

LOCAL WORKING GROUPS



RESOURCE GUIDEBOOK

This guidebook is a set of resources developed through the National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCPPI). NCPPI Leadership recognized an opportunity to reengage, enhance and improve the Local Working Group process in July 2021. A project team was formed and explored the requests of field-level staff and assisted in developing tools to address their findings. Included in the toolbox are sample agendas, notes documents, a bulletin, training resources, and frequently asked questions. We encourage you to adjust the agenda and notes to fit your needs.

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Local Working Group

MEMBERSHIP OF LOCAL WORKING GROUP

The Local Working Groups are a Sub-Committee of the State Technical Committee and exempt from the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). They include representation from the following:

- Conservation District Supervisors and Staff
- State Natural Resource Agencies
- Federal Natural Resource Agencies
- Agriculture Organizations - e.g. Wheat, Potatoes, Etc.
- Fish & Wildlife Organizations - e.g. Pheasants, Ducks, Quail, Salmon, Etc.
- Environmental Organizations - e.g. Audubon, Nature Conservancy, Etc.
- State or local elected officials and/or staff
- Other state-specific natural resource-related organizations
- NRCS-designated conservationist
- FSA county executive director and/or County Committee Members
- Cooperative Extension
- Representatives of American Indian governments
- Resource Conservation and Development Councils

Notes:

Locally led conservation consists of a series of phases which involve community stakeholders in natural resource planning, implementation of solutions and evaluation of results. Locally led conservation begins with the community itself, working through the local Conservation District. It is based on the principle that community stakeholders are best suited to deal with local resource problems.

Individual members of the local working group may be involved in the locally led conservation effort from the beginning. For example, they may be instrumental in assisting with the conservation needs assessment and conservation action plan; it is the responsibility of the USDA local working group to finalize and forward recommendations to the State Conservationist.

The NRCS-designated conservationist will support and advise the local working group concerning technical issues, NRCS cost-share programs, and other matters relating to conservation program delivery.

In cases where the Conservation District does not conduct a conservation needs assessment, it is the responsibility of the local working group, with appropriate outreach and public involvement, to ensure that a conservation needs assessment is completed before submitting priorities and applying for USDA program assistance.

Local Working Group

RESPONSIBILITIES

Local Working Group's Supporting Role In the Locally Led Process

The products of the locally led process will provide USDA and the Conservation District with relevant conservation needs, resource concerns, priorities, and recommendations regarding programs that can be used as tools to address those needs. The delivery process for conservation programs is conducted at the local, state, and national levels based on the conservation needs assessment and the conservation action plans developed by community stakeholders as part of the locally led process.

Conservation District Responsibilities

- Assemble the local working group & set the agenda.
- Acquire input from community stakeholders in the form of a conservation needs assessment.
- Conduct the local working group meetings.

Local Working Group Responsibilities

- Obtain community and stakeholder participation
- Identify program funding needs
- Identify priority natural resource concerns
- Set local priorities based on public inputs and resource needs
- Recommend eligible practices
- Recommend payment and cost-share levels
- Assist in multi-county coordination
- Assist with public outreach & information efforts
- Identify educational assistance needs
- Establish program delivery priorities
- Make program policy recommendations
- Monitor success of Programs
- Update ranking criteria annually
- Identify and recommend new conservation initiatives
- Coordinate local programs
- Provide representatives to serve on multi-county/state committees - as needed
- Promote the need for innovative conservation practices
- Evaluate achievements and parity in program delivery
- Establish program performance indicators
- Develop a comprehensive civil rights analysis

Local Working Group

MEETING CHECKLIST

When: Select an appropriate time and date for the meeting. Consult local calendars and other organizations to ensure that other events will not interfere with attendance by the members and guests.

Where: Select a central, easily accessible location. The location should be familiar, comfortable, well-lit and well-equipped with an adequate room, good tables, and chairs. The recommended meeting room setup would be a large U-shape with a place for one representative from each member government entity. Use a name tent to identify the membership (selected by the Local Working Group). Have an area for guests to sit (but not at the LWG member table). Check the location for adequate restroom facilities and rules for participants who smoke.

