

A GUIDE FOR HOSTING

Conservation Speed-Dating Workshops



Developed by the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative alongside partners within the Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative and Rappahannock River Roundtable



Overview:

The overarching goal for these workshops is to introduce landowners and producers to their local technical service providers and conservation practitioners (hereafter TSPs), their expertise, and the full suite of (technical and financial) resources, knowledge, and programs they can provide. The strength of this event comes from having these TSPs engage one-on-one with each participant discussing how their programs apply specifically to each landowner's property and conservation goals, using a large, hard-copy map of each property as a focal point for discussion.

Workshop Objectives:

- Introduce landowners and producers to the staff that represent their local "conservation team" comprised of state and federal agencies, non profits, land trusts, and other conservation entities.
- Build community around a sense of shared values, which may include themes such as preserving rural character, protecting a specific watershed, or protecting farmland.
- Catalyze both short and long-term conservation action on working landscapes.
- Send participants home with an informative and inspirational roadmap for adding more conservation practices to their landscapes/operations, armed with the knowledge of who to follow up with and what incentives/programming/cost-share is available to support them.

Additional Wins:

- A unique opportunity for TSPs to spend some valuable time together learning about and receiving updates on each other's programs, as well as hearing how they are pitched.
- These workshops make for great *training* events for TSPs. If your organization is newly onboarding staff, they can easily shadow a more seasoned member of your organization during these events.
- Neighbors meet neighbors—sometimes for the first time—at these events. Relationships are developed or reinforced around a shared interest in land stewardship, and landowners are able to network with each other over their conservation goals.

Event Outline

Timing

About 3 hours is a suitable amount of time for these workshops. Any shorter and they feel rushed. Any longer and it can become a challenging time commitment for both landowners and technical service providers. Consider a morning (9am-noon) option, afternoon option (1-4pm), or an evening (4-7pm) option, all of which can be paired with a free meal for all participants.



Venue Prep

Arrange tables so that they are conducive for speed-dating (easy to rotate between and large enough to accommodate a full size map). Lay out the property maps and add pens, pencils, and markers to each table.

TSPs should arrive earlier than participants. This allows them time to lay out any handouts on some side tables for browsing, and also allows them to greet participants as they arrive.



Introduction: Round Robin and/or Lightning Talks

Round-robin: We have found these to be the most effective and easiest lift. The event moderator begins a simple round-robin wherein each TSP and participant introduces themselves. Budget 30-45 seconds per person, maximum. For TSPs: name, organization, maybe a BMP you're excited about promoting. For participants: name, farm name, something they're excited to learn about.

Lightning talks: TSPs introduce themselves — one slide and one minute to connect a name with a face and organization. This takes more time, but for smaller events, can work well.



Speed-Dating Begins

Landowners are directed to find their maps and take a seat at a table. Landowners remain with their maps at the same table throughout the event, and TSPs move around.

Speed-Dating Concept

TSPs rotate around the room, spending one-on-one time (10-12 mins) with each participant (~10-15 landowners total) talking through different best management practices and associated cost-share programs that could be implemented on their properties. These conversations happen over a large (24"x36") color map that each participant receives of their property. TSPs and participants are able to sketch out ideas directly onto the map (e.g., where to build a riparian buffer, where to potentially target some native warm season grass plantings, where a water trough could be positioned once cattle are excluded from a stream, etc.).

There are, of course, a lot of nuances in a property that a map cannot portray, which means that recommendations given during speed-dating should focus on generating conceptual ideas as well as encouraging landowners to think about their properties in new ways. The expectation is that landowners interested in certain BMPs that are discussed with them will then follow up with TSPs about a site visit and next steps.

Depending on the number of participants, consider a brief lunch or snack intermission during the speed dating, or wait to serve food until the end.



Preparation Checklist

Planning/hosting organization should ideally begin planning the event three months ahead of time. Planning your first CSD workshop will take longer, as you are becoming familiar with the process.

