



SUSTAINABILITY LIKE IT OR NOT WILL BE IN YOUR FUTURE

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A One of the latest buzz words in our industry is Sustainability. And like it or not you are going to have to face the challenge of meeting certain required goals in this area of your operations. It is not a new concept and has been tossed around in several ways over the past several years. However, it has never yet been made a requirement or connected to any of your financing avenues. This will no longer be the case in the very near future. So for all of us that have been trying to avoid this task in the past, I think it is time we try to understand the goals set forth in a Sustainability Plan and perhaps even start to work on one to stay ahead of the new requirements instead of having to play catch up. Step one is knowing what being Sustainable means. According to the Merriam-Webster.com web-site this is the definition:

FULL DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABLE

1. 1: capable of being sustained
2. 2a: of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged <*sustainable techniques*> <*sustainable agriculture*>
b: of or relating to a lifestyle involving the use of sustainable methods <*sustainable society*>

Although water and/or the managing of a water system is not mentioned specifically, I think we can all agree that it is a precious resource that no one can live without. Back in 2011, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) agreed to jointly support a series of activities to help rural and small water and wastewater systems to better provide sustainable services to their communities. One of the major accomplishments of this collaboration was a guidebook called, "The Workshop In A Box (WIAB): Sustainable Management of Rural and Small Systems Workshop Kit". Found in this kit are what they had determined to be the 10 major areas of concern and they are:

- 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

In the guide book for conducting your own WIAB you will find a complete definition for each of these areas of concern, as well as, worksheets to be used to gather the information you will need to complete the evaluation of your system. If you either participate in or conduct your own workshop you will meet the upcoming requirements mentioned above and remain eligible for future funding opportunities. With this having been said, there are these benefits gained, as mentioned in the guidebook:

- You get a simple and objective way to evaluate your system's strengths and areas for improvement;
- It will help you develop an easy to follow plan for improving your operations based on your assessment;
- Improved communications with board members and your customers about your system and the challenges you face;
- Gain necessary support for improving your system over time

If you take this opportunity to help your community be prepared for the foreseeable future this workshop is not a self-evaluation, but rather it includes both members of the community and system employees, as well as, board members that participate in the process, which as you will see sheds a different light on how each portion of your system is seen by each of the participants. If you have an interest in conducting a workshop for your system feel free to contact one of us at the New York Rural Water Association: (518) 828-3155. We will be happy to assist in any way we can throughout the process. Keep in mind that this is something that you will eventually have to do anyway. Information can be found on the USDA's web-site: <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome> 💧💧💧