Education



An effective information/education program has identified and targeted specific audiences with a specific message through the right mediums. With limited financial and human resources, it is even more critical that conservation districts use their resources wisely to get the "biggest bank for their buck". Therefore, it is critical to be specific as to who your target audience is and what message you want them to receive.

Adult Learners:

Conservation districts work with many adult audiences, including landowners and users, community leaders, civic clubs, cooperating agency personnel and others. Adult learning styles change as we get older. We have more life experiences, look for education that can be applied in the present, and expect teachers to be sensitive to our educational needs. It is critical to understand that adults have many



demands on their time and will choose to participate only in activities with the most relevant and timely information. With the right mix of marketing, scientifically sound relevant information, and effective delivery techniques people will choose to participate and learn new information.

Reaching Landowners:

the Board for the presentation.

- <u>Personal contact</u> meeting with people on an individual basis is
 often the most effective way of providing information but it is also
 the most time consuming. Board members frequently provide
 information this way simply by talking with their friends and
 neighbors.
- Inviting persons to board meetings guest speakers at board meeting are a great way to improve the knowledge of board members as well as general public. Invite the public to your board meetings not only through posting the meeting notices but have a special guest and run an article in the paper or your newsletter to encourage the public to join

- Annual meetings The Annual Meeting is your opportunity to share all the District's activities
 and successes of the annual plan of work with the public. If the District hosted a local
 workgroup to develop the long range plan, those same people would certainly be interested
 in action taken by the District on the issues they helped to prioritize. This is one of the best
 ways to build credibility with your landowners.
- <u>Community meetings</u> Districts often host community meetings on issues that affect the
 community. The District may host these types of meetings alone or partner with other entities
 depending on the nature of the topic.
- <u>Newsletters</u> Many districts publish a monthly or quarterly newsletter. This is a great tool to communicate with constituents regarding the activities, programs, and issues their district is taking action on. Newsletters have a very targeted audience so you can speak directly to them.
- <u>Field tours</u> "Seeing is believing" Although tours take time and coordination they are a great education and communication tool because people can hear, see, feel and touch the issue at hand.
- <u>Demonstration plots</u> "Seeing is believing" These plots allow others
 to look at results at intervals and on their own time so the district
 does not have to coordinate a large number of schedules as is
 needed for field tours.
- <u>Case studies</u> When a district can not take an audience to see and touch a situation, the
 next best thing is to analyze a case. Provide the group with a case and work through it
 together to find a solution. This simulates the "real" thing and provides adults with ideas on
 how to apply problem solving solutions to their own similar situations.
- Workshops Utilize workshops when the district has a specific resource issue/concern where landowners would benefit from hearing a variety of speakers and points of view. This allows the attendees to ask questions of the presenters in a fairly small group of people and others benefit from hearing the discussions. Often one person's question will trigger more ideas and questions of the group.
- News articles When a district needs to reach a wide audience (general public), news



articles are extremely valuable. They are a useful tool to keep the community and decision makers informed of district activities. Developing a good rapport with news reporters is essential to getting articles in the paper. The district manager or a specific

board member needs to develop that relationship so reporters know they can come to you for information on natural resource issues.

 <u>T.V. and radio programs</u> – Don't count these mediums out. They are valuable tools and much more accessible than you realize. Most communities have local public radio or TV stations at schools/colleges who are eager to provide your information at not cost. Other media, state magazines, etc. – Use your imagination, be creative, and think out of the box on ways to communicate and inform your constituents. Contact your CSCB conservation specialist and/or CACD to discuss opportunities. Contact the local CSU Cooperative Extension office for help in developing conservation education programs for adults.

Reaching Legislators



District programs are often directly affected by local, state, or federal laws. It is critical that all your elected officials are familiar with your districts activities and issues of concerns. Develop relationships with your county commissioners and state and federal legislators by inviting them to your local meetings/activates as they are running for office. Once they are elected, stay in contact with them so they know your issues and concerns.

Invite them to share their ideas and hear your concerns at board meetings, annual meetings, tours, etc. Include the federal legislators' regional staff in these activities and meetings so they can provide solid information to their boss.

Make personal contact with representatives and use concise, well thought out letters, telephone calls or meetings. Board members may also have opportunities to give testimony in formal meetings or hearings on conservation issues.

Media

Whether you are engaging in information, education, or public relations you will use a wide range of media from personal contact to mass media.

Establish friendly, mutually helpful relationships with media representatives. If you convince them of the importance of the district's programs, they will convince the public. Your district may have a committee to coordinate media relations and determine:



- Who is your target audiences
- What specific message do we want to convey
- Which media would be most effective in reaching that audience

Public Relations

Public relations help people understand what the conservation district is, what it is doing, and why it is important. The conservation district's public image affects every aspect of its work. Successful districts typically integrate public relations and media into all parts of their long range program and annual plan of work.



Good public relations will:

- Promote favorable recognition of the district
- Provide a service to landowners by informing them of available technical, financial, and educational assistance
- Build rapport with landowners, groups, and agencies
- Increase funding for district programs
- Increase assistance from cooperating agencies
- Encourage interest from landowners to serve on the district board

It is helpful to appoint one person or a committee to be in charge of conservation district public relations. The committee can identify and implement public relations goals developed by the Board. The public relations goals should grow naturally out of your conservation district activities and permeate all aspects of the district's plans and programs.

