



FRANKLIN COUNTY
NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Employee Handbook

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WELCOME!

This handbook is a guide to the policies and procedures for employees at the Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District (FCNRCD). All employees are expected to become familiar with its contents.

This handbook contains only general information and is not intended to address all possible policies, procedures, and work rules. It is not an employment contract and is not intended to create contractual obligations of any kind. Both the employee and FCNRCD have the right to terminate employment at will, with or without cause, at any time.

This handbook supersedes all past handbooks, policies, procedures, understandings, and/or standards, written or verbal, expressed or implied. It is a “living document” so please share your suggestions for ways that it can be improved. Personnel policies shall be approved by the District Board of Supervisors and may be amended by vote of the Board at any time. It shall be reviewed, amended if needed, and re-approved at least annually.

MISSION

The Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District empowers and partners with land stewards and communities on the ground by supporting connections that benefit natural resources, water quality, soil health, and the working landscape in Franklin County and across Northwest Vermont.

WORKPLACE INCLUSIVITY

Having a workplace that is safe and supportive, where each person feels and is valued, is a priority at FCNRCD. The following policies are in place to set minimum standards for creating this kind of environment.

Equal Employment Opportunity

Employment decisions at FCNRCD will be based on merit, qualifications, and abilities. The District does not discriminate in employment opportunities or practices on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ancestry, place of birth, age, crime victim status, or physical or mental condition, or any other characteristic protected by law.

This policy governs all aspects of employment, including selection, job assignment, compensation, discipline, termination, and access to benefits and training.

Employees with questions or concerns about any type of discrimination in the workplace are encouraged to bring these issues to the attention of the District Manager or any Board member. Employees can raise concerns and make reports without reprisal. Employees determined to be engaging in any type of unlawful discrimination will be subject to disciplinary action including possible termination of employment.

Commitment to an Inclusive Workplace

FCNRCD is committed to fostering, cultivating, and preserving a culture of diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility. The collective sum of the individual differences, life experiences, knowledge, inventiveness, innovation, self-expression, unique capabilities, and talent that our employees invest in their work represents a significant part of not only our culture, but the District's success as well.

FCNRCD attempts to nurture diversity, equity, and inclusion in our values and actions. This includes (and is not limited to) our practices and policies on recruitment and selection, compensation and benefits, professional development and training, and terminations. We strive to develop and maintain a work environment that encourages:

- Respectful communication and cooperation
- Employee participation that permits the representation of all perspectives
- Flexible work schedules to accommodate employees' varying needs

All employees of FCNRCD have a responsibility to treat others with dignity and respect at all times. All employees are expected to exhibit conduct that reflects inclusion during work and adherence to applicable District policies outside of work hours (i.e., see policies on harassment, social media, etc.). Periodically, FCNRCD will provide specific learning opportunities to help all employees expand their understanding of creating an inclusive place to work; all employees are expected to actively participate in this exploration.

Any employee found to have exhibited any inappropriate conduct or behavior against others may be subject to disciplinary action. Employees who believe they have been subjected to any kind of discrimination or conduct that conflicts with this policy should bring their concerns to the attention of the District Manager or a Board member if the concern relates to the District Manager.

Reasonable Accommodations

Staff members with mental or physical disabilities have the right to request reasonable accommodation. A reasonable accommodation is any modification or adjustment to a job, practice, or service environment that makes it possible for an individual with a physical or mental disability to perform the essential functions of a job. It is the policy of the District to accommodate such individuals upon request unless the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the organization.

Examples of accommodations may include acquiring or modifying equipment or devices, modifying examinations and training materials, making facilities readily accessible, job restructuring, modifying service schedules, providing qualified readers or interpreters.

An individual with a disability is defined for purposes of this policy as a person who:

- has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities
- has a history of such an impairment
- is perceived or “regarded as” having such an impairment, even when the impairment does not exist

Requesting reasonable accommodation: A staff member with a disability may request reasonable accommodation from the District Manager. The District Manager will meet with the staff member and, in consultation, discuss: 1) the nature of the impairment, the life activity that is substantially limited, and how the life activity is limited; 2) the effect of the impairment on the ability to perform the job; 3) the type of accommodation requested; and 4) the effect of the accommodation on performing the essential functions of the job.

Lactation Accommodations

Breastfeeding/Chestfeeding employees shall be allowed a flexible schedule for nursing or pumping. For time above and beyond typical needs, the employee is expected to use PTO or speak with the District Manager for alternate accommodation.

It is the intention of FCNRCD to support an employee who is breastfeeding/chestfeeding and given the nature of our different work sites, this may require some creativity and flexibility. The expectation is that the employee and the District Manager will collaboratively find a solution that provides the employee with a private and sanitary location, a means to properly store milk if needed, and a means to wash or clean pumps, etc..

Policy Against Harassment and Discrimination

FCNRCD prohibits harassment and discrimination that is sexual, racial, or religious in nature or is related to anyone’s race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ancestry, place of birth, age, crime victim status, or physical or mental condition, or any other basis protected by federal, state, or local law. This policy applies to all employees throughout the Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District and to all individuals who may have contact with any employee of the District.

Under Vermont law, measures to prevent and respond to harassment and discrimination are very closely related and apply to all aspects of employment. This policy applies to any instance which falls under one or both forms of mistreatment in the workplace.

Sexual Harassment

FCNRCD will not require, as a condition of employment, any employee to sign an agreement that restricts their ability to oppose, disclose, report, or participate in a sexual harassment investigation.

Definition

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, physical, written, auditory, or visual conduct of a sexual nature when:

1. submission to that conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment; or
2. submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a component of the basis for employment decisions affecting that individual; or
3. conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Sexual harassment can take many forms and it can be subtle or direct, explicit or implied. Examples include, but are not limited to the following: suggestive or insulting noises, facial expressions, vulgar language, nicknames, slurs, derogatory comments, deadnaming (i.e., referring to a person by a name they no longer use), misgendering (i.e., not using the correct pronouns for an individual), cartoons, jokes, written materials, offensive gestures or touching, and comments that refer to or explicitly describe sexual behaviors.

Sexual harassment need not be severe or pervasive in order to be unlawful. A single incident of harassment may be enough to constitute a violation of this policy and grounds for disciplinary action.

Discrimination

Vermont law prohibits discrimination that is either intentional or unintentional.

Intentional discrimination in employment happens when decisions are affected by:

- Actual animosity towards a person or group based on their race, ancestry, or other membership in a protected category (although a showing of animus or malice is not required under the law)
- Stereotypes about a person's skills, abilities, personality, or other traits which are consciously held about people because of their sex, race, age, or other legally protected category
- Discriminatory preferences or biases of customers, coworkers, clients, or others in the workplace

Unintentional discrimination includes microaggressions, unconscious biases, and unconsciously held stereotypes. It can take the form of neutral policies or practices when they have a disproportionate impact on people in a protected class.

Stereotypes are generalizations or preconceptions about how members of an identity group should or should not act, feel, or present themselves. Stereotypes develop from ideas that oversimplify or generalize a group of people based on their race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, religious beliefs, practices, or other characteristics. Stereotypes tend to reflect cultural and individual conscious and unconscious biases, preferences, and prejudices. Stereotypes can range from harmful to seemingly benign, but still have negative effects, particularly in the workplace. Cultural stereotypes can limit how a person is perceived as a worker, team member, supervisor, and professional. They can affect employment opportunities, career advancement, career pursuits, and life choices.

The law prohibits employment actions or work environments that are affected by stereotypes, generalizations, assumptions, or biases about members of protected categories.

Reporting Harassment and Discrimination

If an employee believes they have experienced or witnessed harassment/discrimination, they are strongly encouraged to tell the District Manager or a Board member as soon as possible after the offense. While making a report may feel like an uncomfortable step to take, a delay in reporting could make follow-up actions, including an investigation, challenging. Nonetheless, at any point when an employee reports conduct that they feel constitutes harassment/discrimination, FCNRCD will initiate the following protocol for handling such complaints. Employees are not required to approach the person who they allege has acted in a harassing/discriminating manner, and they may bypass any offending member of management.

