SCC – CDs Roundtable Meeting

September 10, 2026

Facilitated by Tara Long | Notes by Tami Stubbs
Next Roundtable Meeting: October 8, 2026 – 9:30 AM

Welcome & Roundtable Discussion Topic Introduction

Tara Long, SCC Strategic Initiatives Manager and newest member of the Communications team, introduced herself.

SCC Staffing Update

SCC is excited to welcome Allan Warren, Director of Programs, and Arthur Smith, Riparian Grant Specialist. The opening for a new Information Governance Manager recently closed. When filled, the staff member in this position will be responsible for data management and Public Records requests.

Elections Rulemaking Update: Bill Eller and Dani Madrone

Bill Eller, SCC Special Projects Coordinator, and Dani Madrone, SCC Director of Policy and Governmental Affairs, presented on the proposed rule changes for conservation district elections. Conservation District elections are authorized under RCW 89.08.190 and WAC 135-110. In March 2026, SCC Commissioners authorized staff to conduct a rulemaking process to update certain election rules. Updated rules are a response to litigation and address issues identified at a December 12, 2025, hearing. SCC staff conducted a public process and recommended some WAC amendments; public comments were captured in the Concise Explanatory Statement.

The proposed WAC changes include two new rules: 1. WAC 135-110-415 – fulfilling a ballot request; 2. WAC 135-110-425, plus amendments to ten WAC sections.
The WAC changes include:

- Creating a definition for “alternate” (previously “designee”).
- Clarify polling officers cannot have a conflict of interest.
- Now districts can obtain a current list of registered voters through both state and county elections offices.
- Districts must have a current list of eligible voters before ballot requests are fulfilled, and an updated list valid on the day ballots are due before tallying ballots.

When fulfilling a ballot request, the new rules state that:

- The voter must provide sufficient information to verify their eligibility and are required to sign an attestation to affirm their identity.
- Before providing a ballot, districts must verify voters. This must be completed by a polling officer or the election supervisor.

Regarding provisional ballots:

- If a voter’s eligibility cannot be immediately determined, they will be provided with a provisional ballot.
- Provisional ballots must be distinguishable from regular ballots (different color paper or ink, or with the word written out).

- The voter must be deemed eligible after the ballot is returned to be tallied.
- If a voter requests a ballot after a previous request has already been fulfilled, only the first ballot is tallied.
- Provisional ballots are tracked to confirm that a voter who returns a provisional ballot had requested one.

If a ballot gets lost, a voter may request a provisional ballot – the first one received back is the one that counts.

Additional WAC changes:
- If a district sends unrequested ballots to any voters, they must send ballots to all eligible voters.
- Districts can maintain a list of voters who request ballots be provided to them every election, but the district must verify eligibility before sending them a ballot.
- For poll-site elections, the voter must place their own ballot into the ballot box.

Dani expects elections work to be ongoing; these rule changes are in response to litigation and the ability to implement the changes before the next election. The WAC 135-110 changes outlined in this presentation will be going before the Commissioners at their September 17 business meeting.

If adopted without changes, staff anticipate filing the final rule soon after. Changes to the WAC will become effective 31 days later. If adopted with changes, filing with the Code Reviser will take longer. The annual elections training on September 29 will include the updates to WAC 135-110.

Dani also reported that at the September 17 Commission meeting, commissioners will be asked to consider that the 'CD Election and Appointment Guide' no longer be classified as a policy guide; staff request that policy be captured in the WAC and the guide provide direction on how the WAC should be followed. SCC is required by the RCW to create the election procedure, which is WAC 135-110.

Districts have had varied experiences obtaining their voter registration databases from the state; the Secretary of State (SOS) website says a list can be obtained within five days; however, the lists are only updated monthly. Dani noted that SCC might need to work with the SOS to inform on CD elections.

This round of CD election rule changes addresses the December 2025 litigation; SCC understands that more rulemaking will be needed as future changes in legislation occur. Kim is thanked for her willingness to help scrutinize the SCC rule changes – there is much support for her from across the conservation community.

Districts still have questions and suggestions surrounding CD elections; Dani reminded that any further rule modifications must go through public comment and would need to be a part of future rulemaking – not this election cycle.

Strategic Planning Workshop Preview: Values & Objectives: Tara Long

Following the SCC Business Meeting on September 17, the next Strategic Planning Workshop will be held. The workshop will be a collaborative effort to develop SCC values and objectives – all are welcome to join in person or online.

