

Local Working Groups

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)



What is a Local Working Group?

Local Working Groups assist the USDA in matters relating to the implementation and technical aspects of conservation programs under Title II of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (the 2014 Farm Bill). Public attendance is permitted and encouraged at Local Working Group meetings.

Responsibilities of a Local Working Group

- Ensure that a conservation needs assessment is developed using community stakeholder input.
- Utilize the conservation needs assessment to help identify program funding needs and conservation practices.
- Identify priority resource concerns and identify, as appropriate, high-priority areas needing assistance.
- Recommend USDA conservation program application and funding criteria, eligible practices (including limits on practice payments or units), and payment rates.
- Participate in multi-county coordination where program funding and priority area proposals cross county boundaries.
- Assist NRCS and the conservation district with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.
- Recommend State and national program policy to the State Technical Committee based on resource data.
- Utilize the conservation needs assessment to identify priority resource concerns that can be addressed by USDA programs.
- Forward recommendations to the NRCS designated conservationist or Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Executive Director, as appropriate.
- Adhere to standard operating procedures identified in Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 501, Subpart B, Section 501.14.

Local Working Group Membership

The Local Working Group membership should be diverse and focus on agricultural interests and natural resource issues existing in the local community. Membership should include agricultural producers representing the variety of crops, livestock, and poultry raised within the local area; owners of nonindustrial private forest land, as appropriate; representatives of agricultural and environmental organizations; and representatives of governmental agencies carrying out agricultural and natural resource conservation programs and activities.

Membership of the USDA local working group may include but is not limited to Federal, State, county, Tribal, or local government representatives.

Examples of potential members include:

- NRCS designated conservationist.
- Members of conservation district boards or equivalent.
- Members of the county FSA committee.
- FSA county executive director or designee.
- Cooperative extension (board members or manager).
- State or local elected or appointed officials.
- Other Federal and State government representatives.
- Representatives of American Indian and Alaskan Native governments.

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Organization and Function

Local Working Groups provide recommendations on local natural resource priorities and criteria for USDA conservation activities and programs. Local working groups are normally chaired by the appropriate soil and water conservation district (SWCD). In the event the SWCD is unable or unwilling to chair the local working group, NRCS district conservationist (or designated conservationist) is responsible for those duties.

Public Notification

Local working group meetings are open to the public and notification must be published in one or more newspapers, including recommended Tribal publications, to attain the appropriate circulation.

Public notice of local working group meetings should be provided at least 14 calendar days prior to the meeting. Notification will need to exceed the 14-calendar-day minimum where State open meeting laws require a longer notification period. The minimum 14-calendar-day notice requirement may be waived in the case of exceptional conditions, as determined by the chairperson or NRCS district conservationist (or designated conservationist). The public notice of local working group meetings will include the time, place, and agenda items for the meeting.

Conducting Business

The meetings will be conducted as an open discussion among members. Discussion will focus on identifying local natural resource concerns that can be treated using programs and activities identified in 440-CPM, Part 501, Subpart A, Section 501.0C. All recommendations will be considered.

The following guidelines will govern meeting discussions:

- The chairperson will lead the discussion.
- Only one person may speak at a time. Every participant should have an opportunity to speak. The chairperson or his or her designee is responsible for recognizing speakers.
- The chairperson, in consultation with those members present, may establish time limits for discussion on individual agenda items.
- State Technical Committees are advisory in nature and all recommendations are considered.
- Members may be polled, but voting on issues is not appropriate.
- The chairperson will defer those agenda items not covered because of time limits to the next meeting.

Record of Meetings

Summaries for all local working group meetings will be available within 30 calendar days of the meeting and will be filed at the appropriate local NRCS office.

Input to State Technical Committee

Local Working Groups recommendations are to be submitted to State Technical Committee chairperson, the district conservationist (or designated conservationist), or both (as appropriate) within 14 calendar days after a meeting.