Who Should Be Involved: Each of the member government entities as selected by the Local Working Group - possible participants include:

- Conservation District Supervisors and Staff
- State Natural Resource Agencies
- Federal Natural Resource Agencies
- Agriculture Organizations - e.g., Wheat, Potatoes, Etc.
- Fish & Wildlife Organizations - e.g., Pheasants, Ducks, Quail, Salmon, Etc.
- Environmental Organizations - e.g., Audubon, Nature Conservancy, Etc.
- State or local elected officials and/or staff
- Other specific natural resource-related organizations
- Resource Conservation and Development Councils
- FSA county executive director and/or County Committee Members
- Cooperative Extension
- Representatives of American Indian

Invitations: Prepare a mailing list of appropriate participants. As far in advance of the meeting as possible, send them an invitation describing the nature and importance of the task they are asked to help with. Follow-up phone calls should be made to individuals three to five days prior to the meeting. Consider sending a map to the meeting location, minutes from the last meeting, agenda, and background materials.

Agenda and Meeting Design: When designing the meeting agenda, think about how to motivate the participants to become involved and generate significant input. Start the meeting on time and set the tone and purpose of the meeting right away. A brief explanation of the USDA Local Working Group, responsibilities, conservation district, the conservation delivery system, and the conservation needs assessment should be presented

Facilitation: Consider the need to utilize a trained and experienced facilitator for your meeting. Such an individual can be invaluable in keeping the discussion focused, resolving conflicts, and maximizing audience participation. Meet with, or call the facilitator, chair, district employee(s), and NRCS DC before the meeting to discuss goals, procedures, and expectations. Your state NRCS office or Extension office may be able to help you locate a trained facilitator.

Staffing: Request assistance from staff members to serve as discussion leaders, presenters, timekeepers, and recorders. The facilitator or discussion leader may need one or more assistants to record comments on a flip chart and perform other tasks. Technical experts from the district, NRCS, FSA, and county committee staff should also be on hand to answer questions. A lead staff person to take care of meeting logistics, meeting notes preparation, and distribution is essential.

Materials: The right materials at the session, in the right quantities, in the briefest form possible, will help your local working group members with their decision-making. Examples include agenda, session design, note pages for PowerPoint presentations, data from previous years, ranking sheets & procedure, and resource data.

A large map of the Local Working Group area should be displayed in a prominent position during the meeting. Sign-in sheets should be used to collect participants' names, organizations, mailing addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses. (Add these names to your conservation district mailing list for future contact.)

Equipment: Arranging for, setting up, and testing equipment for presentations and recording the members' discussions is critical to a successful meeting. Example equipment needs include:

- Projector (for computer and/or overhead)
- Large screen
- Easel(s) with paper
- Markers & Tape
- Phone equipment (if needed)
- Internet access (if needed)
- Electrical cord with multiple outlets
- AV table
- Pens, paper

Refreshments/Meals: Participants appreciate (and often expect) refreshments in the morning and afternoon, and a meal if meeting beyond the lunch or dinner times.

Follow-Up: Before participants leave the meeting, be sure to describe to them what the conservation district and NRCS will do with the input they have provided. Plan for the next meeting of the Local Working Group, including a date, location, and agenda.

Local Working Group

EXAMPLE DOCUMENTS

Example bulletins, agendas, notes, and announcements are provided as guides to help you plan, run, and document your local working group meetings. On the following pages, you will find examples of state bulletins, meeting agendas, meeting note forms, and checklists. They are designed to be fully customizable for your needs. Utilize the correct letterhead, add attachments, or edit to match your local requirements as needed.



Watch for this icon indicating editable templates available to download and customize at www.WeAreNCPP.com.



