



Technical Training and Certification Program

Technical Training and Certification Strategy for Conservation Delivery in Minnesota

May 3, 2021



Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary | 3 |
| Background and Partnership | 3 |
| Purpose of the Technical Training and Certification Program..... | 3 |
| Endorsement of TTCP Strategy | 4 |
| 2021-2023 Goals and Objectives..... | 5 |
| Strategy Implementation | 5 |
| Minnesota Technical Training Committee (MTTC)..... | 5 |
| Area Technical Training Teams (ATTT) | 6 |
| Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)..... | 6 |
| Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) | 7 |
| Technical Training and Certification Program Staff (TTCP) | 7 |
| 2021-2023 Program Goals, Objectives, and Actions | 8 |
| Goal 1: Program activities are implemented through strategic coordination..... | 8 |
| Goal 2: Training needs and credentials are documented and tracked..... | 9 |
| Goal 3: Provide opportunities for partners to build skills and obtain credentials needed for conservation delivery..... | 11 |

Executive Summary

The Technical Training and Certification Program (TTCP) is a collaborative effort among the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD), the Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). TTCP is designed to efficiently provide training to develop and maintain a highly trained, technically skilled workforce of natural resource professionals capable of meeting Minnesota's the conservation delivery needs.

Overall program management is the responsibility of the Minnesota Technical Training Committee (MTTC), which is comprised of representatives from each of the partner organization. This Strategy was developed with input from MTTC to guide implementation of the partnership's efforts to provide technical training through the TTCP.

Background and Partnership

Establishing conservation practices on private lands in Minnesota is critical to achieving state and federal goals for clean and sustainable water resources, healthy and sustainable soil resources, and abundant fish and wildlife. Conservation Technical Assistance requires statewide, core technical assistance capabilities, as well as capabilities tailored to the local priority resource concerns and conservation practices found in the diverse landscapes of Minnesota. Training and certification are key quality assurance elements of an effective conservation delivery system.

In Minnesota, local field offices deliver the technical components of conservation planning and implementation services on private lands by working directly with landowners. Under the existing system, the NRCS, SWCDS, and BWSR use a Job Approval Authority (JAA) credentialing system for planning, design and installation of standard soil and water conservation practices found in the Field Office Technical Guide.

The primary reason this partnership was created was to address input from SWCDs and NRCS, which indicated technical training needs were not being met. Technical training inadequacies initially identified from 2013 to 2015 led to the development of the [2015 Technical Training and Certification Strategy](#), which resulted in the creation of the Technical Training and Certification Program in 2016 to address these needs.

An evaluation of TTCP's efforts to implement the 2015 strategy were evaluated in 2020, and the findings were used in the development of the [Technical Training Certification Program 2015-2020 Implementation Evaluation Report](#). The conclusions and recommendations from this report were used as the foundation for the development of this updated Strategy.

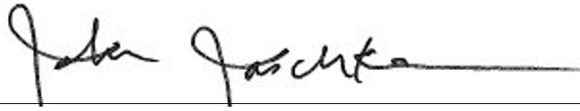
Purpose of the Technical Training and Certification Program

The purpose of the technical training and certification strategy is to provide a framework for development of training and credentialing for local conservation professionals. This strategy document articulates the partnering agencies' and associations' dedication to provide resources and leadership toward achieving training and credentialing of local staff through a robust conservation delivery program in Minnesota.

The goal of TTCP to develop and maintain a highly trained, technically skilled workforce of natural resource professionals to meet Minnesota's conservation delivery needs.

Endorsement of TTCP Strategy

This Strategy serves as a roadmap for accomplishing TTCP's goal to develop and maintain a highly trained, technically skilled workforce of natural resource professionals to meet Minnesota's conservation delivery needs. The undersigned parties commit to continue providing resources for the implementation of this Strategy for technical training and certification of local staff to maintain and enhance conservation delivery.



