



United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency

# WORKSHOP IN A BOX: Sustainable Management of Rural and Small Systems Workshops

2013



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Sponsoring Organizations



In 2011, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to jointly support a series of activities to help small and rural water and wastewater systems address challenges they face and more effectively provide sustainable services to the communities they support. Through this MOA, EPA and USDA have sponsored the development of this *Workshop in a Box* material.

## Partners and Contributors

Special thanks to the **Georgia Rural Water Association**, the **Michigan Rural Water Association**, the **Rural Community Assistance Corporation**, and the **United South & Eastern Tribes**. These organizations individually partnered with EPA and USDA to host the four pilot workshops upon which the content of this *Workshop in a Box* is based.



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# INTRODUCTION

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## Purpose and Background

The *Workshop in a Box* materials, developed collaboratively between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), support small and rural water and wastewater systems in addressing their ongoing challenges to improve management practices and deliver the best quality service to their communities. These materials are intended to help rural and small systems and communities to conduct workshops, either within an individual system or together with a group of systems, based on the *Rural and Small Systems Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management (Guidebook)* – a resource that is included in this *Workshop in a Box* kit. 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 and begin developing an action plan for improving utility management based on the assessment.

The intended audience for these materials is rural and small systems managers who are looking to improve their overall management performance, as well as associations and other service providers that support rural and small systems through education and training. Using the *Workshop in a Box* materials, these entities will be able to guide Workshop participants through a self assessment of their system and identify areas for improvement that are critical to success at their utility. The self assessment will help them to prioritize actions when resources are limited.

To inform development of the *Workshop in a Box* and the *Guidebook*, EPA and USDA hosted a series of four, day-long, pilot workshops in collaboration with local sponsors dedicated to rural and small water and wastewater utility management. The workshops were held in Acme, Michigan in cooperation with the Michigan Rural Water Association, Santa Cruz, California in cooperation with the Rural Community Assistance Corporation, Helena, Georgia with the Georgia Rural Water Association, and in Nashville, Tennessee with the United South and Eastern Tribes. Attendees from over 60 rural and small systems, ranging in size from 200 to 3,000 connections, participated in these workshops. As each workshop was executed, the content for the next workshop was improved through feedback and lessons learned, so that the workshops could better serve their audiences.

The aim of both the *Guidebook* and the *Workshop in a Box* is 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 *Workshop in a Box* and the *Guidebook*, systems will be able to deliver increasingly efficient, higher quality services. The specific improvement actions and the pace at which these improvements are made will be unique to each utility, based on its assessment and the steps outlined by the utility in its System Management Improvement Plan, which is described later in this document.



## Organization & Supplementary Materials

The information in this *Workshop in a Box* is organized in the order in which a workshop would be executed. It begins in the planning stages, moves through the steps of preparation, describes the workshop itself, and concludes with post-workshop follow-up activities. Supplementary materials are also included as attachments to the main guidance document. These materials are everything needed to conduct the workshop, from promotional brochures and informational emails to presentation slides and worksheets. Many of the materials are presented as ‘templates’ that the user can customize with specific event dates and other information. The supplementary materials included in the *Workshop in a Box* kit are described on the following page.

## *Supplementary Materials:*

### **Templates:**

Templates are meant to be customized by the user to add event-specific information (such as dates, times, locations, speaker names, etc.). Areas for the user to add information are **highlighted in blue**.

**Template 1a:** Multi System Workshop Agenda

**Template 1b:** Team Exercise Workshop Agenda

**Template 2a:** Promotional Email for Multi System Workshop

**Template 2b:** Promotional Email for Team Exercise Workshop

**Template 3:** Promotional Brochure

**Template 4:** Sign-in Sheet for Multi System Workshop

**Template 5:** Feedback Form

### **Documents:**

Documents are materials that are not meant to be modified by the user. These contain specific information that has been developed over time by subject matter experts.

**Document 1a:** Workshop Slides for Multi System Workshop

**Document 1b:** Workshop Slides for Team Exercise Workshop

**Document 2:** Self Assessment Worksheet

**Document 3:** Improving Outcomes Worksheet

**Document 4a:** Resources Guide for Rural and Small Systems (Electronic spreadsheet)

**Document 4b:** Resources Guide for Rural and Small Systems (Table for printing)

**Document 5:** System Management Improvement Plan Worksheet

*Rural and Small Systems Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management*

# CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU WILL NEED FOR A SUCCESSFUL WORKSHOP

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- ✓ Agenda
- ✓ Facilitator
- ✓ Promotional Materials
- ✓ Registration and Sign-in Materials
- ✓ Presentation Slides and Talking Points
- ✓ Flip Chart and Projector
- ✓ Handouts:
  - ✓ Self Assessment Worksheet
  - ✓ Improvements Worksheet
  - ✓ Resources Guide for Rural and Small Systems
  - ✓ Improvement Plan Worksheet
- ✓ Workshop Evaluation Form

# DETERMINING WHAT TYPE OF WORKSHOP YOU WILL HOST

There are two main types of workshops that this *Workshop in a Box* is designed to support: a Multi System Workshop, and a Team Exercise Workshop. The workshop format that you choose will dictate how the workshop will be run.

	Multi System Workshop	Team Exercise Workshop
<b>Organizer</b>	Association, organization, or state	Individual utility management (water or wastewater)
<b>Attendees</b>	Participants from multiple utilities (water or wastewater)	Participants directly associated with the utility (potentially including utility staff, board members, or community stakeholders)
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce utilities to the ten management areas</li> <li>• Equip them to use the self assessment exercise with their utility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate staff and stakeholders about the ten management areas</li> <li>• Set improvement priorities based on the self-assessment exercise</li> <li>• Communicate improvement priorities to staff and stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Facilitator</b>	An association/organization staff member or a third-party facilitator	A utility team leader or a third-party facilitator

## Multi System Workshop

A **Multi System Workshop** is a workshop typically sponsored and run by an association or organization that lends assistance to utilities. In this format, the sponsor would invite workshop attendees from several different utilities to participate in a group learning exercise.

