10 Minute Supervisor Trainings

March 2022

Hiring and Training New District Personnel

Your employees are the FACE of your conservation district. They are the first people who meet and greet the public, go into schools, make farm visits and keep your office running. Your employees are one of the most essential parts of a conservation district. In order to be successful, each district board needs to ensure that the people that they employ are good at what they do. This requires good communication, honest conversations and clear expectations from the board of supervisors. In this training we will talk about how to hire a good employee and make them successful.

When it is time to hire an employee where do you begin?
The essential first step is for the board to thoroughly discuss what responsibilities and skills this person will have and how well you will compensate them. Remember to use input from NRCS and your field representative as they may know more about the day to day requirements of the job.

Some of the topics that should be decided BEFORE you advertise are:

- Compensation: wages, overtime pay or comp time, vacation or sick leave, carry over hours, termination pay, insurance, retirement, etc.
- Duties: bookkeeping, education, errands, reporting, farm visits, coordinating meetings, etc.
- Job Description: Do you have one? Has it been updated in the last five years? Each employee must have an up-to-date job description that outlines the goals, duties and expectations for the job and lays out all pay and benefit information. This is not only good business - but is necessary for any legal situations that may arise. Review your current job description and make changes. If you need to start over – no problem ask a neighboring county or your field rep for a good example.
- Office issues: hours, dress code, travel, reimbursements, training, etc.
- Evaluations: probation period, how to evaluate, expectations, etc.
- Supervision: Choose a designated board member to answer questions, give direction, check in on the employee and be the contact for call-ins, etc. Remember that this is a business, and these matters must be handled in that way. Your NRCS office manager, FSA personnel, field representative or other employees in the office are NOT the supervisor. They can, however, be consulted and provide valuable input.

Committees: A personnel or hiring committee can play an important role. The committee can be made up of 3 or fewer members and can take care of issues between monthly board meeting and make recommendations to the board to save time.

Now you are ready to advertise, interview and hire. A simple ad with a general description needs to be advertised for at least one week in the local paper, newsletter, radio or online. If you live in a larger community, you should consider using a platform such as “Indeed” or “Linked In” or advertising in multiple locations. You can obtain a sample ad from your field representative. Applicants can submit a resume, or you can come up with your own application. References are very important, so make sure to require and use them! It is good business to interview at least 3 candidates either with the entire board or just the personnel committee. If you don’t get the right applications – do not hire the only suitable one! Take a look at the pay and benefits and ask why you didn’t get good applicants and then re-advertise.

Important: Hire someone suitable for the position. Just as you wouldn’t hire someone who didn’t like getting dirty for your farming operation – you want to hire someone qualified that can deal with the public, be good at finances and operate financial software to run your office. Experience speaks volumes and can substitute for a degree. Hiring an education coordinator? You need someone not afraid of public speaking. You are in charge of hiring the best person for the position.

FYI – please be conscious of nepotism – hiring the chairperson’s son or technician’s wife etc. is not always a good idea and may cause issues down the road.

Probationary period is an important tool for the district. This gives an opportunity to conduct a background check and give the employee a trial run. It also gives the board a legal opportunity to simply let them go if they are not a good fit. Background checks are very important! You don’t want to find out that the person you hired has been convicted of embezzlement! Your board needs to be very up front that a background check may be expected. Follow through and conduct an evaluation at the conclusion of the probation. This is the time for both the board and employee to be 100% honest with each other to identify what is going well and what is not. This will give the employee and the employer a time to voice any needs or concerns. All evaluations should be handled in a professional “businesslike” manner. All issues (both good and bad) should be discussed. This will also act as documentation for any future matters.

Training the Best Employee for Your District

****Field reps, NRCS and FSA employees are NOT responsible for training!!!**

Meet the Board: Upon hiring a new employee, it is essential that they spend some time with the board and or board designated representative to reviewing benefits, job description, expectations etc. This will also give you an opportunity to get to know each other before they start. The new employee should also get a copy of the job description, benefit details and office and employee handbook. These are all official documents that will serve as guidance for both parties. This is a great opportunity to establish contacts, show them around, introduce to other employees, give keys, combinations and passwords etc.

Field Rep: Your Division of Conservation field rep is a great asset in reviewing DOC programs, reporting, policies and giving a good rundown of state requirements and expectations. Field reps can also review funding, forms, the Division of Conservation role and many other topics.

Neighboring Counties: Since on the job training is usually the most worthwhile, surrounding counties are a wonderful asset. Prior to hiring, reach out to a neighboring county and ask if they would be willing to allow your employee to shadow them for a day. This will allow them to go through bookkeeping, education, organization, cost share, etc.

Bookkeeping: Since this is 75% of an Administrative position, the MOST important skill to acquire will be how to use Quicken or Quick Books, pay taxes, bills and invoices. If the employee does not already know how to do this – it will be up to the board to make sure that these tasks are done correctly.

**<u>Please contact a CPA or payroll company to do payroll and taxes until your employee is trained. It is NOT the field representative nor another administrative secretary's responsibility to do this.</u>

Other avenues for training:

- The Kentucky Association of Conservation Districts Employees association offers monthly share sessions that are very valuable as well as a yearly training conference.
- Division of Conservation also offers an abundance of tools on their website as well as numerous program training throughout the year.
- Networking among counties is a highly beneficial way to train on daily office duties. There is also training provided by the state for everything from CAIP to retirement and in between.
- The yearly KACD convention is an excellent opportunity to meet others, learn more about programs and catch a glimpse at how other Districts run.
- Other state agencies provide training on their specialty throughout the year.
- Paid training and certifications are a great way to get additional courses on so many different topics through extension, local colleges, library or online.

A district board should never be hesitant to provide their employee a chance to get better at what they do!

Conservation districts are required to follow all applicable state and federal labor laws; however, many employee issues are left to the board's discretion. All policies that are made by the board should be reflected in the board's policy and procedures manual so that the board members and employees can make sure that they understand what is required. These can then be reviewed yearly to make necessary changes.