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EC68-774 Guidelines for New Directors of Irrigation Districts

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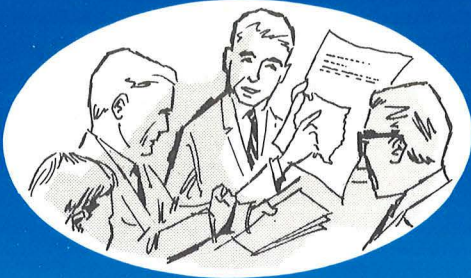
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GUIDELINES for NEW DIRECTORS of IRRIGATION DISTRICTS



EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
AND U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING
E. F. FROLIK, DEAN J. L. ADAMS, DIRECTOR

Guidelines For New Directors Of Irrigation Districts

By Deon Axthelm¹

Agricultural Extension Water Resources Specialist



- When you read this you will be either:
1. Considering becoming an Irrigation District Director or . . .
 2. Already a duly elected Irrigation District Director.

In either case, this bulletin is designed to tell you about the duties a director performs and to help you become a **better director.**

¹ The author wishes to acknowledge the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District for providing photos.

Qualifications of a Director

You may have some reservations about whether you are qualified to be a director. Willingness to learn and an unbiased approach to problems are good attributes for all directors. Besides these, there are certain legal and personal requirements.

First, there are certain legal requirements for directors listed in your district's bylaws or in your state laws. A director:

- Must be a landowner.

- Must be an elector within the division he is elected to represent.

- Must be elected or appointed according to certain legal state regulations.

Second, there are personal requirements closely related to success as a director. You should be willing:

- To work with all directors.

- To support the board's final decisions.

- To believe in the value and need for a good progressive district.

- To attend board meetings.

- To maintain a progressive, experimental attitude and an enthusiastic cooperative approach toward attaining sound district improvements.

- To represent the entire district.

- To take a stand and make a decision.

- To be unbiased in making decisions for the district without regard to personal, religious or political biases.

- To evaluate carefully alternative plans.



What You Need to Know About Your District

You can become an effective director by learning facts about your district. You should try to understand the district's:

- Goals.
- Physical facilities.
- Policies.
- Programs.

Goals

One of your first duties is to know the long- and short-range objectives of your irrigation district. Goals should be kept clearly in mind.

Basically, the long-range goal for all irrigation districts is to provide water for irrigating crops in an efficient, equitable and economical manner for all district water users.

As cropping patterns and water requirements change and as competition for water increases, you will have increased responsibility toward meeting this goal.

An important step, therefore, is to learn the district's goals. You may find these in the constitution or bylaws. You may also find them listed as resolutions or statements developed during regular or annual meetings. The present directors should discuss the district goals with you soon after you take office. Objectives must

be clearly defined and understood if they are to be reached.

Physical Facilities

You should become familiar with the area served, the distribution system, the administration facilities and utility equipment in the entire district. You should begin to learn the extent and condition of the district's real property. One of the better ways to do this is to have the manager or board chairman arrange a tour. Maps will be helpful. It will be difficult to make decisions about problems without seeing your district's facilities.

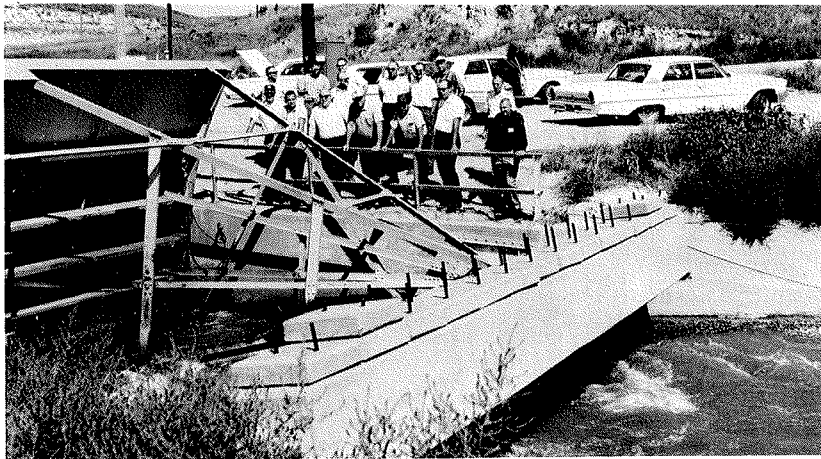
Policies

You will need to know the policies under which the district operates. Policies are the guidelines for the operation, regulation and control of the district. Policies are the established methods by which the district conducts business.