The target audience for a Multi System Workshop is staff members who have management responsibilities at their utilities. For very rural and small systems, this may be a manager/operator, and for somewhat larger systems, this may be an executive director. At minimum, a utility participating in this workshop should send staff with cross-operational management responsibilities, but may also choose to send additional staff (such as a certified operator) to participate. Utilities may also choose to have a board member or city manager accompany the participating manager.



The objective of a Multi System Workshop is to introduce participating utilities to the ten management areas, and equip them to utilize the self assessment exercise on their own. Often, the participants in a Multi System Workshop would use the information that they learned at the event to hold a Team Exercise Workshop at their own facility. However, participation in a Multi System Workshop is not a prerequisite for holding a Team Exercise Workshop.

## Team Exercise Workshop

A **Team Exercise Workshop** is a workshop that is held within an individual system as an educational and strategic priority-setting exercise.

There are two possible audiences for Team Exercise Workshops:

1. Only internal staff members of the utility
2. Utility staff and some combination of board members and/or other community stakeholders

The target audience of a Team Exercise Workshop is a mix of staff members (and in some cases, board members and community stakeholders) who make up a “cross-functional” team. A cross functional team would represent the range of roles that exist at the utility, and may include members from engineering, operations, accounting/finance, customer service, and maintenance. Many rural and small systems do not necessarily have specific departments for each of these functions, so the meeting organizer should do his/her best to have as many of these roles represented as possible, based on the capacity of the individual utility.

If board members and/or community stakeholders are to be included, the meeting organizer should consider carefully who to invite (Who will add valuable content to the discussion? Who needs to understand the utility’s priorities and challenges?). Possible participants may include board members, a city manager (or similar position), town council members, or citizens and neighborhood group representatives.

The objective of a Team Exercise Workshop is to educate utility staff and stakeholders about the ten management areas, to use the self assessment exercise to identify priority areas for performance improvement, and to communicate the priority-setting results to the board and community members. Typically this workshop would be organized and facilitated by a team leader. The team leader would be designated to convene the workshop, make the required presentations, and manage discussions among participants, while also directly participating in the discussions. In this way, the team leader is both a facilitator and a direct participant in the workshop.

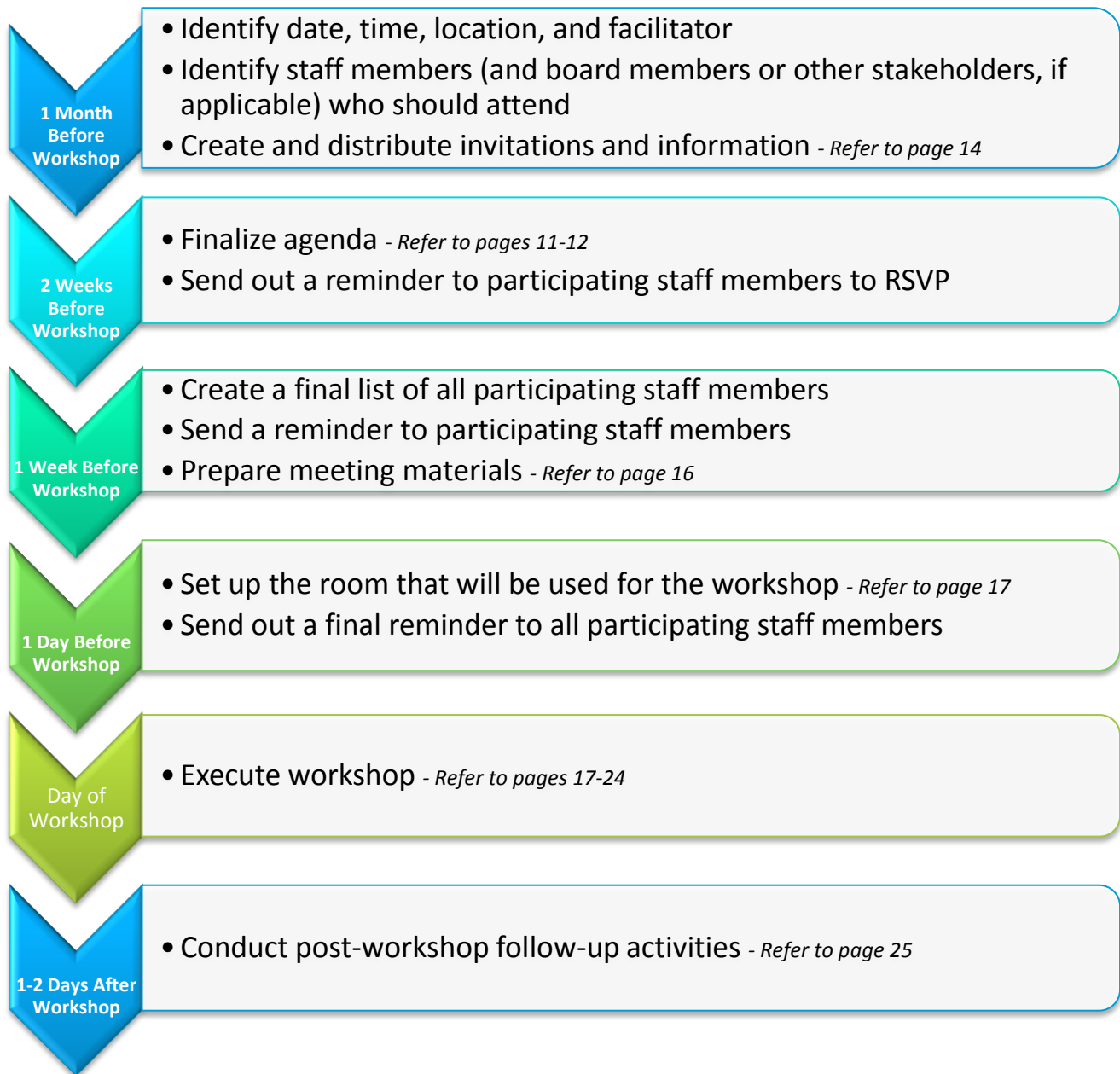
# WORKSHOP PREPARATION TIMELINE

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## Multi System Workshop



# Team Exercise Workshop



# CREATING AN AGENDA

- ✓ Use the sample agenda on the following pages as a guideline for your agenda. Your agenda should use the same sessions as the sample agenda, but may have slightly different time allotments, depending on the number of attendees. The sample agenda is built for approximately 25 attendees – add more time for more attendees, and subtract time for fewer attendees.
- ✓ Identify roles – Who will facilitate the meeting?
- ✓ Find a location – where will the workshop take place?

