

USDA Rural Development Supports Sustainability Management Training

In 2011, the "Sustainability Management Workshop in a Box" materials were developed collaboratively between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to support small and rural water and wastewater systems in an attempt to address their ongoing challenges to improve management practices and deliver best quality service to communities. This training was "kicked off" and first previewed at the 2014 Kansas Rural Water Association Annual Conference in Wichita. The training was attended by 28 people from 18 cities and RWDs in Kansas.

In 2016, USDA Rural Development added attendance of the Sustainability Management training to the Letter of Conditions. The Letter of Conditions is the obligation letter of funds when a system obtains USDA Rural Development as funding. USDA Rural Development strongly supports and encourages systems to attend Sustainability Management Training as USDA Rural Development supports systems furthering the education of governing bodies, clerks/bookkeepers, operators or anyone having to do with the operation of the system that is obtaining funding.

The USDA Letter of Condition states: "Technical, Managerial and Financial Capacity – It is required that



Monica Wurtz, KRWA Technical Assistant, introduces materials at the Sustainability Workshop held in Iola, Kan. on January 24 and 25. Prior to joining KRWA in 2015, Monica was coordinator for Drinking Water Programs at US EPA for Kansas.

members of the board of directors, city council members, trustees, commissioners and other governing members possess the necessary technical, managerial, and financial capacity skills to consistently comply with pertinent Federal and State laws and requirements. It is recommended members receive training within one year of appointment or election to the governing board, and refresher training for all governing members on a routine basis. The content and amount of training should be tailored to the needs of the particular individual and the utility system. Technical assistance providers are available to provide this training for your organization, often at no cost. Contact the Agency for information."

Sháne Hastings, USDA Rural Development Community Programs Director in Kansas says, "USDA Rural Development recommends that organizations receiving funding from the agency obtain routine training for governing board members to ensure that they are complying with federal and state regulations." He noted that in the past five years, USDA Rural Development has invested \$231 million into 126 water and wastewater infrastructure projects in rural Kansas communities and that it is important that the governing boards overseeing these projects have the necessary skills to carry out the projects according to the law. In 2016, eleven systems across the state of Kansas received USDA Rural Development funding.

What is Sustainability Management?

In this era of more "tools and webinars", the Sustainability Management workshops instead bring training to the communities, delivered by real people! The training is an effort to support rural and small water and wastewater utilities in their common mission to become more successful and resilient service providers. By making improvements in any of the ten key management areas through methods outlined in the training and the Guidebook (included in the training), the utilities should be able to deliver increasingly efficient and higher quality services. The specific improvement actions and the pace at which these improvements are made will be unique to each utility, based on the assessment and the steps outlined by the utility in its System Management Improvement Plan.

The "Rural and Small Systems Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management" is a resource that is included in this workshop. The Guidebook, also a joint product of EPA and USDA, provides background information on ten key management areas for sustainable utilities, as well as instruction and assistance on how to conduct the utility assessment process that is used in the workshops. It helps utilities to begin developing an action plan for improving utility management based on the assessment. The intended audience for these materials includes governing bodies and staff of rural and small systems who are looking to improve their overall management performance.

How well do you know your utility?

Sustainability Management covers ten areas about a water or wastewater system. Here are those areas:

1. Water Resource Adequacy
2. Product Quality
3. Customer Satisfaction
4. Community and Economic Development

5. Employee & Leadership Development
6. Financial Viability
7. Operational Optimization
8. Infrastructure Stability
9. Operational Resiliency
10. Stakeholder Understanding & Support

Do you see any two or more areas listed above that your system could use some work on? Sustainable Management provides Tools, Guides, and other Resources to help.

James Smith, Councilman City of Torondo states, "We are not being fair to our customers if we don't seek training to attend as the governing body. As the governing body we need to stay up to date on all of the latest regulations, equipment and programs."

KRWA sponsored Sustainability Management Training in Iola at the Bass Community Center on January 24 and 25. The training was well attended by 21 attendees from six systems; two USDA Rural Development Representatives attended the training.

KRWA Technical Assistants provide the Sustainability Management



Rita Clary, KRWA Technical Assistant, visits with and Debbie Morrison, City Clerk at Caney, Kan., about upcoming training.

Training at no costs to the systems. KRWA even foots the ticket for the meals. There's no funding program that reimburses KRWA for these sessions. This training, like nearly all other training provided by KRWA, is paid for by KRWA. The Sustainability Management Training can be held in a two-evening sessions or as a full day session. Although, the training does not offer operator credits, it's still a beneficial training for all involved.

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Comments submitted by several attendees at the recent Sustainable Management Training held in Iola, Kan. on January 24 and 25:

City of Neodesha City Administrator Ed Truelove stated, "The Sustainable Management of Rural and Small Systems training presented by KRWA provided me with some additional, excellent tools to assist in the management of our utility systems. With the USDA-RD representative in attendance, I appreciated having the opportunity to network and train with representatives from other small systems."

City Administrator Cole Herder, City of Humboldt, commented, "Sustainability Management of our systems should be one of our highest priorities, but can easily be lost to daily activities. The KRWA Sustainable Management Workshop provides tools that help with system assessment and plan development. It's a great opportunity to network with others that have similar situations and know that we all face similar challenges. Rita and Monica did a great job explaining the ten key management areas and demonstrating how to create a plan for action to improve outcomes. The workshop is beneficial for administrators, clerks, operators, mayors, council and board members."

Just completed two – three hour training sessions provided by KRWA. Drove three hours each day to attend. Another great opportunity to continue to learn and network with other utility systems. Thanks!", said Fred Gress City Administrator Caney, Kansas.



Monica Wurtz, KRWA Technical Assistant, visits with Fred Gress and Debbie and Toby Morrison, city of Caney.

If your system and any neighboring systems would like to host a Sustainability Management Training in your area, KRWA is ready, willing and able to provide it. Just contact Monica Wurtz at 785.262.7301 (email: monica@krwa.net) or call me at 785.850.0192 (email rita@krwa.net) to schedule Sustainability Management training for your system.

Leadership Training at Annual KRWA Conference

I want to encourage board and council members to consider attending the training session "Board/Council Leadership - A Key to Good Service" at the KRWA conference on Tuesday, March 28. Topics such as how to deal with discussions that are polarizing and how to develop a culture of accountability for your board or council will be among those presented by professional trainers from the Kansas Leadership Center. Don't miss the opportunity to help your own board/council develop and improve leadership skills and to also meet with other peers from across the state. Check out the full program on page 19 of the program booklet that was mailed in early January; see it also printed in this issue of *The Kansas Lifeline* on page 42.

Rita Clary's focus at KRWA is provides assistance with applications for funding for cities and rural water districts. Rita gained extensive municipal experience working at the city of Troy, Kan. for eleven years prior to joining KRWA in 2009. She is a certified EMT and served as the Ambulance Director for two years and supervised the volunteer staff at Troy. She has worked on or completed most water and wastewater utility reporting requirements.



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