An example of a district policy may be that the manager shall be responsible for hiring all personnel. There may be policies governing water distribution, charges, insurance for personnel, conduct of business and many other items.

Rules are established to permit carrying out the policies. In general, you will also need to know the rules in order to determine if they are helping or hindering the district's policies.

A third step is to ask about policies. Many policies may be in effect but cannot be found in written form. However, they might be found in the minutes of meetings and in resolutions passed. Policy statements should be clearly stated in written form to avoid misunderstanding.



A tour helps familiarize new directors with district facilities.

Programs

When you assume your duties investigate programs currently in effect. Programs should be designed to meet the district's long- and short-term goals. Programs are designed for the current or ensuing years.

For example, a short-term goal may be to reduce the district's indebtedness by \$250,000 during the calendar year and to replace a certain number of laterals with buried pipeline each year over a 5-year period. The problem may be to devise financing, purchase necessary construction equipment and outline the periods of time when the improvements will be constructed.

Programs of a less technical nature may also be in operation.

For example, a goal of the district might be to improve public relations with water users and with the urban community. Tours, visits, meetings and supplying promotional literature may be programmed for the year. Speeches at public meetings or specific ways of getting acquainted with water users may also be in the plans.

Listening, observing and asking questions about programs in effect is another step toward becoming an effective director. The manager, experienced board members and the minutes of regular and annual meetings are excellent sources of information.

Current goals and programs should be developed and reconciled at annual planning sessions or oftener if needed. Some will be ongoing programs but you will need to take the responsibility and opportunity to propose new goals and programs.



Implementing programs such as improving the water distribution system are the responsibility of district directors.



Important Functions of Directors

As a director, you will perform certain important functions, some of which can affect your district to a greater degree than others.

Selection of a Competent Manager

This will be one of your most important duties. You are responsible to water users for the satisfactory and progressive operation of your district. However, the policies the board sets are put into action by the manager. He will:

- Interpret problems for the board.

- Operate and maintain district facilities and equipment.

- Maintain district's accounts and records.

- Prepare and submit an annual budget to the board.

- Manage and maintain the district's real property.

- Be responsible for storage, regulation and distribution of the district's water supply.

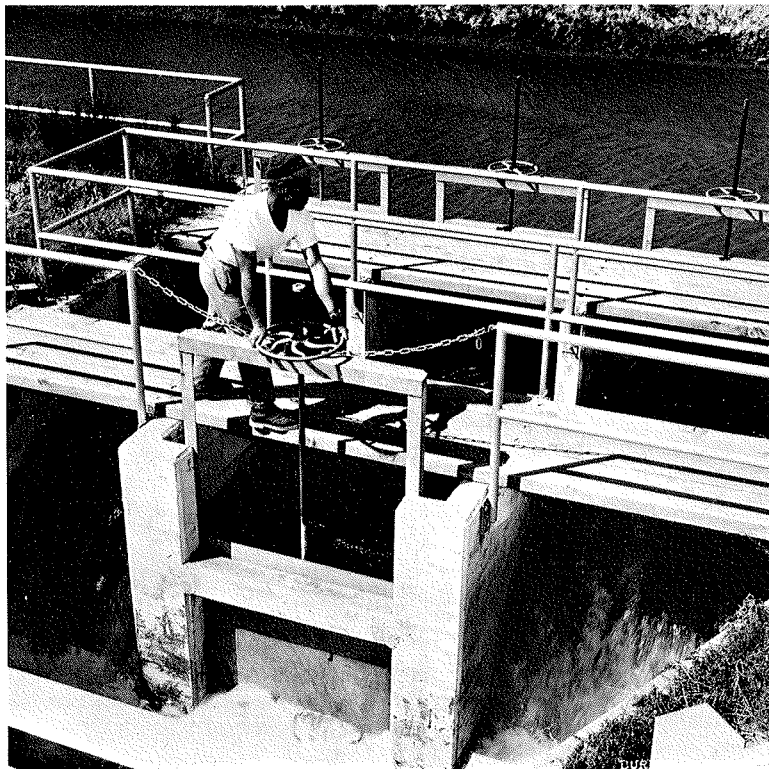
- Maintain an efficient working organization and employ and discharge personnel.

- Direct daily operations of the district.