**HELPFUL HINT:** Consider holding your workshop either as a stand-alone event, or the day before a larger event (like a conference or regional workshop).

*Materials for this section included in your Workshop in a Box kit are:*

**Templates 1a&b:** Workshop Agenda

## Sample Agenda – Multi System Workshop

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>8:30</b> | <b>Sign-in/Registration</b>   |
| <b>9:00</b> | <b>Introductions and Workshop Objectives</b>  |
| <b>9:15</b> | <b>Session 1: Overview of Key Management Areas – Presentation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presentation of Key Management Areas</li><li>• Group Discussion: Other Important Management Areas for Sustainability</li></ul>  |
| <b>9:45</b> | <b>Session 2: Utility ‘Self Assessment’ Exercise</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explain “Sustainable Management Self Assessment” (5 minutes)</li><li>• Participants Conduct Self Assessment (25 minutes)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Rate utility achievements and rank management priorities</li><li>○ Plot results: achievements vs. priorities</li></ul></li><li>• Table Discussion Among Participants About Results (25 minutes)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Where is your utility strong? Why?</li><li>○ Where is there the most room for improvement? Why?</li><li>○ What are your areas of focus?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Why are they a priority?</li><li>▪ Why is performance low?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Technical capacity?</li><li>• Financial capacity?</li><li>• Managerial capacity?</li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul> |

*-Continued on following page-*

- 9:45**            **Session 2 – Continued**
- What are the commonalities and differences among table participants' achievements, priorities, and challenges?
- 10:40**            **Break**
- 10:45**            **Session 3: Plenary Discussion – Self Assessment Results**
- Tables Report Results of Assessment (30 minutes)
  - Synthesize Results (30 minutes)
- 11:45**            **Working Lunch (Optional)**
- 12:45**            **Session 4: Table Exercise – Improving Outcomes**
- Each table completes an improvement worksheet for one low achievement/high priority management area.
  - Discussion Questions:
    - What will constitute “high achievement” in this management area?
    - What changes will the utility need to make to improve performance?
    - How could you track your performance progress?
    - What will be the biggest challenges to performance improvement?
- 1:30**            **Session 5a: Plenary Discussion – Practices, Tools, and Measures: Results**
- Tables Report Findings
  - General Discussion of Findings
- 2:00**            **Break**
- 2:15**            **Session 5b: Plenary Discussion – Practices: Results**
- Synthesis of Table Discussion Results
  - Local Assistance Available in Key Management Areas
  - Presentation of Additional Tips, Tools, and Measurement (prepared before the workshop during the “Prepare Meeting Materials” phase)
  - Reflections: Key Lessons Learned and Near Term Steps
  - Discuss System Management Improvement Plan
- 3:30**            **Session 6: Feedback Session**
- Participants Complete Workshop Evaluation Form
    - Are these the right management areas, and how to improve?
    - Is self assessment useful, and how to improve?
    - Are tools and tips useful, and how to improve?
    - Are measures useful, and how to improve?
    - Overall rating of format, flow, presenters, etc.
  - Collect Evaluation Forms
- 4:00**            **Adjourn**



## Sample Agenda – Team Exercise Workshop

**9:30**            **Introductions and Team Objectives**

**9:45**            **Session 1: Overview of Key Management Areas – Presentation**

- Presentation of Key Management Areas
- Group Discussion: Other Important Management Areas for Sustainability

**10:20**            **Break**

**10:30**            **Session 2: Utility ‘Self Assessment’ Exercise**

- Team Leader explains “Sustainable Management Self Assessment” (5 minutes)
- Team Members Conduct Assessment (25 minutes)
  - Rate utility achievements and rank by priority
  - Plot results: achievements vs. priorities
- Compile and Synthesize Team Member Assessments – Team Leader
- Discussion Among Team Members (1 hour)
  - Where are there commonalities and differences among team members’ assessments? Why?
  - Where is our utility strong? Why?
  - Where is there the most room for improvement? Why?
  - What should be our areas of focus?
    - Why are they a priority?
    - Why is performance low?
      - Technical capacity?
      - Financial capacity?
      - Managerial capacity?

**12:00**            **Working Lunch (Optional)**

**1:00**            **Session 3: Improving Outcomes**

- Break the team into groups of 2 to 3. Each group completes an improvement worksheet for a different low achievement/high priority management area.
- Team Member Questions:
  - What will constitute “high achievement” in this management area?
  - What changes will we need to make to improve performance?
  - How could we track performance progress?
  - What will be our biggest challenges to performance improvement?
- Team members report findings
- Full team discussion – refine and synthesize findings

**2:00**            **Break**

*-Continued on following page-*

**2:15**

**Session 4: Resources and Additional Improvement Ideas**

- Presentation of Additional Tips, Tools, and Measurement – Team Leader
- Team Reflections: further ideas for improving performance and resources of interest

**3:15**

**Session 5: Action Plan**

- Select management areas for focused, near-term attention
- Make assignments for management area leads to prepare plan and identify improvement resources
- Assign time frames for completion of next steps

**3:45**

**Adjourn**

# THE ‘WORKING LUNCH’

In addition to providing an extra opportunity to add content to the workshop, working lunches can help to keep participants nearby (to ensure that you don't lose anyone who goes off-site for lunch), and to keep the momentum going (to reduce the likelihood of a post-lunch 'slump' in energy). If you choose to utilize a 'working lunch' format for your workshop, there are three main options for how to fill the time, which are described below.