Managers, supervisors, Board members, and anyone in a leadership role is required to take action on any and all reported or suspected incidents of harassment/discrimination.

Responding to Harassment and Discrimination Claims

All reports of harassment/discrimination are taken seriously and it is both unethical and illegal for FCNRCD to not take action when this information is brought forward. When any manager, supervisor, or Board member is made aware that there is an allegation of harassment/discrimination or if they witness behaviors that may constitute such, it is incumbent upon them to take action. This may include any or all of the following:

1. Intervention to stop the behavior.
2. Meet with the person making the allegation as soon as possible and document what is reported.
3. Either initiate an investigation or send the documented report to the District Manager or Board member for further action.
4. Initiate an investigation following best practices for conducting and documenting this process.

The District Manager or a Board member will conduct an investigation in as confidential a manner as possible. Interviews, allegations, statements, and identities will be kept confidential to the

extent possible and allowed by law. The investigation process will be conducted in the most time-sensitive manner possible. No employee who indicates they have been the target of harassment/discrimination will be required to work in circumstances that may further jeopardize their well-being during the investigation. At the conclusion of the investigation, information will be shared only with individuals who need to know and in a manner that does not violate any other policy or employment regulation.

Appropriate corrective action including possible termination will be taken promptly for any employee who has engaged in behavior that was determined to be a violation of this policy.

Retaliation

FCNRCD prohibits retaliation of any kind against employees who sincerely believe they have witnessed or experienced harassment/discrimination, or those who assist in an investigation. If an employee feels they have been subjected to any form of retaliation, the employee should report that conduct to the District Manager or Board member as soon as possible. Employees are not required to approach the person who is retaliating against them, and they may bypass any offending member of management.

Resources

If any employee is dissatisfied with this employer's action, they may seek additional recourse and support from the following state or federal agencies:

Vermont Attorney General's Office

Civil Rights Unit 109 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05609

tel (802) 828-3171 (voice/TDD)

<https://ago.vermont.gov/contact>

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

John F. Kennedy Federal Building 475 Government Center Boston, MA 02203

tel (800) 669-4000 (voice), (800) 669-6820 (TTY)

www.eeoc.gov

Vermont Human Rights Council

12 Baldwin St., Montpelier, VT 05633

tel (802) 828-2480

email: human.rights@vermont.gov

WORKPLACE EXPECTATIONS

Business Ethics and Conduct

At FCNRCD we strive to not only adhere to the spirit and letter of all applicable laws and regulations but also to demonstrate the highest standards of conduct and personal integrity.

In general, the use of good judgment, based on high ethical principles, will guide an employee with respect to what is acceptable conduct at work. If an employee is ever unsure of how to handle a situation, they discuss this with the District Manager or a Board member.

Compliance with this policy of business ethics and conduct is the responsibility of all FCNRCD employees and Board members. FCNRCD reserves the right to refuse and/or discontinue relations with anyone or any entity that does not uphold these same ethical standards.

Confidential Information

The Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District and its technical partners provide employees access to a significant amount of confidential information including, without limitation, information regarding customers and the finances, management, and operations of the District. This information is confidential. An employee who divulges confidential information may be terminated. Employees should continue to hold in confidence, after termination of employment for any reason, confidential business or customer information obtained during the course of their employment.

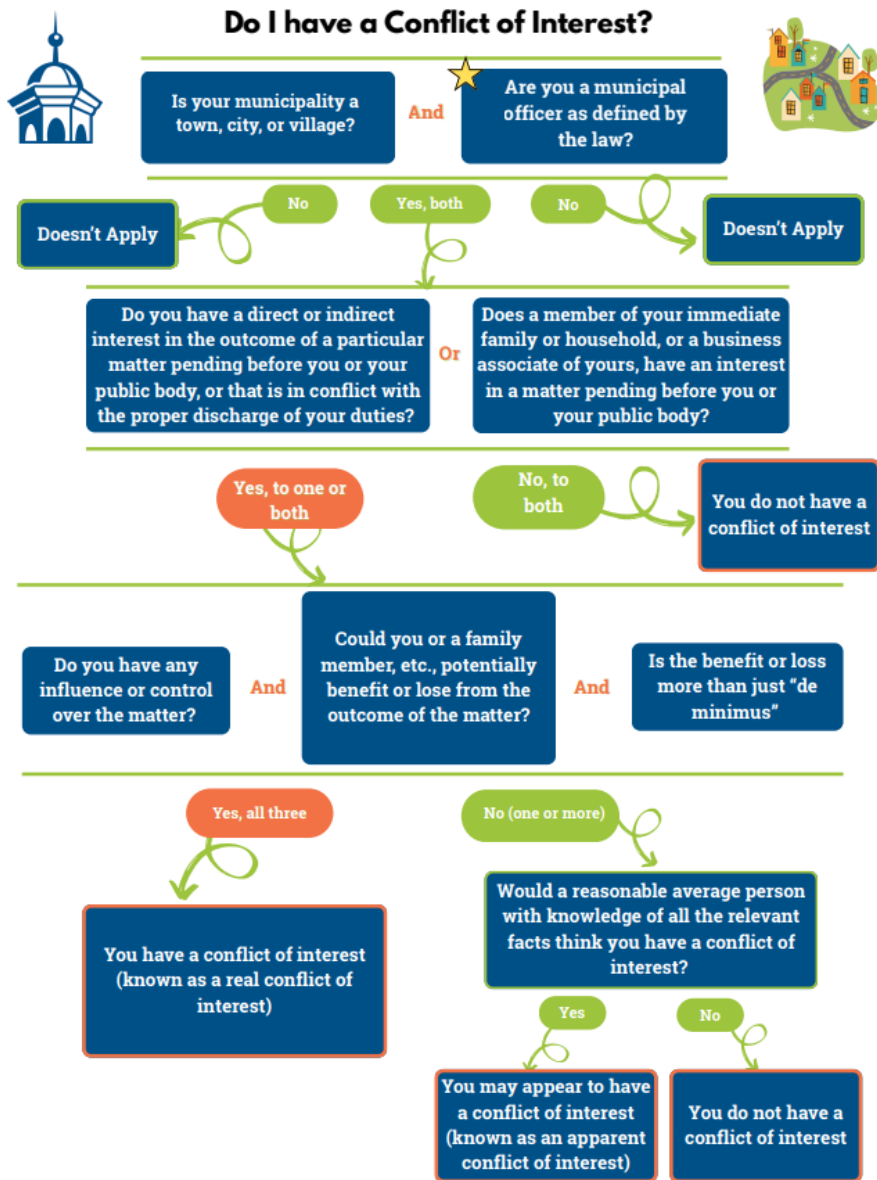
Conflicts of Interest

The following requirements ensure that there will be no conflict of interest with regard to employment, contracts, and other operations of FCNRCD and its programs. For the purposes of this policy, “immediate family” is defined as one’s spouse or partner, adult child(ren), parent, sibling, grandchild(ren), grandparents; also, the parent or sibling of one’s spouse/partner as well as the adult spouse/partner of one’s adult child(ren).

FCNRCD staff and Board members must take the appropriate Code of Ethics Training within 120 days of the start of their position and every three years thereafter link: [Youtube Video](#)

Additional information about Municipal Ethics can be found here:
<https://ethicscommission.vermont.gov/municipal-ethics>

Conflict of Interest Decision Tree and Flow Charts (source: Vermont League of Cities and Towns)



A municipal officer is defined as any member of a legislative body of a municipality (town, city, or village only); Any member of a quasi-judicial body of a municipality; Any individual who holds the position of, or exercises the function of, any of the following positions in or on behalf of any municipality:

- o First Constable
- o Lister or Assessor
- o Auditor
- o Moderator
- o Building Inspector
- o Road Commissioner
- o Town or City Manager, Chief Administrative Officer
- o Municipal Clerk, Treasurer
- o Mayor, governance board member (council, village trustee, selectboard, etc.)
- o Advisory Budget Committee member
- o Planning Commission member
- o Water Commissioner.
- o Cemetery Commissioner
- o Collector of Delinquent Taxes
- o Trustee of Public Funds



Instructions for Handling a Conflict of Interest (COI)





A nonrecusal statement should:

- Describe the matter requiring action.
- Describe the nature of the conflict (whether real or apparent).
- Explain why there is "good cause" for you to continue to act fairly, objectively, and in the public interest in the matter, despite the conflict.
- Be written clearly and in sufficient detail so the public can understand; AND
- Be signed by you




Good cause means that the:

- The conflict is amorphous, intangible, or otherwise speculative;
- the officer cannot legally or practically delegate the matter; or
- action to be taken by the officer is purely ministerial and does not involve substantive decision-making

Not sure what to do?
CONTACT THE ETHICS
COMMISSION FOR ADVICE

Vermont State Ethics Commission
 6 Baldwin St.
 Montpelier, VT 05633-7950
 802-828-7187
ethicscommission@vermont.gov
<https://ethicscommission.vermont.gov/>



Employment

No one shall be employed by FCNRCD while they, or their immediate family, serve on the FCNRCD Board or on a Board committee that has the authority to order personnel actions affecting their job. No employee shall hold a job:

- Over which a member of their immediate family exercises direct supervisory authority; or
- Which exercises direct supervisory authority over a member of their immediate family.