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05/03/2021

Date



Nicole Bernd, President, MACDE

05/06/2021

Date



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05/10/2021

Date



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05/11/2021

Date

2021-2023 Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Program activities are implemented through strategic coordination

Objectives

- 1.1 The Minnesota Technical Training Committee (MTTC) is able to make decisions and provide direction to the program
- 1.2 Area Technical Training Teams provide a connection between local staff, the MTTC, and overall program implementation
- 1.3 TTCP Goals and Objectives are met through coordination and communication between partner staff at all levels
- 1.4 The program is managed and utilized to meet the intended purpose

Goal 2: Training needs and certifications are documented and tracked

Objectives

- 2.1 The IDP tool is maintained and updated
- 2.2 Technical staff complete Individual Development Plans in eLINK
- 2.3 IDP data is used to identify training priorities and develop an annual training plan

Goal 3: Provide opportunities for partners to build skills and obtain certifications needed for conservation delivery

Objectives

- 3.1 Training on skills needed for achieving or maintaining conservation credentials and certifications are developed and delivered annually
- 3.2 NRCS and BWSR Trainers coordinate on training development and delivery
- 3.3 Online training opportunities for the development of basic and advanced skills are readily available
- 3.4 Partner staff obtain and/or maintain conservation credentials and certifications
- 3.5 Partner staff are aware of and can plan for training opportunities

Strategy Implementation

The following parties are identified as having lead roles in implementing objectives throughout the Strategy.

Minnesota Technical Training Committee (MTTC)

The Minnesota Technical Training Committee (MTTC) assists in building and maintaining a high quality, technical workforce capable of meeting Minnesota's conservation needs. This committee serves administrative functions for the Technical Training and Certification Program, including the following activities:

- Make program decisions and provide direction for program implementation
- Periodically review annual training calendar
- Review and act on long-term recommendations from Area Technical Training Teams (ATTTs)
- Review and disseminate annual reporting of accomplishments back to individual organizations
- Ensure communication with organization members about TTCP priorities and messaging

In addition to Ad Hoc members, the MTTC is comprised of the following positions:

2021 TTCP Implementation Strategy, Page 6

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):

- State Resource Conservationist
- State Conservation Engineer
- State Soil Scientist
- Assistant State Conservationist (Field Operations):

Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)

- TTCP Coordinator
- Organizational Effectiveness Manager
- Resource Conservation Manager
- Regional Manager
- Chief Engineer

Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE)

- President
- Member

Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD)

- Assistant Director

Area Technical Training Teams (ATTT)

The Area Technical Training Teams (ATTTs) are a bridge connecting local staff needs and priorities to the Minnesota Technical Training Committee. The ATTTs help ensure training and credentialing needs are met by simultaneously advocating needs to the Minnesota Technical Training Committee and by providing local opportunities for formal and informal technical training. Primary roles of the teams are to identify and prioritize local training needs, identify trainers, organize, and coordinate local training delivery, and coordinate with other Area teams throughout the state to maximize training efficiencies.

There are eight ATTTs, aligned with the MASWCD/TSA (Technical Service Area) Area boundaries. In addition to Ad Hoc members they are comprised of:

- Two NRCS Representatives
- Two SWCD Representatives
- One TSA Representative
- One BWSR Representative
- TTCP Training Conservationist
- TTCP Training Engineer

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS Leadership of TTCP is provided through the State Conservationist in consultation with the NRCS Leadership Team. Some NRCS positions have training as part of the job duties. Some of these include:

- State Resource Conservationist
- State Ecological Science Staff (Biologist, Agronomist, Cultural Resources, GIS)
- Area Resource Conservationists
- State Conservation Engineer
- State Engineering Staff (Assistant, Design, Hydraulic)
- Area Engineers

2021 TTCP Implementation Strategy, Page 7

Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)

BWSR Leadership of TTCP is provided through the Executive Director, in consultation with the BWSR Senior Management Team. Day to day management of TTCP is overseen by:

- Organizational Effectiveness Manager
- Resource Conservation Manager
- Chief Engineer

Technical Training and Certification Program Staff (TTCP)

