USDA NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Board Diversity

Adding Diversity to the Conservation Partnership

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), along with the National Association of Conservation Districts and the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils, Inc., plays a vital role in conserving our natural resources.

The importance of this partnership centers on the connection it has with the community. The partnership ensures that communities' interests are addressed when issues arise that affect soil health, water quantity and quality, energy, livestock, wildlife, air quality, plants, and quality of life issues of community residents.

Sometimes, however, the entire community is not aware of the great things the partnership is engaged in on their behalf or they don't think the partnership can help. If this is your situation, there are some things you can do to recruit new board members and generate interest!

Recruitment

Recruiting people of different skills, backgrounds, and ethnicity is a positive method of enhancing creativity on your board and promoting ideas that will appeal to a wider range of people. Answering the following questions can help guide your recruitment efforts:

- Who in the community is affected by your committee's actions?
- How many sectors of the community should be represented?
- Does the representation of your group mirror the diversity in the community?
- Is there an adequate community cross-section of race, gender, age, disability, and expertise among the committee members?
- Can your organization do more to help deliver conservation programs and services to a broader group of customers in the community?

Diversity

Ethnically and culturally diverse boards and councils with a variety of experiences, perspectives and expertise can produce comprehensive and powerful solutions to community problems. Valuing diversity means being aware of, sensitive to, and appreciating differences such as ethnicity, national origin, age, gender, race, culture, physical abilities, sexual orientation, and lifestyles.

Before you begin your recruitment efforts you should assess the demographics of your board/council to see if it is representative of your community, county, city, watershed, and/or RC&D area's general population.

Recruitment Tips

- Conduct a current analysis of the demographic composition of the area you serve so you are able to develop appropriate recruitment goals, along with a time line.
- Identify recruitment barriers and ways of overcoming those barriers.
- Enlist the help of community leaders. Encourage people of different cultures, languages, ethnic backgrounds, and beliefs to assist your organization by asking them to provide names of possible recruits.
- Cultivate organizational partnerships with groups that cater to the needs and interests of diverse audiences (e.g., people of color, women, the disabled, etc.).
- Invite community leaders representing various minority organizations to your meetings as guest speakers or to occasionally observe your meetings.
- Incorporate non-traditional networking channels to reach diverse audiences (for example, foreign language press, places of worship, and community-based organizations' newsletters).

- Ask your local partners, neighbors, friends, and associates whom they would recommend to serve with your organization.
- Develop written statements that reflect the diversity that you wish to attain. Include articles on diversity in your publications and presentations to communicate the message that your board/council/office is open and accessible to all.
- Ask potential recruits to attend meetings and go out with board members on projects. This can indicate whether the fit is right from both perspectives.
- Share the benefits, tasks, and responsibilities of being on the local board/councils with potential recruits.
- Share your diversity recruitment and retention achievements with similar organizations.

For more information please contact:

National Civil Rights Committee
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/civilrights/
Social Sciences Team
http://www.ssl.nrcs.usda.gov/
American Indian/Alaskan Native Association for NRCS
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/partners/employee_org.html
Asian Pacific Islander Organization
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/partners/employee_org.html
National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/partners/employee_org.html
National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/partners/employee_org.html
National Association of Conservation Districts
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http://www.rcdnet.org./

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