

ADVICE FOR NEW COORDINATORS

9/2/2010

- 1) Listen and learn from the experienced Coordinators, don't be afraid to ask them for help. Support one another.
- 2) Get to know your Board members and their roles on the RC&D board, they are your first line of defense from within or from without. Build the Trust. If you are doing your job well, you will get into trouble occasionally and your Board can be a shield.
- 3) Start small; don't try to run before you can walk. You will learn many things as you go.
- 4) Be open and honest with your Board. I view my job as someone who gives them the pros and cons of a decision or project and then offers ideas on appropriate courses of action. I tell them the good, the bad and the ugly!
- 5) It is easier to beg forgiveness than ask permission (this applies more to NRCS).
- 6) Be tenacious, if you find a roadblock in one direction, head around it in another way.
- 7) Help develop your Board's capacity. They are a wonderful resource; ask them, involve them, but don't wear them out. Ask when you really need it.
- 8) As NRCS staff, do not sign anything and don't touch the RC&D money or checks. This will help alleviate some of the need for item #2.
- 9) Don't ask the question if you don't want to live with the answer. This is especially true with NRCS. In other words know when **not** to ask the question (if in doubt ask the other Coordinators).
- 10) The most important - The Coordinators job is about relationships and reputation, make sure both of yours are sparkling. Do what you say you are going to do!
- 11) Attend Clinch Powell's 3 day Non-profit management workshop as early as possible.
- 12) Get a copy of the NRCS office review/audit from your state coordinator. This will help with tracking and reporting and filing.
- 13) Get good templates from fellow coordinators on Area Plans, Annual Plans of Work, and Annual Reports.
- 14) Take a few days in the beginning and get familiar with your area by taking a drive and getting an idea about what natural resources there are and what some of the small towns are like. It will give you a little insight as to what some of the needs are.
- 15) Value your council members; seek out their wisdom and support.
- 16) Strive to make the partnership between NRCS and your council a strong one. I know at times this can be difficult. But believe me both will benefit tremendously from this.
- 17) You don't need to know something about a project to do it. There are partners out there that have the expertise to implement anything; the secret to success is finding those partners.
- 18) Celebrate your success with your partners, give them the credit they are due.
- 19) Enjoy your job!
- 20) Always remember that each RC&D Council is autonomous. NRCS has a hard time in getting away from a top down approach. The NRCS RC&D Coordinator should satisfy NRCS requirements such as timekeeping, POINTS data entry, Civil Rights, and other NRCS policies and procedures; but constant focus should be given to providing the best technical assistance possible to help the Council plan and implement projects under the umbrella of an Annual Plan of Work that supports the vision of the Area Plan. While Council autonomy is important, RC&D should also be viewed as one big family and RC&D Coordinators should have a sharing spirit.
- 21) LISTEN to the local people! But don't always listen to the same group. Strive to have a diverse sounding board in the Council service area.
- 22) Develop a 30 second stump speech about RC&D as soon as possible. This a great tool for establishing partnerships and getting people to pay serious attention to the mission of RC&D.

- 23) Work with your supervisor to take the NRCS RC&D Training Courses ASAP!
- 24) Attend a “good” grant writing session
- 25) Attend a non-profit training session (highly recommend the Clinch Powell session)
- 26) Be a good partner-Turf is a four letter word that can hurt one’s reputation and kill a project
- 27) Be prepared for an adjustment period, especially if past position was NRCS District Conservationist. It takes a while to get one’s feet on the ground and get the feel of the RC&D Coordinator role and responsibilities.
- 28) Be patient with project planning and implementation. Some of the best projects during my tenure as RC&D Coordinator have taken a few years to become a reality.
- 29) Always remember to share thanks to partners (personal thank you notes)
- 30) Share success of projects via print and electronic media and local meetings
- 31) Review National and Regional RC&Ds websites.
- 32) Sign up for National listserv.
- 33) Sign up to receive the national grant list –Grant Station.
- 34) Visit your Chair and your supervisor and discuss expectations. Resolve discrepancies immediately.
- 35) Visit your local elected officials – county commissioners, mayors, etc. – and discover their needs.
- 36) Read your Council’s Area Plan, Annual Report, and Annual Plan of Work.
- 37) Become familiar with POINTS.
- 38) Ask for a mentor – suggest a coordinator from another state.
- 39) Review Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws, and Council Policies.
- 40) Attend State, Regional, and National Association meetings.
- 41) Read grants and obtain solid understanding of current status.
- 42) Review past minutes.
- 43) Understand Council’s financial situation keeping a hands-off stance.
- 44) Use Good Search <http://www.goodsearch.com> for all of your internet searches. If you designate the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils – NARC&DC as the beneficiary, they receive one penny for each search.
- 45) Celebrate your Council’s successes.
- 46) GO SLOW the first year. Take the first year to understand your council’s capacity to grow. Then be deliberate in evaluating new projects; understand the magnitude of the projects that are multi-year.
- 47) Print off this list and read it each month for a year.
- 48) Become bonded with your council members (especially your chairperson) so that you and your council feel comfortable in discussing any item that is put on the table.
- 49) If you want your council to be successful, help them understand and move in the direction of sustainability. Gain freedom from dependency of NRCS or any other group. Financial freedom allows your council to be more independent and to think outside of the box. People like successful projects and successful organizations and in time will migrate your way bringing projects and funding.
- 50) Don’t run from your failures learn and grow.
- 51) Just because it didn’t work doesn’t mean it wasn’t a good idea.
- 52) “Revisit” old canceled projects. Things may have changed to allow them to be implemented.
- 53) Do not be afraid to ask for help/guidance/feedback. There are over 400 of us (coordinators) and there will be very few things that someone hasn’t already seen happen. So develop a network of coordinators to use as mentors/sounding boards they can be a big help.
- 54) Learn how to say no. Some projects are best left to someone else.
- 55) Keep your supervisor and your state program well informed. A well-timed “heads up” can help keep you/Council out of sticky situations or help you out if trouble does come knocking. (Sometimes “forgiveness” isn’t quite enough.) These state leadership people are also strong

supporters for your work and that of your Council. And they can help “make things happen” with other disciplines in the agency.

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