

Community Strategies for Meeting Rural Water and Wastewater Needs

Environmental Finance Center's Funding Roundtable

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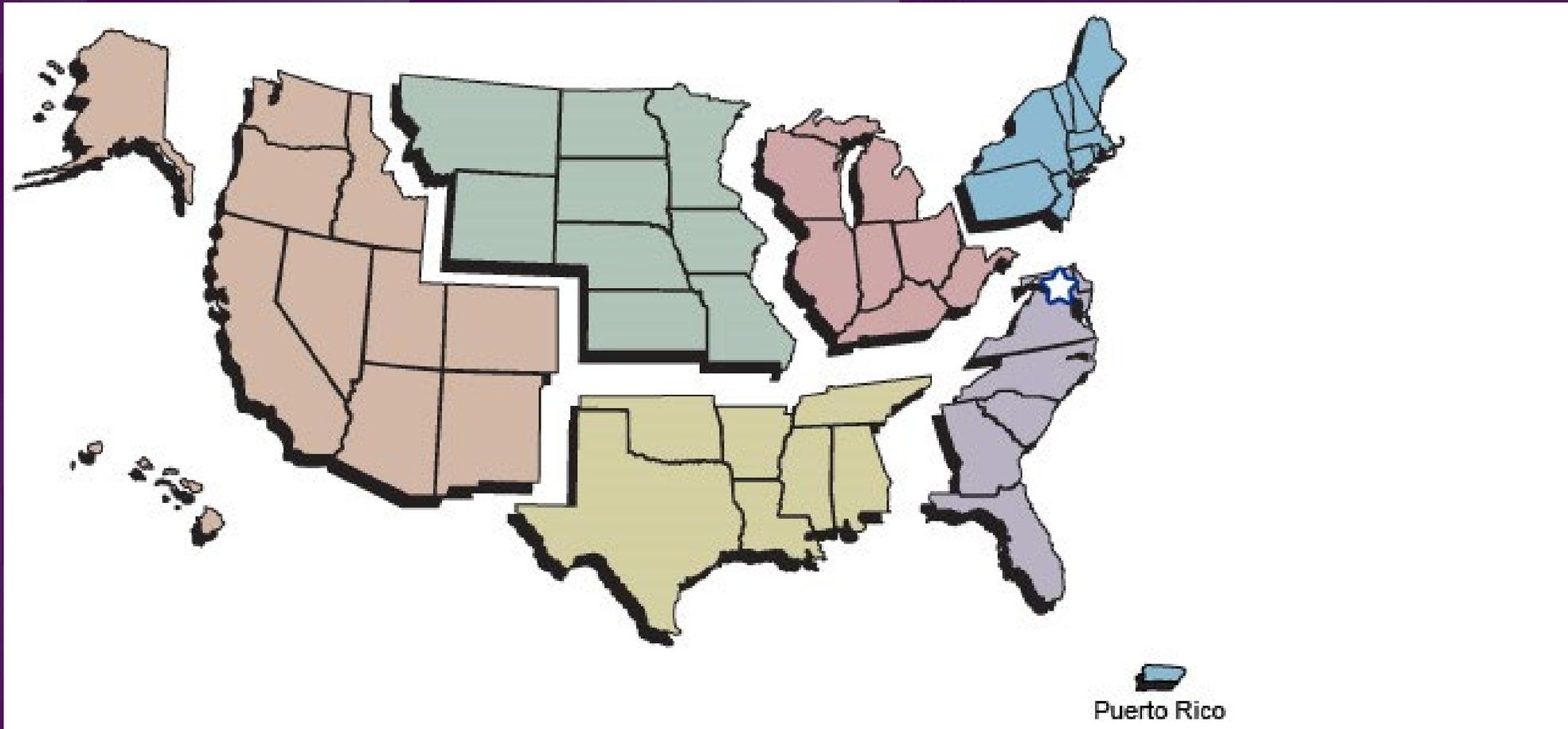
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Rural Community Assistance Partnership



Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP)

Mission

- National network is federally funded to assist small poor rural communities to implement water, wastewater and solid waste projects

RCAP Funders

- US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- US Department of Agriculture, Rural Development (RD)
- US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP)

Strategy

- Provide on site technical assistance and training to communities
- Technical Assistance Providers, TAP's
- Services are generally at no cost to the community

TAP Expertise

- Staff backgrounds: water and wastewater operations, engineering, environmental science, planning, chemistry, geology, GIS and others

Community Water and Wastewater Projects

Communities:

- May be contemplating creating a new water or wastewater system, or
- Wanting to upgrade or extend an existing system

This presentation includes:

- Tips and considerations for successful project planning and implementation
- Elements of the planning process
- How technical assistance can help

Project planning and development is challenging for small communities

- Planning and management require commitment and follow-through
- Elected officials are often part-time administrators
- Project costs rise
 - Materials costs/ labor
 - Compliance with new regulations
 - Greater emphasis on emergency preparedness and response
- Existing systems - may be political resistance to raising rates, even for regular maintenance
- No system? Often because residents have voted down a municipal project in the past

