



2023-2024 Strategic Planning Grants for Conservation Districts

The State Conservation Commission has allocated funding for grants to reimburse up to a maximum of \$1,500 in expenses related to the development of a strategic plan in 2023-24.

In order to be eligible for these funds, conservation districts must meet the requirements outlined in this document. Priority will be given to conservation districts that did not receive a strategic planning grant in the past five years.

The Strategic Planning process

- Assesses an organization's direction in response to a changing environment.
- Is used to set priorities, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, ensure progress toward common goals, and establish agreement around intended outcomes.
- Results in decisions and actions that guide and shape the identity, priorities, and mission of an organization.

Purpose, Mission, and Value

Conservation district strategic planning involves articulating why the conservation district exists, whom they serve and what natural resource issues need to be addressed to satisfy customer needs and enhance the district's ability to meet its goals. The development of a strategic plan spells out the purpose, mission, vision, and values of the conservation district.



What are the differences between strategic planning, long-range planning, and the development of annual goals and objectives?

- Annual goals and objectives focus on accomplishing specific, measurable goals for a 12-month period, usually tied to defined district program responsibilities.
- Long-range planning focuses on accomplishing a set of goals over a multi-year period when the environment is assumed to be stable and predictable.
- Strategic planning emphasizes understanding of how the working environment is changing and will change, and in developing informed organizational decisions that are responsive to those changes. The process outlines the resource-based accomplishments you want to complete and develops an approach to achieve those goals.

Grants

1. Grants for the reimbursement of up to a maximum of \$1,500 in expenses related to the development of a strategic plan meeting the requirements outlined for this special project will be available to all conservation districts. Priority will be given to conservation districts that have not received a strategic planning grant in the past five years.
2. Expenses will be covered on a reimbursement basis and only actual expenses will be reimbursed. The district will be asked to complete one progress report by March 29, 2024 and a draft of the plan by May 31, 2024 during the plan development phase. Once the plan is completed, the district will submit three copies of the plan, an expense reimbursement form and all pertinent expense receipts before reimbursement is made.
3. The basic content of the plan and the process used to develop it must meet the minimum requirements outlined below in order for expenses to be reimbursed.



4. Strategic plans developed with the intent of using these funds must be completed by June 28, 2024. Deadline extensions may be granted at discretion of the Leadership Development Coordinator.

Strategic Plan Development Process Requirements

In order to be eligible to receive reimbursement under this special project for reasonable costs of developing a conservation district strategic plan, the plan development process must include the following:

1. The development of a strategic plan should be a “stand alone project.” A meaningful plan cannot be developed in a piecemeal fashion. It is important to recognize that not all conservation districts are currently ready to develop a strategic plan. Factors such as a recent influx of new district staff and/or district directors, time constraints, or more pressing needs requiring staff and board time could be reasons to delay or reconsider a district’s readiness to begin this process. The district team must first assess whether they are ready to devote the time and energy to developing a useful strategic plan.
2. The following key individuals should participate in the process:
 - District directors (at least a majority of the district board must be actively involved in the session discussions and plan content decisions)
 - Associate directors
 - Traditional district partners (i.e. NRCS, County Commissioners, Nominating Organizations, and other agencies that work closely with the district)
 - Conservation District Field Representatives
 - District staff (including district manager plus additional staff representatives as determined by the board of directors and the district manager)
 - Representatives of district customers (farmers, developers, municipalities, etc.)
 - Representatives of key environmental organizations and other community groups that work with the district and understand the district’s mission and programs



3. The district needs to identify a director or associate director to act as project team lead who will be responsible for project oversight and production of the actual written plan. An outside facilitator to guide the process may allow for more active participation by everyone involved, but an outside facilitator is not usually responsible for preparing the written plan.

