

Gathering Information from Your Community

The Effective DC

DEVELOPING AN AREA/COMMUNITY PLAN

Outreach Hints

Informal meetings (over coffee, at a baseball game) are very effective for gathering information.

Meet with as many groups as possible to build a strong support base for your conservation program.

Meet with people face-to-face whenever possible.

Meet people on their own 'turf' and at a time convenient for them.

County commissioners, ag reporters, and the local radio station are all good outreach sources.

Why Should I Meet With Community Leaders?

There are two important reasons to involve community leaders and opinion leaders in building support for your conservation program:

1. As a new member of the community, you will build a lot of initial credibility
2. As you move forward with your county's conservation plan, using input you received from community leaders will be invaluable for building program support. These individuals have identified the concerns that are important to them, and will have a stake in solving those concerns.

Who Do I Talk To?

- Start close to home. Meet with your conservation district supervisors/directors first
- Identify other government-based community leaders - extension agents, district forester, BLM staff, others
- Contact local agriculture, conservation and environmental organization representatives (county president, local staff person)
- Meet with key local elected officials - county commissioners and others
- Ask each person for recommendations of other key individuals. After a number of interviews, a common set of community leaders will emerge
- Select a few individuals to begin your interview process that you are comfortable talking to. These interviews provide you a chance to build confidence and comfort with the process.
- But... as soon as possible, select individuals who: have not been worked with, have a differing opinion from your background, are strong leaders
- Make a point of meeting with groups who don't necessarily share your opinions
- Meet with groups that haven't been met with as early as possible. The sooner they know that you are interested in their point of view, the more they'll feel like they can go to you with issues/ideas.

How Do I Reach Them?

- Utilize face-to-face meetings wherever possible
- Meet them on their turf - visit their farm/business, meet at the coffeeshop
- The meeting needs to be convenient for the individual - evening or weekend meetings may be inconvenient for you, but could go a long way toward building a strong working relationship

What Do I Ask?

Break the ice with general questions about their ag operation or business, the organizations they belong to, etc.

Questions to ask:

- As you travel throughout the county, what do you see as the biggest natural resource threat to (farming, wildlife, tribal lands, salmon habitat – their interest area)? Describe the resource concern - where, how big, how long it's been a concern, etc.
- What effects have you seen as a result of this resource concern? (try to gather effects to both the land base and to people)
- Has anyone tried to tackle (resource issue identified)? If so, what's worked and what hasn't?
- What will happen if nothing is done to correct the problem?
- If you were to gather a group of local leaders who could really influence (resource issue identified), who would they be?
- What other natural resource issues do you think impact (their interest area)? – Follow same line of questioning above.
- Who should be involved in our local conservation partnership that hasn't been in the past?
- How do producers/members of your organization/ get their information – both formally and informally? (local radio station, coffee shop, etc.)
- Who is/are the best individual(s) in (their interest area) to help get the word out about programs that might be available, or resource concerns that need to be addressed?

In addition to helping you identify effective outreach efforts, this information will help you develop specific resource concerns and solutions in your local business plan.