## Networking Time

By having the participants remain in the room, they can often benefit greatly from visiting with each other about utility operational issues, either related to the workshop content or separate from the workshop. This is especially useful for Multi System Workshops, where attendees from different systems can trade tips and learn from the experiences of others.

## Working Time

In the event that workshop participants are engaging in in-depth discussions, it is useful to have time set aside at lunch to expand on topics in a less formal setting. This is especially valuable for the self assessment exercise, which can be as deep of a discussion as you allow it to be – by adding extra time to your agenda for this or other discussions, you will allow participants to get to the “meat” of the issues.

## Guest Speakers

Having guest speakers, such as local sponsors, present at lunch provides an opportunity for the sponsors to connect their services directly to management areas of interest that utility participants had identified during the self assessment exercise. Alternatively, presentations by utility managers on their successes and challenges can also help to ground the management area improvement discussions in the workshop in the practical context of local, peer utilities, lending substantial credibility and a stronger sense of accessibility to performance improvements.

# PROMOTING THE WORKSHOP

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## Multi System Workshop

- ✓ Send a promotional email or letter to your intended audience and other relevant networks two months before the workshop. The message should include:
  - Time, date, and location of the workshop
  - Information about the sponsoring organization (who is hosting the event?)
  - Information about the purpose of the workshop (what can participants expect to get out of it?)
  - Workshop agenda
  - Instructions on how to register for the event
  - Instructions about what to bring (relevant materials, lunch, etc.)

**HELPFUL HINT:** *If you have a meeting planning committee or team, consider having each member identify potential participants, and then have each member be responsible for reaching out individually to the participants who they identified.*

- ✓ Distribute brochures or any other promotional materials you have developed.
- ✓ Track registration in advance of the meeting and send reminders to registered participants.

*Materials for this section included in your Workshop*

*in a Box kit are:*

**Templates 2a&b:** Promotional Email

**Template 3:** Promotional Brochure

## Team Exercise Workshop

- ✓ Announce the workshop to your staff, either at an all-staff meeting or by email/letter, at least two weeks in advance of the event. Announce the workshop by email/letter to invited stakeholders. Include information about:
  - Who should plan to attend – all staff members/stakeholder groups, or only specific ones?
  - Time, date, and location of the workshop
  - Information about the purpose of the workshop (what you hope to accomplish)
  - Workshop agenda
  - Instructions on how to register for the event
  - Instructions about what to bring (relevant materials, lunch, etc.)
- ✓ Distribute promotional materials to intended participants
- ✓ Send reminders to participants one week in advance, and then again the day before the workshop

# MANAGING REGISTRATION

It is a good idea to collect registration information in advance so that you know how many people will attend, which helps to plan for room capacity, create sign-in sheets, print the right number of meeting materials, and anticipate refreshments needs (if you will be providing them). Pre-registration also allows you to have contact information for attendees to use for sending out meeting reminders and other meeting information.

## Multi System Workshop

At minimum, you should collect the participant's name, organization, and email. You may want to consider organizing it in a table or spreadsheet (see example below). Other optional information you may want to collect can include: phone number, address, or dietary preferences (if you plan to have food at the event). There are many ways to collect registration information, depending on your organization's technical capabilities, including:

- Collecting registration by email
- Creating a registration website
- Posting sign-up sheets or a registration phone number at central community locations

## Sample Registration Tracking Table

Last Name	First Name	Organization	Email
Anderson	Mary	Village Loop Water	manderson@villageloop.com
Johnson	Mike	Lost Lake Sewer District	Mike.johnson@llsd.com
Smith	Joe	City Public Utilities	joesmith@city.gov

## Team Exercise Workshop

When hosting a workshop at your own utility, it is still important to track who will be attending the event to ensure that you will have the right mix of people (appropriate staff members, and board/community members if you plan to invite them). Creating a simple internal RSVP list is an easy way to track this (see example below).

## Sample RSVP List

Last Name	First Name	Representing	RSVP – Yes/No?
Anderson	Mary	Staff (financials)	Yes
Johnson	Mike	Board Member	No
Martin	Amy	Stakeholder (Citizens for Clean Water)	Yes



# PREPARING MATERIALS

One of the last steps in preparing for your meeting is to finalize the meeting materials, which can be adapted from the resources provided in your *Workshop in a Box* packet. Materials should be printed for all attendees to allow everyone to follow along easily. The materials you will need include:

**Agenda** Make sure to add the following information to the agenda template before printing:

- ✓ Start and end time, date, and location
- ✓ Roles (facilitator, speakers)
- ✓ Times for each session

## Sign-in Sheet(s) and Name Tags

These should be pre-populated with the names that you gathered during your registration/attendance tracking process, with extra spaces on the sign-in sheet and blank tags for day-of registrants/walk-ins.

## Presentation Slides

Printing slides for participants is optional, but can be useful for note-taking purposes. At minimum, the slides should be projected and visible to the whole room, with a printed copy for the facilitator to speak from. Additionally, a flip chart may be helpful for recording and organizing group discussion.

**Hand-Outs** Each participant will need an individual copy of the Self Assessment Worksheet and the Improving Outcomes Worksheet. Multi System Workshop participants should receive the Feedback Form (make sure to adapt the Feedback Form as needed for your specific event to highlight what is important to take away from the workshop). Team Exercise participants should receive a copy of the System Management Improvement Plan worksheet.

