



Indiana Women's Conservation Learning Circles Roles & Responsibilities for Hosting a Successful Local Workshop

Thank you for agreeing to work with Women4theLand (W4L) to host a learning circle meeting for female landowners and operators about conservation. We appreciate your interest in this Indiana program based on an award-winning successful model of conservation outreach to women developed by the Women, Food, and Agriculture Network.

Key Elements to a Successful Meeting

The learning circles methodology was developed and tested by the Women Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) and has proven to be a successful program to guide women all across the Midwest to improve soil and water quality on the land they own. The method can be modified somewhat, but should always include these key elements:

- The morning is a women-only facilitated discussion, with female resource persons on hand to contribute information as needed. No lectures or PowerPoints. Demonstrations, such as the slake test or infiltration test can be done as part of the discussion.
- Providing women with information (handouts and discussion) on best practices and resources available.
- Taking women on a field tour of area farmland to view conservation practices on the ground (male conservation professionals are welcome for the tour); no caravans, the expense of renting a bus or getting several large vans is worthwhile for the time spent asking/answering questions.
- Keeping the focus on conservation-related topics.
- Allowing women to build trust among one another and with resource professionals to empower them as decision-makers for their land.

As with any outreach activity, much planning is involved and typically these are partnership efforts. The main roles and responsibilities necessary for a successful meeting are listed below. Note: individuals will often fill multiple roles and not all of the roles need to be filled by women.

Planning a Learning Circle: Roles and Responsibilities

Lead meeting planner: Leads all aspects of planning, ensuring that all of the roles and responsibilities listed below are met and that group stays on track in planning an event that follows WFAN guidelines. The meeting planner works the Lead Facilitator and Indiana's WLC Training and Workshop Committee to develop the agenda and helps the local group select appropriate conservation-related topics for discussions and tours. The meeting planner ensures local female conservation professionals are invited to the meeting for both general discussion and specific topics and that they understand their role. (Note: for subsequent meetings, the evaluation sheets will provide topic areas women want to know more about.)

Lead facilitator: Works with the local planning group to help determine meeting topics. Leads meeting discussion keeping the group on track regarding time and topic. The facilitator may have a lot of knowledge about conservation practices but their primary role in these meetings is facilitation—including drawing out the quiet participants and controlling the domineering ones. Ideally, she has experience leading learning circles and has been trained in how and why the method works. The lead facilitator will also prepare the agenda and evaluation sheets.

Co-facilitator: Helps the lead facilitator run the meeting. The meeting facilitators work as a team, and should discuss in advance their respective roles and responsibilities for each meeting. (Often the co-facilitator has facilitation experience and wants experience to lead future learning circles).

Note-taker: Keeps track of topics brought up by the women, follow-up steps/parking lot (topics that come up that can't be addressed at that particular meeting, but important to come back to at some point), unique barriers women face, issues they need help with, etc. This role is often filled by the co-facilitator.

On-site registration and evaluations: This person is the contact person listed on all promotional materials and news releases and handles RSVPs. Ensures that all participants (including staff) sign in and create name tags; provides and collects completed evaluations after the meeting.

Logistics coordinator: Coordinates all the meeting logistics including

- reserving the meeting space
- making sure the room is set up (u-shape) and has with a table for publications and registration
- arranging for audio/visual equipment if needed
- arrange for food/drinks for the meeting and also field tour if needed
- reserving transportation if needed for the field tour
- making special arrangements for women with disabilities
- coordinating payments
- providing the facilitator with all last minute meeting details prior to the meeting (e.g., who will unlock/open the meeting space, who is getting coffee, cell numbers, etc.),
- coordinating materials and supplies for the meeting itself – makes sure that agendas, sign in sheets and meeting evaluations are printed and meeting supplies (pens, name tags, etc.) are there

Tour coordinator: Coordinates the field tour – getting permission from the farmer/landowner, choosing tour stops, providing maps, etc. Works with logistics coordinator to arrange for transportation, water, and snacks (if needed). This activity can be planned by male conservationists.

Outreach coordinator: Leads efforts to get people to the meeting. Templates of invites, news releases, ads, flyers will be provided. Compiling mailing list, sends out invites, distributes news releases and working with people/organizations/churches that can post about the meeting through their email lists/newsletters/websites/Facebook/etc. Works with State W4L marketing and communications coordinator on suggested materials for publication table.

Resource professionals: Female staff are invited to attend because they have expertise or programming assistance to bring to the conversation. These women should be hand selected since they are integral to the success of your meeting. The Indiana WLC Training and Workshop Committee can offer suggestions but as a guide, the topics of discussion and meeting location will help you decide who should be invited. Staff should be prepared to share personal information and also talk briefly about their agency/organization and role during introductions. Staff should be good listeners and ready to contribute to the topic area of discussion for that meeting if asked. Note: Male staff may be invited to speak at or lead the field tour. Resource professionals may bring publications to share that would be helpful to the discussion topic(s).

Below are examples of organizations and agencies that may be invited to participate in learning circles.

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (if not available in county invite from area office or nearby counties)
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- Indiana State Department of Agriculture
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- Indiana Department of Environmental Management
- Purdue Extension
- Local watershed organizations
- The Nature Conservancy
- American Farmland Trust
- Local land trusts
- Women Food and Agriculture Network
- State and local Farm Bureau
- Resource Conservation & Development Councils

Meeting sponsors, hosts, and funders

As you plan the meeting, if you have others offer to provide free meeting space, donate transportation or provide food or drink, please acknowledge and thank them in your promotional materials, in interviews with media and during the meeting.

Meeting Expenses

Typical expenses for WLC include food, beverages, tableware, postage, name badges and transportation. Meeting room space can always be found free of charge. WFAN recommends the group travel together as a group on the tour to facilitate networking, however if that is not possible vans or carpooling can be used. Some groups may choose to purchase ads in the local paper.

Food cost is usually \$10 per person (remember women will not eat as much). Typical offerings include a snack in the morning (coffee, juice, rolls, yogurt, fruit, granola bars); light lunch (assortment of sandwiches plus salad, soup, or chips) and dessert after the tour (cookies or brownies work great). Coffee, tea, lemonade and water work best for beverages.

Many grocery stores and diners will make box lunches that are perfect. Subway also works well. Don't forget vegetarian options.

Ideas for Funding a Learning Circle:

Typical meeting expenses include:

- Meeting room rental
- Transportation for field tour (don't forget to tip the driver)
- Food, beverages
- Postage, ads (if mailing invitations via direct mail, or placing ads in local papers)
- Printing (agendas, handouts, name tags, sign in sheets, evaluations)
- Supplies – name badges, table tents, etc.

Many of these expenses can be donated. You should get a meeting room for free, printing could be done by a partner organization, or a local business might sponsor food or drink. Suggested sponsors for expenses: Farm Bureau, Community Foundations, Watershed Groups, Ag Businesses, Co-Ops, Farm Credit, Ag. Associations, local banks, REMCs, local land trusts, and Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Councils.