

Staffing and Succession Planning for Wastewater Agencies

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Why is succession planning important?

- Depending on what study you read, somewhere between 20 and 30% of the national wastewater workforce will retire in the next 5 to 10 years. That's one third of your managers, operators, electricians, engineers and IT support staff.
- As the economy improves, there is more competition for qualified employees, so you are also vulnerable to losing staff to other government agencies and private companies, especially consulting firms.
- Most agencies have not documented their processes in ways that capture instructional knowledge and facilitate fast on-boarding, leaving them vulnerable to unexpected separations. In light of these realities, the need to ensure a reliable, well trained work force will become more and more of a challenge.

What can we do about it?

While some hiring practices and transparency rules of the public sector seem to limit what we can do to prepare for vacancies, in reality there is much that can be done to mitigate the coming wave of retirements and separations. This includes:

- Career paths that retain skilled employees and prepare them for promotion
- Leadership development programs to prepare the next generation of managers
- Cooperative programs with local colleges and trade schools to expose potential employees to the profession and prepare them to be successful candidates
- Capturing the knowledge of senior employees in a way that is accessible and transferable, before they walk out the door
- Discussions with the Union about their role in staff development and succession planning

Where do we start?

Succession planning is most successful when it is done from the point of view of risk assessment and mitigation. This approach addresses succession planning in six steps:

1. Perform a need and risk assessment
2. Match strategies to risks
3. Create individual succession plans for key employees
4. Align organizational policies to support succession planning
5. Anticipate and address barriers to implementation
6. Monitor, review and update the plan

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Step 1: Needs/Risk Assessment

Successful succession planning starts with an organizational needs assessment. It is important that limited resources are directed to those areas with the most need. Every agency will have a unique mix of staff, vulnerable positions and resources that will have to be taken into account.

In order to perform a robust needs assessment, each position or classification should be examined for risks such as:

- Mission critical positions. The needs assessment starts by asking: "What are the jobs that the agency absolutely has to get done in order to protect human health and the environment?" Those are your Mission Critical Positions.
- The concentration of critical skills and knowledge. Does one person have specialized knowledge and/or experience that is only acquired over time or through specialized education and training. Are there other employees that could step in and perform the critical

work with little training? Does one employee have specialized skills in several areas?

- Risk of retirement. Which current employees in each critical position are planning to retire in the near future, are eligible to retire now, or will be eligible in the next 5 years?
- Risk of attrition. Are there individuals that are at risk of leaving the agency due to a lack of developmental and/or promotional opportunities? Are there high performers or critical functions that are at risk of leaving due to role dissatisfaction or high demand for their skill sets?
- Availability of qualified internal and external candidates, based on historical recruitments. How hard would it be to replace someone who leaves? How long will it take?

In doing the risk assessment, evaluate needs for various scenarios:

- Short-term, planned separation (coverage during planned vacations and absences)
- Long-term or permanent planned separation (retirement, maternity leave, promotion)
- Short-term, unplanned separation (illness, family emergencies)
- Long-term or permanent unplanned separation (death, sudden serious illness, resignation with little notice)

When identifying mission critical skills and positions, also consider new or changing skills needed to meet future service demands and changing customer expectations.

See Attachment A for an example risk assessment table and template.

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Step 2: Matching Strategies to Risks

For each at-risk position, identify potential strategies based on the particular risks you've identified and the critical tasks included in that position. The strategies can focus on one or more of these goals:

- Preparing current staff for promotion
- Preparing to train a newly hired or promoted employee
- Covering critical tasks in the short-term
- Preparing to recruit for this position

Attachment B contains a table of potential strategies for different staffing risks.

Step 3: Create individual succession plans for key employees

Using the worksheet in Attachment C, each employee who is responsible for a mission critical function should work with their supervisor to come up with a plan to back-up critical tasks, develop potential successors to their position and prepare to hire and train their replacement. The plan activities should be incorporated into the affected employees' performance goals and the plan updated as necessary to meet changing needs. See Attachment D for an example of a completed individual plan.

Step 4: Align organizational policies to support succession planning

In addition to implementing the individual succession plans, agencies should consider making organization-wide improvements that support succession planning. Some examples:

To support employee development

- Create a system to identify and develop employees that indicate interest in higher positions. See Attachment E for an example interest form that could be used in conjunction with the employees' evaluation and development plans.
- Formalize leadership development programs to prepare the next generation of managers. This could be done through a combination of in-house training and mentoring, leadership and management programs sponsored by industry organizations and local community college programs. Currently, these are offered to employees on an ad hoc basis. See Attachment F for an outline of a possible Leadership Development Program.
- Create programs and promotional paths that allow the organization to hire employees with basic skills and attributes and train them in specific jobs. One example of this type of program is the

Alternative Staffing Program at Union Sanitary Organization (see Resources in Attachment G).