No one shall hold a job at FCNRCD while either they or a member of their immediate family serves on a Board or committee, which, either by rule or practice, regularly nominates, recommends, or screens candidates for the District, or for the program in which they work.

Contracts

In addition to avoiding the employment conflicts above, no employee or agent shall participate in the selection, award, or administration of a contract if a real (or apparent) conflict of interest is involved. Such a conflict would arise when the employee or agent (any member of their immediate family, their partner, or an organization that employs or is about to employ any of the parties indicated herein) has a financial or other interest in the firm selected for an award.

Other Operations & Funding

Conflicts, real or apparent, must also be avoided with regard to FCNRCD's operations and funding sources. The following restrictions apply to anyone who exercises or has exercised any functions or responsibilities with respect to services, operations, or any other activities associated with any

FCNRCD programs or funding sources. They also apply to anyone who is in a position to participate in a decision-making process or gain inside information with regard to services, operations, or other activities assisted under those programs or with those funding sources. These individuals are prohibited from:

- Obtaining a financial interest or benefit from an assisted activity.
- Having a financial interest in any contract, subcontract, or agreement with respect to an assisted activity.
- Having a financial interest in the proceeds derived from an assisted activity (either for themselves or for those with whom they have family or business ties) during their tenure or during the one-year period following their tenure.

All employees and members of the Board will be required to annually review and sign an acknowledgement that they will follow this Conflict of Interest policy.

Whistleblower Protections

(source: Vermont League of Cities and Towns)

Protected activity.

An agency, department, appointing authority, official, or employee of a municipality is prohibited against engaging in retaliatory action against a protected employee because the protected employee refuses to comply with an illegal order or engages in any of the following:

- providing to a designated complaint recipient a good faith report or good faith testimony that alleges an entity of a municipality, employee or official of a municipality, or a person providing services to a municipality under contract has engaged in a violation of law or in waste, fraud, abuse of authority, or a threat to the health of employees, the public, or persons under the care of a municipality; or
- assisting or participating in a proceeding to enforce the provisions of Title 24, Section 1998 (VT's Municipal Whistleblower Protection Law).

No agency, department, appointing authority, official, or employee of a municipality can attempt to restrict or interfere with, in any manner, a protected employee's ability to engage in any of the protected activity described above.

No agency, department, appointing authority, or manager of a municipality can require any protected employee to discuss or disclose the employee's testimony, or intended testimony, prior to the employee's appearance to testify before the General Assembly if the employee is not testifying on behalf of an entity of the municipality.

No protected employee can divulge information that is confidential under State or federal law. An act by which a protected employee divulges such information will not be considered protected activity.

In order to establish a claim of retaliation based upon the refusal to follow an illegal order, a protected employee must assert at the time of the refusal the employee's good faith and reasonable belief that the order is illegal.

Communications with legislative bodies of municipalities and the General Assembly.

No entity of a municipality can prohibit a protected employee from engaging in discussion with a member of a legislative body or the General Assembly or from testifying before a committee of a municipality or a committee of the General Assembly; provided, however, that a protected employee cannot divulge confidential information, and an employee must be clear that the employee is not speaking on behalf of an entity of a municipality.

No protected employee will be subject to discipline, discharge, discrimination, or other adverse employment action as a result of the employee providing information to a member of a legislative body, a legislator, or a committee of a municipality or a committee of the General Assembly; provided, however, that the protected employee does not divulge confidential information and that the employee is clear that the employee is not speaking on behalf of any entity of the municipality. The protections set forth herein do not apply to statements that constitute hate speech or threats of violence against a person.

In the event that an appearance before a committee of a municipality or committee of the General Assembly will cause a protected employee to miss work, the employee must request to be absent from work and must provide as much notice as is reasonably possible. The request must be granted unless there is good cause to deny the request. If a request is denied, the decision and reasons for the denial must be in writing and must be provided to the protected employee in advance of the scheduled appearance. These protections are subject to the efficient operation of municipal government, which shall prevail in any instance of conflict.

Enforcement and preemption.

Nothing in this section will be deemed to diminish the rights, privileges, or remedies of a protected employee under other federal, State, or local law, or under any collective bargaining agreement or employment contract, except the limitation on multiple actions as set forth herein.

A protected employee who files a claim of retaliation for protected activity with the Vermont Labor Relations Board or through binding arbitration under a grievance procedure or similar process available to the employee may not bring such a claim in Superior Court. A protected employee who files a claim under Title 24, Section 1998 in Superior Court may not bring a claim of retaliation for protected activity under a grievance procedure or similar process available to the employee.

Remedies.

A protected employee who brings a claim in Superior Court may be awarded the following remedies:

- reinstatement of the employee to the same position, seniority, and work location held prior to the retaliatory action;
- back pay, lost wages, benefits, and other remuneration;
- in the event of a showing of a willful, intentional, and egregious violation of this section, an amount up to the amount of back pay in addition to the actual back pay;
- other compensatory damages;
- interest on back pay;
- appropriate injunctive relief; and
- reasonable costs and attorney's fees.

Posting.

Every agency, department, and office of a municipality must post and display notices of protected employee protection under this law in a prominent and accessible location in the workplace.

Limitations of actions. An action alleging a violation of Vermont's Municipal Whistleblower Protection Law (Title 24, Section 1998) brought under a grievance procedure or similar process shall be brought within the period allowed by that process or procedure. An action brought in Superior Court must be brought within 180 days following the date of the alleged retaliatory action.

Outside Employment

If an employee would like to engage in outside work or to hold other jobs they may do so as long as it does not interfere with their availability or ability to perform their duties for the District.

Additionally, employees must adhere to the Conflict of Interest and all other applicable policies.

They are expected to manage their additional work commitments in a manner that:

- does not compete with, conflict with, or compromise the District's interests;
- does not adversely affect job performance and the ability to fulfill all job responsibilities;
- does not involve performing any services for customers on non-work time that are normally performed by FCNRCD; and
- does not entail the use of any District tools or equipment and the unauthorized use or application of any confidential information.

Employees are cautioned to carefully consider the demands that additional work activity will create before accepting outside employment.

Flexible Work Arrangements

Employees in the State of Vermont have the right to request flexible working arrangements.

FCNRCD will discuss and consider such a request with an employee in the event that one is made.

Requests may be made verbally or in writing. The District Manager will provide the employee a final decision in writing. Requests should be as specific as possible and indicate how the employee will still be able to meet the obligations of their role at FCNRCD. Should a flexible work arrangement be granted, it will not change any other terms of employment. The intention of this law is to provide a framework for meaningful dialogue about whether such an arrangement would work for both parties.

Attendance and Punctuality

Employees' schedules are generally self-designed. Employees are expected to manage this flexibility in a way that ensures all responsibilities are tended to in a timely manner and to the best of their abilities. It is expected that individuals will arrive promptly at all meetings whether those are virtual or in-person. One's availability should be clearly communicated to coworkers to allow for a collaborative working relationship among the team.

