

Executive Summary

In July 2005, Saratoga County Sewer District No. 1 (the Sewer District) agreed to participate in a partnership pilot program with New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPCC). The purpose of the pilot program was to evaluate the Sewer District's collection system business practices. The evaluation provided an assessment of the gaps between the District's current business practices and generally-accepted industry standards of collection system management, operation, and maintenance. With this information, the Sewer District will be able to develop a prioritized long term plan to address the identified gaps. The pilot program was not only a learning tool for all parties involved, but also provided the Sewer District with a foundation to better manage, operate and maintain their extensive collection system.

NYSDEC, NEIWPCC and the Sewer District, together with input and assessment from outside experts, participated in the business practice evaluation and gap assessment. The scope of this project included the following tasks and is described in detail below:

Task 1	Document Review
Task 2	Staff Interviews
Task 3	Field Observation of Work Practices
Task 4	Business Practice Evaluation
Task 5	Project Team Consensus Workshop
Task 6	Matrix of Recommendations

Task 1 Document Review

The first step was to review and compare the Sewer District's plans, policies and procedures against how work is actually performed, measured and reported. In order to do this, a compilation and review of relevant documents and information was performed. The information from this review was used to formulate and prompt questions for the staff interview and field observation phases.

Task 2 Staff Interviews

Staff interviews were conducted in April of 2006. The interviews covered the entire Sewer District organization to ensure that every position and/or department associated with collection system management, operation, and maintenance were fairly represented. The interviews consisted of groups of 1 to 4 employees at the same level within the organization to avoid intimidation of senior staff. Over a dozen interviews were conducted. It is important to note that interviews must remain confidential and information extracted from the interviews has been presented in a generalized format as to not identify or discriminate against organizational staff. The information from the interviews has been used as a tool to identify positive traits within the organization and opportunities for improvement.

Task 3 Field Observation of Work Practices

Field observation of work practices were conducted in May of 2006. Observations consisted of a ride along with supervisors and field staff to various aspects of the Sewer District collection system to observe work practices and communication. This exercise also allowed for additional interview time in a relaxed environment that encouraged honest and real conversations.

Task 4 Business Practice Evaluation

The project team worked together to combine their findings of the document review, staff interviews, and field observations to develop a draft Business Practice Evaluation Report and accompanying Evaluation Worksheet. In this evaluation, twenty-six categories - associated with collection system management, operation, and maintenance as well as environmental compliance - were analyzed. Each category consisted of several subcategories which were ranked based on their performance level under the following criteria:

1. Stage 1 - Unaware
2. Stage 2 - Systematic approach not developed
3. Stage 3 (Low or High) – Defined, repeatable approach. High Stage 3 is generally considered an acceptable performance level.
4. Stage 4 (Low, Medium or High) – Approach with defined measurements and standards
5. Stage 5 - Continual improvement and refinement of all processes and procedures

Task 5 Project Team Consensus Workshop

Once the draft Business Practice Evaluation was completed, Sewer District staff had time to review the documents. In January of 2007, a consensus workshop was held with management and supervisors from the Sewer District. Each of the twenty-six categories and their associated subcategories were reviewed during the workshop. This was an important part of the process as the Sewer District had undergone several changes in key personnel and procedures since the staff interviews. The rankings presented in the draft evaluation were adjusted as the project team came to a consensus of the actual Sewer District performance levels across all of the business practices.

Once the performance levels were set, the team reviewed each category again in order to establish the desired level of performance with respect to regulatory requirements, public expectations and level of service.

With the rankings complete, the gaps (or opportunities for improvement) were clearly defined in the evaluation worksheet. The project team then prioritized the gaps with associated rating of 1 through 5, 1 being high priority and 5 being low priority. With the opportunities for improvement identified and prioritized, the Sewer District had laid the foundation for a business

optimization plan; a plan that is compliant with regulatory requirements and makes good business sense.

Task 6 Matrix of Recommendations

Once the consensus workshop was completed, a Recommendation and Action Matrix was developed. This matrix includes the priority ranking for each category, the associated findings, recommendations, risk and consequence.

Acknowledgements

All of the Sewer District employees that participated in this project should be commended for their thoroughness and active support of the project. The information and data provided during the project was extensive and clearly the staff spent a great deal of time providing it. Without exception, everyone who participated in the interviews and field inspections was well prepared, extremely knowledgeable and highly professional.

Attachments

Attachment 1	Business Practice Evaluation Report
Attachment 2	Gap Analysis Evaluation Matrix
Attachment 3	Evaluation Criteria
Attachment 4	Recommendation and Action Matrix