Local Working Group

EXAMPLE STATE BULLETIN

Date, 20XX

(STATE NAME) BULLETIN NO. (ST) 300-22-__ LTP

Subject: Local Working Groups

Purpose: To provide information and procedures for the Local Working Group meetings.

Expiration Date: Month Day, 20XX

Explanation

This bulletin addresses the Local Working Group (LWG) activities for FY 20XX in (State). Prior to attending LWG meetings, District Conservationists (DC) should review Locally Led Conservation in CPM 440 Part 500, and Local Working Groups in CPM 440 Part 501.

LWG meetings are open to the public. LWGs should be comprised of a diverse group of agricultural and environmental interests. Across the state, many organizations and individuals continue to express interest in participating in LWGs. To facilitate participation, DCs will work with the State Public Affairs Officer to post the schedule for all LWG meetings on the (State) NRCS website. Individuals or groups wanting to become members of a LWG may submit a request that explains their interest and outlines their credentials for becoming a member of the LWG to the LWG chairperson and the DC. The DC will assist the Conservation District (CD) in making decisions concerning membership of the group.

The Memorandum of Agreement with each CD gives the CD the authority and responsibility to chair the LWG. If the CD is unable to, or unwilling to chair the LWG, the NRCS District Conservationist is responsible for chair duties. Districts should work with their DCs and State Associations to consider opportunities to secure facilitation services for the LWG meeting.

DCs will review with the LWG the prior year's planning and implementation progress toward long-range plans, strategic plans, and other resource recommendations. Care should be taken to protect personally identifiable information. Generic treatment information, such as resource concerns, total acres treated, aggregated practice/enhancements and funds obligated, may be shared with the group.

LWG meetings should be an open, orderly discussion driven by natural resource conservation needs. The conservation needs assessment should form the basis for collaboration and provide a basis for long-range plan development and updates. Once the natural resource concerns are identified and prioritized, appropriate Federal, State, local, and nongovernmental program tools can be used, both individually and in combination, to address these resource concerns and attempt to meet the established goals of the community stakeholders. Recognizing that funding levels are finite, LWG should develop recommendations that help NRCS focus human and financial resources toward achievable natural resource solutions.

(Note: the LWGs are advisory in nature and have no implementation or enforcement authority. NRCS uses their input and recommendations to identify conservation planning needs, to prioritize resource concerns for the state's programs, and to develop ranking questions and procedures.)

LWG input and recommendations may assist NRCS in identifying any of the following conditions:

- Identifying significant local, regional, and statewide geographic areas of concern.
- Identifying significant local, regional, and statewide natural resource concerns.
- Technical programmatic recommendation.
- Need for regional or statewide public information and outreach campaign.
- Guidelines for developing ranking criteria for evaluating applications.
- Guidance on eligible conservation activities.
- Technical guidance on conservation practices, including new, innovative practices.
- Identifying, monitoring and analyzing performance indicators.
- Evaluating and reporting program impacts on natural resources and the environment; and
- Coordinating with other Federal, state, tribal, and local public and private activities.

Following the LWG meeting, the Conservationist Districts or DCs will report the outcomes of Local Working Group meetings to the ASTC-FO and ASTC-Programs by Month Day, 20XX. Reports will be provided to the State Conservationist by Month Day, 20XX.

DC Reporting from the LWG meeting will include:

- Identify existing financial resource needs for FY 20XX
- Review the Conservation Needs Assessment:
 - Define other high priority resource concerns needing treatment
 - Recommended activities to solve identified resource concerns
- Identify NRCS and other programs (i.e EQIP, CSP, ACEP, RCPP, state cost share programs, etc.) or combination of programs that may be used to address other high priority resource concerns
 - 3-year plan to address identified resource concerns
 - Identify the extent of resource concerns to be treated
 - Identify annual program funding required to treat the resource concerns
 - Identify annual technical assistance requirement to assist producers to treat the resource concerns
- Recommendations for application selection criteria for targeted resource concerns
- Policy/technical recommendation for the State Technical Advisory Committee

Contact: For questions contact _____, ASTC-Programs, at _____ or _____@usda.gov.