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- Encourage mentoring by management and senior employees. As time allows, managers should mentor employees in the non-technical aspects of their work to help prepare employees to take on higher level supervisory and management level work. This could be incorporated into the formal leadership development program.
- Ensure that HR policies are in alignment with staffing goals (education reimbursement, out of class pay, etc.). Encourage supervisors to talk to their employees about opportunities. Include adequate money in the training budget.

To prepare to fill critical positions

- Update recruitment materials now in order to avoid delay in the event of unexpected separations. Ensure that job descriptions are current (less than 2 years old). Know what knowledge, skills and abilities you need in new hires. Prepare effective testing materials. Determine most effective advertising.
- Plan to overlap exiting employee with the new employee for several months to allow time for training
- Became more visible in the community. Participate in job fairs at local high schools and colleges, perform community outreach and participate in professional organizations such as the California Water Environment Association (CWEA), The California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA) and the Water Environment Federation (WEF) to project the image of an organization people would want to work for. Emphasize the environmental aspect of positions in recruitment materials.

To ensure critical processes continue uninterrupted in case of unplanned separation

- Document process and systems. Up-to-date Standard Operating Procedures, manuals, as-built drawings etc. will allow employees to perform duties as back-up and shorten the time needed to train new employees.
- Look for ways to streamline and automate processes to make them easier to learn for new employees or employees providing back-up coverage.

Step 5: Anticipate and address barriers

The main barrier to implementing succession plans is lack of time in the work day to do classroom and on-the-job training and to document process and procedures. Some utilities have been able to temporarily increase staff numbers to cover these activities, with the understanding that the new positions would be reduced in the future, usually through attrition.

Other possible barriers to implementing a successful succession plan are resistance from Unions to employees working out of class while learning new skills, or the danger of management being seen as “playing favorites”. It is important to get the Union involved in any new programs or classification changes early to avoid these types of problems.

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Step 6: Monitor, review and update the plan

In order to avoid succession plans sitting on a shelf and going unimplemented, activities in the individual plans should be incorporated into other employee development processes, such the employee evaluation process or individual development plans. Review individual plans at least every two years or whenever the situation changes due to a new hire or promotion.

The individual plans and organizational changes should be evaluated periodically by management to assess implementation progress and effectiveness.

Other Resources

Attachment G contains a list of resources and best practices with contacts for additional information.

Attachments

Attachment A: Example Risk Table and Template

Attachment B: Matching Strategies to Risks

Attachment C: Succession Planning Worksheet

Attachment D: Example Individual Plan

Attachment E: Example Employee Development Interest Form

Attachment F: Example Leadership Program

Attachment G: Additional Resources

Attachment A: Example Risk Table and Template

Table 1: Each “X” indicates a risk for that position in that area. Eligibility to retire was assessed based on the age of the employee, with 55 years old assumed as the minimum retirement age. Positions were selected as “high priority” if they exhibited any of the following characteristics:

- There is concentration of critical skills and knowledge in one person.
- There is a risk of separation for reasons other than retirement.
- There may be a lack of qualified internal and external candidates for the position.

Positions with three or more risk factors are highlighted.

Job Title
Bold = Mgmt
Years
w/District
Eligible to
retire 2015
Eligible to
retire 2020
High Priority
(Field
Supervisors)
High Priority
(Managers)
Accountant 13 X X
Administrative Technician 6
Assistant Maintenance Superintendent 18 X X
Construction Inspector 26 X X X
District Manager 5 X X
Field Supervisor 14
Field Supervisor 7 X
Field Supervisor 18 X X
Field Supervisor 9
IT Analyst 2
Maintenance Mechanic 12
Maintenance Superintendent 5
Maintenance Worker 1
Maintenance Worker 7
Maintenance Worker 3
Maintenance Worker 5 X
Office Manager 8
Pipeline Inspection Technician II 9
Projects & IT Manager 17 X X X
Pump Facility Supervisor 5
Regulatory Compliance Coordinator 26 X X X
Rehab Field Supervisor 10 X
Rehab Technician 9
Senior Administrative Technician 13 X
Source Control Inspector 15
Source Control Inspector 30 X X

Attachment A: Risk Table Template

Identify Mission critical positions and roles. Be sure and also consider emerging skills and new/redesigned positions that may be needed in the future.

For positions and critical roles that are currently filled, identify how many years of experience the people in those roles have with the agency.

Evaluate risk of retirement. Where the agency has a defined-benefit retirement program, employees should be considered eligible for retirement when they qualify in that program. If no retirement program exists, the agency will have to define eligibility.

Identify other conditions that may put the sustainability of the agency at risk. Place an X in each applicable category.