Consistent targeted messaging is important. Review the district's written, graphic, and non-verbal aspects of your activities and programs to ensure consistency in the messages. As often noted, "You can't be everything to everyone" so identify the audience that you want to reach with your message and then specifically target them with the message.

An example of a target audience is small acreage landowners with five to forty acres. The message must be timely, relevant, factual, and interesting to that specific group of individuals. Talk directly with people within that audience to learn the most effective and efficient medium to reach them. Some messages will need to be time specific such as the availability of herbicides. But the message about general weed control awareness may be more effective on a year round basis.

In developing and maintaining your district's public relations program:

- It is important for board members to represent the Board in person whenever possible. Staff
 may carry the same message but it is often more affective for landowners to hear from their
 peers and neighbors.
- Pay close attention to public relations details throughout your district program: treat people
 warmly over the phone and via mail; follow through on commitments; pay attention to
 cultural differences; and give adequate recognition to individuals, agencies, associations, and
 other groups.

 Look for new and innovative ways to reach out to your audience. You will need to know your audience and how they are most likely to get information. Take advantage of the traditional mediums of news papers, newsletters, radio, etc. but many audiences will require technologies such as the internet.

CACD, NACD and many other sources have specific information on conducting effective public relations programs.

Web Site & Design

Conservation districts can greatly benefit from developing and maintaining an effective and efficient web page. Because districts typically have limited staff, a web page can provide a wide range of information and answer questions for constituents and the public.



The following are the basics that a person should be able to view and understand from visiting the District's web site:

- Purpose The mission and vision of the organization
- Location District boundaries (map)
- Contact Information Office contact information
- What the District does Long Range Plan and Annual Plan of Work (this should be conveyed in a pleasant and user friendly format)
- Events such as workshops, tours, demonstrations, etc.
- District Services Tree sales, PAM sales, equipment rental, conservation planning, subdivision reviews, etc.
- Accomplishments publish your story, what has the district done to benefit its constituents (why the District is important)

It is important that web site visitors experience:

- Quick response time site must load quickly, strategically utilize pictures and graphics so a visitor can quickly get to the information they are seeking
- Excellent product information flow
- Readability and originality
- Friendly layout
- Good listings on major search engines

Youth Learners:

A primary focus of conservation education is to help young people understand their role in the "wise use" of natural resources. Today's youth are several generations removed from the land and lack the understanding of how soil, water, air, plants, and animals contribute to their life style.

By providing scientifically sound natural resource information and education to our youth, districts are helping tomorrows decision makers make more informed decisions on the environment, economy, and society.

Districts work with groups such as area schools, 4-H clubs, Future Farmers of America (FFA), Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and others. It is important to be conscious of the special needs of different youth audiences such as teens and kindergartners and use the most appropriate methods. Conservation districts have used a wide variety of methods to reach youth, including:

- <u>Camp Rocky Scholarships</u> Camp Rocky is a youth conservation camp hosted by the
 Colorado Association of Conservation Districts in July of each year. Students between the
 ages of 14 and 19 have the opportunity to study Range Science, Soil and Water
 Management, Forest Management, Fish and Wildlife Management, and Recreation
 Management. Districts often provide local students full or partial scholarships
 to the camp.
- <u>Academic Scholarships</u> Many districts provide college scholarships to graduating seniors towards agriculture and/or natural resource degrees.
- <u>Teacher Workshops/Programs</u> Many districts provide scholarships for teachers to attend
 the Teachers' Conservation Workshop hosted by CACD and/or the Ag Institute hosted by the
 Colorado Foundation for Agriculture. Some districts host their own teachers' workshop to
 provide information and education. By providing one teacher with accurate and timely
 information, you are providing exponential numbers of students with the same information.
- Conservation Poster Contests Most districts host an annual poster contest based on the
 natural resource theme developed by NACD each year. Colorado districts focus on working
 with the 6th grade classes within their district boundaries. The top two posters are then
 submitted to CACD at the Annual Meeting in November where the top poster is selected and
 forwarded to NACD for national recognition.
- <u>Children's Water Festivals</u> Many districts partner with water groups and agencies to host an annual water festival where 4th graders will learn about water quality and quantity while having fun.
- Farm & Ranch Tours and/or "Ag Day" Some districts host tours and/or coordinate an "Ag Day" where students can participate in activities on a local farm or ranch. This can be a great hands on activity with lasting impressions.

- <u>Providing Educational Materials</u> Districts can provide a great deal of educational material in cooperation with their partners. These materials can be distributed through workshops, teachers, youth groups, tours, etc.
- Youth Involvement with the Conservation Board Districts can develop opportunities for
 youth to become involved with the Board by having one youth advisor to the Board and/or
 setting up a "youth conservation board".
- Youth Participation in Conservation Projects Districts develop conservation programs and projects which can involve youth such as tree planting days, noxious weed programs, etc.
- <u>Demonstrations/Tours</u> Youth enjoy going on tours and becoming more familiar with the
 outdoors. Districts can utilize this opportunity to provide information and education on natural
 resources through demonstrations and tours.

NACD and CACD may have a variety of ready-made educational materials for working with youth. There are also materials developed by other groups, such as Colorado Ag in the Classroom, Project Learning Tree, Project Wild, NRCS, and others.