

Are We Ready to District?

The decision to district is an important one. It brings change and exciting new partnerships, and it can help ensure future relevance and sustainability. But there are a few elements to keep in mind as you consider whether you are ready to start a district partnership.

What do you need to district?

There are three key considerations in the districting process: staff support, public support and enthusiasm.

- *Staff support:* A district staff of at least 7-8 agents is best, but not required. Most important is a staff that works together to identify and fill any holes in district programming. Staff members should support one another and willingly pass responsibilities to the agent whose area of program focus is best suited to meet those responsibilities.
- *Public support:* The district will have to be approved by county commissioners, so there should be sensitivity towards public misconceptions and opinions about the district. Reasons for forming the district should be made clear to all county residents. Avoid surprises that could catch residents off guard and create resentment.
- *Enthusiasm:* Equally important is enthusiasm. District formation requires many changes and adjustments, and an enthusiastic staff and board is critical. The individuals involved should be ready to positively address challenges and make changes needed for a successful process.

Forming a district partnership

Partnership is an important aspect of the districting process. Qualities to keep in mind while building partnerships with other local units are:

- *Willing and engaged:* All partners need willingness and enthusiasm to work through the process.
- *Supported by the public:* Be aware of public sentiment regarding districting in potential partner counties. All need strong public support or confidence that they can develop that support.
- *Similar to other partners:* The process tends to be easier when partner counties have similar characteristics. When differences exist, compromise smooths the way. Partners can overcome differences to form a dynamic, successful district.
- *Focused on the goal of success:* This is perhaps the most crucial trait for partners. Districting is a team effort needing full participation by all partners. Success must be their priority and they must be willing to work and adapt as necessary to achieve it.

Is districting for you?

If you want to know whether districting is the right move for your county, ask yourself these questions:

- Are we as effective as we should be in meeting the needs of our county residents?
- Are we as relevant as we should be in delivery of cutting-edge information to address local issues?
- Are our services and efforts sustainable in their current format?
- Do we have the political and public support necessary to pursue districting?

Answers to these questions will help you determine whether districting is for you.