- In order for the manager to carry out policies established by the board, he must be delegated sufficient responsibility and authority to implement the policies.

If there are operational questions—and you will receive many from water users of the district—take these up directly with the manager or at a board meeting. Remember, this is a team effort. Do not attempt to provide a direct answer except as it is based on a clearly stated district policy.

The hiring (or discharging, if necessary) of a manager is a serious responsibility of the board of directors.



Water is delivered according to policies established by district directors.

Establishing Policy

Establishment of policies for the direction and functioning of the district is a primary function of the board. Some policies were in effect when you became a member. Some may be in force through mutual understanding or just “grew up” with the district. It is wise to have policies in writing so there is little chance for misunderstanding.

The manager may suggest policies and should be included in the establishment and evaluation of new policies or the changing of present policies. However, final acceptance and action is solely the responsibility of the board. Remember, too, that decisions and agreements are made only by the Board of Directors and not by individual members acting independently. Responsibility for putting the policies into effect belongs to the manager.

Here are some areas in which policies should be established.

- Water allotments.

- Water delivery rates.

- Control of district property.

- Employee wages and work regulations.

- Repayment of debt.

- Board-water user relations.

- District public relations.

Determining Objectives and Progress

Your personal responsibility is to help establish annual objectives and to evaluate progress. Progress can be measured by reviewing carefully the manager's monthly reports and statements and by requesting special reports when necessary. Progress made on items of construction or alleviation of problems can often be determined by photos or first-hand observation. Your manager should arrange for these visual reports.

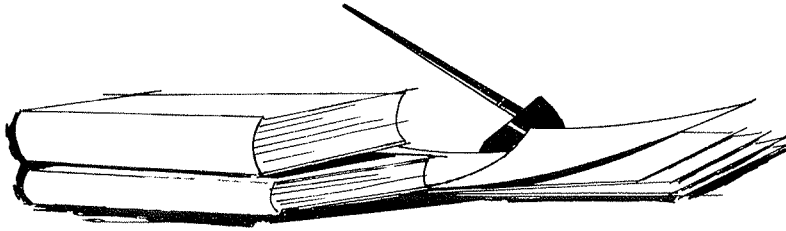
New objectives for future years should be decided upon. Board-based programs proposed by your manager to meet these objectives should be evaluated and approved by the board. Do not hesitate to suggest new objectives or upgrade old ones any time the opportunity arises. This will encourage greater efficiency and progress.

Approving the Budget

The manager should prepare and submit a budget for review and approval of the directors. The budget must be prepared and approved in sufficient time to permit the establishment of annual assessments. It should include all normal costs of necessary functions adjusted for increased or decreased labor, equipment and material costs.

The budget should include the estimated costs of both continuing and new programs designed to attain certain objectives. If additional funds are available, the board may consider and approve budgets for those programs. Any new program must be justified and approved through careful evaluation of objectives.





Executing Contracts and Agreements

As a board member, your signature will carry authority and responsibility and will bind the district in contracts and agreements signed in the district's behalf. This carries an obligation to procure the best possible services and terms.

Collecting and Disbursing District Funds

You will be making decisions equivalent to those made by executives of large corporations. Funds will need to be disbursed in the course of business. You will be jointly responsible with the board for prompt billing and collection of water assessments and payment of bills.

As in any business, regular audits of the district's financial records are essential. An annual report containing financial records authenticated by a competent auditing firm builds confidence and stability into operation of the district.

Establishing Wages

Your district should have a policy establishing competitive wage scales under which your manager can hire the quality and number of working personnel he needs. The manager's salary will be a high priority item in accord with the authority and responsibility he will shoulder. It is a sign of good directorship to disregard personal feelings and pay satisfactory wages that will help produce a continuing and efficient district labor force.

Operating Within Legal Authorization

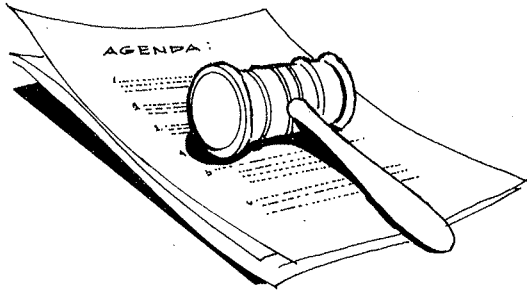
Actions of the board and the manager must conform to all federal, state and local statutes and ordinances and conform to provisions of contracts and district bylaws. The bylaws should be reviewed periodically. Many districts retain legal counsel for this and other purposes. Whether or not you know the law, the board is responsible for operating within the law.

