

## INTRODUCTION

The *Oregon Soil and Water Conservation District Guidebook – A Guide to Operations and Management*, provides information and directions to assist soil and water conservation district directors, associate directors, directors emeritus, and employees to carry out the district's statutory responsibilities. Every conservation district director and employee should have a working knowledge of the Guidebook's contents. A suggested strategy for districts is to review portions of this Guidebook at each monthly board meeting. This will establish a routine under which districts can review and discuss information relating to district operations and management.

This Guidebook is provided to conservation district partners so they will understand the opportunities, authorities, limitations, and constraints of conservation districts. This Guidebook was developed as a collaborative effort of the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) and the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD), and is updated as new information is available and as laws change. Updates will be available on the ODA website; hard copies will be distributed as appropriate. Questions, comments, and suggestions on the contents are welcome and may be directed to Karla Sanders at ODA. For additional copies, contact Karla Sanders at (503) 986-4696 or email [ksanders@oda.state.or.us](mailto:ksanders@oda.state.or.us).

Other publications that complement and serve as a reference to the Guidebook include:

*Oregon Soil & Water Conservation District Laws*: This is a useful compilation of statutes relevant to SWCDs.

*Directory of Oregon Soil and Water Conservation Districts*: ODA maintains a directory of contact information for the Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC), SWCC advisors and partners, and SWCD offices, directors and staff. The directory also includes a map of the districts and their regularly scheduled meeting dates.

These two publications are available through the Oregon Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Division, and can also be found on ODA's Soil and Water Conservation Districts website at <http://oregon.gov/ODA/SWCD/>.

*Oregon Attorney General's Public Records and Meetings Manual*: This publication may be purchased from the Department of Justice, 1162 Court Street, NE, Salem, Oregon 97301-4096. For a current price please call: (503) 378-2992.

*Oregon Attorney General's Public Contracts Manual*: This publication may be purchased from the Department of Justice, 1162 Court Street, NE, Salem, Oregon 97301-4096. For a current price please call (503) 378-2992.

The ability of conservation districts to fully utilize the powers and authorities assigned in Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) 568.210-890 and ORS 568.900-933 relies heavily on four essential administrative and organizational functions:

1. Recruit, train, and retain high-quality directors, associate directors, and directors emeritus who demonstrate leadership skills and have organizational skills to address natural resource concerns and manage the conservation district;
2. Hire, train, and retain skilled, knowledgeable employees and volunteers;
3. Create and maintain an organizational system that operates legally, meets all the rules and mandates associated with being a public body, and carries out all explicit and implied business functions; and
4. Establish and maintain effective collaborative relationships with partners; other local, state, and federal agencies and organizations; cooperators and customers; and the public.

These four functions have been addressed in this Guidebook under 10 essential “desirable conditions” listed below. The contents of this Guidebook, individual consultation with districts, annual operations reviews, and training programs will focus on helping conservation districts achieve these desirable conditions. Future capacity building efforts of ODA, OACD, and partners will focus heavily on these functions.

### **Desirable Components of Effective Districts**

1. Dedicated, effective directors and district leadership
2. Skilled and knowledgeable employees
3. Clear sense of direction and purpose
4. Defined ways to do business
5. Processes to monitor and evaluate operations – internal performance audits
6. Effective collaborative partnerships
7. Informed and involved publics
8. Stable resources and financial base
9. Effective involvement in political processes
10. Adaptable and able to recognize, accept, and internalize purposeful change