



## Strategies to Secure County Government Support for SWCDs

Adequate funding is key to having a high functioning Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). Funding for SWCD operations typically comes from multiple sources including state appropriations, local government appropriations, grants, donations, and income producing activities. Even though districts are technically subdivisions of state government, they are aligned with the boundaries of the counties and according to District Law (see IC 14-32-4-18), district employees are to be considered as employees of the county in which they are located. In a perfect world, each SWCD would have at least two full time positions, a Director and a Technical Assistance Specialist/Education Specialist. SWCDs with strong support and adequate funding from their local county officials generally manage to provide a higher level of service and get more conservation on the ground than those without that support. This guide is intended for those SWCDs that are struggling to secure adequate support from county officials. Below are several proven strategies SWCDs have used to gain the confidence and the financial commitment of your local county officials.

**It is imperative that this effort is spearheaded and carried out by the Board of Supervisors.**

### 1. Establish a clear identity

To be effective, SWCDs need to think in terms of sales and marketing. People need to know who you are, what you do and why you do it. **Establish a clear identity, be confident in your District's goals, and believe in your District and its mission.** This is a process. The first step is to review and update your long-range plan and your annual plan of work. In your review, be sure to bring your mission, goals and objectives up to date and format your plan into an attractive document with a clearly stated vision and mission. If you don't have a strategic long-range plan with clearly defined goals and metrics, develop one, because otherwise you are flying blind! Your Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD) and your District Support Specialist are available to help you through the process. **This must be a team effort. Staff and supervisors must commit to working together** to establish credibility in the eyes of not only your county officials but also the public in general. When ready, post your plan on your website and social media, and bring copies to meetings of county officials and your annual meeting.

---

*Already have an ongoing relationship with your county government? Share your experience with IASWCD so we can encourage other districts and share ideas. Email us at [hello@iaswcd.org](mailto:hello@iaswcd.org) to share your story.*



## 2. Identify and build relationships

Identify existing relationships, even if they are just acquaintances, between District Staff and Supervisors and County Commissioners, Council members and other county government personnel. Seek opportunities to interact one on one. Grabbing a coffee or lunch is a great way to build a relationship. SWCD board members will also benefit from being visible at events that attract community leaders, even when not specific to conservation. One example is local Chamber of Commerce meetings; another is legislative breakfast/lunch events. More formally, make it a point to show up in the courthouse or the county office building from time to time, especially for meetings that touch on topics of interest to the SWCD and its budget.

Over time, county officials will leave and new ones will be brought on. Stay up to date on changes in county leadership, and be sure to continually develop relationships with new and current leaders. Similarly, establish the expectation within your Board of Supervisors that all members should work to develop and maintain these county relationships.

## 3. Build partnerships

The reason that we hear the word partnership over and over is because partnerships are key to success in any endeavor. Beyond the Indiana Conservation Partnership, the list of potential partners for conservation is only limited by your vision – and be sure to think creatively! You never know who might want to support your vision. Below is a sample list of groups and organizations that SWCDs across the state have partnered with.

|                                   |                                   |                           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Arborists                         | Neighboring SWCDs                 | Farm Bureau               |
| Pheasants Forever / Quail Forever | Land Trusts                       | Chambers of Commerce      |
| Ducks Unlimited                   | The Nature Conservancy            | Tourism Boards            |
| Wild Turkey Federation            | Realtor Associations (e.g. MIBOR) | Neighborhood Associations |
| Local Co-Ops                      | Boating Associations              | Parks Foundations         |
| Plant Nurseries                   | Local Zoos                        | Colleges / Universities   |
| Local Schools                     | Department of Transportation      | Local CISMAs              |
| Seed Dealers                      | Citizen Science Organizations     | Master Gardener Clubs     |
| Audubon Society Chapters          | Newspapers and Radio Outlets      | Builders Association      |

---

*Already have an ongoing relationship with your county government? Share your experience with IASWCD so we can encourage other districts and share ideas. Email us at [hello@iaswcd.org](mailto:hello@iaswcd.org) to share your story.*



## Indiana Conservation Partnership:

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| IN Assn. of SWCDs – All 92 SWCDs                                      | IN Dept. of Natural Resources –<br>Division of Forestry          | Purdue Extension*                                |
| IN Dept. of Environmental Mgmt.                                       | IN State Dept. of Agriculture –<br>Division of Soil Conservation | USDA – Farm Services Agency                      |
| Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources –<br>Division of Fish and Wildlife | State Soil Conservation Board                                    | USDA – Natural Resources<br>Conservation Service |

*\* Purdue Extension is similar to SWCDs in that they have a presence in each of our 92 counties. They are therefore well-positioned to be excellent partners in locally-led initiatives.*

Reach out and identify a contact person within every group, share your strategic plan with them and identify potential synergies. Invite them to join you to host an event and share costs and benefits. Offer to make a presentation to their membership to inform them of who you are, what you do and why you do it. Overall, be confident in your vision and enthusiastic about collaboration.

## 4. Raise Your Visibility

If nobody knows what you are doing, they can't help you. Be sure to stay in the public eye. When it comes to advocating for your SWCD, ask for and secure a spot on the agenda of your County Council and County Commissioner meetings. **Don't wait until budget hearings** to show up at your County Council meetings. Instead, be proactive! Make a plan to provide updates and reports from time to time throughout the year. Many districts have a standing agenda item and provide monthly or quarterly reports. It is crucial that supervisors and staff show up together – to send a clear message to county officials that you have an engaged and dedicated board.

In addition, SWCDs' visibility will benefit from these activities:

- Hold and publicize events. Extend invitations to officials, especially for your annual meeting.
- Media is your friend. Make sure to publicize events in local news media and social media.
- Include county council, commissioners, elected officials, township trustees, municipal officials, school officials on email lists for monthly meeting agendas and minutes.
- Find a reason to be in the courthouse from time to time and develop personal acquaintances with office holders, e.g. auditor, treasurer, surveyor and courthouse personnel.
- Make it a team effort. **Supervisors and staff must do this together.**

---

*Already have an ongoing relationship with your county government? Share your experience with IASWCD so we can encourage other districts and share ideas. Email us at [hello@iaswcd.org](mailto:hello@iaswcd.org) to share your story.*



- Stay grounded. Have realistic expectations. This is not a one and done. This is a long slow process. Like a marathon, patience and persistence will get you where you want to be.
- Attend county meetings periodically. Get on the agenda and provide updates and reports from time to time throughout the year. Bring good news.

## 5. Demonstrate Return On Investment (ROI)

- Use the ISDA leveraging sheet. [Learn more in this ISDA-IASWCD webinar](#) on YouTube.
- Remind officials that money spent on conservation work is typically spent with local contractors and suppliers. SWCDs are often one of the only county agencies that bring money into the county.
- Contact your local NRCS partner to make sure to have a complete list of Farm Bill program monies that have accrued to local farmers.
- Talk about how you have leveraged partnerships to benefit landowners and residents of your county, and the synergies that have resulted from those relationships.

## 6. Conclusion

Gaining support from your County Government is a journey. It is more like a marathon than a sprint. Your goal should be a long-term relationship where your SWCD creates the expectations and parameters for success and then fulfills them year after year. A team approach with staff and supervisors working together is key to success.



---

*Already have an ongoing relationship with your county government? Share your experience with IASWCD so we can encourage other districts and share ideas. Email us at [hello@iaswcd.org](mailto:hello@iaswcd.org) to share your story.*