

THE SUSTAINABLY MANAGED UTILITY: TEN KEY MANAGEMENT AREAS

The ten key management areas of sustainably managed utilities described here can help rural and small water and wastewater system managers address many ongoing challenges and move toward sustainable management of both operations and infrastructure. In aiming to increase their long-term sustainability and effectiveness, the eventual goal for systems is high achievement, consistent with the needs and expectations of their communities, in each of the management areas.

The management areas were developed by drawing on information and experience from a wide range of rural and small water system operations specialists and managers from across the United States. The management areas were further validated through the workshops held with rural and small systems, sponsored by EPA and USDA. Each management area is described as a desirable outcome for a system to achieve. Each can be considered a building block for improving system performance. Through working to improve performance in each of the ten areas, managers can help their systems to become more successful, resilient, and sustainable for the long term.

The management areas are not presented in a specific order. Together they make up the framework for a complete and well-rounded management approach. By making improvements in any of the areas, at a pace consistent with its most pressing challenges, a system will be able to deliver increasingly efficient, higher quality services. The graphic on the next page depicts the interconnectedness of the management areas. It also shows that no one area is weighted more heavily than another. All areas are equal in the context of the *Guidebook*. Descriptions of the management areas are found in the following pages, including the characteristics of successful outcomes for each.

Product Quality

Customer Satisfaction

Employee & Leadership Development

Operational Optimization

Financial Viability

Infrastructure Stability

Operational Resiliency

Community Sustainability & Economic
Development

Water Resource Adequacy

Stakeholder Understanding & Support



PRODUCT QUALITY: The system is in compliance with permit requirements and other regulatory or reliability requirements. It meets its community’s expectations for the potable water or treated effluent and process residuals that it produces. The system reliably meets customer, public health, and ecological needs.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: The system is informed about what its customers expect in terms of service, water quality, and rates. It provides reliable, responsive, and affordable services, and requests and receives timely customer feedback to maintain responsiveness to customer needs and emergencies. Customers are satisfied with the services that the system provides.

EMPLOYEE & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: The system recruits and retains a workforce that is competent, motivated, and safe-working. Opportunities exist for employee skill development and career enhancement, and training programs are in place, or are available, to retain and improve their technical and other knowledge. Job descriptions and performance expectations are clearly established (in writing), and a code of conduct is in place and accepted by all employees.

OPERATIONAL OPTIMIZATION: The system ensures ongoing, timely, cost-effective, reliable, and sustainable performance in all aspects of its operations. The key operational aspects of the system (e.g., pressure, flow, quality) are documented and monitored. It minimizes resource use, loss, and impacts from day-to-day operations. It has assessed its current energy use and water loss and performed related audits.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: The system establishes and maintains an effective balance between long-term debt, asset values, operations and maintenance expenditures, and operating revenues. Rates are adequate to pay its bills, put some funds away for both future capital expenditures and unanticipated issues, and maintain, repair, and replace its equipment and infrastructure as needed. The system discusses rate requirements with its customers, decision making authorities, and other key stakeholders.

INFRASTRUCTURE STABILITY: The system understands the condition and costs associated with its critical infrastructure assets. It has inventoried its system components, conditions, and costs, and has a plan in place to repair and replace these components. It maintains and enhances the condition of all assets over the long-term at the lowest possible life-cycle cost and acceptable level of risk.

OPERATIONAL RESILIENCY: The system ensures that its leadership and staff members work together to anticipate and avoid problems. It proactively identifies legal, financial, non-compliance, environmental, safety, security, and natural threats to the system. It has conducted a vulnerability assessment for safety, natural disasters, and other environmental threats, and has prepared an emergency response plan for these hazards.

COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: The system is active in its community and is aware of the impacts that its decisions have on current and long-term future community health and welfare. It seeks to support overall watershed, source water protection, and community economic goals, where feasible. It is aware of, and participates in, local community and economic development plans.

WATER RESOURCE ADEQUACY: The system ensures that water availability is consistent with current and future customer needs. It understands its role in water availability, and manages its operations to provide for long-term aquifer and surface water sustainability and replenishment. It has performed a long-term water supply and demand analysis, and is able to meet the water and sanitation needs of its customers now and for the reasonable future.

STAKEHOLDER UNDERSTANDING & SUPPORT: The system actively seeks understanding and support from decision making bodies, community members, and regulatory bodies related to service levels, operating budgets, capital improvement programs, and risk management decisions. It takes appropriate steps with these stakeholders to build support for its performance goals, resources, and the value of the services that it provides. The system performs active outreach and education to understand concerns and promote the value of clean, safe water and the services the utility provides, consistent with available resources.