MEETING AGENDA EXAMPLE 1

Long meeting

Long LWG Template Agenda
Local Working Group Invitation Here
(Name of organizing group plus NRCS)

Date:

Time:

Address:

Welcome and instructions- District and NRCS Designated Conservationist (5 mins)

1. Purpose and Goals
2. Introductions
3. Introduction of Facilitator

Overview of Local Working Group formation and Role (10 minutes)

NRCS Report (10 Minutes)

1. Previous year accomplishments- (Show on large map)
2. Changes for coming year
3. Ranking Pools
4. State available money (not specified by National)

District Report (10 Minutes)

1. LWG report on previous year findings
2. Previous year accomplishments- (Show on large map)
3. Planned work for coming year

Breakout Sessions (40 Minutes) (Provide large map to show areas of concern)

1. Break into groups - facilitator
2. Select Secretary for each group
3. Groups discuss problems and suggest where they would like to see money

Break (15 minutes)

Large group discussion (30-45 minutes)

1. Secretary for each group reports out top three to five problems they deem most important to fix
2. What outcome do you want
3. Allow individual discussion on reported item

Explanation of the process moving forward (15 minutes)

1. How the District and NRCS will use the data
2. Expected response time from the State Technical Committee

Discussion of next meeting date and time (5 minutes)



MEETING AGENDA EXAMPLE 2

Short meeting

LWG Template Agenda
Local Working Group Invitation Here
(Name of organizing group plus NRCS)

Date:

Time:

Address:

Welcome and Instructions (10 minutes), CD official or designated CD representative

Previous year goals and progress on those goals (10 minutes), Official or NRCS designated conservationist

Overview and Purpose of Meeting (30 Minutes), Designated Conservationist (Provide maps)

- A. General description of NRCS spending and practices as well as location
- B. New or changes in funding - Assigned Conservationist

Priorities, CD Official (40 Minutes)

- A. Participants identify local problems in general
- B. Participants identify specific Natural Resources
- C. Participants suggest specific possible needed outcomes

Review and Close (15 minutes)

CD Official (after the meeting)

- A. Review information received to ensure accuracy
- B. Discuss what will happen to information

Funding

Group discussion of % funding to each Resource Issue: Entities that could fund the work.

Resource Issue	%	Entity and Funding

Building an Area Initiative(s)

Highest priority natural resource issue(s)

-

High priority area

-

Practices to promote

-

Programs to use

-

Funding needed, and partners to involve

-

Community development and issues addressed

-

Next Steps

Action	Timeline	Lead



Local Working Group

NOTES EXAMPLE 2

Local Working Group Reporting Instructions

1. Review Local Working Group Bulletin
2. The Conservation Partnership has the current business plan goals of strategically identifying and analyzing natural resource needs on a landscape-level scale, determining the best solutions to address those needs and prioritize technical and financial assistance to those targeted needs, using locally led conservation and cutting-edge technology. To aid us in moving toward this goal, LWG should develop recommendations that help focus human and financial resources toward achievable natural resource solutions.
3. Based on the action plan developed by the Local Working Group, complete the Conservation Needs Assessment Report to inform NRCS and the State Technical Committee and other partners of opportunities to solve resource concerns.
 - a. **Narrative of priority resource issue:** In paragraph form, discuss each of the resource concerns. Include items such as geographic area, environmental threats, wildlife, societal, or economic effects of the resource concern. What opportunities identified in the LWG Action Plan are appropriate for Local, State and Federal focused efforts? What is the likelihood of solving the resource concern with a strategic effort?
 - b. **NRCS resource concern categories:** Document the NRCS resource concern categories that fit the situation.
 - c. **Extent:** Document the extent of the resource issue as it exists in appropriate units or detail.
 - d. **Recommended activities to solve resource concerns:** List activities (name and code) that have been identified in the LWG Action Plan for addressing the resource concern. Think beyond the commonly used EQIP practice codes. Please consider enhancements and long term protection also.
 - e. **Local, State or Federal Programs and fund pools that may help treat the identified resource concerns:** Identify if NRCS funding of practices is appropriate. If so, identify programs and fund pools that would best address the resource concern. If existing pools do not address the resource concern, consider the SFP proposals process, or the recommendation of resource-specific pools.

