



Oregon Association of
Conservation Districts

STRATEGIC PLAN

Adopted September 24, 2024

The Challenge

As the state association for Oregon's 45 conservation districts, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts must provide value to all its members. Member districts reflect the state's diverse geography, population demographics, land uses, natural resources, environmental challenges, and political perspectives. There are regionally specific needs and issues. There are major trends affecting every district that will continue over the next five to ten years and beyond. Increasingly severe climate impacts are exacerbating the pressures on communities and on resource conservation work. Continued urbanization and suburbanization, different attitudes about what land should be used for, changes in agricultural practices, and an aging landowner base may result in a shift in the clientele that districts serve. The next few years likely will see less federal and state funding for conservation, though potentially more funding for climate priorities. There will likely be a consistent flow of new technologies that continue the transitions underway in how people work, relate to each other, and consume information. Within conservation districts, next-generation staff and directors are bringing more comfort with technology as well as different expectations about work. Districts are increasingly interested in collaborating with new partners and finding ways to serve a broader audience within their territories, to maintain and continue to grow the number of acres in conservation even as their communities grow and change.

Our Response

OACD will actively connect with our member districts, to understand their needs in real time, so we can continue to build SWCD capacity and mission impact. We play a key *advocacy role* as the voice of conservation districts in Salem and with state agencies, and to tell the SWCD story to Oregonians more broadly. We play an *educational role* to help our members stay on top of current issues in our field. And we play a *convening role*, facilitating communication and bringing our members together for peer learning and networking. Our mission is to *advance the interests of Oregon Soil and Water Conservation Districts for the conservation and wise use of Oregon's natural resources.*

Practical Vision

Five years from today, we want to see progress toward district excellence.

We want to see high-performing soil and water conservation districts that demonstrate clear resource conservation impact and offer career pathways for their staff members. We want districts to be financially successful, with the capacity funding they need to support their work. We want districts to be visible and respected in the communities they serve – we want them to be known, understood, and valued for their work. To move toward district excellence and greater visibility, we want OACD to be serving successfully as the voice of conservation districts and seen as the go-to organization tapped by legislators and agencies on matters of policy and funding that impact resource conservation work. We want OACD to be operationally effective, and we want to have active and engaged board members who stay up to date on districts' needs so we can respond accordingly.

Strategic Directions

To move in the direction of our vision, we will pursue three programmatic strategies and two operational strategies:

1. MEMBER SERVICES. Increase districts’ effectiveness in serving their communities. In the next 3 to 5 years, we will:

- Continue to plan and support the District Manager Roundtable meetings and newsletter. *Led by our Executive Director.*
- Continue to plan and host the OACD Annual Conference (fall), as a networking and training opportunity for districts that also actively seeks districts input regarding needs and opportunities. Explore the potential to time this conference adjacent to CONNECT, to reduce districts’ travel burden. *Led by our Executive Director.*
- Seek additional input from member districts via a brief online survey of their needs (spring). *Led by our Executive Director.*
- Ensure ongoing and regular two-way communications with our members to ensure we are closely connected to their needs and concerns, via participation in regional meetings, individual phone calls, or other means. *Led by our Board members, each of whom will be assigned a “portfolio” of several districts in addition to their own district (see Strategy 4 below).*
- Use input from the Annual Meeting, survey, and board-led member stewardship to drive our responses, including sending “hot topic” emergent issues to our District Manager Roundtables for discussion and identifying other training and support needs. *Led by our Executive Director.*
- Explore member interest and funding potential for collaborative development of conservation district best practices that would be used to support district capacity-building, and ultimately for benchmarking district excellence. *Led by an ad-hoc Board team and the Executive Director.*

5-year success measures for this strategy

- *We have restructured board engagement and are connecting with members regularly.*
- *Our members know when to call us and feel comfortable calling us because they see us as responsive.*
- *As a result of our services, 80% of districts surveyed report that they feel more confident and capable in serving their communities.*

2. PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS. Align strategic communications to support OACD’s advocacy and to deepen public understanding of conservation districts and their value. In the next 3 to 5 years, we will:

