

Hosting a Legislative Event

Conservation districts should consider hosting legislative events at the local level. Many districts already hold these types of events to discuss conservation district programs and activities, bringing federal, state, and local legislative leaders together. The steps below will guide conservation districts through the event planning process.

1. Pick a date when the General Assembly is not in session. Remember on election years all House members and half of the Senators are running for re-election, so their schedule right before the election may be hectic. Click here for the session schedule: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/> or contact PACD.
2. Your event can be a tour, a meeting, or an information session. Choose a convenient and easily accessible location. It is sometimes easier to get legislators to attend events first thing in the morning rather than the middle or the end of the day. Providing some type of refreshment or meal is an option to consider, but not mandatory.
3. Develop an invitation list. PACD recommends inviting all federal, state, county, and local elected leaders. Some legislators may send staff, especially federal legislators, but staff will relay the information you provide. Also, consider inviting cooperating agencies, related organizations, and the local press. This event may be the only time all the interested parties are together to discuss mutual interests. Official printed invitations are not essential, an invitation letter on district letterhead will be sufficient. Invitations should go out at least one month before the event. Ask for an RSVP at least a week prior to the event to have an accurate count. Districts may have to call the legislators' offices and the press to receive a response. Also, by calling and reminding the staff, it reinforces the time and place of the event.
4. Putting together an agenda is the most important part of the planning process. Legislators are generally extremely busy, so it is unrealistic to expect them to spend more than 2 hours at a legislative event. Begin the program with introductions by the board president or manager. Have the MC announce that reporters are at the event. Pick interesting speakers who can give 15 minute presentations including a question/answer session. The presentations should be about recent district accomplishments and ongoing projects, challenges the district is experiencing, and most importantly a thank you for the legislator's support. General information should be discussed, but more detailed information can be distributed via handouts, etc. Keep to the schedule so those at the end of the agenda are not lost in the shuffle.
5. Prepare handouts and a press release concerning the event. Make sure the handouts and press release are sent to those who were invited, but unable to attend.
6. Take pictures at the meeting. After the event, follow up with a thank you note to all attendees. Include a press release and pictures to elected officials for use in their own newsletter.