Individual copies of the Resources Guide for Rural and Small Systems should also be provided, especially in the Multi System Workshop format. Note that there are two versions of the Resources Guide – one that is formatted for printing (Document 4b), and another more detailed spreadsheet that is formatted for electronic use (Document 4a). Document 4b should be printed and distributed at the meeting, while Document 4a should be sent to participants electronically after the meeting. Finally, participants should each receive a copy of the *Rural and Small Systems Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management* (preferably in hard copy at the workshop, but at least an electronic copy after the workshop).

*Materials for this section included in your Workshop in a Box kit are:*

**Templates 1a&b:** Workshop Agenda

**Template 4:** Sign-in Sheet

**Template 5:** Feedback Form

**Document 1:** Workshop Slides

**Document 2:** Self Assessment Worksheet

**Document 3:** Improving Outcomes Worksheet

**Document 4b:** Resources Guide for Small and Rural Utilities (Table for printing)

**Document 5:** System Management Improvement Plan Worksheet

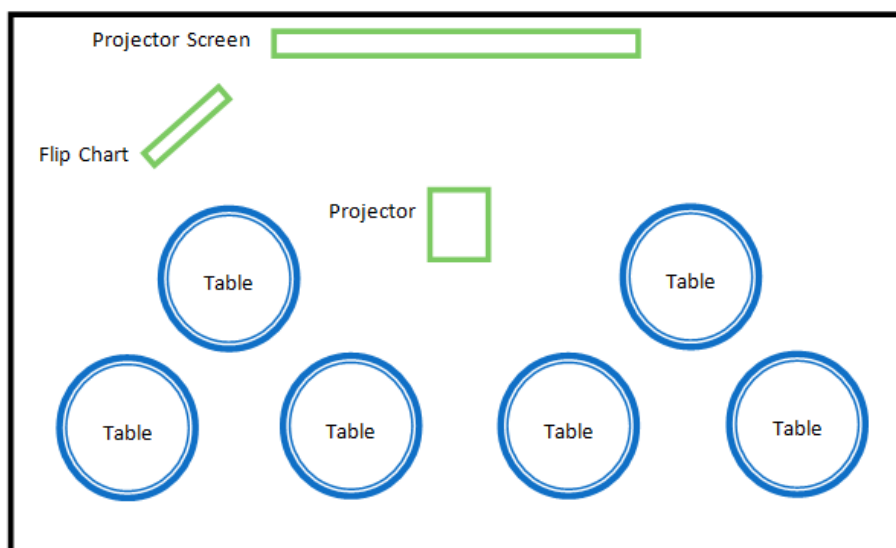
*Rural and Small Systems Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management*

# EXECUTING THE WORKSHOP

## Room Set-Up

The room should ideally be set up in 'round table' style to allow for interaction among workshop participants. If you are conducting a Multi System Workshop, it is best to get a variety of participants at each table (e.g., if a utility has sent more than one representative to the workshop, ask them to sit at different tables – this will help everyone learn from each other and get the most out of the experience). Multi System Workshop table groups should target between 6-8 participants per table. If you are holding a Team Exercise Workshop with board members or outside stakeholders present, you should ask them to spread out and sit at tables with utility staff members. Team Exercise Workshops are typically comprised of 3-15 participants. For less than 8 participants, all should be seated at the same table, and for more than 8, break up into two tables.

## Sample Room Configuration for Multi System Workshop



Other items that you will need for the day of the meeting include:

- ✓ Projector to display the slides at the front of the room
- ✓ Flip chart and markers to record notes during group discussions
- ✓ Printed meeting materials for all participants (refer back to the **Preparing Materials** section for additional details)

# Presenting Workshop Material

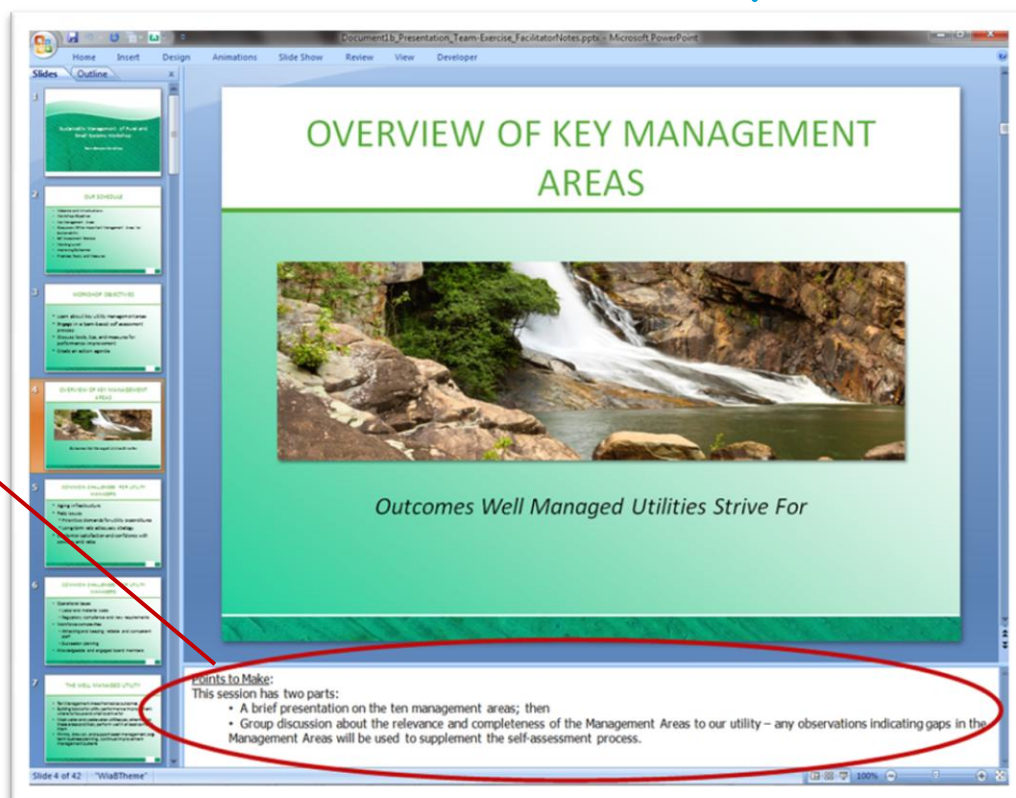
While walking through the workshop sessions and slides, the facilitator should refer to the talking points and helpful presentation tips that are included in the slides. These points were developed and modified based on what worked well (and what did not work well) during discussions at the pilot workshops. They can be found in the “Notes” section of the presentation (see example below).