In such a flexible working environment, it can be difficult to define what it means to be absent or late. It is expected that if an employee will not be available on a day they are scheduled to work or typically work (or a portion of that day), they will communicate this to the District Manager and anyone else who needs to know. If an employee is unable to attend a scheduled meeting or event, they must let the District Manager know as soon as possible so other arrangements can be made, if necessary. Excessive absenteeism or lateness (i.e., not showing up when expected, arriving late at meetings or events, etc.) will be addressed by the District Manager.

Emergency Closings

Due to the nature of flexible scheduling, employees are expected to manage inclement weather in a manner that minimally disrupts their work week. If they are unable to work for a portion of a day or a full day, they may either rearrange their schedule for the week or take Paid Time Off (PTO). See Time Off and Leaves of Absence policies for more details.

Personal Appearance

The following guidelines for appearance apply to all employees at FCNRCD and will not be applied differentially based on an employee's gender identity or expression. An employee's personal presentation is a reflection of FCNRCD. While the District does not wish to be the arbiter of appearance and hygiene, it is important to provide a general sense of what is meant by "dressed appropriately" for one's role. Clothing should not contain words or images that denigrate any individuals or groups. Specifically prohibited are demeaning, violent, or sexually explicit images or words as well as any that depict drugs (and paraphernalia, legal or otherwise), tobacco, and alcohol. Clothing should also not promote any other business, as much as possible. Branded clothing that cannot be avoided (i.e., Carhartt, Northface, etc.) are acceptable. Items with promotions for colleges, restaurants, or other such endorsements should not be worn. Long pants, closed-toed shoes, and short or long sleeve shirts are required for field work. Office work attire is the same with the exception that open toed shoes may be worn. Shorts and tank tops are not

acceptable work attire. Clothing should be clean and allow an employee to safely and effectively perform their duties. Personal hygiene includes a degree of cleanliness that is suitable for the workplace.

Use of District Property

Protocols regarding the private use of FCNRCD and NRCS property and resources, such as equipment, materials, computers, documents, software, and online services, should be discussed with the District Manager.

Employees are responsible for keeping all equipment in good working order. Upon termination, employees must return all equipment to FCNRCD or NRCS, as appropriate.

Use of Phone and Mail Systems

Personal use of the telephone for local and long-distance calls should be limited. To ensure effective telephone communications, employees should always speak in a courteous and professional manner.

Personal use of FCNRCD paid postage, parcel, and courier services is prohibited. When unavoidable, arrangements should be made with the District Manager to reimburse FCNRCD for any charges.

Computer, Email, Telephone, and Internet Usage

Devices, equipment, and technology provided by FCNRCD should be reserved for business-related matters at all times. All communication using these tools should be handled in a professional and respectful manner.

Employees should not have any expectation of privacy in their use of District computer, phone, or other communication tools. All communications made using District-provided equipment or services including email and internet activity are subject to inspection by FCNRCD and NRCS. Employees should keep in mind that even if they delete an email, voicemail, or other communication, a copy may be archived on the District's or federal government's systems.

Employees should also be aware that information transmitted through email and the internet is not completely secure or may contain viruses or malware. To protect against possible problems, delete any email messages prior to opening that are received from unknown senders and advertisers and/or notify NRCS IT services and/or the District Manager. It also is against District policy to turn off antivirus protection software or make unauthorized changes to system configurations installed on District or NRCS computers.

Internal and external emails are considered business records and may be subject to federal and state recordkeeping requirements, as well as to discovery in the event of litigation.

All use of District-provided communications systems, including email and internet use, should conform to our District guidelines/policies, including but not limited to Equal Opportunity, Harassment, Confidential Information, and Conflicts of Interest policies. For example, employees should not engage in harassing or discriminatory behavior that targets other employees or individuals because of their protected class status or make defamatory comments. Similarly, employees should not divulge confidential information such as trade secrets, client lists, or information restricted from disclosure by law on social media sites.

The electronic communication systems may allow inadvertent disclosure, accidental transmission to third parties, etc. Sensitive information should not be sent via unsecured electronic means.

Office telephones are for business purposes. While FCNRCD recognizes that some personal calls are necessary, these should be kept as brief as possible and to a minimum. Abuse of this privilege is subject to corrective action including possible termination.

Social Media Acceptable Use

FCNRCD neither encourages nor discourages employee use of social media. However, the District has established the following guidelines should an employee choose to participate in social media.

Nothing in this policy is meant to, nor should it be interpreted to, in any way limit your rights under any applicable federal, state, or local laws, including your rights under the National Labor Relations Act to engage in protected concerted activities with other employees to improve or discuss terms and conditions of employment, such as wages, working conditions, and benefits.

Definition of social media. As used in this policy, “social media” refers to blogs, forums, and social networking sites, such as Twitter (X), Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and SnapChat, among others.

Off-duty use of social media. Employees maintaining personal websites, blogs, and social media accounts must do so on their own time using their own facilities.

On-duty use of social media. Employees may engage in social media activity during work time provided it is directly related to their work, approved by their manager, and does not identify or reference District clients, customers, or vendors without express permission. The District may monitor employee use of District computers and the Internet, including employee blogging and social networking activity.

Post disclaimers. If an employee identifies themselves as a District employee or discusses matters related to the District on a social media site, the site must include a disclaimer on the front page stating that it does not express the views of the District and that the employee is expressing only their personal views. For example: “The views expressed on this website/blog are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer.” Place the disclaimer in a prominent position and repeat it for each posting expressing an opinion related to the District or the District’s

business. Employees must keep in mind that if they post information on a social media site that is in violation of District policy and/or federal, state, or local law, the disclaimer will not shield them from disciplinary action.

Competition. Employees should not use social media to criticize the District's competition and should not use it to compete with the District.

Confidentiality. Employees should not identify or reference District clients, customers, or vendors without express permission. Employees may write about their jobs in general but may not disclose any confidential or proprietary information. For examples of confidential information, please refer to the Confidentiality Policy. When in doubt, ask before publishing.

New ideas. Please remember that new ideas related to work or the District's business belong to the District. Do not post them on a social media site without the District's permission.

Trademarks and copyrights. Do not use the District's or others' trademarks on a social media site or reproduce the District's or others' material without first obtaining permission.

Discipline. Violations of this policy may result in discipline up to and including immediate termination of employment.

Retaliation is prohibited. FCNRCD prohibits taking negative action against any employee for reporting a possible deviation from this policy or for cooperating in an investigation. Any employee who retaliates against another for reporting a possible deviation from this policy or for cooperating in an investigation will be subject to disciplinary action, including possible termination.

Media contacts

In order to provide accurate and consistent details about events and information regarding FCNRCD, all media inquiries should be given to the District Manager or have their approval before responding.

Employee Conduct and Work Rules

FCNRCD expects employees to follow rules of conduct that will protect the interests and safety of all employees and the District.

It is not possible to list all the forms of behavior that are considered unacceptable in the workplace. The following are examples of conduct that may result in disciplinary action, including possible termination of employment:

- sexual or other unlawful or unwelcome harassment
- theft or inappropriate removal or possession of property
- working under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs

- possession, distribution, sale, transfer, or use of illegal drugs in the workplace, while on duty, or while operating employer-owned vehicles or equipment
- fighting or threatening violence in the workplace
- disruptive activity in the workplace
- negligence or improper conduct leading to damage of employer-owned or customer-owned property
- insubordination or other disrespectful conduct
- violation of safety or health rules
- excessive absenteeism or any absence without notice
- unauthorized disclosure of business “secrets” or confidential information
- violation of personnel policies
- falsification of timekeeping records

Employee Relations

FCNRCD strives to ensure fair and honest treatment of all employees. Both supervisors and employees are expected to treat each other with respect and are encouraged to offer positive and constructive criticism. All employees are encouraged to address specific issues and concerns first with the other employee(s) involved, and then, if necessary, with your supervisor.

