



Resource Conservation & Development for
Healthy Communities, Ecosystems & Enterprises

NARC&DC

Presents

The First 90 Days

A Guidebook for new

RC&D Council

Executive Directors

December 2016

Healthy Communities, Ecosystems and Enterprises

Acknowledgements

Over the past 50 years, thousands of volunteers nationwide have dedicated countless hours to their communities and natural resources in the name of RC&D. We are truly in your debt and, as a direct result, we are a better nation due to your efforts. This handbook is dedicated to you – the pathfinders - who forged ahead despite the mountains that had to be scaled and discovered. Their success was well worth the effort.

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INTRODUCTION

The First 90 Days is a guide for new Executive Directors of RC&D councils across the United States. It is a basic beginning guide, meant to help you discover more about your new position, those you work with, and the region around you.

Even if you have previously worked for an RC&D council, we expect that by educating yourself on the many pieces of information for which you are now, or will be, responsible, your value to the organization will be greatly enhanced. In addition, what you learn may help you avoid costly setbacks.

As an RC&D Executive Director, you hold a specialized position in the world of conservation and development. The first ninety days of a new job is both exciting and overwhelming. There is so much to learn, so many new faces and new people to meet. This guide has been prepared by people who have been where you are today; people who have endured and enjoyed their adventures within RC&D, both locally and nationally. We hope their experiences will be beneficial to you as you read and follow this guide.

The time divisions in the following pages are not set in stone. They are suggestions and can vary greatly based upon your council's distinguished attributes. If this information reaches you too late for any of the sections, we encourage you to read through those sections anyway and prioritize what still needs to be done.

Not everything in this manual applies to every Director's unique situation. Because each RC&D Council is self-governed, and chooses projects based upon its own guidelines, there will be differences between them. We encourage you to discuss the specifics of your Council with the members themselves to determine differences based upon Council goals, demographics, geography, and local interest. Choose what applies to your situation and feel free to offer suggestions for future editions of this manual so we can improve it for future Directors.

RC&D BACKGROUND

What is RC&D? Local People Solving Local Problems

You are part of an extraordinary local network. The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council is a locally led organization that helps communities care for and protect their natural and human resources in a way that improves the local economy, environment and living standard. RC&D is a way for people to work together to plan and carry out activities that will make their areas a better place to live.

Our mode of operations has always been, local people know what is best for their communities. That is the core premise of the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program and the key to its success. The RC&D Program provides a development process that is remarkable in that it is driven by a passion to mobilize local, state and national resources to address economic, social, and environmental and quality of life issues on the ground where those issues occur. Often that ground is rural America and the partnerships formed are rooted in the communities being served.

The hallmark of the program is its diversity and scope. There is no one RC&D model. There are hundreds of local RC&D Councils across the United States and several of its territories. Each council is made up of local leaders of all types who know their communities well. These volunteers are driven by a passion to serve their home places. They identify the challenges their communities are facing, forge partnerships to take on those challenges and solve them.

The scope of the RC&D Program is exceptional. Its councils form a rural information delivery system that relies on its collective strength to provide technical expertise, create funding partnerships and puts boots on the ground to solve a locally identified problem. The focus on local direction and control has made the RC&D Program one of the Federal government's most successful rural development programs, with RC&D Councils able to leverage approximately \$7 for every Federal dollar invested in the program.

The RC&D movement and the local RC&D Councils are based on several concepts that make it a unique public/private relationship. These concepts include:

- The value of public/private partnerships in making the best use of limited resources;
- The value of grass-roots involvement in making decisions about local areas;
- Bringing Federal agencies together to focus on the same problems and opportunities;
- Creative leveraging of limited public and private funds to accomplish targeted goals;
- Working toward the goal of community sustainability; and
- Achieving a balance between rural economic development and natural resources protection.

Since RC&D Councils are 501(C)3 non-for-profit corporations, they are not governmental entities, so the typical policies and constraints of local, state, and federal government programs do not limit the types of issues they address or the means they use. Within their respective

areas (typically covering 5-8 counties), RC&D Councils have a high degree of independence to carry out activities that will achieve their most important goals. RC&D Council volunteers are leaders and community stakeholders involved in multiple roles in local government, school boards, churches, and other civic activities. At RC&D Council meetings, they draw from their professional expertise and community connections to determine the needs of their RC&D Council areas, address those needs, and make their communities better places to live, work, and play.