**HELPFUL HINT:** *Prior to the meeting, the facilitator should consider going through the slides to identify any areas that may not make sense to include, or additional points that should be made.*

*Materials for this section included in your Workshop in a Box kit are:*

- Documents 1a&b:** Workshop Slides
- Document 2:** Self Assessment Worksheet
- Document 3:** Improving Outcomes Worksheet
- Document 4a:** Resources Guide for Rural and Small Utilities (Electronic spreadsheet)
- Document 4b:** Resources Guide for Rural and Small Utilities (Table for printing)
- Document 5:** System Management Improvement Plan Worksheet
- Document 6:** *Rural and Small Systems Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management*

**Presentation Tips  
& Talking Points**



# Introductions & Workshop Objectives

*Use slides 1-3 in Workshop Slides*

The purpose of this session is for the facilitator to introduce himself/herself, and to have the other participants in the room introduce themselves to each other. The facilitator will also use this session to thank sponsors (if applicable), review the printed meeting materials that each participant has in front of him/her, and outline the meeting schedule and objectives (i.e., what should participants expect the workshop to look like?).

## Overview of Key Management Areas (Session 1)

*Use slides 4-18 in Workshop Slides and refer to pages 3-5 in the Rural and Small Systems Guidebook*

During this session, the facilitator (or another presenter) will describe the challenges faced by many rural and small system managers, and the ten key management areas that can help address these challenges. The facilitator will specify that the management areas are not presented in a specific order, but together, they make up the framework for a complete and well-rounded management approach. Need and priority will be totally driven by the individual utility's operating environment. The facilitator will then provide an overview of each of the management areas, using the slides that have been created to describe each area. This session is primarily for the education of participants, and will help to inform the discussions throughout the remainder of the workshop.

At the end of the session, the facilitator should take questions from participants to explore the relevance of the management areas to those in the room (e.g., do these management areas relate to what you are doing?), and to fill in any gaps that are left in the management areas (e.g., does another area need to be added for consideration throughout the rest of the workshop?). Note that a critical aspect of the success of the pilot workshops was the dialog among participants throughout each session. Participant feedback indicated this was a key aspect of the workshop learning process, and it is up to the workshop facilitator to stimulate this dialog by asking questions and prompting all participants to engage in discussion.

## Utility 'Self Assessment' Exercise and Results

*Use slides 19-26 in Workshop Slides and the Self Assessment Worksheet and refer to pages 6-10 and Appendix I in the Rural and Small Systems Guidebook*

The Self Assessment is perhaps the most important session of the workshop. To begin this session, the facilitator will provide instructions for how the exercise is to be completed (refer to slides 19-25), and the objectives of the

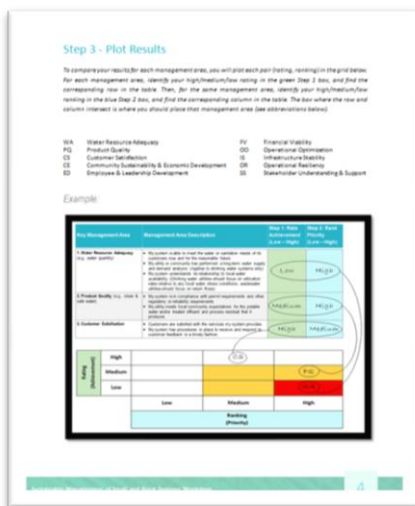
Key Management Area	Management Area Description	Key 1: Rate Achievement	Key 2: Rate Priority
1. Water Resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My system plan to meet the water or sanitation needs of its customers and fit the operational budget</li> <li>My system has sufficient capacity to meet water needs and demand peaks. (Subject to the required regulatory)</li> <li>My system has sufficient capacity to meet water needs and demand peaks. (Subject to the required regulatory)</li> <li>My system has sufficient capacity to meet water needs and demand peaks. (Subject to the required regulatory)</li> </ul>		
2. Product Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All systems in compliance with current requirements and other regulatory or industry requirements.</li> <li>My utility meets all regulatory requirements for the quality of water and/or treated effluent and processes residual that produces</li> <li>Customer are satisfied with the service or system performance.</li> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> </ul>		
3. Customer Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> </ul>		
4. Financial Sustainability & Customer Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> </ul>		
5. Employee & Leadership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> </ul>		
6. Financial Viability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> <li>My system has processes in place to monitor and respond to customer feedback on a daily basis.</li> </ul>		
7. Operational Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> </ul>		
8. Infrastructure Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> </ul>		
9. Environmental Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> </ul>		
10. Stakeholder Engagement & Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> <li>My utility has assessed its current energy usage and performance energy use.</li> </ul>		

exercise. The approach taken for the self assessment exercise differs between the two types of workshops.

## Multi System Workshop (Session 2 & Session 3)

For a Multi System Workshop, each individual participant will complete the Self Assessment Worksheet (Document 2) with his/her own utility in mind. Once all participants have completed their worksheets, the table groups will convene to discuss their results. Table groups should discuss the questions on slide 26 on their own for approximately 25 minutes (during this time, it helps to assign a 'table captain' to keep the discussion moving and on-topic). After table groups have discussed the questions, the entire group of workshop participants will reconvene for the facilitator to lead a discussion about the questions. This discussion will help draw out common themes from each table. As themes emerge, the facilitator should ask participants how they have dealt with relevant challenges to help participants learn from each other's experiences, successes, and mistakes.