Find a suitable venue

The venue is very important. It should be accessible — a diverse array of farmers and landowners should all feel comfortable in the space. Ideally, farmers can swing in without feeling like they need to change into more formal attire. Allowing for folks to bring their kids can boost attendance as well. Meeting in a farmer's barn can be a great venue option!

The venue should be a covered space with 10-15 tables comfortable for speed-dating. Tables should be large enough to accommodate four people, two on each side of the table, and a big map. Electricity can be helpful if you're planning to heat food or run a projector. Restrooms are a must.

While these events can certainly be held any time of year, they can lend themselves well to an indoor winter event, providing an opportunity for landowners to get excited about new management ideas to move forward with in the spring.

A possible approach (that has worked well) can be to team up with a farmer/landowner who has a space to use, wants to host, and wants to help advertise to their network of neighbors.

Generate a list of all of the TSPs specific to the geography where you will be advertising the event.

Round up technical service providers

The scale/geography targeted is very important. Any bigger than county-wide may prove challenging and ineffective. For example, TSPs often change between counties). Neighborhood, community, or watershed-size will probably work best. Consider targeting a sub watershed scale.

Suggested organizations to include: NRCS, FSA, SWCD, Cooperative Extension, American Farmland Trust, DOF, DCR, DWR, DEQ, Land Trusts, "Friends of" groups, water groups, invasive species groups, land management groups, and other relevant nonprofits.

Select a date & time

Getting everyone in the same room at the same time is probably the most challenging part of planning these events, and the reason why you will want to plan the workshop 2-3 months from the time you begin inviting TSPs.

Begin advertising to landowners noting the comment about scale/geography above. Sometimes it is best to not broadcast the net too far, but rather target small, community-scale participation. Neighbors inviting neighbors, or having the host landowner invite neighbors can work well.

Preparation Checklist

Participant Registration

As participants register for the event, have them email over their property plats, addresses, tax map numbers, or other ways to find and map their property. You can easily gather this data through a quick Google Form. Then, take a screen shot of the property you're seeing on Google Earth, email it back to the participant, and have them confirm that the entirety of their property is shown.

Map Setup

One method for ultimately producing a high quality map that shows well in a 24" x 36" hard copy is to use Google Earth imagery. Hover over the property in question, File > Save As (JPEG), and note that there is an option for saving as a higher resolution file.

Simultaneously create a slide deck template (sized to 24" x 36") that includes room for the map, the farm info, the full list of TSPs for that geography, and room for notes. See the example on page 7.

224" x 36" maps work well and can be printed off most plotters. Consider printing onto a non-glossy, thicker poundage paper (~36 lb) so that the maps are more robust and will survive the interaction they'll receive during the workshop.

Snacks & Refreshments

Organize the food (e.g., coffee and snacks upon arrival, then a full meal (wraps, sandwiches, chips, etc.).

TSP

Responsibilities

Have TSPs email you 1-3 pptx slides that you can then compile for the lightning talks, if desired.

