

Tips to engage elected officials and decision makers



It's crucial that conservation districts engage elected officials and other decision-makers who have influence on voluntary conservation efforts. Knowing how to engage with them can feel intimidating. Here are simple tips to help start and maintain effective relationships with key influencers of your work.

WHY



... engage elected officials and decision makers?

- ▶ **Establish trust.** Give them confidence in your credibility, honesty, and ability to provide factual information.
- ▶ **Demonstrate value.** Ensure they recognize the vital services your CD provides to their constituents. Provide examples and testimonials of your work.
- ▶ **Offer solutions.** Present CDs as “can do” entities that can help them be successful.

HOW



... do I engage them?

- ▶ **Meet for coffee or at their office** to introduce yourself and as a regular check-in.
- ▶ Invite them to **tours, open houses, annual meetings**, and other events (and include an invitation for them to speak).
- ▶ Subscribe to their **newsletter** and invite them to subscribe to yours.
- ▶ Invite them to write a **guest editorial** for your newsletter.
- ▶ Invite them to give a **presentation at a board meeting**.
- ▶ When in doubt, **ask them** how they would like to engage.

WHAT



... should I ask and talk about?

- ▶ “What made you interested in running for office / taking this position?” (Then, talk about ways your work relates to their answer.)
- ▶ “What do you hope to accomplish in the next few years?” (Then, talk about how your CD can help them achieve their answer.)
- ▶ “How can our conservation district help you?”
- ▶ Make a personal connection — talk about shared interests, including things that aren't work-related (e.g. growing up in the same town, shared hobbies). Research their interests ahead of time (follow their blogs and social media, talk to their staff).
- ▶ Give updates and show pictures of projects that relate to their priorities.