The TTCP staff provide leadership in the collection and analysis of technical training needs, curriculum development, and training delivery. TTCP staff also provide assistance to NRCS and SWCD technical employees to develop technical skills and abilities, obtain Job Approval Authority, and obtain Conservation Planning Certification. TTCP staff is comprised of:

- Coordinator
- Training Conservationists (Ecological Sciences)
- Training Engineers (Engineering)
- Office Administrative Support (OAS)

2021-2023 Program Goals, Objectives, and Actions

Goal 1: Program activities are implemented through strategic coordination

Objectives

1.1 The Minnesota Technical Training Committee (MTTC) is able to make decisions and provide direction to the program

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Review and approve the MTTC team charter and membership | First quarter of each calendar year | MTTC | MTTC partners indicate the membership adequately represents the committee, understand role of MTTC |
| Establish a quarterly meeting schedule | First quarter of each calendar year | MTTC, Coordinator | MTTC members indicate they are well informed of program progress |

1.2 Area Technical Training Teams provide a connection between local staff, the MTTC, and overall program implementation

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Review and approve team charter and membership | First quarter of each calendar year | ATTT, TTCP Trainers | ATTTs maintain full membership with representation from the partner agencies |
| Review roles and responsibilities of ATTT members and conduct orientation sessions for new members | First quarter of each calendar year | ATTT, TTCP Trainers, Coordinator | ATTT members report understanding the team's role and individual member responsibilities Meetings to discuss training needs and opportunities are held regularly but at least twice a year |
| Identify additional opportunities for coordination between ATTTs, District Managers and NRCS Team Leads | 2021 | MTTC, ATTTs, Coordinator, NRCS Team Leads, SWCD Managers | District Managers and NRCS Team leads report good coordination/communication with ATTTs to gather training needs and advertise training opportunities |
| Identify additional opportunities for coordination between ATTTs and MTTC | Ongoing | MTTC, Coordinator, ATTT Chairs | ATTTs report having the opportunity to contribute to decisions being made |

1.3 TTCP Goals and Objectives are met through coordination and communication between partner staff at all levels

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|--|------------|-------------|--|
| Encourage communication and coordination between NRCS Team Leads and SWCD Managers | Biannually | MTTC | Partner staff indicate that professional development and certification is coordinated and supported internally |
| Promote program initiatives and accomplishments through Train Tracks, website, email, and fact sheets | Monthly | Coordinator | Partner staff report awareness of program progress and activities |

2021 TTCP Implementation Strategy, Page 9

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| Promote program achievements through the development of success stories | Quarterly | TTCP staff | Partners report awareness of achievements |
| Provide status updates and meet with partner leadership to review progress and anticipated initiatives | Biannually | Coordinator | Agency Leadership is aware of and promotes program success |

1.4 The program is managed and utilized to meet the intended purpose

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|--|---------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Provide funding for full time dedicated program coordinator | Ongoing | NRCS, BWSR | Partners report successful interagency and program coordination |
| Complete and submit regular reports program accomplishments and expenditures | Quarterly, Annually | Coordinator | Reporting requirements are met, partners are aware of accomplishments |
| Obtain feedback regarding effectiveness in addressing training needs and increasing credentials | Annually | Coordinator | Program implementation is adjusted based on feedback from participants |
| Provide annual communication to the partnership on the goals and objectives of the TTCP | Annually | MTTC | Partner staff report an understanding of why the TTCP exists and what its role is in training assessment and delivery |
| Evaluate program progress | 2023 | Coordinator, MTTC | Program continues to meet make progress toward program goals and objectives |
| Seek funding opportunities to renew or extend partnership agreement | 2023 | NRCS, BWSR, MASWCD, MACDE | Program funding and coordination is maintained long term |

Goal 2: Training needs and credentials are documented and tracked

Objectives

2.1 The IDP tool is maintained and updated

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|---|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Ensure the IDP tool is compatible with software and database updates | 2021-2022 | BWSR, TTCP Staff | System continues to be accessible to users |
| Import JAA and Planner Certification Database information | Biannually in February and August | NRCS, BWSR, Coordinator | Data in the tool is up to date |
| Ensure IDP tool reflects emerging technical training needs | Ongoing, Annually | Coordinator, eLINK Team, ATTTs | The IDP tool identifies technical training needs |