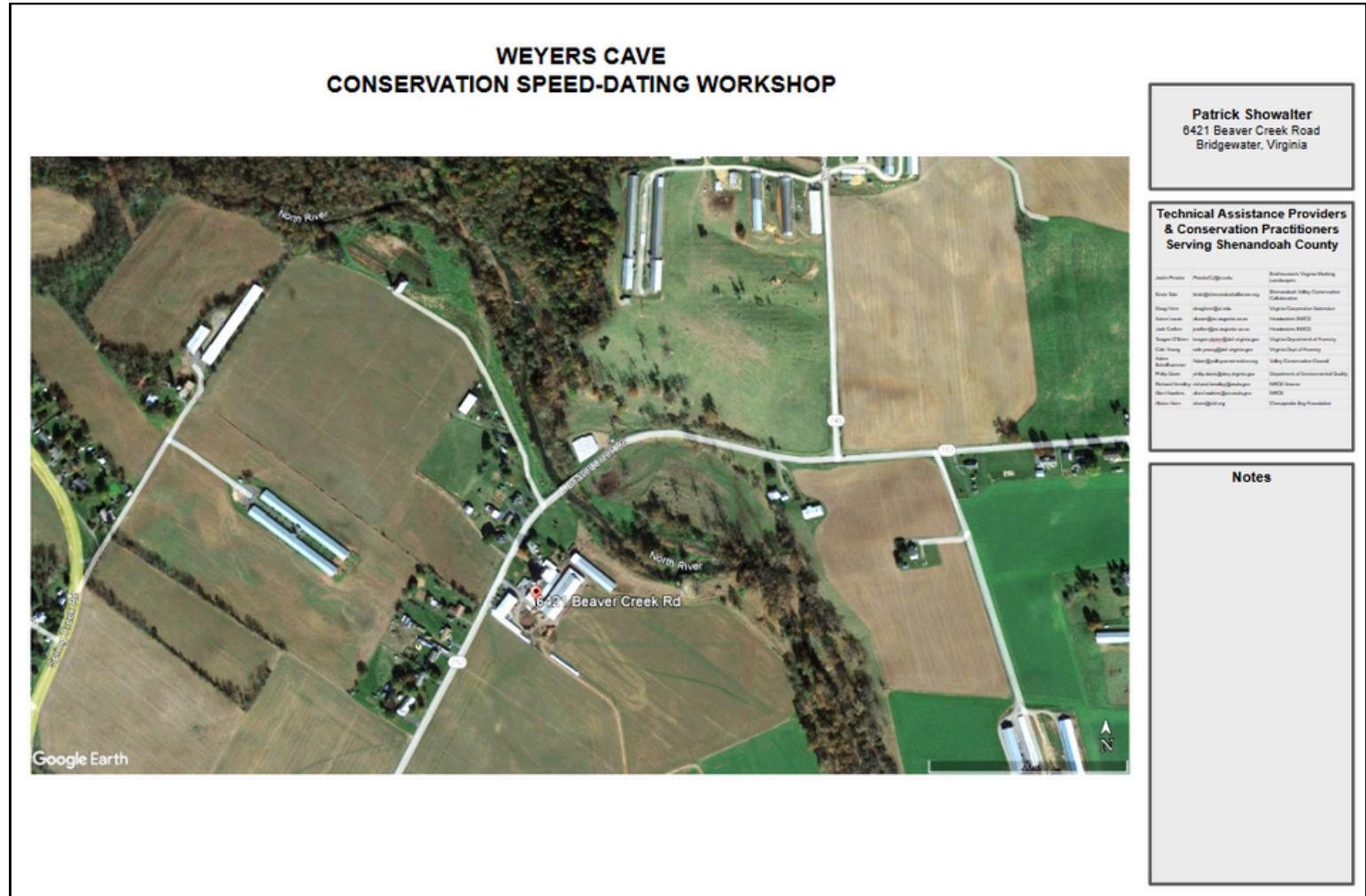
Day-of Materials

A big box of pencils, pens, and different colored markers that landowners and TSPs can use to take notes and draw overtop maps.

Projector equipment (if using slides for lightning talks)

- extension cords
- thumb drives

The Map Makes It Personal



Printing the entirety of the map (i.e., map + title + TSP info + note section) as a 2'x3' on a plotter works well.

Print on 36 lb paper (or slightly heavier). Thicker paper means the maps are more durable, last longer, and are more likely to be kept and referenced by participants into the future.

Include as much of a contiguous property as possible. Each map may be at a slightly different scale, depending on acreage, in order to fully include a property.

If properties are not contiguous or too big to reasonably fit on one map, consider printing 2 maps for a single landowner.

We **strongly** suggest increasing the brightness and contrast of the map image so that when written on, notes are legible.

List all TSP information (names, affiliation, and email addresses).

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