- f. **Funding required:** (Local, State, or Federal) estimate the total funding for each Farm Bill program and other programs necessary to treat the resource concern over the next 3 years.
 - g. **Identify suggestions for technical, policy, or application selection criteria that should be forwarded to the State Technical Committee for consideration in addressing the resource concerns:** Document the concerns and recommendations from the Local Working Group. These items will be reviewed by the appropriate leadership team members and shared with the State technical committee where appropriate.
Suggestion will be considered during the annual ranking development.
4. Reports will be completed and submitted to ASTC- FO and ASTC- Programs



TEAM	
Local Working Group	
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Conservation Needs Assessment Report

Rank in order of Priority resources concerns identified in the Conservation needs assessment.					Local Funding Required			State Funding Required			NRCS Funding Required			Recommendation from Local working group	CART Ranking Criteria
Narrative of priority resource Issue	NRCS resource concern categories	Extent	Recommended activities to solve resource concerns	Local, State and Federal programs and fund pools that may help treat the identified resource concerns	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	Identify suggestion for technical, policy, or application selection criteria that should be forwarded to the State Technical Committee, State Commission or other decision-making body for consideration in	Recommend specific Ranking Questions for CART (if Applicable)
					6	7	8	6	7	8	6	7	8		
1															
2															
3															
4															
5															
6															

Local Working Group

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q1. Why is the local working group important?

Rooted in the locally led conservation process, Local Working Groups (LWG) make the connection between Districts, NRCS, State, local partners, and producers to work through an assessment of current natural resource concerns in a given area or region, and to identify opportunities and challenges that NRCS and partners can address through their conservation programs. This input helps guide local decision making and can influence state, regional and national programs, as well as policy development.

Q2. What is the purpose of the Local Working Group?

In accordance [with 7 CFR Part 610, Subpart C](#), Local Working Groups are subcommittees of the State Technical Committee and provide recommendations to USDA on local and state natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs. This process can also be valuable to local and state leaders in the development of priorities, programs and policies.

Q3. Who convenes the Local Working Group?

It is the responsibility of the Conservation District to convene the Local Working Group. This includes developing the conservation needs assessment, setting the agenda, conducting the meeting, and sharing the information with the designated conservationist or State Technical Committee. Details about responsibilities for hosting the Local Working Group are found in [7 CFR Part 610, Subpart C](#) and the [NRCS Directives](#).

Q4. What is NRCS's role in the Local Working Group?

It is the NRCS designated conservationist's responsibility to participate in the USDA Local Working Group to:

- Encourage and assist other USDA agencies to participate in the locally led conservation and working group efforts, as feasible.
- Assist with identifying members for the Local Working Group.
- Help identify program priorities and resources available.
- Assist in the development of program priority area proposals.
- Comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, nondiscrimination statement, and other environmental, civil rights, and cultural resource requirements.
- Support and advise the Local Working Group concerning technical issues, program policies and procedures, and other matters relating to conservation program delivery.
- Ensure that populations are:
 - Provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered.
 - Allowed to share the benefits of, not excluded from, and not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by Government programs and activities affecting human health or the environment.
- Analyze performance indicators and reports.
- Report the conservation programs' impacts on resources.
- Perform the responsibilities of the conservation district where a conservation district is not present or chooses not to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in 440-CPM, Part 501, Subpart A, Section 501.6A.
- Consider the Local Working Group's recommendations on NRCS programs, initiatives, and activities.
- Ensure that recommendations, when adopted, address natural resource concerns.

Q5. What is the authority of the Local Working Group?