Grievances

If an employee is unable to resolve a conflict through addressing the situation directly with an individual, if they have a complaint about their working conditions, or if they believe there has been unethical or illegal activity by another employee or Board member, they are encouraged to initiate the District’s grievance process. The steps for this are as follows:

1. As soon as possible after the issue giving rise to the complaint, the employee should discuss the issue with the District Manager. They will provide the employee with a decision about how the issue will be addressed during the discussion or as soon as possible after the discussion.
2. In the event that the complaint or concern is about the District Manager, or the issue may create a conflict of interest for them, the employee may go directly to any member of the Board, who will follow the same protocol. They will provide the employee with a decision about how the issue will be addressed during the discussion or as soon as possible after the discussion.
3. If the employee is not satisfied with the outcome of the discussion, they may submit their complaint to the District Manager or Board member in writing. This should be done as soon as possible after the discussion to facilitate addressing the concern in a timely manner. The employee should attach all relevant documents to the written complaint. The District Manager or Board member will issue a written decision as soon as possible after receipt of

the written complaint. This decision will be final and binding unless the employee takes the following step.

4. If the employee does not believe these actions have resolved or will resolve the issue, and/or if the District Manager/Board member does not follow the complaint process, the employee may bring their concern, in writing to any member of the Board. Again, this should be handled as expediently as possible. The Board member who receives the written concern will respond in writing to the employee and the District Manager, ensuring that they do so in a timely manner. This decision will be final and binding.

FCNRCD has developed this protocol to provide an intentional and comprehensive process for all parties. At no point should an employee go directly to a Board member and bypass this process, unless their complaint is with the District Manager.

FCNRCD specifically prohibits retaliation against an employee for coming forward with a complaint and/or employees who participate in the investigation. An employee who believes they are being retaliated against should report the alleged retaliation using the same steps described above.

Employees who believe they have experienced or witnessed harassment or discrimination should follow the reporting protocols in the Harassment and Discrimination policy.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Commitment to Safety

There is mutual responsibility and accountability to ensure that the work environments for employees of FCNRCD are safe. The District will take precautions to ensure employees are aware of the risks associated with their role (i.e., lifting heavy objects) and employees will notify the District Manager if there are circumstances that pose an unreasonable risk to their health and well-being. Anyone working in a capacity that exposes them to role-specific hazards will maintain up to date levels of any applicable training.

Substance Use

It is the intent of FCNRCD to provide a drug-free, healthy, and safe workplace. To promote this goal, employees are required to report to work in appropriate mental and physical condition to perform their jobs.

While on FCNRCD and NRCS premises and while conducting business-related activities off the premises, no employee may use, possess, distribute, sell, or be under the influence of illegal drugs. Violation of this policy may be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including termination.

No employee may be under the influence of alcohol or recreational marijuana while engaged in work for the District. At all times, employees are responsible for adhering to all policies in this Employee Handbook, regardless of whether they have consumed alcohol or not at a District-sanctioned event.

The legal use of prescribed medications is permitted on the job only if:

- it does not impair an employee's ability to perform the essential functions of the job effectively, and
- it does not impair the employee's ability to perform their job (or any actions) in a safe manner that does not endanger the employee or other individuals in the workplace.

Employees must consult with their doctor about a medication's effect on their ability to work safely. They must promptly disclose any work restrictions to their supervisor (without disclosing any underlying medical conditions unless directed to do so by their physician). Should an employee need to bring a prescribed medication to work, it must be in the container labeled by a licensed pharmacist.

Workplace Bullying

Bullying is antithetical to the kind of work environment FCNRCD strives to create. The purpose of this policy is to communicate to all employees, supervisors, and Board members that the District will not tolerate bullying behavior. Employees found in violation of this policy will be disciplined, with possible termination.

Bullying may be intentional or unintentional. However, it must be noted that where an allegation of bullying is made, the intention of the alleged bully is irrelevant and will not be given consideration when deciding on disciplinary measures. As in sexual harassment, it is the effect of the behavior upon the individual that is important. FCNRCD considers the following types of behavior examples of bullying:

- Verbal bullying: Slandering, ridiculing, or maligning a person or their family; persistent name calling that is hurtful, insulting, or humiliating; using a person as the target of jokes; abusive and offensive remarks.
- Physical bullying: Pushing, shoving, kicking, poking, tripping, assault, or threat of physical assault; damage to a person's work area or property.
- Gesture bullying: Nonverbal threatening gestures or glances that convey threatening messages.
- Exclusion: Socially or physically excluding or disregarding a person in work-related activities.

Violence in the Workplace

The safety and security of all employees is of primary importance at FCNRCD. Threats, stalking, threatening and abusive behavior, or acts of violence against employees, visitors, customers,

and/or District facilities or property by anyone on District property, or in connection with District employment or District business will not be tolerated (even those made in jest). Violations of this policy will lead to corrective action up to and including termination and/or referral to appropriate law enforcement agencies. FCNRCD reserves the right to take any necessary legal action to protect its employees.

All employees are responsible for notifying management of any threats that they witness or receive or that they are told another person witnessed or received. Even without a specific threat, all employees should report any behavior they have witnessed that they regard as potentially threatening or violent or that could endanger the health or safety of an employee when the behavior has been carried out on District premises or is connected to District employment or District business. Employees are responsible for making this report regardless of the relationship between the individual who initiated the threatening behavior and the person or persons being threatened.

Weapons in the Workplace

FCNRCD prohibits the possession and use of the following weapons in District buildings and while working including, but not limited to knives with blades over 4' long, firearms, and explosives. This prohibition applies whether or not the employee has a concealed weapons permit or is otherwise allowed by law to possess these weapons. Any employee who violates this policy may be subject to discipline including possible termination.

Infectious Disease Control Policy

FCNRCD will take proactive steps to protect the workplace in the event of an infectious disease outbreak. It is the goal of FCNRCD during any such time period to strive to operate effectively and ensure that all essential services are continuously provided and that employees are safe within the workplace.

Employees are required to follow all policies and protocols that FCNRCD adopts and/or is required to put in place as a result of an infectious disease outbreak. FCNRCD will follow protocols that reflect current federal, state, and/or local guidelines. The District will provide authoritative information about the nature and spread of infectious diseases, including symptoms and signs to watch for, as well as required steps to be taken in the event of an illness or outbreak. During any such time, FCNRCD will take measures to operate safely and effectively, and ensure that all essential services are continuously provided and that employees are safe within the workplace.

If an employee is not permitted to work as usual (attend an event, come into the office, etc.) but is well enough to work remotely, they may do so. Otherwise, they are expected to use Paid Time Off until they are able to return to their usual duties and schedule. However, a lack of available PTO will not be considered an acceptable reason to continue to come to work if they are unable to safely do so and/or while contagious. See Time Off and Leaves of Absence policies for more details.

Cell Phone Safety and Driving

Employees are only permitted to drive NRCS vehicles after receiving approval to do so (typically at the beginning of their employment).

Safe driving is the first priority when operating a vehicle while driving for work-related reasons (and at all times). An employee's first responsibility is to pay attention to driving and they should never allow a cell phone or other mobile device to distract them from this.

It is never FCNRCD's expectation that an employee will place themselves or others at risk by answering or making a phone call, sending or replying to a text or other written message, or in any other way using a cell phone while driving. Employees should follow these procedures to avoid distracted driving:

- Follow all applicable state and local laws that address the use of cell phones and other mobile devices while driving.
- Avoid using cell phones while driving and avoid it as a hand-held device. Find a safe place to pull over to make or receive phone calls, send or receive text messages, or manipulate navigation apps.
- Program their destination into navigation apps or GPS devices before they start driving.
- Do not read or respond to text messages or e-mail or browse social media or the Internet while driving.
- Be aware of distractions from in-car "infotainment" systems. Just because they are built into the vehicle does not mean they do not create a hazardous distraction.

Employees who fail to follow safety guidelines are subject to discipline.

Ergonomics and Physical Demands

FCNRCD is committed to minimizing injuries that could result from the repetitive motion and/or physical demands of some tasks. Staff who perform repetitive actions (such as working at a keyboard, bending, lifting, etc.) must take precautions to perform their duties in the safest manner possible. Duties that require unique instructions for their safe execution will be explained. However, staff are also expected to exercise good judgment and ask for assistance if they are unsure of their ability to perform a physical task. In the event that a staff member sustains an injury from repetitive motion tasks or other physical demands of their work, they must immediately inform the District Manager so appropriate protocols can be followed.

EMPLOYMENT

Hiring Practices

FCNRCD endeavors to conduct a well-planned and discrimination-free hiring process in order to find and hire the most qualified candidates to our team.