Project planning and development is challenging for small communities

Financial hardship is more widespread than might be imagined:

- 2015, 1 in 7, or 14% of U.S. households earned less than the Federal Poverty Level (that is, less than \$25,100 for a family of four)

Rural areas hit hardest:

- Economies of scale and density of service area
- Rural residents generally pay a larger portion of their income for water and sewer service than residents of metropolitan areas
- Generally fewer social services and programs for low-income areas and people

Infrastructure funding programs are only part of the solution

- Funding programs don't have unlimited resources
- Project could require co-funding (multiple sources)
- Also, not all projects are eligible. Priority is given to projects that address:
 - Public health and/or environmental quality,
 - Affordability and community need, and
 - Potential for success including through partnering and/or co-funding.

Begin planning now

Master Planning

- Water and wastewater services should be high on the radar screen of master planning committees.
- Be aware of current and future water and wastewater treatment needs and what options exist.
- County planning agencies and other professional planners can help evaluate
 - demographic trends
 - community development options.

Begin planning now

Explore options

- Your Water or Wastewater Superintendent / Operator is a key source of information
- Don't be in a hurry to select an engineer right away
- Perhaps invite different engineering firms in to discuss some of the more practical aspects of the community's needs, and how these needs might be addressed
- Funders may require that the consulting engineer is selected through a formal process, i.e. Request for Proposals (RFP)

Regular stakeholder meetings

- Encourage participation from other departments
- Share ideas
- Involve residents, foster a sense of community ownership of plans

Involve regulators

Meet early with representatives from

- NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)
- NYS Department of Health (DOH) and other regulating agencies

They can help

- Guide the project
- Educate project beneficiaries
- Ensure that the project design meets agency approval criteria

Exercise administrative will

Projects can take several years from planning to implementation

- Managerial
- Financial
- Technical

Be cognizant of the demands that will be imposed

- May be turn over of administration
- May be project opposition

Establish an ad hoc water or wastewater committee for long term

- Represent the Town Board or Board of Trustees
- Advise

Identify community “sparkplugs” to help move the project along

Take advantage of technical assistance

A variety of no-cost technical assistance (TA):

- Funding agencies
- Regulators
- County or intermunicipal agencies
- Private not-for-profit organizations such as RCAP Solutions and the Rural Water Association.

Other TA, planning, and grant-writing services can be contracted

Take advantage of technical assistance

Technical assistance providers

- Can help guide the community throughout the life of the project and/ or help with specific tasks

Their services are for project planning and coordination

- They do not substitute for professional engineering services
- Recognized to be of vital importance for small communities

Typical RCAP Technical Assistance (TA) Activities

Needs Assessment

- Identify community water and wastewater needs
- Conduct project-specific surveys

Project Planning and Development

- Liaise with engineering consultants, funders and regulators on behalf of the community
- Help determine technical and financial options
- Procure professional services, e.g. engineers (RFP/RFQ)
- Create a legal entity

Typical RCAP Technical Assistance (TA) Activities

Funding exploration and applications

- Document eligibility for funding programs
- Funding applications
- Loan and grant management

System management

- Manage project finances, set rates
- Comply with regulations, stay current
- Asset management
- System mapping
- Emergency response plans

Training and Education Services

Community projects

- Municipal and community leaders
- System users and other stakeholders
- Organize and facilitate public meetings

Sustainable Management of Rural and Small Systems Workshop

- Designed for community leaders and utility managers
- Worksheet-based self assessment, improvement plan and action plan

Water and wastewater operators

- Develop and provide accredited training for operators
- Partner with American Water Works Association (AWWA)

Training and Education

Private homeowners

- Septic systems: Care and feeding of onsite wastewater treatment systems
- Private well owners: RCAP partners with University of Illinois' Private Well Program

Legislators

- Activities in congressional district, leveraging of funds
- National impacts of TA and training program

Income Survey Purpose and Benefits

Purpose of income survey

- Project affordability: ensure services to lower income residents
- Document income eligibility of service area
- Used by multiple funders: both federal and State infrastructure funding programs

Benefits

- Qualify for low interest loans and grants
- Offset the cost of making water and/ or wastewater improvements

Specific to the Project Service Area

- Documents income eligibility of the project service area
- Income survey used when:
 1. Reason to suspect Census data is not representative of the service area, e.g.
 - Hamlet in a town or water district or proposed extension
 - Village or District with many apartment units, subsidized housing, and/or lower income mobile home parks.
 2. As required by the funding agency

Funding Agencies and Programs

Funding agencies that typically may require or use income survey data include:

- USDA Rural Development (RD)
- State Revolving Fund (DWSRF and CWSRF)
- Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)

Protecting Confidentiality

- Findings pertain to the service area collectively
- Individual responses are not important
- Form and process are designed to protect confidentiality

RCAP Solutions no-cost technical assistance with income surveys

- Creating the Master List of Households
- Developing the survey materials
- Advertising
- Public information meetings
- Processing returns
- Achieving the required return rate
- Assembling required documentation
- Maintaining confidentiality