Local Working Group is advisory with no implementation or enforcement authority. However, it is policy for NRCS to work with the public as voluntary local working groups to submit annual reports on locally led processes to identify natural resource issues facing their areas.

Q6. Is money available to cover cost of planning and running the Local Working Group?

In general, there is no direct funding to cover the cost of planning and running the Local Working Group. Districts are uniquely positioned to work in cooperative agreement with NRCS to extend its reach to deliver a unified conservation mission. In Partnership with SWCD's outreach, technical and financial assistance objectives can be identified. Area-wide conservation planning today presents opportunities for Local Working Groups to consider and assess climate resiliency, urban and small acreage agriculture, coupled with equitable distribution of resources to meet the nation's production and conservation needs. The right set of participants, data and information is recommended a report that results in strong recommendations for the State Conservationist.

Q7. What if the district cannot afford or is otherwise unable to host the Local Working Group?

Districts are encouraged to first reach out to the NRCS District Conservationist to seek assistance in organizing and facilitating of the local working group meetings. If that resource is unavailable, next steps would be to contact their Area Conservationist, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships or other NRCS contact. In addition, various local and state partners are excellent resources to reach out to.

Q8. What do we do with the data collected?

Local Working Groups should be encouraged ahead of meetings to identify specific information on local agriculture, forestry and natural resources issues. As a group, members will compare data and ideas of how it can be shared and analyzed in a collective manner. Meeting facilitation and member diversity to broadly discuss the data and compare to NRCS practices, payment rates, program eligibility, production types and innovation will formulate the recommendations to the State Technical Committee and NRCS State Conservationist to make decisions on technical and financial strategy.

Q9. Will we hear anything back from the State Technical Committee after we submit our report?

Yes, the Local Working Group report and conservation needs assessment is welcomed by the State Technical Committee to assess the state's priority resource concerns. Community stakeholder recommendations within the proposal target conservation needs and programs that can be supported by this planning process. The report, as appropriate, will be compiled and reviewed by members of the State Technical Committee, and comments as well as results will be reported back to the Local Working Group.

Q10. Where can I find guidance on the function, establishment and operation of Local Working Groups?

- [Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\) - Title 7 \(Agriculture\), Subtitle B \(Regulations of the Department of Agriculture\), Chapter VI \(Natural Resources Conservation Service, Department of Agriculture\), Subchapter B \(Conservation Operations\), Part 610 \(Technical Assistance\), Subpart C \(State Technical Committees\)](#)
- [NRCS Directives System - M 440 501 B - Subpart B - Local Working Groups](#)

- Locally Led Conservation - Refer to NRCS Manuals, Title 440 - Programs, Part 500 - Locally Led Conservation (Executive Summary, Locally Led Conservation Defined, Locally Led Leadership and Public Involvement, The Conservation Needs Assessment, The Conservation Action Plan, Implementing the Conservation Action Plan, Evaluating Results).

Local Working Group TRAINING

- [Locally Led Conservation: The Imperative for Effective Local Working Groups, Tom Christensen](#)
In this session, you will learn why Local Working Groups matter, the history and value of the Partnership and the role of Local Working Groups in conservation.
- [Leading a Successful Local Working Group, Ray Ledgerwood](#)
This session will provide tips, techniques and recommendations for leading successful local working group activities, including: LWG membership and operating procedures, utilizing data, identification of high priority and development of proposals for USDA programs and other opportunities.
- I hosted my Local Working Group. Now what?
 - [Session 1 - Tyler Ross, Madison County SWCD, Marshall, NC](#)
Hear from Madison County SWCD Director Tyler Ross on how they plan for their LWG and what they do with the data they collect.
 - [Session 2 - Lars Santana, NRCS, Redmond, OR](#)
Lars explains how NRCS can help facilitate a strong LWG when the Conservation District may not have the capacity to help but is still engaged in the process. Hear the NRCS perspective on planning for your LWG.

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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

1. Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
2. Fax: (202) 690-7442; or
3. Email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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