

# Guidelines for Conservation District Policy Development During a Federal Shutdown

## Introduction

The National Conservation District Employees Association (NCDEA) recommends that Conservation Districts carefully consider a range of factors when developing policies for local district operations in the event of a federal shutdown. While not every item will apply to all districts, these guidelines are intended to help districts prepare for and respond to federal closures effectively. Idaho District Employees Association (IDEA) Directors have reviewed these recommendations and strongly encourage all Idaho Districts to review this checklist with their Board to ensure that their district has a clear plan of action before a shutdown looms. Some items such as external hard drives require additional time and depending on if your files are on the NRCS server additional support from NRCS' I.T. and are best completed before a shutdown is on the horizon. An external hard drive is also a good idea for employee transitions as it can take a significant amount of time for new employees to gain access to federal servers.

## District Office Operations

Districts must decide whether their offices will remain open during a federal shutdown. If closure is necessary, districts should establish a clear policy or announcement regarding the office's status during the federal closure.

## Possible Work Locations

- Employee homes
- Neighboring county offices
- Local courthouse facilities
- Stand-alone district office buildings
- Sister agency offices in separate buildings
- Other designated locations

If the district rents space in a USDA co-located building, it will only retain access for daily operations if it also pays for utilities and phone services for that area (check with your DC)

## Materials Needed for Continued Operations

### Financial and Administrative Materials

- Checkbooks
- Deposit books
- Financial records
- Safe deposit keys
- Credit cards
- Active cost share reports
- Password book (if applicable)

### Board Meeting Materials

- Documents and supplies needed for board meetings

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## Office Supplies

- Copier paper
- Pens
- Other supplies purchased by the district as needed to complete tasks

## Project and Grant Materials

- Active producers' folders (excluding NRCS cost share programs)
- Cost share folders
- Grant materials

## Educational and Event Materials

- Charts for school projects
- Materials to complete educational initiatives
- School program resources
- Field day supplies
- Eco Meet and Farm Safety Day materials

## District Equipment

The following equipment may be removed from the office to ensure uninterrupted work:

- Laptops
- Portable copiers and printers
- Scanners
- GPS units
- Level and transit tools
- Measuring wheels and survey equipment

Districts must arrange their own internet access during a federal shutdown.

## Vehicle Use and Reimbursement

NRCS vehicles will not be accessible during a shutdown. Districts should develop policies regarding reimbursement for employees who use their personal vehicles, which may include a set monthly rate. Districts may also opt to use or purchase their own vehicles for field or district-related work.

## Communication Procedures

### Agreements and Notifications

- Establish a written agreement with USDA
- Determine notification procedures for shutdown dates
- Set a timeframe for removal of items from the office
- Ensure partner agencies communicate shutdown activities to the district
- Appoint an NRCS representative to update the District Board and staff on shutdown progress
- Post notice to front door of the office including contact information

### Email and Online Communication

- Districts must create their own email addresses, as NRCS email will be inaccessible

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- Appoint someone to notify employees when they may reenter federal buildings via email or phone
- Keep the District website updated for clients

## Phone Communication

- Set up a district-owned phone number for customer inquiries
- Forward office phone to district contact
- Publish district contact information in front door notice, District website, District Facebook

## District Property and Record Keeping

- District staff should notify the District Board Chairman about the location of financial records, files, and other important materials

## Data Backup and Security

- Perform backups of all district materials prior to office shutdown
- Store backups at a separate location during the shutdown
- Consider purchasing an external hard drive for file storage

## Project Continuity

Districts should determine how to complete active projects in a timely manner during a federal shutdown. If NRCS personnel cannot sign off on projects, districts need to decide if appropriate staff have NRCS delegated job approval authority to continue operations.

## Quick Reminders:

- Have a copy of critical contact information including phone & email for Board members, Farmers, active contractors, employees, or partners.
- Password list
- Arrange for mail pickup and/or for mail to be held at the post office
- Communicate with your Board to determine if comp time or vacation time can be used during this period if you are unable to meet your typical weekly schedule due to access or partner limitations. Would this be a time the Board would like you to tackle any public outreach or lingering projects?

## Plan Ahead:

- Purchase an external hard drive and coordinate with NRCS IT to save your District files from the NRCS network. This is best done well in advance of a shutdown and will allow you to have access to your critical documents regardless of where you are located.
- Set up a secondary District email address that can be utilized we recommend that this stays generic [district@gmail.com](mailto:district@gmail.com) etc.
- Ask your DC if it would be possible to get access to work remotely. This is an I.T. setting that will need approval to allow you to work from a private network outside of the federal network but still be able to access your federal email. This may require you to purchase a card reader if your federal laptop does not have an internal card reader (HID omnikey reader works best).

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