2.2 Technical staff complete Individual Development Plans in eLINK

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|--------|----------|-------------|---------|
|--------|----------|-------------|---------|

2021 TTCP Implementation Strategy, Page 10

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| Coordinate eLINK access and updates for partner employees | Ongoing | NRCS, Coordinator, OAS | All partners report having access to IDP tool in eLINK. Information in the database is accurate |
| Promote the use of existing training resources, develop/update additional training resources, and provide additional training on using the IDP tool as needed | Annually | TTCP Staff | Partners report ability to use the IDP tool |
| Encourage NRCS and SWCD participation in collaborative efforts when determining local priorities | Ongoing | MTTC | Improved consistency in local identification of priority resource concerns and practices |
| Increase messaging and provide training on using local priorities to identify technical training needs in the IDP tool | Annually | MTTC, TTCP Staff | Technical training needs correlate with locally identified priorities |
| Promote use of the IDP tool throughout the year, and emphasize the annual capture of training needs data | Ongoing, August-October | TTCP Staff, MTTC, ATTT | IDP reports show the addition and/or update of technical training needs throughout the year |
| Continually improve participation in IDP process through the development of training and targeted messaging for staff and supervisors | Ongoing | MASWCD, MACDE, NRCS, BWSR, ATTTs | Technical training needs are identified for each SWCD and NRCS CST. The number of individuals completing/updating IDPs increases annually |

2.3 IDP data is used to identify training priorities and develop an annual training plan

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|--|-----------------|---|---|
| Review IDP data and develop statewide priorities | Annually | TTCP Staff, NRCS Trainers | A training plan based on priority needs is created each year |
| Share IDP data and training plan with ATTTs | Ongoing | TTCP Trainers | ATTT member are aware of TTCP offerings and can identify gaps in local training needs |
| Hold quarterly check ins to review and update the training plan | Quarterly | Coordinator, TTCP Trainers, NRCS Trainers | An updated training plan is published quarterly on the website and/or in Train Tracks |

Goal 3: Provide opportunities for partners to build skills and obtain credentials needed for conservation delivery

Objectives

3.1 Training on skills needed for achieving or maintaining conservation credentials and certifications are developed and delivered annually

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|---|------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Develop curriculum to address priority training needs | Ongoing | TTCP Trainers | Curriculum is developed or updated for 20 training sessions annually |
| Deliver training on topics identified as priorities through the IDP process | Ongoing | TTCP Trainers | 85% of Partner staff report access to training that is relevant to their needs |
| Provide logistical support for TTCP training events (registration, facilities, advertising, etc) | Ongoing | Coordinator, TTCP Trainers, OAS | Partner staff report that training events are delivered in a smooth and predictable manner |
| Provide funding to ATTTs to develop and deliver training on local priority trainings | Biennially | TTCP | ATTTs develop and deliver training specific to their area training priorities |
| Deliver training on continuing education topics | Ongoing | TTCP Trainers | Partner staff report maintaining their conservation credentials and certifications. Changes to credentials in the JAA and Planner databases |
| Review and evaluate training sessions | Ongoing | TTCP Trainers | Curriculum and delivery of training sessions are adjusted or improved based on participant feedback |

3.2 Partnership Trainers coordinate on training development and delivery

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|---|----------|---|--|
| Coordinate and collaborate on the development of TTCP training curriculum | Ongoing | NRCS Trainers, TTCP Trainers, Coordinator | Training staff from report awareness of curriculum development by both agencies |
| Establish a mechanism to organize, share, and store training curriculum | 2021 | Coordinator | Training staff have access to and are using completed curriculum. Trainers are able to collaborate during curriculum development |
| Include TTCP Trainers in monthly ARC and AE calls to coordinate technical training | Monthly | NRCS, TTCP Trainers | Trainers report high quality communication and coordination in identifying and addressing prioritized training needs |