The District Manager is responsible for all aspects of the screening and selection process, which is as follows:

- A job description will be posted or provided to all interested candidates.
- Candidates will be required to complete an application or submit a cover letter and resume.
- Candidates may be required to submit other materials, such as work samples.
- At least one round of interviews will be conducted.
- Professional reference checks will be conducted for candidates who advance to that point in the process.
- Once a candidate is selected, they will be sent a conditional job offer letter that details salary, work hours, benefits, and any other special terms of employment.
- All individuals must successfully pass a background check to have access to NRCS systems. A background check is not required to work at the District without access to NRCS systems. In the event that a recently hired individual does not have a successful background check, their duties may be reassigned as needed or their employment may be terminated if rearranging duties is not feasible for the position.

New employees will have a 90-day probationary orientation period in which they become acquainted with the basic elements of their position and the work of the District. During this time, the District Manager and Board will be evaluating the employee for their abilities to fill the position as required; termination can be made at the discretion of the District Manager and Board for any reason. Following the probationary period, employees remain under at-will employment. During the probationary period, in addition to verifying that they understand the duties of their new role and are able to fulfill them, they will receive a copy of this Employee Handbook and be required to sign confirmation of its receipt.

Employment Eligibility Documents

Each new employee, as a condition of employment, must complete the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9 and present documentation establishing identity and employment eligibility. Former employees who are rehired must also complete the form if they have not completed an I-9 with FCNRCD within the past three years, or if their previous I-9 is no longer retained or valid.

FCNRCD will employ only United States citizens and persons who are authorized to work in the United States but does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of citizenship or national origin. Employees may raise questions or complaints about immigration law compliance without reprisal.

Employment Records

FCNRCD is required to keep accurate, up-to-date employment records on all employees to ensure compliance with state and federal regulations, to keep benefits information up to date, and to make certain that important mailings reach all employees. FCNRCD maintains electronic personnel files for all employees and strives to ensure they are secured and protected from unauthorized access. The information contained in them is the property of FCNRCD and is considered confidential.

Employees must inform FCNRCD of any necessary updates to their personnel file such as a change of address, changed telephone numbers, emergency contact, marital status, number of dependents, or military status. Employees also should inform the District Manager of any outside training, professional certifications, education, or any other change in status. In the event that an employee needs to provide FCNRCD with medical information, a separate file (per employee) will be maintained for that purpose. Access to an employee's medical file is extremely limited and based on a need-to-know only basis.

All current employees will be permitted to review their personnel files at reasonable times with reasonable notice. Former employees will not normally be permitted to review their personnel files after leaving the District.

Performance Review

FCNRCD believes that ongoing feedback and evaluation of work performance is not only essential to the success of the District, but to the professional development of employees. Supervisors and employees are strongly encouraged to discuss job performance and goals on an informal, day-to-day basis.

The District Manager conducts regular meetings with each employee to review their work experience, performance details, professional development, and any other items that may be beneficial. Annually, the District Manager meets with each employee for a formal review which provides both parties with the opportunity to discuss job tasks, identify and correct weaknesses, encourage and recognize strengths, discuss positive, purposeful approaches for meeting goals, and to establish a basis for linking performance to compensation. These reviews should occur during June of each year.

The District Manager has an annual review each winter that is led by the Board and incorporates employees' feedback into the process.

Performance Improvement Process

At FCNRCD, we recognize that people make mistakes and sometimes may not always follow policies closely. The purpose of a Performance Improvement Process is to give an individual the opportunity to address the issue that includes clear expectations as well as support when needed and available.

Our Performance Improvement Process is intended to improve the situation and prevent any further recurrence. It is not intended to be punitive, but it is a response to persistent performance concerns, employee misconduct, or policy violation. It may include any (but not necessarily all) of the following:

1. Verbal warning (in the moment redirection)
2. Informal meeting with supervisor (lengthier conversation than a verbal warning)
3. Written warning (manager reviews issue with employee and documents it)
4. Performance Improvement Plan (written documentation of the issue and plan to address) placed in the employee's personnel file
5. Formal disciplinary meeting to determine if employment should continue and if so, what else can be done or needs to be done to address the issue(s)

If the steps above are not successful, an employee may be terminated. FCNRCD may terminate an employee at any point during the process without completing each step if adequate progress is not being made or other concerns arise.

A supervisor should let an employee know when they launch a Performance Improvement Process. For example, pointing out a performance issue is not necessarily a verbal warning and may be part of the regular feedback an employee receives. If a supervisor judges that it is appropriate to initiate the Performance Improvement Process, they must clarify this to the employee.

Each step may be repeated instead of moving forward to the next step at the discretion of the supervisor. For example, a supervisor may choose to have more than one informal meeting with their employees (step 2) before they give the employee a written warning (step 3).

While the intent of the performance improvement process is to correct a course of action and retain an employee, this process does not nullify the at-will nature of employment.

Decision-Making Leave

If an employee is not making satisfactory progress on addressing the performance concern, or if they successfully complete one Performance Improvement Process and then have another violation of FCNRCD's practices, rules, or standards of conduct, or if the District Manager determines that this intervention is otherwise appropriate, they will be placed on Decision-Making Leave.

Decision-Making Leave is a paid, one (1) day disciplinary suspension. Employees on Decision-Making Leave will spend the following day away from work deciding whether to commit to correcting the immediate problem, conform to all of FCNRCD's practices, rules, and standards of conduct, or quit and terminate their employment with FCNRCD.

If the employee's decision following the Decision-Making Leave is to return to work and abide by FCNRCD practices, rules, and standards of conduct, the District Manager will outline, in written

form, the consequences of failing to meet this commitment. The employee will be required to sign the letter to acknowledge receipt. A copy will be placed in their personnel file.

The employee will be allowed to return to work with the understanding that if a positive change in behavior does not occur or another disciplinary problem occurs within a set period of time, they will be terminated. If they are unwilling to make such a commitment, they may either resign or be terminated.

Unpaid Administrative Suspension

In some instances, an apparent action may be such an egregious violation of District policy or practices that it warrants further inquiry into the event or circumstances. In these cases, an employee may be suspended without pay pending the outcome of this process.

Separation from Employment

When an employee decides to leave FCNRCD (i.e. quits), they are asked to provide a written notice to their supervisors at least 10 working days in advance of the last day of work. The 10 days must be actual working days. If PTO is taken during that time, it will not be considered a working day. Employees who provide the requested amount of notice will be considered to have resigned in good standing and generally will be eligible for rehire.

In most cases, they will be invited to an exit interview on or before the last day of employment to reflect on their work experience and share insights about FCNRCD as an employer.

References

All requests for information on employees or former employees from sources outside FCNRCD should be referred to the District Manager. To protect the privacy and safety of former and current employees, no one should release information, verbally or otherwise, about an employee or former employee without checking with the District Manager.

FCNRCD reserves the right not to give out any information without written authorization from and/or a release form signed by the former employee.

Return of Property

Employees are responsible for all FCNRCD and NRCS property, keys, materials, or written information issued to them or in their possession or control and must return them immediately upon request or upon termination of employment.

COMPENSATION

Employment Categories

Each employee is designated as either nonexempt or exempt from federal and state wage and hour laws. Employees will be notified of their classification at the time of hire and may inquire at any time about their classification.

- **Nonexempt employees** are entitled to minimum wages and overtime pay under the specific provisions of federal and state laws.
- **Exempt employees** are typically paid on a salary basis and are not eligible to receive overtime pay

An employee's exempt or nonexempt classification may be changed only upon written notification from FCNRCD management.

In addition to the above classifications, each employee will belong to one of the following employment categories:

- **Full-time employees** are those who are not in a temporary position and who are regularly scheduled to work a full-time schedule (35-40 hours each week).
- **Part-time employees** are those who are not assigned to a temporary position and who are regularly scheduled to work less than a full-time schedule. Part-time employees receive all legally mandated benefits (such as Social Security and workers' compensation insurance).
- **Temporary employees** are those who are not assigned to a regular position with the District. Temporary employment may be for a specified or unspecified period of time and may entail full-time or part-time work. Temporary employees receive all legally mandated benefits (such as Social Security and workers' compensation insurance).