- Short-term (next 6 months): Maximize our utilization of the joint media consultant through the Oregon Conservation Partnership (OCEAN, COLT and NOWC), to tell the SWCD story. This approach will develop and test a set of clear and compelling messages about soil and water conservation. Use the SWCD messages that work. Encourage OACD members to participate in testing and using the SWCD messages. *Led by our Executive Director.*
- Create a Public Relations / Communications Working Group that engages staff at high-capacity districts to help develop and test SWCD messaging. *Led by the Executive Director with the help of a contracted media consultant.*
- Longer-term (next 2 to 3 years): Develop a unified story about local conservation, collaboratively with land trusts and watershed councils. *Led by the PR / Comms Working Group with the help of a contracted media consultant.*
- Partner with OCEAN to increase our social media presence, with consistent use of our SWCD messages and conservation success stories. *Led by the PR consultant under contract to OCEAN.*

5-year success measures for this strategy

- At least two SWCD messages, of all the messages tested, resonate with constituents statewide
- At least 50% of districts surveyed use the SWCD messages consistently in communications

3. ADVOCACY. Proactively push for policy and funding that enables the work of conservation districts in Oregon. In the next 3 to 5 years, we will:

- Continue to cultivate relationships with legislators, particularly those on key committees and allies who can introduce favorable legislation, to deepen their understanding of conservation districts’ role and value to their constituents. *Led by our Advocacy Committee.*
- Continue to cultivate relationships with state agencies, at the leadership and staff levels, to strengthen the role of OACD as a thought partner and effectively advocate for changes that strengthen SWCDs both programmatically and financially. *Led by our Executive Director.*
- Continue to engage our members directly in advocacy and grow their participation in building relationships with their lawmakers and regulators, with consistent use of the SWCD messages. *Led by our Advocacy Committee.*
- Focus on advocacy for funding to support districts’ operational capacity. This includes working with our partners in the Oregon Conservation Partnership to advocate that the amount of capacity grants keep pace with inflation, become more flexible in the type of work that they are allowed to fund, and the reporting process is streamlined. *Led by our Executive Director.*
- Prioritize bills we want to track. *Led by the Advocacy Committee.*

5-year success measures for this strategy

- At least 8 different districts have hosted legislative tours and / or participating in Legislative Days
- OACD had engaged representation on the OWEB regulatory advisory committee developing rules for the capacity grants.

4. TEAM. Make dynamic and effective use of board and staff to represent, engage with, and serve as a conduit to members. In the next 3 to 5 years, we will:

- Assign each board member a “portfolio” of several conservation districts, in addition to their own, serving as a two-way conduit between these districts and the OACD board. Member stewardship may include: attending board meetings of each district in the assigned portfolio; meeting with the District Manager; asking to be placed on the e-distribution list for board meeting minutes; or other ways to learn about member needs and concerns. Board members will report at the OACD board meetings regarding the needs and concerns of members, and the organization will use this information to help shape a response. *Led by the Executive Committee of the Board*
- Revisit OACD’s regional representation structure on the Board. *Led by the Executive Committee of the Board*
- Continue in-person district visits, with an aim of visiting every member at least once in the next 3 to 5 years. *Led by our Executive Director.*

5-year success measures for this strategy

- At least 90% of member districts surveyed report feeling seen and heard by OACD’s board and staff

5. REVENUE. Expand and diversify organizational revenues. In the next 3 to 5 years, we will:

- Create an ad-hoc Dues Committee to review our dues structure, particularly the upper end. *Led by our Executive Director.*

- Continue to pursue grant opportunities as they arise. *Led by our Executive Director.*
- Explore and evaluate the possibility for additional revenue sources, such as:
 - Charging a nominal fee for OACD trainings and workshops.
 - Adding a dues-paying non-voting associate membership level for non-SWCDs, which would include clarifying the value proposition for such membership and exploring potential risks and downsides.
 - Re-establishing a 501c3 foundation arm or partnering with OCEAN and seeking targeted grants for operations.

5-year success measures for this strategy

- All conservation districts in Oregon are dues-paying members of OACD.

Adopted on September 24, 2024 by Oregon Association of Conservation Districts' Board:

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