Assisting the Manager With Decisions

Much responsibility and authority will be delegated to the manager. However, at times he will have important and difficult problems.

He may ask for help in making decisions. The board should help in such instances and should support the manager in carrying out board decisions and policies.

Refer to your district's stated policies for guidance. If none exist or they are unclear, then a problem may call for establishment of new or revised policies.



Irrigation District Board Meetings

When you are elected to the board and if you agree to serve, you thereby commit yourself to attend regularly all scheduled board meetings. Although each district will have a specific format for the meetings, you can help create a lively and interesting atmosphere by your attitude and your attentiveness.

You are a busy person as is every member of the board. You should, therefore, encourage efficient conduct of board meetings. Meetings can be productive and be concluded within a reasonable period if you will help with adoption of the following suggestions.

Before the Meeting Date

Agenda—Have a tentative agenda worked out by the chairman and the manager and mailed to each director. Be sure to read and note the subjects and have questions and comments in mind. The agenda should accompany the meeting notice.

Minutes—The minutes should be mailed to directors as soon after each meeting as possible so that additions and corrections can be noted. This will preclude the necessity of reading minutes at the board meeting. It also serves as a reminder of business to be conducted.

Comments—Have clearly in mind the problems and comments you wish to bring before the board, and how you will state them. If necessary, write them down.

Visitors—If a topic requires the presence of a person other than a board member, ask the chairman for an early place on the agenda for the visitor and arrange for his transportation and introduction.

At the Meeting

Start Promptly—Many boards have fallen into the habit of starting later than the stated time. Busy persons resent impositions and waste of time. Adhere to a definite starting schedule—it will work if you try it.

Follow a Definite Agenda—Although meetings of different districts may vary, here is a suggested outline:

- Call meeting to order on time.

- Discuss and approve minutes.

- Financial report.

- Manager's report.

- Unfinished business.

- Committee reports.

- New business, correspondence, announcements, etc.

- Prompt adjournment.

Following most board meetings you will want to participate in the "socializing" that takes place. This informal contact is considered necessary and desirable and permits you to know your fellow directors and to gain further insights into problems and attitudes.



Annual meetings of the water users are planned and conducted by the district board.

Annual Meeting of the Water Users

One of your duties will be to help plan and to be a part of one or more water-user meetings. Most districts have an annual meeting. The purpose of the annual meeting is to keep water users informed of the preceding year's business and to review plans for the coming year. Water users are interested in knowing why certain things happened or why a particular program is necessary. It is your job to help with explanations at an annual meeting. An informed water user is a more cooperative water user.

A regular format for the meeting, similar to the one outlined in the board meeting section, can be tied in with a banquet or entertainment. The secret is careful detailed planning. Do not forget that awards stimulate interest. Awards may be made for such things as conserving water, best suggestion for more efficient operation, etc. Use your imagination. Guest speakers, movies, contests, door prizes and favors are often used to boost attendance.

Always keep in mind, however, that the main purpose is to inform your water users. A vivid presentation of your problems and accomplishments and proposals by using slides, pictures, models or other visual means (actual equipment) is the heart of your meeting. Keep it lively, imaginative and informational.

Public Relations

Public relations is an often used and little understood term. You will find that public relations can mean various things to various segments of your district. You will be dealing with public relations for your water users, your employees, other agencies and organizations and the general public.

You will find that activities that build sound productive relationships permit your district to grow and function in the community.

Water Users

Keep them informed and up to date.

Welcome calls and inquiries.

Remember you are working for them and the good of the district.

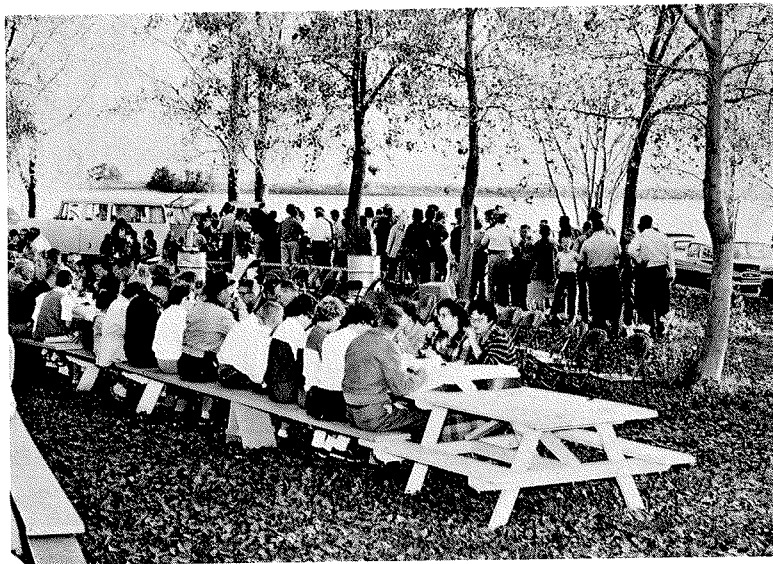
Give each user equal opportunity to attention.

