

2003 CSDA Innovative Program Award

In 1996, six special districts in San Diego County signed a Memorandum of Understanding establishing the *Shared Resources Program* – policies and procedures for the inter-agency sharing of equipment, personnel and information:

- Padre Dam Municipal Water District
 - 126,254 customers
 - water, wastewater, recycled water and recreation services
- Helix Water District
 - 251,879 customers
 - water delivery, water treatment and recreation services
- Otay Municipal Water District
 - 135,000 customers
 - water, wastewater and recycled water service
- Lakeside Municipal Water District
 - 16,271 customers
 - water delivery
- Riverview Municipal Water District
 - 8,552 customers
 - water delivery
- Sweetwater Authority
 - 176,000 customers
 - water delivery

The *Shared Resources Program* had originated as a joint-Board directive at the annual joint meeting of the Board of Directors of the above districts, stemming from growing concern over privatization and the need to develop operating efficiencies competitive with private sector utilities.

Over the next three years, the inter-agency team of engineers, inspectors and operations staff managing the *Shared Resources Program* developed *Water Agencies Standards*, a triple innovation streamlining engineering, maintenance and repair, purchasing and employee training, and creating day-to-day operational efficiencies and cost savings at each district.

Innovation #1

Development of a *Standard Materials* list for use by engineers, inspectors and developers. Each of the participating districts supplied its list of materials, and over 100 common materials were incorporated on the Standard Materials List – 14 pages of materials for water and recycled water projects, and five pages of materials for sewer projects.

Innovation #2

Development of *Standard Drawings* depicting installation configurations for all equipment, from meters to air valves. The engineering and operations team incorporated the “best of” examples from each of the districts. The group adopted, for example, a concrete pad used by Otay Municipal Water District and air valve inspection and maintenance enclosures fabricated in-house at Helix Water District. An outside company now produces the Helix-designed can for districts throughout California and nationwide. The group also selected Padre Dam’s drawings as the model for the group based on their consistency and user-friendliness.

Innovation #3

Development of *Standard Specifications*, the written installation instructions that accompany *Standard Drawings*, and which clearly describe the installation processes for water, recycled water and sewer facilities. Padre Dam specifications, based on the Construction Specifications Institute (CSI) format, were selected as the model by the engineering team.

Resulting Efficiencies and Cost Savings

Implemented at the member districts in 1999, the *Water Agencies Standards* produce clear, tangible efficiencies. The *Water Agencies Standards* are dynamic documents; a committee of the member districts meets regularly to discuss suggestions and implement improvements. Because the five districts use identical pipes, equipment, configurations and procedures:

- Developers and contractors
 - know what to expect on projects
 - complete projects with greater quality, speed and predictability
 - bid projects with greater accuracy, higher confidence and lower contingency amounts
 - decrease employee training costs
 - increase employee experience and expertise levels on district projects
 - value their business relationship with the five districts

- Suppliers
 - reduce equipment inventories, lowering operating costs and prices

- Member Districts
 - utilize economies of scale to lower materials prices. Lakeside Water District, for example, can include its order for 10 meter boxes in an order for 3,000 meter boxes placed for all five districts
 - share the new product testing facility at Helix Water District
 - share key personnel such as inspectors and the cathodic protection specialist at Helix Water District
 - share knowledge regarding equipment, procedures and vendors, leading to higher levels of quality and innovation

Challenges Along the Way

Creation of the *Standard Materials* list, step one in the development of the *Water Agencies Standards*, was a stop-and-go project with little progress over the initial six months. The project committee included engineering, inspection and field operations staff from each district, and the committee met monthly for two to three hours. At the one year point, The Board of Directors of the participating districts, in their annual joint meeting, directed staff to complete the *Water Agencies Standards*, narrowly preventing districts from dropping out of the program. The *Water Agencies Standards* became mandatory for all developer projects within six months of its completion.

Where the Program is Going

The *Shared Resources Program* and *Water Agencies Standards* are as innovative and effective in 2003 as they were upon their introduction in 1999. The team of engineers managing the program continues to meet monthly and is currently working on its next triple innovation:

Innovation #4

In December 2003, the team will release the fourth section of the *Water Agencies Standards* – the *Water Agencies Design Guide* providing specifications for design development and plans preparation.

Innovation #5

The team has just begun compiling an operations manual for participating districts, which will include guidelines and procedures for every district operation, from valve turning to wet-tapping.

Innovation #6

The team is developing the procedure for the sharing of project estimates, assuring that each district works with the most up-to-date prices available for efficient and accurate budget development.

Conclusion

The Shared Resources Program and Water Agencies Standards provide an excellent example of the efficiencies possible through the sharing of our number one resource – our people. And it is a valuable model readily adaptable by special districts throughout California.