For more information about RC&D and its programs, visit the following webpages:

- National RC&D website – narcdc.org
- RC&D's Historic Focus – narcdc.org/about.html
- Circle of Diamonds – narcdc.org/general-information.html

CHAPTER ONE: Your First Week on the Job

You've accepted the position as the Executive Director for a RC&D council and the next stage of your career has begun. As you look forward to the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead, there are some steps you can take to smooth the transition into your new position.

These important steps can help you "hit the ground running" when you step into your office on your first day. Remember that 70% of skills development happens through experience. Although you were likely hired because of your education and preexisting skills, you will be constantly acquiring new talents and skills during the first month, and beyond. The following are some suggested steps to get yourself ready as you embark on your new career:

- _____ 1. Review the following documents to get a better understanding of your council
 - Articles of Incorporation
 - By-laws
 - Five-year Area Plan and Annual Plan
 - General Policies and Procedures (This should include Codes of Conduct, Sexual Harassment, Whistleblower, Conflict of Interest and other policies that should be in place. If you need help on developing policies, contact the NARC&DC for help or go to the members only section of the NARC&DC website at <http://www.narcdcmembers.org>)
 - Accounting Manual
 - Personnel Manual
 - Board minutes from the past 6-12 months
- _____ 2. Review at least three (3) years of financial data including the following (if available):
 - Budget
 - Year-end financial statements
 - Audits
 - Annual Report
 - Grant reports
 - IRS Documents tax filings and forms 990
 - Council Financial Plan including Protocol on Money Management
- _____ 3. Review the general structure of your Council, including as many of the following as available:
 - Organizational chart
 - Council member roster
 - Committee list
 - Staff or Council Biographies
 - Ongoing Project Roster including status of grants and applications
 - Job Descriptions for all active positions
 - Organization brochures, newsletters, or other mailings
 - Contracts for all committed services (buildings, autos, maintenance,

contractors, and sub-contractors)

- Summary of insurance policies; insure there is D&O insurance

- _____ 4. Arrange to meet with the previous Executive Director, if possible. Be sure to have a list of questions in hand.
- _____ 5. Review outstanding office keys to determine if you should have locks changed (if applicable).
- _____ 6. Arrange for an announcement about your appointment in the local newspaper and in the next newsletter or council mailing.
- _____ 7. Setup a council email account
- _____ 8. Order your business cards
- _____ 9. Begin a calendar of upcoming events: Board meetings, conventions, trainings, and fundraisers
- _____ 10. Familiarize yourself with the nearby RC&D councils as well as any state, regional, and national associations
- _____ 11. Start a list of things you want to do during your second week on the job
- _____ 12. Complete necessary paperwork for employment and compensation; I-9, W-4, direct deposit, etc.
- _____ 13. Don't make any snap decisions. Sometimes, when there is a lapse in the Executive Director's position, some people may come in wanting decisions made yesterday. Take your time and review the circumstances around your decisions.

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CHAPTER TWO: Your First Thirty Days

After the first few busy days of your new position, you should be starting to better understand the organization you are working for. People within the council and the community will be anxious to meet you, and will be forming first impressions that will establish future relationships.

Following are some tasks you will want to accomplish within the first thirty days:

- _____ 1. Schedule a personal conference with each staff person, project leader, or key contractor. Use the time to get better acquainted and find out what each should say about the organization, their role and responsibilities, and share some things about yourself.
- _____ 2. Schedule visits with key council members and committee chairs. Discuss current events within the organization and any expectations they have for you.
- _____ 3. Make a personal visit to:
 - The outside auditing firm or accountant (If you do not have one, ask for one)
 - Any other key financial or legal persons that have an impact on the organization
- _____ 4. Continue filling out the calendar you started before and add:
 - Committee meetings
 - NARC&DC National conferences and meetings
 - Phone Conferences
- _____ 5. Notify NARC&DC of your arrival and contact information to establish two-way communication with the National office
 - Subscribe to the NARC&DC listserv
 - Review NARC&DC website
- _____ 6. Contact the executive directors of neighboring (state or region) RC&D councils and introduce yourself. Determine the status of state and regional associations.
- _____ 7. Look at your Dues situation. Determine if your council requires dues and if your members are up-to-date. Is your council current on paying your state, regional, and national dues?
- _____ 8. Understand your role as the Executive Director and how your role intersects with the RC&D Council's Board of Directors. Many Boards are unclear about the difference between governance and management. It is your job to help them understand that tasks such as hiring, project management, and grant writing fall in management while tasks like setting policy, strategies and general oversight and financial solvency fall within governance.