3.3 Online training opportunities for the development of basic and advanced skills are readily available

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|---|----------|----------------------------|--|
| Maintain the MNC3 website and Core Competency Curriculum | Ongoing | Coordinator, TTCP Trainers | Core Competency modules are kept up to date based on feedback and changes to practices, policies, and priorities. Core Competency modules are utilized |

2021 TTCP Implementation Strategy, Page 12

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| Promote the use of the MNC3 website for all partner staff | 2021 | NRCS, BWSR, MASWCD, MACDE | Registered users on the MNC3 website. Module utilization analytics |
| Update and maintain content on BWSR's Online Library | Ongoing | TTCP Trainers | Partner staff report trainings are relevant to their needs. Website analytics |
| Develop guidance for locating relevant content in the Online Library | 2021 | TTCP Trainers | Partner staff report trainings are available. Website analytics |

3.4 Partner staff obtain and/or maintain conservation credentials

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|--|-----------------|--|--|
| Establish parameters to define success in partner staff obtaining and/or maintaining conservation credentials and certifications | 2021 | MTTC | Baseline parameters established |
| Identify barriers to obtaining JAA and develop an action plan to address them | 2021 | MTTC, ATTT, TTCP Trainers, Coordinator | Plan developed to overcome identified barriers. Additional guidance and resources for obtaining JAA are developed |
| Implement a plan to assist technical staff in obtaining JAA | 2021-2022 | TBD based on plan | Partner staff report they are able to obtain JAA. JAA database shows an increase in credentials |
| Identify barriers to obtaining certification and develop an action plan to address them | 2021 | MTTC, ATTT, TTCP Trainers, Coordinator | Plan developed to overcome identified barriers. Guidance and resources for obtaining certifications are developed |
| Implement a plan to assist technical staff in obtaining identified certifications | 2021-2022 | TBD based on plan | Partner staff report they are able to obtain certifications. Planner database shows an increase in credentials |
| Increase coordination and messaging related to credentialing | 2021-2022 | MTTC | Partner staff understand expectations for obtaining JAA and/or certifications |
| Follow up with students 60-90 days after a training session to encourage progress toward credentialing and identify barriers, as applicable | Ongoing | TTCP Trainers | JAA and Planner databases show an increase in credentials |
| Obtain input and use it to develop an approach for increasing On the Job Training opportunities | 2021 | MTTC, ATTT, TTCP | Plan developed to implement an OJT program |
| Implement a plan to provide On the Job Training opportunities | 2022 | TBD based on plan | OJT program implemented |
| Obtain feedback on the effectiveness in the resources provided to aid in obtaining and/or maintaining conservation credentials and certifications | Annually | Coordinator | Positive feedback reflects effective portions of the implemented plans. Negative feedback identifies portions of plans to be revised |

3.5 Partner staff are aware of and can plan for training opportunities

| Action | Timeline | Responsible | Measure |
|--|-----------|---|---|
| Publish trainings in the Training Calendar on BWSR's website | Ongoing | Coordinator | Partner staff indicate an awareness of upcoming training opportunities. Website analytics |
| Advertise trainings in Train Tracks | Ongoing | Coordinator | Partner staff indicate an awareness of upcoming training opportunities. Website analytics |
| Utilize IDP data to provide direct email correspondence to interested attendees regarding upcoming training opportunities | Ongoing | TTCP Trainers, Coordinator, OAS | Partner staff indicate an awareness of upcoming training opportunities |
| Develop an improved approach for notifying NRCS staff of upcoming training opportunities | 2021 | NRCS, Coordinator | NRCS staff indicate an awareness of upcoming training opportunities |
| Share an updated training calendar | Quarterly | NRCS Trainers, TTCP Trainers, Coordinator | Partner staff can plan in advance to complete prerequisites attend training |
| Develop a long term schedule for the rotation of fundamental trainings | Ongoing | NRCS Trainers, TTCP Trainers, Coordinator | Partner staff have confidence they will have access to the training they need in the future |