Ombuds Working Group Progress Report: Tara Long

Tara reviewed the status of the Ombuds Working Group's progress and described the process for addressing all comments received from districts, which were divided into 39 topic areas. The Ombuds Working Group was divided into Tiger Teams – a name that comes from the military and refers to a small, specialized group brought together to solve specific problems. The decisions of the group are being released in batches through progress reports. The first progress report, containing 14 topic areas, was released on August 28. The report can be accessed here: SCC Media & Files | FIN - Grants Manual Update Progress Report - August 2026. Two additional progress reports will be released, one at the end of September and another at the end of October.

Tara went over the best way to utilize the progress reports. The report itself is five pages long; the remainder is appendices and contains lists of topic areas and their status. Users can view the recommendations for each individual topic area – they are listed in alphabetical order. The Ombuds Working Group is requesting feedback focused on any 'fatal flaws' in the recommendations. It's important to identify those areas now so that modifications can be made before the grants manual is rewritten. She noted that we are not looking for editing/wordsmithing/opinions – feedback should be focused on anything that won't work for districts. There will also be a public comment period where additional feedback can be contributed. For now, feedback can be submitted through the Ombuds Recommendations Feedback 1 link; you may also reach out to Tiger Team members or regional managers with feedback – sooner the better! Feedback helps the ombuds working group do their job – please review the 14 topic areas if you can.

The discussion shifted to open conversation with three of the Tiger Teams who described their work:

Tiger Team #1: Jennifer Boie – tackled the "Approvals & Exceptions" topic – appropriate oversight and administrative efficiency. The team addressed clearer guidance, predictability, and reducing administrative burden.
Zorah Oppenheimer – still working through the process to address funding and program requirements; allowable costs, flexibility to move money within an award while working within provisos and guidelines. Technology upgrades will be needed to implement some of the changes requested. The group is also addressing application and award development, including the level of detail required.
Heather Wendt – the team has made 11 total recommendations condensed into 5 focus areas. SCC staff go through the recommendations for feasibility, and then the recommendations are vetted by the larger Ombuds Working Group. Heather encouraged districts with limited time to focus on reviewing the topic areas where they have the most challenges and concerns with the current Grants Manual.

It was confirmed that SCC is moving away from CPDS and will adopt PRISM for grant award and contract management. A concern was voiced about ensuring landowner privacy. Sarah Groth, SCC Chief Financial Officer, noted that SCC is still working with RCO and Ecology IT teams to ensure that there will be clear boundaries for data access.

There was a huge shout-out to recognize Sarah Jones for all her time and hard work serving the Ombuds Working Group!

Tiger Team #2: Megan Stewart – Her Tiger Team addressed the Cost share, DIP, and Labor Rates topics. Determining labor rate has been a challenge for the agency; it needs to be updated regularly, and a methodology needs to be created for placing a value on landowner labor. The team recommends ensuring that districts know the labor rate is intended for Commission projects and they may choose to use it for other projects if they wish.

Tiger Team #3: Ryan Williams – His Tiger Team worked on the Clothing, Apparel, and PPE topics. Feedback on these topics centered around uncertainty about which programs allow these types of purchases. Clarity is needed on what's eligible and what's considered promotional. The team recommends removing redundancy in the approvals needed for reimbursement and improving clarity in individual program guidelines. If eligible, these purchases should be part of the application process, so they are preapproved, but leave the option to

allow changes. It should be clearly defined which items are promotional items and which are considered PPE. In summary, they recommended clarifications to program guidelines up front; not necessarily policy changes.

In response to a comment from the chat, Tara noted that the goal of the Ombuds Working Group is to develop an updated Grants Manual that is durable, clearer, and easier to use. It is a living document in the respect that it will need to be revisited from time to time. One consideration is to form an advisory group tasked with monitoring how the rewritten Grants Manual is performing and take a strategic, continuous improvement approach to future updates.

Closing: Tara Long

The Roundtable notes will be sent out following the meeting; reach out to Tara or your Regional Manager with feedback. She has captured the idea for a PRISM update at a future Roundtable meeting; other ideas for future agenda items can be submitted here: Business Improvement.

The next Roundtable meeting will be Thursday, October 8 at 9:30 AM.

Resources:

- Ombuds Working Group Progress Report: SCC Media & Files | FIN - Grants Manual Update Progress Report - August 2026
- Ombuds Recommendations Feedback Form: Ombuds Recommendations Feedback 1
- Suggestions for future Roundtable Meeting agenda items: Business Improvement