

National Association of Conservation Districts
Conservation District Official Accreditation Program
PILOT PROGRAM, NORTH CENTRAL REGION

Purpose: To establish and maintain conservation district officials' basic knowledge of their responsibilities.

Primary audience: Local conservation district officials

Vision: District official accreditation, although **strictly voluntary**, becomes a new standard for district official performance.

Accreditation becomes a routine practice for all state associations and/or state conservation agencies. District officials expect to be accredited after they are elected or appointed.

Partner organizations recognize the importance of district official accreditation.

District officials volunteer their time to participate in re-accreditation each term; because it helps them do their jobs better.

Assumptions: Many states have well-developed, established training programs.
Some states have no formal conservation district official training program.

Benefits:

- A national uniform minimum standard for training content ensures accredited district officials have at least a basic understanding of the conservation district movement and their responsibilities as a public official.
- Better informed district officials will result in stronger local conservation district officials.
- Accreditation may result in additional funding opportunities for conservation districts.
- Accreditation reduces district official liability exposure, since district officials will be more aware of liability issues.
- Re-accreditation provides additional forums for teaching new information and reinforcement of concepts.
- Individual district officials may be more empowered to fulfill public duties, especially in states where district official training does not currently exist.

Existing Training Program Accreditation:

- State agencies and state associations can submit existing programs for review by NACD's North Central Region Accreditation committee, to verify the inclusion of all required elements.
- If all required elements exist in the current program, the state will not need to make any modifications and can begin accrediting district officials immediately.

Initial Accreditation:

- With state agency and state association partners, NACD will ensure that every district official will have an opportunity to be accredited within one year of election or appointment.

Re-accreditation:

- To retain accreditation after their first term, district officials must participate in an approved training session during their second term and during each subsequent term. Length of term is defined by each state's district law. If the district official does not participate in training during his or her second term, district official loses his or her accreditation.

Record-keeping:

- State conservation agencies or other appropriate entity, will maintain a master list of their state's accredited district officials, and update it each year.

Delivery:

Basic accreditation training may be delivered in one or a combination of the following ways.

- Through existing approved state conservation agency training programs (see Existing Training Program Accreditation). States can submit existing programs for review by NACD's North Central Region Accreditation committee, to verify the inclusion of all required elements. If all required elements exist in the current program, the state will not need to make any modifications and can begin accrediting district officials immediately.
- Through existing conservation district state association training programs. Existing programs will be reviewed by NACD's North Central Region Accreditation committee, to verify the inclusion of all required elements. If all required elements exist in the current program, the state will not need to make any modifications and can begin accrediting district officials immediately.
- Through NACD training opportunities/events. NACD may offer accreditation opportunities for district officials at region meetings or other events.
- District officials may be accredited by viewing the training program content on-line, and verifying their knowledge of the concepts.
- District officials may become accredited by viewing NACD's presentation, and verifying their knowledge at a local board meeting or region/area meeting.

Digital Presentation:

- NACD will develop a digital presentation with audio narration, and make it available for download. Download will include a session guide for the trainer/facilitator. Each state will have the opportunity to add content relevant to their individual state.
- States that obtain verification of their existing district official training programs may choose not to use the digital presentation.

ACCREDITATION TRAINING CONTENT

NACD's accreditation training will contain the following elements. To be approved for accreditation, existing state training programs must adequately cover the following elements.

Basic Concepts

- What is a conservation district?
- History of NACD and its partners: Dust Bowl, FDR's model legislation, etc.
- Clearinghouse/wagon wheel concept (how conservation districts work effectively with partners to meet locally-identified needs)
- Identification of partners: traditional and non-traditional
- Public accountability and public fiduciary responsibilities
- Ethics, including employee/supervisor relationship; conflict of interest; nepotism

Basic Responsibilities

District officials' roles and responsibilities

- Legal responsibilities (state): district officials must understand the content of their state law regarding conservation districts
- Conservation districts take the lead in assessing local natural resource issues
- Conservation districts establish goals through strategic/long-range and annual planning
- Conservation districts establish policy (how district will conduct business; operational procedures)
- The conservation district board is responsible for defining a personnel management system
- Conservation districts must secure sufficient funding to reach goals
- Conservation district officials need to understand state and national resolutions processes
- Conservation district officials should understand the roles and responsibilities of district employees (employees implement policy and strategies to reach goals)

Awards:

- State associations and state conservation agencies can award accreditation on behalf of NACD, as appropriate.
- To help maintain uniformity, states will be asked to use NACD's standard certificate and program logo.

Recognition:

National

- NACD will develop a standard certificate for download.
- NACD will develop a standard press release for local districts to announce certification of the board member(s).
- NACD may develop a lapel pin.
- NACD may recognize certified district officials in national or regional publications, or at national or regional meetings (recognition in annual conference program, ACCREDITED on annual conference name badge, etc.)

State

- State associations and/or state conservation agencies are encouraged to publicly recognize newly accredited conservation district officials.

Participation Incentives:

National

- North Central Region may require region board members to be accredited.
- NACD may require national board members to be accredited.
- NACD may reward states for adopting the accreditation process, for example, accredited district officials from participating states could be eligible for "reduced" registration fees; scholarships to attend meetings.
- NRCS and other partners may consider special grants to states who achieve a percentage of district officials accredited.

State

- State associations and/or state conservation agencies are encouraged to offer incentives for conservation district officials to participate.

Implementation:

- NACD may provide "train the trainer" sessions for accreditation trainers/facilitators when necessary.
- Partner employees are welcome to participate in training sessions, however they are not eligible to receive district official accreditation.
- North Central Region will pilot the program.