



WORKSHEET: CAPTURING EFFECTIVE TESTIMONIALS FROM LANDOWNERS AND PARTNERS

Testimonials from landowners and partner organizations can be effective ways for legislators to hear about the value and need for conservation district services. This worksheet was created at the request of districts to provide guidance on how to capture and share effective testimonials.

A: Getting started – what’s your story?

Before deciding what kind of testimonials your district will capture and from whom, define what story you want to tell.

WHAT IS THE MAIN THEME OF YOUR STORY? This can be:

- A strong “take-home message” (e.g. *You don’t have to choose between supporting the environment and supporting agriculture — by investing in conservation districts, you’re ensuring the viability of both*), or
- A natural resource or service theme (e.g. *Expanding conservation districts’ proven-successful, voluntary services is an effective, efficient path to improve water quality.*)

Theme:

WHO WILL TELL YOUR STORY? Answer the following questions to identify landowners and representatives from partner entities who could be spokespeople that provide testimonials that support your theme. Think of their testimonials as paragraphs or chapters of your story that prove your identified theme.

Identify landowner spokespeople

Who have we worked with who is passionate, has a story to tell, and/or had a challenge that our CD was uniquely positioned to address? Who has more work to do (showing the unmet need)?

Identify spokespeople from partner entities (e.g. agencies, schools, tribes, associations) and the community

*What entities / organizations have benefited from our services or contracted with us to complete a successful project?
Who would make a good spokesperson from that entity?*

B. Choosing a format

Not every spokesperson is a good fit for every testimonial format — for example, some people are uncomfortable or freeze-up on camera. And, not every format is a good fit for your audience.

HOW WILL YOUR STORY BE TOLD? Some options for testimonial formats are outlined in the chart below. Complete the chart to decide which testimonial format(s) each of your identified landowner / partner spokespeople will provide, and how the testimonial(s) will be delivered to your legislators.

Format	Which spokespeople (landowners / partners) will participate?	Other things to consider:
<p><i>In-person meetings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the <u>most effective testimonial option</u> • Encourage your spokespeople to send a thank you letter after the meeting 		<p>When will the meetings occur?</p> <hr/> <p>Who will help the spokespeople with scheduling?</p> <hr/> <p>Legislative meetings typically are very short—how will you help the spokesperson prepare a concise statement?</p> <hr/> <p>Are there talking points you want spokespeople to cover? (<i>see section C for tips on talking points</i>)</p>

Format	Which spokespeople (landowners / partners) will participate?	Other things to consider:
<p><i>Presentations / Events</i></p> <p><i>Options:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field tours / SCC tours • Virtual tours (1-2 hour events where spokespeople present projects they worked on with you - nice option for legislators who have a hard time fitting a full, on-site tour into their schedule) • “Open house” (invite all partner organizations to learn more about what you do and the support you need) 		<p>How will you schedule a date/time that works for legislators, landowners, and partner organizations?</p> <hr/> <p>Are there other conservation districts that have run successful events who you could contact for advice?</p>
<p><i>Letters</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage plain talk and no acronyms. • Make it easier for cooperators by giving them the mailing address(es) for their legislator(s) 		<p>Is the spokesperson willing to enclose photos? (<i>e.g. before/after photos, photos of the landowner/partner at project site</i>)</p> <hr/> <p>Is the spokesperson willing to give you a copy?</p>
<p><i>Videos</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get a signed Appearance Release Form from each spokesperson • Shoot in a location where background noise isn't a distraction • Capture B-roll on site (extra audio/video of the project and interview location that can be used as filler) <p>Keep it short — aim for 30-90 seconds.</p>		<p>What's your distribution plan? How will you ensure the videos reach and are seen by your legislators and other intended audience(s)?</p>

C. Getting the message across

Testimonials are most powerful when spokespeople are unscripted and explain their experience in their own words. The challenge is giving them space to be candid while still making sure they touch on the key messages of your story.

HOW DO YOU DRAW OUT THE STORY? Encourage spokespeople to answer key questions in their testimonials. These questions can be shared with spokespeople as suggested talking points to address in their letter, in-person meeting, or presentation, or as the questions you ask them during a video interview.

Examples of key questions:

- 1) What problem(s)/issue(s) were you experiencing that led you to contact the conservation district?
- 2) Had you previously tried anything else to solve the problem? If so, what?
- 3) Why did you choose to contact the conservation district, rather than a different entity or organization?
- 4) What was the result of the conservation district's program(s)/service(s)? (*Encourage specifics. Rather than "we saw a big improvement in salmon habitat," ask the landowner or partner to state exactly what the improvement was, such as "we witnessed salmon migrating up our stream for the first time in x years..."*)
- 5) How did the conservation district's service(s) help meet your objectives for your property?
- 6) What word or phrase best describes your relationship with the district, and why?
- 7) What specific feature did you like most about working with the conservation district?
- 8) If someone called you and said, "Why should I support conservation districts," what would you tell them?
- 9) Would you consider working with us again? If so, on what kind of project?
- 10) How would you describe the importance of voluntary and incentive-based conservation services and programs?

Depending on the testimonial format(s) you choose, there may not be time for the spokespeople to address all 10 questions. In that case, pick and choose the ones you think work best.

Note on key questions during video interviews: Ask the cooperator to restate the question in their own words as they answer the question (e.g. Interviewer question: "Why did you contact the conservation district?" Interviewee response: "I decided to contact X Conservation District because...").

Are there other key questions that are important for telling our story?

D. Keeping agency and association partners in the loop

Congrats! You finished your plan for capturing effective testimonials!

Your partners at the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) appreciate being kept in the loop as you move forward. Please consider sending the following materials to [Laura Johnson](#) (SCC Communications Coordinator), [Larry Davis](#) (WACD Secretary Treasurer; *please send to WACD director when hired*), and your [SCC Regional Manager](#).

- Copies of letters from spokespeople to legislators
- Summaries of in-person meetings (between spokespeople and legislators, and between CD and partner organizations)
- Examples of your on-site tour packets
- Examples of agendas / presentations from virtual tours and open houses
- Testimonial video links
- News articles

Thank you! We look forward to learning more about your work through the voices of your cooperating landowners and partners, and will do our best to support you and your work.

E. Other Resources

- [Marketing Toolkit and Resources](#) (on SCC website): Find free tools and templates designed to help districts with your communication efforts. In the Toolkit you'll find key messages about conservation districts, branding guidelines (logo, color palette) media and event planning templates, PowerPoint templates, and more. Under the Resources section, you can find examples of CD videos.
- [Talking Points on Voluntary Conservation Programs](#): Key messages to help conservation districts and partners answer questions and speak in a unified voice about the value of voluntary / incentive programs (developed by the SCC at districts' request).
- [Appearance Release Form](#): Use when capturing people on camera, video, audio, and written transcripts for promotional uses
- [A Citizen's Guide to Effective Legislative Participation](#) (from the Washington State Legislature)
- [How to schedule and conduct and editorial board meeting](#): As a supplement to testimonials, consider scheduling a meeting with a local or regional editorial board. Editorial boards can take a stand on issues and urge support for a certain position. The linked resource above is from the American Library Association, but contains information that pertains to a general audience. *Here's an [example of an editorial board article](#) published after their meeting with Snohomish Conservation District in 2014.*

Consider revisiting this worksheet every 6-18 months to keep spreading the word of your evolving story!