promoting what you do?

Now the main question is - are these concerns taken into consideration in your yearly planning? We can talk a lot about change and how it is needed. But making those changes is sometimes difficult. Try to use this training as a push toward making those hard, but necessary, changes. Sometimes, change occurs one small step at a time.

WHAT BUSINESS ARE YOU IN?

You are in the business of **people**. That means that everything you do as a conservation district must take into consideration the public and the impacts you can make. Public perception of what you do can be affected by the way your district hires personnel, fills supervisor seats, conducts office operations, and provides programs and services. You serve the taxpayers of Kentucky, and the mentality of the public has changed! The agriculture community is not the only sector you serve. Only when you are meeting the needs of most of your community can you be successful.

What is Conservation Relevancy?

Conservation relevance refers to **the ability of conservation efforts to remain meaningful and effective in the face of societal and environmental changes.**

It's about ensuring that conservation practices are aligned with evolving public values, demographics, and ecological challenges to secure long-term support and success.

What does it mean to be relevant?

Important to the matter at hand

To be needed, useful and appropriate

Up to date

Closely connected

FUNDING STRUGGLES

If you are struggling with funding and can't seem to get your local government's attention, this could be why. They either don't see the need or demand to fund you, or they see that your district is not relevant and impactful enough. Local governments want to see diversity in programs and those you serve. They want to see that you are serving everyone, not just the agriculture sector, and that you can justify what you do. Success = Funds. No matter how much money you have, if you are not using it wisely and promoting yourself positively, chances are there will be no increases. You must be willing to seek new projects to serve your community, as well as other funds to be used for your traditional projects.

BETTER PROMOTION: The single most important thing your district can do!

Though every community is different, you should determine the most effective way to get information out into the public eye. Many local newspapers have lost readers over the years and, in many cases, have proven to be ineffective in sharing information. You should take every opportunity possible to put your district in the spotlight. It may require districts to look "outside of the box" for better ways of communicating.

- In today's world of smart phones, the internet seems to be the best tool. This could take the form of social media, like Facebook or Instagram, or a district web page. This will allow your district to post pictures, articles and information about your district in "real time" without waiting for newspaper publication dates. While Facebook and Instagram are free, a webpage might require a small investment to secure a domain, get it designed, and get training on how to run and edit it. Posting online will also allow you to make information such as applications readily available. More importantly, this information can be shared very quickly among users. There must be a designated person to update information and a designated schedule for posting so that it doesn't become outdated or irrelevant.
- Partnerships! Get involved with other entities and work together on projects. Not only does this get you a new set of abilities and ideas, it also gets your district in front of new people.
- Group text messaging has proven to be very effective. You will, however, have to build a database of phone numbers. Mass e-mail is also useful but requires a database of addresses. Recipients may not check e-mail often, creating a lag in information.
- Newsletters are great but are often expensive to publish or mail.
- The use of local billboards, TV, radio and other networks is very effective.

What influences relevancy?

- Conservation importance in your community
- Sustainability and Longevity
- Public perception
- Political perception of Conservation
- Professionalism of the Board and staff
- District Support

The understanding that Conservation Districts can be dissolved if enough of the public wants them to be.

PLANNING

Each year, your district is required to create a plan of work. This is a very important tool in accomplishing your short-term and long-term goals and should not be haphazardly completed. Take time to work together and set goals and take steps to accomplish them.

Incorporate NEW partnerships: This will help you to better promote your district. For example: work with local park services, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, boy scouts, or any other group you have not worked with in the past. Host a field day, participate in community events, plant a tree in the park, etc. Your district should be constantly working on new ways to improve the relationship with schools and NOT walking away because it's not going so well. Partnerships can be mutually beneficial and will help with overall promotion of your district.

Develop and implement NEW programs: Problem = Solution Identify community issues then plan for how you are going to improve or solve that program with different programs. Do you need more urban programs? Local cost share? Better conservation education? Identify where your district needs improvement and plan to implement.

WHERE TO START

Talk very openly about each of the topics discussed in this training and take suggestions for improvements (no matter how small) that your county can make to move forward. Poll the community about what they need and then take the time to plan to meet those needs. Look outside of your county for new ideas. Consult other districts, your field representative or take the time to research the web and look at other states. We can all learn from and help each other.

There will be more talk about relevancy in trainings and meetings throughout the year, and we encourage you to begin the conversation of change in your district.

Are all the district supervisors On Board or just “On a Board”

Is your district good at these things?

- Working as a team
- Showing up outside of meetings
- Accepting different opinions
- Willing to put in the work required
- Energetic about making decisions
- Willing to make things happen

If you answered “No” then maybe your district needs to make some changes.



You can talk and plan all day but until we put that plan in action, change will not occur.