

# Community Engagement Guide

*How to gather local input before your LWG meeting*

## 1. Five Ways to Gather Input

*Use as many of these as you can. Different approaches reach different people.*

### 1. Online Survey

**When to use:** *Ongoing great for reaching people who aren't at your meetings*

**How:** Share the link from [sdconservation.org](https://sdconservation.org) through your district's social media channels, email list, and by asking NRCS and FSA to share with producers they work with.

**Tip:** *Don't rely on it alone. Surveys reach people who are already engaged. The people whose input matters most often won't fill one out.*

### 2. Local Input Survey Sheet

**When to use:** *At any district meeting, field day, or community event*

**How:** Put a stack on the table when people arrive. Keep it simple, most of it is checkboxes. Collect them before people leave.

**Tip:** *Have someone collect completed sheets at the door. Don't leave a pile for people to 'drop off later' ... they likely won't.*

### 3. Producer Coffee / Tailgate Meeting

**When to use:** *Before a big LWG meeting or when you want deeper input from a specific area*

**How:** Invite 8–12 producers to a casual conversation at the co-op, coffee shop, or someone's shop. Bring a few questions, order food or drinks, and mostly just listen. 45–60 minutes is plenty.

**Tip:** *The conversation between participants is often more valuable than their answers to your questions. Let it go where it goes.*

### 4. One-on-One Producer Interviews

**When to use:** *For your most important landowners and producers, or when you need to understand a specific issue deeply*

**How:** Call or visit 5–10 producers personally. Take notes. Ask who else you should talk to.

**Tip:** *A personal phone call from a board member or district manager is worth ten surveys. People talk when someone they know asks.*

## 5. Partner Input

**When to use:** *Before every LWG meeting*

**How:** Ask your NRCS district conservationist, FSA office, and other partners what they're hearing from producers. A 10-minute conversation with your DC is free community input.

**Tip:** *Partners talk to producers every day. They know what's out there. Don't skip this one.*

## 2. Landowner Interview Questions by Topic

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*Pick questions that fit your district's priorities. You don't need to ask all of them, 3–4 per conversation is plenty.*

### What Are You Seeing?

What's the biggest challenge you're dealing with on your land right now?

Is it getting better or worse over time?

Are you seeing this across the area or just on your place?

What have you tried so far, and did it help?

### Conservation Priorities

If your conservation district could do one thing to help you in the next year or two, what would it be?

What would that actually look like on your operation?

Are there programs or resources you wish existed, or that you've heard about but couldn't access?

### Working With the District

Have you worked with the conservation district before? How did that go?

What would make it easier to work with us?

Is there something you wish we understood better about your operation or your situation?

### Connecting to Others

Who else should we be talking to about this?

Is there anyone dealing with this issue worse than most, someone we should reach out to?

Would it be okay if I mentioned your name when I talk to them?

## 3. What to Do with What You Hear

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Write up your notes right after the conversation, even bullet points are enough

*Don't wait until later*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Look for patterns. If 3+ people mention the same issue, that's a priority signal	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bring what you heard to the LWG meeting, not just your opinions, but actual quotes and observations	<i>"Three producers I talked to mentioned..."</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Add new contacts to your district list if they're willing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Follow up on any referrals you received	<i>Warmest leads you'll get</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Share patterns and themes with SDACD, they want to know what's happening across districts	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Close the loop with people you talked to, let them know what your district decided to work on	<i>Shows their input actually mattered</i>