- _____ 9. With appropriate staff, board members or volunteers review the following:
- Cash flow situation
 - Policies and procedures for accounts payable and receivable
 - Current grant contracts
 - Annual fund raising events and procedures
 - Staff Policies and Procedures
 - Council Policies and Procedures
 - Newsletter, website and other communications expectations and deadlines.

The first thirty days is a good time to ask a lot of questions. You don't have to worry about seeming unknowledgeable. However, remember to respect the other professionals you work with by asking informed questions and being willing to do some research and work yourself.

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CHAPTER THREE: Your Second Thirty Days

During the first thirty days, you were encouraged to spend much of your time learning about your new organization, your staff and co-workers, council members, and volunteers. Your focus has been internal. Now it is time to get to know the community that your council serves.

Following are recommendations for tasks to accomplish during your second thirty days:

- _____ 1. Scheduling meetings with key leaders within the community. Take direction from your council as to whom you should meet with. Remember, in these early meetings, to be polite and interested, but not to commit too much time or resources to projects or agendas. You are there to introduce yourself and find out more about other individuals, sponsors, partners, and organizations. Some suggested groups include: County Commissioners, Soil Conservation Districts, Extension Agents, USDA - NRCS, Forest Service and Rural Development.
- _____ 2. Arrange to meet (or at least speak with) key staff at foundations, grantors, or other significant funding sources for your organization.
- _____ 3. Speak with the major local newspaper(s) to establish a relationship with the editor and/or writing staff that handle local and/or environmental issues. Find out deadlines and best practices for submission of articles and press releases.
- _____ 4. Contact other media outlets, such as television and radio to establish relationships and best practices for sharing information. Determine what is available on social media including websites, Facebook, and ListServes.
- _____ 5. Arrange to meet, or speak with, state or regional Executive Directors to establish a relationship and share project ideas, fundraising concepts, and grantor opportunities. Ask about communication methods (email, newsletters, and meetings) and attempt to participate fully. Try not to commit to projects or issues that will be too time intensive. There will be plenty of time later.
- _____ 6. With staff and appropriate volunteers, review annual giving campaigns and fundraising events. Learn about the major donors and review donor records.
- _____ 7. Review programs with staff:
 - Make sure you understand each project or program offered
 - Know whether there is a time limit or if the project is ongoing
 - Find out where the program/project is being held and what portion of your geographic region is affected
 - Review program budgets and how they are subsidized
 - Make sure to understand how the program is evaluated and who decides whether the work is satisfactory
 - Review all current project reports and any feedback received.
 - Ask how the project is marketed or advertised
 - Find out if any future programs are planned similar to the current one.

CHAPTER FOUR: Your Third Thirty Days

Your new job isn't all that new anymore. After a couple of months, you have learned a great deal, but will continue over the next year. In this thirty day period, there is still some detailed reviewing to be done, however, it is time to move into planning, establishing priorities, and communicating them with others around you. You will likely have had a board meeting in these first ninety days, an important step in establishing your relationship with the leadership and staff of the organization.

Following are some suggestions for this next thirty days:

- _____ 1. Determine what the protocol is on adopting new projects.
- _____ 2. Look at ways to expand your council's resources. Grant Station available through the NARC&DC Office is a good resource.
- _____ 3. Executive Director Performance Evaluation – Determine what the annual evaluation procedure is for your position.
- _____ 4. Board Evaluation – Determine what the annual evaluation procedure is for your Board.
- _____ 5. Fiscal Responsibility – Ask the following:
 - Who has oversight?
 - How is fiscal integrity maintained?
 - Are Direct/Indirect Policies adhered to?
- _____ 6. Determine Circle of Diamond status with NARC&DC.
- _____ 7. Time Management is essential. As Executive Director, time management probably comes naturally. But, what do you do when your resources have been cut, and you've got two to three times as much to do? To really "do more with less," you've got to become more productive. Make sure you plan each day to be productive. Consider maintaining a "to-do" list and make sure it works for you. Something as simple as this can help you identify top priorities, eliminate time wasters, and get rid of wasteful processes.
- _____ 8. Develop a Risk Management Plan. The purpose of risk management is to identify potential problems before they occur. You want to ensure your RC&D Council has a process in place to identify risk, respond to those risks, and monitoring them throughout any project or activity your RC&D Council participates in. In short, your risk management plan ties together all the components of risk management—risk identification, analysis, and mitigation—into a functional whole.