Timekeeping

Due to federal regulations and grant requirements, all employees are required to complete accurate weekly time reports showing all time actually worked. These records are required by governmental regulations and are used to calculate regular and overtime pay. At the end of pay period, employees must submit their timesheets to the District Manager for approval before they are processed.

Meal and Break Periods

FCNRCD recognizes that periodic breaks during the workday are healthy and increase an employee's capacity to perform the duties of their job. In general, employees should monitor their own needs as well as the needs of the workplace to determine when best to take a break to attend

to personal needs and/or have a meal. Time taken for meals and breaks are not counted as part of the workday.

Overtime – Comp Time

When required due to the needs of FCNRCD, employees may be asked to work beyond their regularly scheduled hours. This must be requested or pre-authorized by a supervisor. If a nonexempt employee works more than 40 hours in a work week, FCNRCD provides compensatory time (comp time) in lieu of overtime pay (wages) for these additional hours. Comp time is earned at a rate of 1.5 hours for every hour worked (beyond 40 in a work week). The work week begins on Sunday and ends on Saturday. The exact number of hours worked over 40 in one week in a given pay period (1:1 ratio) must be used in the following pay period; the remaining value of the 0.5 accrued hours (1:0.5) will be added into the employee's PTO bank at a rate of either (a) $0.33 \times$ number of overtime hours worked for 0-3 year staff or (b) $0.30 \times$ number of overtime hours worked for 3+ year staff to account for the automatic PTO accrual of the 1:1 hours being spent as regular hours worked (1 hour of PTO accrued for every 6 hours worked for 0-3 year staff or 1 hour of PTO accrued for every 4.9 hours worked for 3+ year staff). The employee will receive an email from the District Manager with the number of hours added into their PTO bank once that process is complete. This policy applies only to nonexempt employees. Exempt employees are exempt from overtime and comp time.

Upon separation from employment, any comp time balance will be paid in full to the employee.

Time off on holidays, sick leave, vacation leave, or any leave of absence will not be considered hours worked for purposes of performing overtime/comp time calculations.

Wages and Compensation Increases

Salaries are adjusted each year in July. Annual increases are determined by time spent at the District, performance, and the availability of funds. The increases, as well as any bonuses, recommended by the District Manager, are subject to Board approval.

At the start of each new calendar year, all District employees will also be considered for a Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA) wage increase. Contingent upon availability of funds, these increases shall follow the federal COLA adjustment for that year.

The District Manager will prepare, and the Board will review and approve, an annual budget that supports anticipated wages, raises, bonuses, and benefits for the fiscal year. Grants and agreements will be written to provide necessary funding to support these wages.

Paychecks

FCNRCD employees are paid every two weeks on Friday following the end of the pay period. Each paycheck will include earnings for all work performed through the end of the previous pay period. In the event that a regularly scheduled payday falls on a holiday, employees will receive pay on the

last day of work before the regularly scheduled payday. Pay checks are made available through direct deposit to an employee's chosen bank account.

Deductions from Pay

The District does not make improper deductions from the salaries of exempt employees and complies with the salary basis requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

Permitted deductions

The FLSA limits the types of deductions that may be made from the pay of an exempt employee. Deductions that are permitted include:

- Deductions that are required by law, e.g., income taxes;
- Deductions for employee benefits when authorized by the employee;
- Absence from work for one or more full days for personal reasons other than sickness or disability;
- Absence from work for one or more full days due to sickness or disability if the deduction is made in accordance with a bona fide plan, policy or practice of providing compensation for salary lost due to illness;
- Offset for amounts received as witness or jury fees, or for military pay; or
- Unpaid disciplinary suspensions of one or more full days imposed in good faith for workplace conduct rule infractions.

During the week an exempt employee begins work for the District or during the last week of employment, the employee will only be paid for actual hours worked. In addition, an employee may be paid only for hours worked during a period when the employee is using unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

Final Pay

Employees who voluntarily leave employment will generally be paid in the next regularly scheduled pay cycle. Employees who involuntarily leave (employment is terminated) will receive their final paycheck on the day they receive notice that employment has ended or within 72 hours of the notice.

TIME OFF AND LEAVES OF ABSENCE

Paid Time Off (PTO)

The District offers combined Paid Time Off (PTO). Uses of PTO include vacation, sick leave, family and medical leave, holidays, bereavement, mental health, and any other purpose. It can be used for the employee's illness or injury, for a dependent's illness or injury, to address the effects of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking, or to care for a family member because the school

or business where the family member is located is closed for public health or safety reasons. Unless used for unexpected health needs or for extenuating personal circumstances, paid time off requests must receive prior approval from the District Manager (or from the Board, for the District Manager.) Paid leave of one or more consecutive days should be scheduled with as much advance notice as possible so that workloads may be reallocated as necessary.

Employees who have worked for the District for 0-3 years accrue one hour of combined paid leave for every 6 hours worked (37 eight-hour days assuming 40-hr work week schedule).

Employees who have worked for the District for 3 years or more accrue one hour of combined paid leave for every 4.9 hours worked (44 eight-hour days assuming 40-hr work week schedule). Salaried staff will accrue time off for hours worked up to 40 hours per week.

“Hours worked” excludes paid leave hours used. Employees may borrow up to one week’s paid leave before it has been accrued. They may carry forward up to 200 hours of paid leave from one fiscal year to the next; any hours accrued above 200 will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Board. In the event of termination, the District will compensate the employee for paid leave accrued but not taken up to a maximum of 80 hours.

If an employee has earned comp time, they must use this prior to using PTO hours.

Family and Medical Leave

For employees who have worked for the District for at least 12 months (does not need to be consecutive), the District will provide 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons with continuation of group health insurance coverage under the same terms and conditions. Additional unpaid time off beyond the base 12 weeks may be approved on a case-by-case basis. Examples of how Family and Medical Leave may be used include:

1. To care for an eligible family member with a serious health condition.
2. The employee has a serious health condition that makes it impossible for them to perform the essential functions of their job.
3. The birth of the employee's child or the placement of a child for adoption or foster care.

If an employee anticipates needing to take Family and Medical Leave, they must make this request in writing at least 30 days in advance (whenever possible). They will be provided with additional information regarding documenting the request and planning for their return to work.

Crime Victim Leave

FCNRCD provides crime victims with job-protected, unpaid leave to attend certain legal proceedings relating to the crime or the alleged crime.

Under the law, a "crime victim" includes a person who is also an alleged victim of a crime and who has experienced any of the following:

- Obtained a relief from abuse order against a family or household member
- Obtained a court order against stalking or sexual assault
- Obtained a court order against abuse of a vulnerable adult
- Sustained physical, emotional, or financial injury as the direct result of a crime and is identified as a crime victim in an affidavit filed by law enforcement

Employees who are crime victims/alleged crime victims have the right to take unpaid leave to attend:

- Criminal proceedings where the employee has a legal right or obligation to appear at the proceeding
- Relief from abuse hearings and neglect or exploitation hearings when the employee is a plaintiff
- Hearings concerning an order against stalking or sexual assault

When an employee is using crime victim leave, they may, at their discretion, use any accrued Paid Time Off. Employees will continue to receive employment benefits while on leave and have the right to return to their same job or a comparable position upon return.

Employees are protected from harassment or other discrimination based on their status as a crime victim, as defined by Vermont law.

Personal Leave of Absence

In recognition that employees may require more leave than can be accommodated under the other leave policies, the District may provide, in some circumstances, unpaid personal leave. This is not intended for occasional use of unpaid hours, rather, for a more extended period of time such as a week or more. If an employee has exhausted their PTO and needs to take off a lesser amount of time, they should discuss this with the District Manager.

If an employee needs to take an extended period of time off from work, they must put this request in writing and submit it to the District Manager (or the Board, for the Manager) at least two weeks prior to the anticipated leave time. If the leave is an emergency in nature, this two-week period may be waived. The request should state the general nature of the need for leave, the duration of leave, and, if possible, how the employee anticipates their duties can be managed in their absence. Approval will be based on the District's expected ability to fulfill its responsibilities during the employee's absence without placing undue burden on other staff. The District will make every reasonable effort to continue full payment of health care benefits during unpaid leave. Provision of benefits and other terms of such longer-term unpaid leave will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

In order to qualify for a personal leave of absence, the employee must be classified as a full-time employee and must have completed at least three months of full-time service at the time of the request.

