



Legislative Outreach Tips, Tricks, and Checklists for SWCDs

Conservation tours, field days, roundtables and other local events are some of the most effective ways to inform and influence your state and federal legislators as well as your local county officials. These events can demonstrate the impact that the local SWCD is having in putting conservation on the ground. As we seek to maintain and ultimately increase their financial support, we need to continually demonstrate to our public officials that their investment in SWCDs is returning value to their districts and is providing a better quality of life for their constituents. It is always helpful to point out how you have leveraged the investment of taxpayer dollars with additional funding and with the participation of your many partners.

Since there is an ongoing turnover of elected officials, educating legislators about conservation in their home districts should be an ongoing process. So, plan to host a legislative event at least every other year. With proper media coverage events such as these can also raise the profile and credibility of your District locally and regionally.

Choose a topic and identify your goals

Conservation tours can showcase all manner of conservation practices including soil health systems, livestock and manure management, urban farms and farm markets, invasive species and forestry management, buffers and erosion control, habitat and wetland development, education initiatives, the list goes on.

Whatever topic you choose, one of your goals should be to demonstrate the impact of the investment of taxpayer dollars by your county, state, and federal government officials. Other goals may include raising awareness of specific natural resource concerns, showcasing the power of partnerships, providing opportunities for legislator questions and feedback.

Start early and plan ahead

The best season for outdoor events will commence with spring planting and run through early November. Roundtables are often held indoors and can be especially effective during the cold months. It is important to begin planning two to three months ahead of your event in order to identify the



project(s) you want to highlight, pick a venue, line up speakers, arrange shuttles, find a caterer, prepare invitations, etc.

Legislator schedules fill up quickly, so it is important to get invitations sent out well ahead of the event.

Consider collaborating with your neighbors and partners

It takes a lot of effort to stage a high quality outreach event. Be sure to engage your SWCD board and staff in the planning process. In rural areas many legislators represent multiple counties so you may want to consider joining forces with one or more neighboring SWCDs to reach more legislative districts. Be sure to check out [legislative district maps](#) to identify all of your county's representatives and senators. Determine the best possible multi-county collaborations while still considering the convenience of travel to the site of the event.

Your NRCS District Conservationist, District Support Specialist and other members of the IN Conservation Partnership are great resources for planning and presenting. Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI), Urban Soil Health (USH) and State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management (SICIM) are all available to help with events and can provide or refer you to relevant speakers and experts. Be sure to reach out early in the process. Note that agency and program staff are able to help educate legislators, but cannot lobby.

Who to invite

In addition to your SWCD supervisors, associates, and staff, consider inviting the following individuals and agency representatives. These influential folks will add visibility and credibility to your event.

- US Senator and Representative and their local staff
- State Senators and Representatives and their staff (contact info below)
- Indiana Conservation Partnership staff
- County Commissioners
- County Council members
- County Surveyors and Drainage Board
- Municipal leaders
- Other partners that may have been involved with the project being showcased (DNR, USFWS, Non-Governmental Organizations)
- River Basin Commission leaders
- Community members, farmers, and land owners who are interested in the topic you've chosen.

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Links to lists of State of Indiana Senators and Representatives:

- Indiana House Republicans: <https://www.indianahouserepublicans.com/members/>
- Indiana House Democrats: <https://indianahousedemocrats.org/members>
- Indiana Senate Republicans: <https://www.indianasenaterepublicans.com/senators>
- Indiana Senate Democrats: <https://www.indianasenatedemocrats.com/members/>

Media coverage

Media is your friend. Be sure to invite local print, radio and television reporters and use partner newsletters and social media. Media coverage will amplify the message of your SWCD and provides a great opportunity for legislators to demonstrate their commitment to their legislative districts.

Checklist

- Define your event
- Pick a date and a venue
- Develop the agenda and any printed program materials, handouts, SWAG
- Line up your speaker(s) and make sure their topics align with your goals
- Identify your invitees and send invitations well ahead of time
- Designate a contact person and include their contact info on invitations and programs
- Determine the food and drink items and make necessary arrangements
- Decide on tables, chairs, A/V equipment, portable PA system, pop up tents, port-o-pots, shuttles, accessibility concerns, signs, handouts, parking, etc.
- Choose a master of ceremonies to conduct the event
- Designate a photographer and take plenty of pictures
- Be sure to introduce everyone
- Keep track of who attended and get their contact information
- Send thank you notes to attendees
- Do a thorough post event review and take notes on how to improve on your next one
- Write a press release and an article for inclusion in newsletters or your annual report



Final thoughts

Don't hope for success – plan for it! As you plan your event, try to gain an understanding of the following to help guide your messaging:

- Where your legislators stand on issues that are important to your District
- Their background and occupation (e.g. farming/forestry/development/education)
- Their relationship to conservation (Are they already practicing conservation? Is Districts' work and mission a new topic for them?)
- Their House or Senate committee assignments – this is where they can have the most influence
- What is their passion – why do they serve their constituents?

Results drive increased investment.

It is critical to clearly communicate the impact that your SWCD has in getting conservation on the ground!