4. The Leadership Development Coordinator may provide facilitation and planning support services for districts, at their discretion and based on availability and board approval of an agreement including scope of work, timeline, and budget. Facilitation services provided by the Leadership Development Coordinator will be tracked on an hourly basis and will be applied to, and included in, the total reimbursement amount. SPG agreements that include planning support services will be limited to a maximum of \$750 for reimbursable expenses and a maximum of 30 hours of support services delivery.

5. No more than twenty percent of the projected costs for the strategic plan can be used for duplication and distribution of the plan.

Strategic Plan Content Requirements

In order to be eligible to receive reimbursement for reasonable costs of developing a conservation district strategic plan under this special project, the content of the plan must include the following:

- The district's mission statement.
- A short description of how the plan was developed and how the involvement of district partners and customers was achieved.
- A brief explanation of how priorities were chosen.
- A ranked list of critical natural resource issues and critical geographical areas in the county.
- Outcome statements (i.e., goals) for all critical natural resource issues identified with some indication of which statements are priorities for district action.



- An indication that the district has analyzed existing resources to accomplish specific outcomes and has identified any resource shortfalls to accomplish specific outcomes.
- A plan of distribution and use for the strategic plan. How, when, and to whom will the plan be distributed? How will the district pursue the assistance or collaboration necessary for fulfilling the plan?
- The final plan should be a neat, type-written document with a consistent font throughout, a cover page, the date of the district board meeting when the plan was officially adopted, and the signatures of the district chair and the district secretary or treasurer.

Applying and Qualifying for a Grant

Conservation districts interested in receiving a strategic planning grant from this special project need to submit a Letter of Intent (can be emailed). District directors and staff need to think through how they will handle the various aspects of their intended strategic plan development process and research the costs associated with their intentions.

The Letter of Intent (LOI) should include:

- An outlined time frame for development of the strategic plan
- Date of board approval for the grant application
- When was the last district strategic plan developed
- The estimated costs for plan development (does not necessarily have to equal \$1,500) *Costs must be identified. Cost categories will be reviewed before grant is approved.
- What participation and involvement is planned for the process
- What information gathering will be used during the process
- What the final document will look like and how it will be used



The Leadership Development Committee will accept Letters of Intent for this special project through December 22, 2023.

Send Letters to:

Matt Miller
Leadership Development Program Coordinator
Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts
5925 Stevenson Avenue, Suite A
Harrisburg, PA 17112-1788
or email to mmiller@pacd.org

Letters will be acknowledged within 15 days of receipt with a determination of eligibility for a grant. Progress reports, final reports (3 copies), requests for reimbursement, and necessary receipts should also be submitted to the coordinator via email or at the above address.



Planning to Plan

In preparing your proposal to develop a Strategic Plan, please take some time to consider the following questions and share your process with us as part of the application letter.

What is the knowledge base of the District Team?

If your district has new directors, managers, or staff, your planning process will be enhanced by having a session covering topics such as:

- Conservation District history
- PA Conservation District Law
- District programs & partners
- District operations, county affiliation, and finances

What are the future natural resource needs of the County ... and the operational needs of the District?

There are many perspectives to consider when assessing the future needs of your County and District. The more comprehensive the collection of those perspectives, the better your foresight in determining where the District fits in and how it can meet emerging needs.

Sources for this information can include:

- Surveys
- Input from partners
- Existing planning
- Economic development plans
- Natural resource studies

Who should be involved in the Strategic Planning Process?

Each individual involved in drafting the Strategic Plan brings a unique perspective. Consider having the key individuals listed in the process requirements direct the process, and having a separate facilitator to keep the group focused and on-task.

Other important questions to ask before you begin:

- Who else is integral to District operations?
- How comprehensive was your information collection?



- Who will be drafting and re-viewing the document?
- How many meetings, for how long, and who should attend each?

How will you distribute your Strategic Plan?

A Strategic Plan is a tool to communicate your District's identity, priorities, and mission. It should be shared with all staff, partners, legislators, and the community at large.

Consider:

- Developing a concise summary for your completed plan
- Developing a media presentation for the plan
- Developing a distribution strategy for all community stakeholders