

Meaningful Change Requires a Long-Term Strategy



Craig Yokopenic
Executive
Vice President

EMA recently conducted a series of one-on-one interviews and discussions with municipal and water sector utility leaders across the country. The talks covered a broad range of topics that included conversation about industry trends and challenges.

The discussions identified numerous issues that are on the minds of utilities and municipalities. In addition to topics such as asset management, infrastructure, customer service, the economy, energy, regulation, and technology, there were pressing concerns surrounding workforce, communications, rates, security, and, of course, politics.

Adopting the Larger View

In part, these interviews revealed what many of us already knew. Municipalities and water sector utilities face serious challenges. But it was one utility manager, speaking about his own utility, who drove home the larger point of how to move forward in light of these challenges when he said:

"We want to assess business needs to figure out what we need to do."

Assessing business needs. This is key to the future of our industry. It is a larger enterprise view that moves beyond simply fixing the immediate, more

short-term issue to determining the best solution that will fit within your broader enterprise strategy.

Building Strategies; Critical Analysis

As we face tighter budgets, greater regulation, failing infrastructure, and other challenges, both regional and industry-wide, every one of our actions matters. Quick or partial fixes to work practices, organization changes, or technology, which are not part of a larger enterprise strategy, are often a waste of time and money. These projects may resolve an immediate issue, but often must be revisited down the road and reworked to integrate with the other larger enterprise plans.

Meaningful change must consider the long-term view from the outset, drawing on critical, constructive analysis of your utility or municipality to help build the strategies and establish the plans that support meaningful change not only in practices, processes, and technology, but in organizational culture as well.

An overall strategy provides a roadmap that ensures that the solutions you implement for today's problems fit into the larger enterprise needs now and in the future. It also equips your organization with the ability to identify challenges on the horizon.

<p>What's on the minds of municipal and water sector utility leaders?</p> <p>Here are some of the trends topping their lists and a few of their remarks.</p>	<p>Asset Management & Infrastructure</p>	<p>"Regulation will mandate asset management." "Asset management continues to be a hot, top issue in all public infrastructure circles." "More and better tools for planning will be needed."</p>
	<p>Economy</p>	<p>"We need to do more with less. There is not enough money ... to cover all projects." "The stimulus money provides a lot of opportunity for capital projects. But every completed capital project requires operating money to run and maintain. We are hurting for operating money more than capital money."</p>
	<p>Energy/Green</p>	<p>"The municipality must be seen as progressive and green." "We will do green things, but they have to also make business sense." "We are investigating green processes."</p>
	<p>Regulations</p>	<p>"Modifications to [water] treatment processes may be coming to detect extremely small levels of contaminants." "State funds and property taxes have dropped significantly but we still have to comply with regulations."</p>
	<p>Technology</p>	<p>"SCADA security is becoming a big issue." "... understanding the business requirements and educating the people" "We will be looking to upgrade technology because of expansion and old systems ..." "... implementing software as a service rather than buy and own"</p>
	<p>Workforce</p>	<p>"... retirements and the inability to hire skilled replacements" "... staff retention and succession planning for operations and engineering" "... the aging workforce and consequent loss of institutional knowledge"</p>