



By Benjamin H. Grumbles

## Changing & Sustaining

### *Establishing a common management framework for water and wastewater utilities*

Across the nation, communities face a daunting array of water-related challenges ranging from rising costs and higher performance requirements to energy and climate considerations and aging infrastructure.

How do we meet those challenges? The first step—and it is a big one—is to change the way America views, values and manages water and the infrastructure that supports it.

This is a multi-faceted, multi-generational campaign that helps the public, including politicians and policymakers, stop taking water for granted and start investing in its future more wisely. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been working to do its part to move this concept forward on many fronts through its Sustainable Infrastructure Initiative.

It is the water and wastewater utilities, however, who are at the center of it all and can make the biggest difference in bringing about change. In my 23 years in the water policy trenches, I have come to recognize water and wastewater utilities as the key movers, shakers and agents of change. EPA knows this and has been partnering across the water sector to foster sustainable management.

One of the most significant developments has been a broad collaborative effort to promote effective utility management (EUM). EPA was pleased to participate in this effort, which was launched in May 2006 and involves six professional associations: Water Environment Federation, National Association of Clean Water Agencies, American Water Works Association, Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, American Public Works Association and National Association of Water Companies.

#### **EUM Effort**

This coalition chose the term “EUM” knowing that, as is true of other types of organizations, our nation’s water and wastewater utilities have areas where they are already managing effectively, as well as areas where there are gains to be made through improvements and new ways of thinking. Through the EUM effort, the water sector has come together for the first time to provide utilities with a common management framework that can help guide the way to continuous improvements in performance and long-term sustainability of their infrastructure, operations and all facets of business.

The foundation of this framework is based on 10 Attributes of an Effectively Managed Utility, developed by a diverse group of utility managers and endorsed by all of the partners referenced above, including EPA. The attributes are described in detail in a report released by the partners in May 2007 and range across all aspects of the water business. Here is the list:

- Product quality
- Employee and leadership development
- Financial viability
- Community sustainability
- Customer satisfaction
- Operational optimization

- Operational resiliency
- Infrastructure stability
- Water resource adequacy
- Stakeholder understanding and support

The 2007 report also offers a perspective on what is needed to be successful in reaching a high performance level under each of the attributes. This is presented in the form of Five Keys to Management Success: leadership, strategic business planning, organizational approaches, measurement and continual improvement management.

#### **Resources**

The management framework was developed to enable utilities to focus on the areas where they see their greatest challenges—and their greatest potential for improvement. To help each utility find the best entry point, the partnership released in June an easy-to-follow guide called “Effective Utility Management: A Primer for Water and Wastewater Utilities.”

The primer offers a short, self-evaluation through which a utility can pause to consider each of the 10 attributes and select the area or areas where it sees the greatest need for action. Then, recognizing the importance of tracking progress, the primer also provides a series of suggested utility performance measures, based on the attributes, which will help utilities establish performance baselines and measure their progress.

This approach to utility management is the future of the water and wastewater sector in the U.S. and across the world. Utilities are uniquely positioned to embrace the change from managing for basic compliance to managing for sustainability of both infrastructure and vital water resources.

I urge you to join in the turning of the tide. If you have not already, take the first step and visit [www.epa.gov/waterinfrastructure/watereum.html](http://www.epa.gov/waterinfrastructure/watereum.html). **WWD**

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