Generally, a personal leave of absence shall not exceed four calendar weeks. A longer personal leave of absence may be granted only under extreme circumstances. Failure to report back to work on the first day after expiration of the leave of absence will be considered a voluntary termination of employment.

Employees who are granted personal leaves of absence must either have exhausted any paid time off they have accrued or use it in conjunction with their leave. If there is not enough PTO to cover the entire leave, the remainder will be unpaid. Unless required by applicable law, employees will not accrue additional paid time off while on an unpaid leave of absence that exceeds 30 days.

Employees who return to work at the end of a personal leave of absence will normally be restored to their former position if an opening exists. If there is no such opening, they will be considered for a comparable position if one is available when they return.

Military/Reserve Leave

FCNRCD will abide by all the provisions of the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act (USERRA) and will grant military leave to all eligible full-time and part-time employees. Military leave may be granted to full-time and part-time employees for a period of four years plus a one-year voluntary extension of active duty (five years total) if this is at the request and for the convenience of the United States government. Employees who need to request a military/reserve leave of absence should contact the District Manager.

Jury Duty Leave

FCNRCD encourages employees to fulfill their civic responsibilities by serving jury duty when required. The District will cover an employee's regular compensation for up to three days of jury duty service each year. For non-exempt employees, jury duty leave pay will be calculated on the employee's base pay rate times the number of hours the employee would otherwise have worked on the day of absence. Employees can use unpaid time or PTO for additional time spent serving on jury duty.

If summoned for jury duty, employees must notify their supervisor as soon as possible so that the supervisor may make arrangements to accommodate their absence. Of course, employees are expected to report for work whenever the court schedule permits.

Either FCNRCD or the employee may request an excuse from jury duty if, in FCNRCD's judgment, the employee's absence would create serious operational difficulties.

Paid time off will continue to accrue during jury duty leave.

BENEFITS

Medical Insurance

All full time District staff shall receive medical health insurance benefits from the District, unless otherwise noted in hiring documents. For those employees who elect not to receive medical health insurance through the District, the average value of premium benefits for those enrolled in the medical health insurance plans will be provided as supplemental income, unless otherwise noted. For 2026, the District is participating in a Blue Cross Blue Shield health insurance program where staff may choose their preferred plan from a set of three options; the District Board has agreed to pay all actual premiums for each employee's selected plan.

If an employee elects to participate in a High Deductible Health Plan that is eligible for a Health Savings Account (HSA), the employee must set up their own HSA at their preferred institution and then the employee must work with the District Manager and accountant to set up pre-tax payments to the HSA account in a manner aligned with IRS requirements.

For 2026, the District has enrolled in optional Dental and Vision insurance plans that each employee may elect to participate in; all premiums and fees associated with these plans must be paid by the employee directly through payroll deductions. Regular part-time staff (averaging less than 35 hrs/week) will receive pro-rated stipend benefits proportional to their hours.

Temporary employees are generally not eligible for health benefits, but individual arrangements outside this policy may be approved by the Board.

Workers' Compensation Insurance

FCNRCD provides a comprehensive workers' compensation insurance program at no cost to employees. This program covers any injury or illness sustained in the course of employment that requires medical, surgical, or hospital treatment. Subject to applicable legal requirements, workers' compensation insurance provides benefits after a short waiting period or, if the employee is hospitalized, immediately.

Employees who sustain work-related injuries or illnesses should inform their supervisor or a member of the Board if the supervisor is unavailable immediately. No matter how minor an on-the-job injury may appear, it is important that it be reported immediately. This will enable an eligible employee to qualify for coverage as quickly as possible. Most workers' compensation policies require notification within 72 hours of an on-the-job injury, or benefits may be denied.

Any claim for an injury or illness caused by an employee's willful misconduct, alcohol or drug usage, or that occurs during the employee's voluntary participation in any off-duty recreational, social, or athletic activity sponsored by FCNRCD, will not be compensable.

Short-Term & Long-Term Disability Benefits/Life & A.D.D. Insurance

The District has a Group Policy with Madison National Life Insurance Company via VLCT for Group Short Term Disability Insurance, Group Long Term Disability Insurance, and Life Insurance. Details about these policies can be found in the corresponding documents in the FCNRCD Policies folder on the FCNRCD server. A brief overview of the policies is as follows:

- Short Term Disability
 - 60% of base pay up to \$500/week up to 26 weeks
- Long Term Disability
 - 60% of base pay up to \$4000/month beginning at the end of Short Term Disability coverage to age 65 for employees disabled before age 59
- Life Insurance and Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance
 - Coverage up to \$10,000

*Additional conditions and restrictions do apply; see policy documents for full information.

Retirement Plans and Contributions

After completing six months of successful employment, District staff are eligible to start accruing retirement benefits. The retirement benefit includes a 401k plan administered by TransAmerica with safe harbor contributions from FCNRCD. Additional information about this policy can be accessed on the FCNRCD server.

Mileage and Cell Phone Reimbursement

The District reimburses employees for mileage expenses when using their own vehicle for work purposes, however, this should be avoided whenever possible through use of FCNRCD's vehicles. The reimbursement rate is determined annually based on the federal rate. This does not include commuting to and from the office; the office address is 431 Franklin Park West, St Albans, VT 05478. Employees must provide information to justify their mileage claims including to and from locations, round trip mileage, and the purpose of the trip.

Mileage and time should always be counted from the office to the location (and then any subsequent locations after that) and then back to the office. This holds even if the employee is leaving from their home which may be closer to the location. Reasonable explanations for using a personal vehicle include: the vehicle is already in use by another employee, using a vehicle to transport necessary supplies for a project that saves the District a considerable amount of time, using a vehicle to travel a very long distance which could cause undue wear and tear to FCNRCD's vehicle; using a vehicle that has seating beyond what is offered by FCNRCD's truck to reduce the need for a second vehicle for a given trip, etc. Please ask the District Manager if there is ever a question about appropriate use of personal vehicles.

The District reimburses employees for other expenses such as supplies, transportation, lodging, meals, etc. upon presentation of receipts, explanation of purpose, and with supervisor approval.

FCNRCD offers cell phones for staff to use as part of their employment.

Travel Policy

Staff will be entitled to lodging and meals and incidental expenses for travel approved by their supervisor in accordance with the U.S. General Services Administration's per diem rates found here: https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates/per-diem-rates-results?action=perdiems_report&fiscal_year=2025&state=VT&city=&zip=

Professional Development & Tuition Reimbursement

The District offers a Tuition Reimbursement Policy, outlined in a separate document, to support staff members in continuing their education as it pertains to the work of the District. See the "Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District Tuition Reimbursement Policy" for the most accurate details about this benefit.

Employee Handbook Acknowledgment and Receipt

Your signature below indicates that you have received the District's employee handbook and understand that it is your responsibility to read and comply with the policies contained in it. Future revisions will require a signature acknowledging receipt.

- The employee handbook is a general guideline to FCNRCD's policies. It is not an employment contract or a guarantee of employment.
- FCNRCD reserves the right to suspend, revise, or revoke any of its policies, procedures, and/or practices (allowable by law) at any time with or without notice.
- You have reviewed the Harassment and Discrimination policy, and agreed to abide by it.
- You are an at-will employee, which means that either you or FCNRCD can end the employment relationship at any time, for any reason or no reason, with or without notice.
- You agree not to disclose confidential information at any time, except as required to perform your job duties.
- The latest version of the employee handbook replaces and supersedes any prior handbooks or policy documents.
- To the extent that any policy may conflict with federal, state, or local laws, the District will abide by the applicable federal, state, or local law.

Employee's Name (Print)

Employee's Signature

Date

Furthermore, your initials below indicate that you have read and agree to abide by the Conflict of Interest policy outlined in this handbook.

_____ Initials

_____ Date

TO BE PLACED IN EMPLOYEE'S PERSONNEL FILE