## Team Exercise Workshop (Session 2)



In the context of an individual utility running a Team Exercise Workshop, the Self Assessment will be more of a full-group exercise. After the team leader has explained how to complete the worksheet, each meeting participant will fill out the worksheet on his/her own for approximately 30 minutes. Using a 'master copy' of the worksheet, the team leader will then compile the results of all worksheets and lead a discussion with the entire group to reach consensus on worksheet responses (i.e., come to agreement on where the utility's improvement efforts should be focused based on the worksheet results). Based on the compiled responses, this group discussion should be guided by (but not limited to) the questions found on slide 26. At the end of the session, the group should be able to answer the question, "What are our priority areas to focus on as we move forward?" (Try to limit this to no more than three management areas to begin with.)

## Improving Outcomes

*Use slides 27-28 in Workshop Slides and the Improving Outcomes Worksheet and refer to pages 11-19 in the Rural and Small Systems Guidebook*

The purpose of this session is to build on the results of the Self Assessment Worksheet exercise and focus on how to improve outcomes in the key management areas that were identified as highest priority and lowest areas of achievement (i.e., the management areas that were in the yellow or red boxes in the plotting exercise). Participants should aim to answer all of the worksheet questions, but focus initially on the bolded ones, and address the others as time allows.



## Multi System Workshop (Session 4)

In the Multi System Workshop context, each table will be assigned a different management area to focus on as they fill out the worksheet. These management areas should be chosen based on the Self Assessment results (which areas were the most common for needing improvement among table participants?). Each table group will address the questions on slide 28 (which correspond with the bolded questions in the “Improvements Worksheet”) for their respective management area. As the table group discusses as a whole, each participant should be recording notes about answers to the questions on his/her worksheet.

## Team Exercise Workshop (Session 3)

For a Team Exercise Workshop, the management areas that were identified as priorities in the Self Assessment discussion should be assigned to groups of 2-3 members (or more, depending on your team size). Each group should spend approximately 75 minutes addressing the questions on slide 28 for their respective management areas. After the groups have answered the questions, the team leader should bring everyone back together to hold a full team discussion. During this discussion, each group should report out about what they discussed, and other team members should be given the chance to weigh in on the areas that they did not participate in.

## Multi System Workshop only: Practices, Tools, and Measures Results (Session 5)

*Use slides 28-41 in Workshop Slides, the Resources Guide, and refer to Appendix III in the Rural and Small Systems Guidebook*

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**Session 5a:** To build on the discussions in Session 4 about improving outcomes, the facilitator should ask each table group to share their responses to the questions on slide 28. After each table has reported out, the group will have a facilitator-led discussion of the findings. (What do the findings tell us about the challenges and improvement options for each of the areas? What are the similar and different approaches that systems take to address the challenges that they face?). This session is a critical peer-to-peer learning opportunity. The session facilitator should be sure to engage all workshop participants in the discussion and ask them to share their ideas for how to improve, what they have done previously to improve, and what types of challenges they have faced.

**Session 5b:** To begin this portion of the session, the facilitator should recap the results of the group discussion in Session 5a. In response to the challenges discussed in Session 5a, the facilitator will present resources that EPA and USDA identified for rural and small systems that relate to the ten management areas. These resources can be found on slides 30-41. When addressing the Resources Guide, the facilitator should note that there are two versions of the document: a printer-friendly version (which should be included in the materials given to participants), and a more in-depth electronic version (which should be emailed to participants after the meeting). The more in-depth version has a filter function that allows the user to sort the resources by management area. Finally, the facilitator should take about 30 minutes to introduce the attendees to the System Management Improvement Plan worksheet, which will be a useful resource for them to use at their individual systems when identifying improvement activities. An example of the completed worksheet can be found on the next page.

## EXAMPLE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN WORKSHEET

### Priority Management Areas:

1. Water Resource Adequacy
2. Product Quality
3. Financial Viability

<b>Improvement Action:</b>	Improve practices for reducing the number of outstanding bills
<b>Description:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Limit the carry-forward balance to a fixed amount and increase service deposits to discourage customers who move frequently or avoid paying their bills.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Action</li> <li>✓ Management Area(s) addressed</li> <li>✓ Objective(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Financial Viability</li> <li>✓ Reduce the amount of money lost to unpaid bills</li> </ul>
<b>Timeline:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ June 2013: Start -Draft new carry-forward balance allowance and new service deposit requirements for new customers</li> <li>✓ July 2013: Propose and approve new balance and deposit requirements at board meeting</li> <li>August 2013: Notify customers of new requirements</li> <li>✓ September 2013: Completion - Implement new balance and deposit requirements</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Start date</li> <li>✓ Milestones</li> <li>✓ Target completion date</li> </ul>	
<b>Responsible Party (or Parties):</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Bill Smith</li> <li>✓ Jane Anderson</li> </ul>
<b>Relevant Resources (on-hand or needed):</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Example ordinance text created by other utilities to support the desired policy change</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges to Address:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Public pressure on board members to reject rate increases</li> </ul>
<b>Review Process:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Milestone dates met</li> <li>✓ Weekly progress checks with utility director relative to identified milestones</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Performance indicators or measures</li> <li>✓ Status reports and updates frequency/cycle</li> </ul>	
<b>Other Notes:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Conduct calls with each board member to explain the need for the policy change and answer their questions</li> </ul>

# Multi System Workshop only: Participant Feedback (Session 6)

Use slide 42 in Workshop Slides and the Participant Feedback Form

As part of closing out the day, it is important to get feedback from participants about how they thought the workshop went. This is especially true if you are planning to run another similar event in the future, so that you can modify your approach as needed. The facilitator should thank the group for their participation, explain the feedback form, give any information about follow-up (electronic distribution of meeting materials, etc.), and close out the day by letting participants know that they are free to leave once they've completed their forms (try to give them approximately 15-30 minutes to do so).

