

Rural water/municipal planning— a strategy for success?

I recently completed the KanCap board/council training curriculum with several others from the rural water district I serve, Douglas RWD 5. There were also four members of Douglas County's RWD 3 Board of Directors and one staff member present. During each of the three sessions, I was struck by how beneficial it would be for other city and water district governing body members to enroll in the program. Yes, there was a commitment by those who attended to give up three evenings after long days at work to take the course; it's a total of nine hours of guided discussion and study. But even the nine hours are not adequate to fully understand our roles as board and council members, operators and managers

of public drinking water systems. The discussions and KanCap readings were illuminating. Frankly, the sessions ended too soon for all the questions that everyone had in mind.



Sharon Dwyer
KRWA President

Strategic planning

One of the topics not fully addressed was the role of strategic planning in the management of the water system. Too often there are at least three different responses when strategic planning is raised: 1) We do not need a formal planning process because we “know” where our system is headed; 2) We have a plan already developed on the shelf at the office; or, 3) We cannot afford to develop a plan.

Strategic plans or evaluations are not static, they change with circumstances. The plans themselves are less important than the process the board and council and staff follow to develop a consensus of opinion on the organization's priorities and goals, implementation strategies, time frame for accomplishment, and accountability.

Dr. E. James Burton has authored a book entitled, “Total Business Planning: A Step-By-Step Guide with Forms,” in which he identifies several significant strategic issues for public utility board members to address. These include: the financial integrity of the utility, customer satisfaction, service capacity, provider stability, board and staff training, disaster recovery, and technology acquisition.

system growth and in what time frame?

2. What are the district's or municipality's financial and operational conditions if a water tower is lost or a key employee suddenly leaves?
3. Is the system being fiscally and managerially responsible to customers' needs today and in five years? What are those needs and how are they determined?
4. Are board members and staff meeting all federal and state requirements in the operation of the system – and how is this determined?
5. Are system rates and management practices good enough to ensure the long-term well-being of the system?



Can a system's board or council or staff answer the following questions (and agree on the answers)?

1. What parts of the system need replacement in order to meet Safe Drinking Water Act requirements or anticipated

Discussing a strategic plan required four to eight hours. The main points to review and formalize:

- a) The organization's mission (why does it exist? Is it to provide cheap water, adequate water, safe water, customer service of what quality, etc.?).

- b) Measurable goals to determine whether the organization is achieving the mission (what is “cheap” water, adequate or appropriate customer service?);
- c) Strategies and options to achieve those goals (survey customers as to satisfaction and identifiable future needs) and their costs;
- d) Identification of the person(s) responsible for implementing the selected strategies and policies with a time-frame for completion;
- e) Regular follow-up evaluation of the appropriateness of the mission, goals, strategies, projects, and more.

Yes, planning will cost a little time and some money – but it is also the most cost-effective use of time and money. As someone much wiser than I said, “You cannot know when you have arrived if you do not know from whence you started!” Strategic planning identifies where an organization is, what the priorities are, how priorities will be achieved, and who will be responsible.

As a 'graduate' of the KanCap seminars, I encourage board/ council and staff members to enroll in the program, read the materials and plan for a brighter future for their utility. If your RWD or city is interested in hosting the training, contact KRWA at 785/ 336-3760 or call Cathy Tucker-Vogel at KDHE at 785/ 296-7310. Cathy, who is Capacity Development Coordinator, has done an good job in organizing training sessions. KanCap is a truly unique program; I encourage systems to investigate it. An excellent opportunity is available at the 2008 Conference in Wichita. Two modules (Managerial and Financial) will be presented as a

pre-conference session on Tuesday, March 25. I encourage boards and councils to attend. I am confident that participants will find KanCap not only interesting but also a valuable resource tool

in anyone’s future years as a member of the governing body or staff of a city or RWD.

KRWA’s strategic plan

As a director of Kansas Rural Water Association, I have appreciated the opportunity to be part of KRWA's annual review of its strategic plan. The first plan was developed in 1992; it has been reviewed and updated annually since. The most recent review was completed in November. Here are the highlights of the 2007 review and KRWA's goals for the future:

1. KRWA will continue interacting with municipal and rural water systems experiencing conflicts over annexation/service territories in an effort to develop an acceptable compromise between the competing interests; KRWA will seek discussion at NRWA regarding the desirability and feasibility of procuring Congressional clarification of 1926 (b) language.
2. KRWA will monitor and participate, as necessary, in the debate regarding changes to the One Call program and law at the Kansas Legislature and the Kansas Corporation Commission to ensure water and wastewater systems' interests are protected.
3. Education of water system operators regarding assisting communities and patrons to receive broadband services. This will involve the development of a 'model' agreement for the lease of water storage tanks for antennae.
4. Financial audits of water and wastewater systems are available, especially for systems that have borrowed funds. A management audit is a useful tool in determining the operating and fiscal health of the system. KRWA will work with KDHE to expand management review materials in the Department's Capacity Development Survey. Also, additional articles in *The Kansas Lifeline* will include questions and materials encouraging system operators and boards/commissions to review the long-term viability of their systems in terms of ensuring adequate public water supplies to their customers.
5. Increase the number of qualified water and wastewater system operators. KRWA staff shall discuss with Community College and Vocational-Technical College staffs the feasibility of expanding water and wastewater treatment educational curriculum.
6. Engage in collaborative efforts to increase the accuracy of water quality projections. To help water system develop their ability to predict operating, taste and odor, and quantity problems, KRWA staff will engage the Kansas Biological Survey staff in conversations about collaborative data distribution. KRWA will provide advance information to water systems about challenges anticipated in maintaining adequate water supplies and quality of water from lakes and reservoirs. This collaboration shall be an extension of the work done in conjunction with the State's Municipal Drinking Water Lakes Preservation and Restoration project coordinated by the State Conservation Commission.

