

OUTREACH ASSISTANCE HANDBOOK

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Iowa

August 2006

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service instituted a National Outreach Policy, 230 GM Part 406, in 2003. This policy provides guidance to agency staff to meet outreach requirements and accountability standards.

This Outreach Process Handbook provides guidance to meet policy requirements with the goal of consistent outreach procedures conducted in each office and follows the Quality Assurance Process Step Table for "Outreach Assistance to Customers."

STEP 1-- *Identify under-served and non-traditional customers in each county in Iowa.*

District Conservationists and RC&D Coordinators are responsible for identifying these individuals and/or groups in their counties or service areas. Several resources for identification are shown below.

- 1. Census statistics**
- 2. Employee knowledge**
- 3. Partner knowledge**
- 4. Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)**
- 5. Iowa State University Extension Service**
- 6. Public Library**
- 7. Minority organizations**
- 8. County Government (Public Health, Social Services, Recorder, Assessor)**
- 9. Chamber of Commerce**
- 10. Community non-profit organizations**
- 11. Local media**

STEP 2-- *Meet With Identified Customer Groups to Identify Needs*

Once potentially underserved groups are identified, it is important to gather information about and understand the characteristics of these groups. Successful outreach and increased program participation cannot be achieved without “knowing” these people.

What you need to know:

- Characteristics (social, economic, cultural), attitudes and perspectives.
- Connections to land and agriculture
- Natural resource or other needs and description of problems as they see it.
- Current efforts of the community to address natural resource problems and resources used.
- What is limiting their participation? (e.g.: Lack of information/knowledge, lack of financial or technical resources, communication barriers, lack of trust in government)
- What is their motivation for participation? What benefits are we offering?

How do you gather the information?

See “*Outreach Communication Process Guide (Iowa NRCS)*”

Other Resources:

- Staff knowledge
- Partner knowledge
- Local agencies and organizations that serve the underserved groups
- Local newspapers or other media that serve the underserved groups
- Field office records of assistance and participation
- FSA and other government agency records
- Census data
- University or Extension Service research and reports

Understanding Under-served Customers

Understanding customers and potential customers by considering the characteristics, problems, and needs they have in common can be helpful in outreach efforts and success. The following chart may provide information to consider.

Producer Characteristics

Characteristic	Considerations
• Education	College education or not
• Occupational status	Full-time or part-time farmer, off-farm job
• Intergenerational land transfer	Children to take over farm or not
• Risk orientation	Risk taker or not
• Number of innovations adopted	Average, above, or below
• Use of local media for conservation information	What sources are used – local, ethnic etc.
• Conservation planning	Follows a conservation plan or not
• Local organization participation	Active or not
• Awareness of resource problems	Average, above or below
• Farm size	County average, above or below
• Ownership/rental	% of rented and/or owned land
• Lease arrangements	1 year, 2 year, stable or not
• Gross farm sales	County average, above or below

Step 3 – Develop an Outreach Strategy or Business Plan

Step 4 – Identify and Request Resources for Outreach Implementation

Step 5 – Implement Outreach Strategy or Business Plan

Utilize the preceding information, along with the Outreach Communication Process Guide, to identify outreach needs, the actions required to meet identified needs, the target date, and the person responsible for the action. It is important to set meaningful goals and to accurately determine how they will be accomplished. The actions determined should also be incorporated into the Annual Work Plan with the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council.

Remember to utilize volunteers, local organizations, and other partners to complete actions when possible. Some items are accomplished better and more effectively by non-agency individuals that have more expertise or contacts in a particular area.

Identifying technical and financial resources for accomplishing outreach actions is also necessary. What funds are needed and available? What technical expertise is needed and available? Consider all sources for financial and technical support: USDA, state, county, local and private funding and technical possibilities.

Be creative!! Action items can include, but are not limited to:

- Conducting demonstrations and tours with members of underserved groups
- Providing meetings, training sessions, and presentations
- Identifying and contacting key leaders in the community
- Developing brochures to meet specific needs
- Developing resource directories
- Conducting mailings
- Developing and distributing surveys
- Developing advisory or mentoring networks
- Developing partnerships with non-traditional groups and organizations
- Marketing the agency better and to non-traditional groups
- Issuing news releases, utilizing media used by underserved groups
- Becoming involved in cultural groups
- Displaying posters and signs where underserved groups tend to gather
- Identifying the underserved and contacting them (personally works best)
- Providing church bulletin inserts
- Maintaining information at local libraries

Action items on the outreach strategy or business plan must result from communication with underserved and non-traditional groups in which they have the opportunity to identify and report what their needs are. Action items should not result from agency staff determining needs and developing actions to meet needs that may or may not exist. Only those with the needs can identify them.