



## WORKSHOP IN A BOX AND THE COMMITTEE APPROACH

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What's the best way to approach sustainability/asset management? You could bury your head in the sand and hope it will go away. It won't. You could say "I'm not going to do anything until it's a requirement". That approach just delays the inevitable and will leave you completely unprepared when it comes to fruition. You could hire a consultant to do it for you. That's fine except that until DEC publishes a policy and guidance on what constitutes an approvable plan you're wasting your money.

Sustainability is how you manage and operate your utility. Asset management is a tool used to achieve sustainability. While DEC is developing its asset management policy and guidance, it's important to evaluate your current state of sustainability. Identifying your strengths and weaknesses, as well as the challenges you will surely face addressing those weaknesses, will begin to prepare you for the larger challenge ahead, that of asset management.

I advocate the use of the Rural and Small System Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management program (aka Workshop in a Box; aka WIAB) developed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The WIAB program is a self assessment program with results that are NON BINDING. It is simply a tool with which you, the water utility, can evaluate the current state of your utility in the ten (10) key management areas of product quality, customer satisfaction, employee and leadership development, operational optimization, financial viability, infrastructure stability, operational resiliency, community sustainability and economic development, water adequacy and stakeholder understanding and support. WIAB helps you identify your strengths and weaknesses and enables you to set realistic goals and workable timelines for improving sustainability.

I also advocate the committee approach. The committee should consist of the chief elected official (mayor or town supervisor), clerk, one (1) additional board member (sewer board member), operations specialist, and two (2) members of the public that live in the sewer district. Why two members of the public? They represent the ones who will ultimately fund your utility. It's important that they are involved from the beginning. You

need their input, their comments and concerns. As the process moves forward you will find they will become your biggest ally in presenting your plan to the general public. I am currently finishing up a WIAB program with a municipality. We used the committee approach and the interaction between committee members, the comments, concerns and the results, were eye opening. Look for an article in the near future once the process has been completed.

Evaluating the ten key management areas is the first step in moving toward a more sustainable utility. Utilizing the committee approach with the members described above will enable you to guide your utility down the sustainability path in a manner that is palatable to most.

Please contact me at [Grimm@nyruralwater.org](mailto:Grimm@nyruralwater.org) if you have any questions or would like more information regarding sustainability and the WIAB committee approach. 💧💧