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CHAPTER FIVE: The Rest of Your Career

After just three short months you're expected to know the basic operations, the most pressing challenges, and the greatest opportunities for the council you serve. You are well on your way in making a difference in your community.

The final piece of RC&D advice is:

DON'T BE AFRAID!

What? Be afraid? How can RC&D be scary? Here are some examples of how your leadership can make a difference within your council.

DON'T BE AFRAID Of What Might Go Wrong!

A proactive Executive Director tries to resolve potential problems before they happen by developing a Risk Management Plan. Yet, not all issues can be foreseen and the unlikely can occur—so don't be afraid of what might go wrong! Some things are simply out of your control and you will inevitably make mistakes in your career. The key is to learn from your mistakes by understanding what didn't work and how you can improve upon it the next time around. Remember, you are not the first Executive Director to go through this. Use your resources and the resources found in this booklet to help you.

DON'T BE AFRAID To Delegate!

You can't do it all yourself. Delegating not only provides team members with opportunities to hone their skills, but it also shows that you trust them to get the job done — no one likes being micromanaged! But as a side note, remember that YOU and your Board are accountable for the overall well-being and accomplishment of your goals and objectives. Regularly checking in with your team members is a smart way to ensure completion of all delegated tasks. Know your limits and your capabilities and the time restrictions you are under and ask for assistance when your capabilities or time is limited.

DON'T BE AFRAID To Say No!

There are many great ideas and wonderful projects to work on. But sometimes those ideas do not fit within your RC&D Councils strategic plan or funding framework. RC&D can be an incubator or clearinghouse for other entities. Don't be afraid to say no and turn that no into a positive by leveraging your partners and friends and suggesting others who might be better positioned to work the idea or project.

DON'T BE AFRAID to Share your Stories with other Executive Directors!

Joining a group specific to Executive Directors and others working in your field, will put you in touch with others in your profession, and:

- Keep up-to-date on issues and developments
- See who the "thought leaders" are
- Inform you of companies—or individuals—with whom you would like to work
- Obtain information about upcoming conferences, networking opportunities and professional development opportunities
- Access journals, job listings, newsletters, articles, blogs and much, much more!

Some examples of such groups are:

- NARC&DC's Council Support Staff (CSS) Group – www.narcdc.org
- NARC&DC's National ListServ – <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/NARCDC/info>
- American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) - <https://www.asaecenter.org>
- Local Chapters of Community Foundations
- Association Management Group - <http://www.amg-inc.com>

More current links can be found on the NARC&DC website at www.narcdc.org.

CHAPTER SIX: Final Thoughts

It doesn't matter if your RC&D Council is as large as other organizations in your region or as small as two dedicated persons working to better your community. What matters is that what you are doing is important enough and you market your accomplishments, then others WILL join you.

If at any point you feel unsure of your council's goals, your role, or your general purpose, remember that you are not alone. Every Executive Director has been where you are, and they want to help you succeed. Seek out your colleagues from other RC&D councils. RC&D councils span the nation, and they all work toward the same goals. So, helping you succeed is everyone's goal.

And, once you succeed, share that success and celebrate that success! RC&D Councils, as a whole, are not very good at tooting our own horn and telling the RC&D story. However, people need time to celebrate and relish in the successes of the project. The community needs to hear what RC&D has done. Working on projects is hard work requiring many hours of dedication. This is why it is important to recognize team contributions in making any project a success.

We hope that the information that has been developed for this workbook will offer you a better understanding of the First 90 days as a new Executive Director of an RC&D Council. There are many programs and services the NARC&DC offers. We hope you will use all our services to your advantage and success. The NARC&DC is here to help enable RC&D Councils to build "Healthy Communities, Ecosystems and Enterprises" across our great Nation. Together, as a team, we will be successful as we share many of the same core values; a commitment to helping farmers and ranchers and local communities help themselves; dedication to natural resource conservation; and a belief that working in partnership with others is often the best route to success.

We wish you the best in making the difference in your RC&D communities. Please, keep the NARC&DC in the loop and let us know how we can assist in furthering your mission.

Good Luck!