# Team Exercise Workshop only: Resources and Additional Improvement Ideas (Session 4)

Use slides 29-41 in Workshop Slides, the Resources Guide, and refer to Appendix III in the Rural and Small Systems Guidebook

In response to the discussions from Session 3 about improving outcomes and challenges that the utility faces, the team leader will present the tips, tools, and resources that EPA and USDA have compiled for rural and small systems to use when making improvements in the management areas. This information can be found in slides 29-41. The team leader should also walk participants through the Resources Guide, making sure to note that there are two versions of the document: a printer-friendly version (which should be included in the materials given to participants), and a more in-depth electronic version (which should be made available after the meeting). The more in-depth version has a filter function that allows the user to sort the resources by management area.

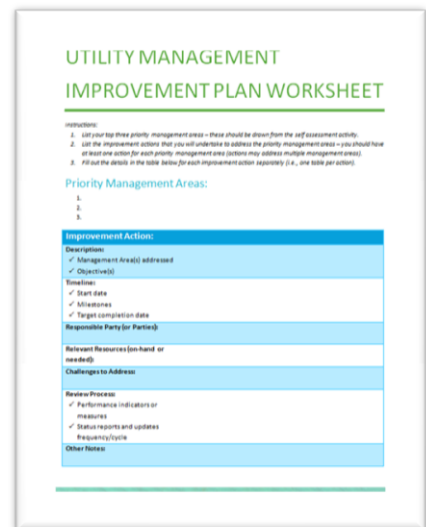
	Water Resource Adequacy	Asset Condition	Customer Satisfaction	Community Sustainability & Economic Development	Employee & Leadership Development	Financial Viability	Operational Performance	Infrastructure Reliability	Operational Readiness	Stakeholder Understanding & Support
Asset Management: A handbook for small water systems <a href="http://www.epa.gov/epawaters/assetmanagement/asset_mgmt_handbook.pdf">http://www.epa.gov/epawaters/assetmanagement/asset_mgmt_handbook.pdf</a>										
Check Up Program for Small Systems <a href="http://www.epa.gov/epawaters/assetmanagement/asset_mgmt_handbook.pdf">http://www.epa.gov/epawaters/assetmanagement/asset_mgmt_handbook.pdf</a>										
Sustainable Infrastructure for Small Water Public Utilities: A Planning and Design Guide <a href="http://www.epa.gov/epawaters/assetmanagement/asset_mgmt_handbook.pdf">http://www.epa.gov/epawaters/assetmanagement/asset_mgmt_handbook.pdf</a>										
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Following the team leader's presentation, the team should have a full-group discussion about any additional ideas that may have been sparked about improving performance in the management areas, and any resources that they would like to explore further.

# Team Exercise Workshop only: Action Plan (Session 5)

*Use slide 42 in Workshop Slides, the System Management Improvement Plan worksheet, and refer to pages 17-19 and Appendix II in the Rural and Small Systems Guidebook*

To close out the day, the team should regroup to discuss what next steps will be taken to move forward with making improvements in the management areas that were identified as priorities. With the team leader leading the discussion, the group should confirm the management areas that it will focus on, make assignments for whom will take the lead in each area, and assign time frames for completing the next steps in the improvement process. The System Management Improvement Plan worksheet is a useful resource when conducting this exercise.



The image shows a worksheet titled "UTILITY MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN WORKSHEET". It includes instructions, a section for "Priority Management Areas" with a numbered list, and a table for "Improvement Actions". The table has columns for Description, Objectives, Start date, Advances, Target completion date, Responsible Party (or Parties), Relevant Resources (on-hand or needed), Challenges to Address, Review Process, and Other Notes.

**UTILITY MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN WORKSHEET**

**Instructions:**

1. List your top three priority management areas - these should be drawn from the self-assessment activity.
2. List the improvement actions that you will undertake to address the priority management areas - you should have at least one action for each priority management area (actions may address multiple management areas).
3. Fill out the details in the table below for each improvement action separately (i.e., one table per action).

**Priority Management Areas:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Improvement Actions:**

Description
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Management Area(s) addressed
<input type="checkbox"/> Objective(s)
<b>Timeline:</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Start date
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advances
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Target completion date
<b>Responsible Party (or Parties):</b>
<b>Relevant Resources (on-hand or needed):</b>
<b>Challenges to Address:</b>
<b>Review Process:</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Performance indicators or measures
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Status reports and updates
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Frequency/cycle
<b>Other Notes:</b>

# POST-WORKSHOP FOLLOW-UP

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## Multi System Workshop

In the days following your meeting, there are still a few steps that need to be completed. Make sure that you address these items in particular, as well as any others that came up during your workshop:

- ✓ Record the contact information that you received for participants on the sign-in sheets so that you can get in touch with them in the future.
- ✓ Send a follow-up message to participants, thanking them for attending, and providing any meeting materials that you may have promised, such as the electronic version of the Resource Guide.
- ✓ Review feedback given on Feedback Forms – What went well? What could be improved? If you are planning on hosting another workshop, make a plan for modifying your approach based on the feedback you received.

## Team Exercise Workshop

Now that your team is on the path to making improvements in the management areas, it is important to follow up immediately after the meeting (let no more than a day or two pass before doing this) so that you can keep the momentum going. Make sure that you address these items in particular, as well as any others that came up during your workshop:

- ✓ Follow up on the list of action items that you came up with at the end of the meeting (immediate next steps, identifying resources and guides that will help you with your priority management areas, etc.).
- ✓ Brief any staff members who may have missed the event.
- ✓ Schedule a follow-up meeting for a few weeks or a month later to check in on progress made on the action items that were identified to address the top three priority management areas.

Congratulations! You have completed the *Workshop in a Box* for the Sustainable Management of Rural and Small Systems Workshops!



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***Workshop in a Box: Sustainable Management of Rural and  
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