Make employees aware of their conduct with water users.

Provide a tour or open house.



Good public relations has been developed with this satisfied water user because the district employee has taken a personal interest in good service.



An employees' picnic helps everyone feel they are part of a team—an example of developing public relations with employees.

Employees

Instill pride in being part of a team.

Familiarize them with district goals and objectives.

Provide satisfactory working conditions and adequate equipment.

Inform them of wage policies.

Pay compliments when a job is well accomplished.

Take interest in their personal problems.

Encourage good working relationships between the manager and the employees.

Give the manager appropriate authority and back his authority.

Build a personal rapport with your manager.

Other Agencies

Call on them for assistance when the problem is relevant.

Invite them to your annual meetings.

Mail relevant materials and information to them.

Visit their offices and take an interest in their problems.

Offer the cooperation of your board.

Public

Inform through news media.

Invite newspaper, radio, TV and magazine editors to district functions.

Hold an open house.

Have a field day to show progress or innovations.

Publish a small educational folder.

Tell public school personnel about the district's job.

Provide tours for businessmen, school children, public officials and clubs.

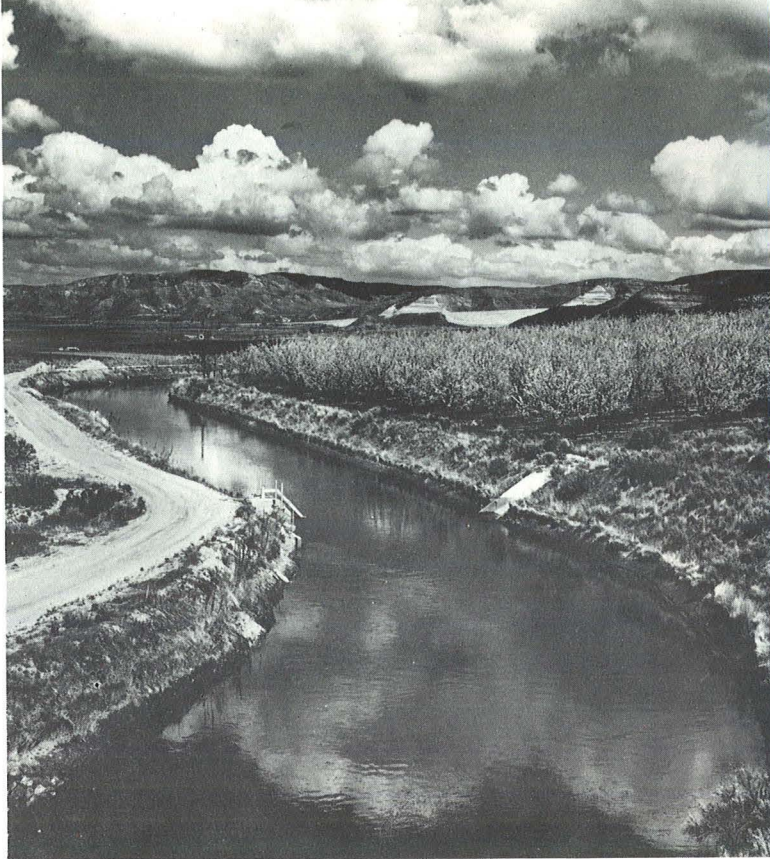
General

Whatever you do in terms of public relations do it well. Provide high quality folders with good printing; run efficient, lively, interesting meetings; exhibit enthusiasm.

The qualities you exhibit in public relations efforts will influence how others perceive the level of quality of your district. But the most important item, remember, is for your district to provide quality and equitable service to water users.



These folks will speak well of the district. Providing good safe recreational sites and keeping the public informed is a part of public relations.



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