Job Title/ Critical Role Yrs with

Agency
Eligible to
retire 2016
Eligible to
retire 2020
Concentrated
skills
Separation Risk
(nonretirement)
Lack of
qualified
internal
candidates
Lack of
qualified
external
candidates
Other

Ex: Operations Supervisor 20 X X X

Ex: IT Network Admin 5 X X X X

Attachment B: Matching Strategies to Risks

To be used with the Succession Plan Worksheet. For each at-risk position, identify potential strategies based on 1) the particular risks you've identified and 2) the needs of the position.

Risk Strategy

Concentration of
skills and knowledge
in one employee

Document and test work process through Standard Operating Procedures,
process maps, desk manuals, etc.

Cross-train employees in critical skills and give them experience by rotating
work or making temporary assignments.

Plan to overlap exiting employee with the new employee for several months to
allow time for training

Update recruitment materials. Know what knowledge, skills and abilities you
need in new hires. Prepare effective testing materials. Determine most effective
advertising.

High percentage of
employees in a
classification eligible
to retire

Document and test work process through Standard Operating Procedures,
process maps, desk manuals, etc.

Update recruitment materials. Know what knowledge, skills and abilities you
need in new hires. Prepare effective testing materials. Determine most effective
advertising.

Capture knowledge of experienced employees and design a training program to
transfer knowledge.

Improve on-boarding processes so new employees are effective faster.

Create opportunities to retain experienced employee and keep them engaged
(special projects, mentoring other employees, etc.)

Low availability of
qualified internal
candidates

Focus training programs on preparing current employees for promotion through
technical and leadership training.

Encourage employees to take advantage of opportunities to advance their education.

Create opportunities for employees to gain experience through more challenging assignments.

Ensure that HR policies are in alignment with training goals (education reimbursement, out of class pay, etc.)

Low availability of qualified external candidates

Partner with community colleges to offer courses and advertise positions

Emphasize environmental careers in recruitment materials

Offer competitive pay and benefits to attract skilled candidates

Create programs and promotional paths that allow you to hire employees with basic skills and attributes you need and train them in specific jobs.

Attachment B: Matching Strategies to Risks

Risk Strategy

Became more visible in the community. Participate in job fairs, community outreach and professional organizations to project the image of an organization people would want to work for.

Attachment C: Succession Planning Worksheet

Complete this worksheet prior to meeting with your supervisor to develop your individual plan. Refer to the

attached example.

Date:

Position:

If this position were to become vacant, it would most likely be filled

- Internally
- Externally
- Would not be filled

The goal of this plan is to (check all that apply):

- Prepare current staff for promotion
- Prepare to train a newly hired or promoted employee
- Cover critical tasks in the short-term
- Prepare to recruit for this position
- Other:

Critical tasks: List tasks for which you are responsible that are critical to the functioning of the District:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

5
6
7
8
9
10

Attachment C: Succession Planning Worksheet

Potential strategies:

Check all strategies would be appropriate for this position. See *Matching Strategies to Risks*.

Create training programs that prepare current employees for promotion through technical and leadership training.

Encourage employees to take advantage of opportunities to advance their education.

Create opportunities for employees to gain experience through more challenging assignments.

Cross-train employees in critical skills and give them experience by rotating work or making temporary assignments

Capture knowledge of experienced employees and design a training program to transfer knowledge.

Create promotional paths that allow you to hire employees with the basic skills/attributes and promote them as they demonstrate additional competencies

Be ready to recruit. Update recruitment materials. Know what knowledge, skills and abilities you need in new hires. Prepare effective testing materials.

Plan to overlap exiting employee with the new employee for several months to allow time for training

Improve on-boarding processes so new employees are effective faster.

Improve and automate processes to make them easier to document and train

Document and test work process through Standard Operating Procedures, process maps, desk manuals, etc.

Create inter-agency agreements for emergency back-up of critical functions

Use a contractor or consultant to cover key tasks

Other:

Attachment C: Succession Planning Worksheet

Action Plan: Describe the goal for this plan and any redundancy and back-up for the position that is already in place.

Because this position would most likely be , the action plan focuses on

. The main back-up for all tasks is currently . (Add other relevant information about the position, back-up needs, planned separations or other risks.)

Complete for each critical task (in order of priority).

Critical task Action (be specific) Affected employee(s) By when?

Organizational Support needed. List support you would need from outside your immediate work area in

order to implement your plan.

Attachment D: Example Plan

Individual Succession Plan

Employee/Position: Regulatory Compliance Coordinator

If this position were to become vacant, it would most likely be filled internally.

The goal of this plan is to:

- Prepare current staff for promotion
- Prepare to train a newly hired or promoted employee
- Cover critical tasks in the short-term
- Prepare to recruit for this position

Critical tasks: List tasks for which you are responsible that are critical to the functioning of the District:

1. **Records Management;** Safety Training & Programs, Cal-OSHA Requirements, Sanitary Sewer Management Plan, CERS, CIWQS, Claims, Commercial Files
2. **Fats, Oil & Grease Program (FOG)**
3. **Commercial & Industrial monitoring Program**
4. **Flow Monitoring Program;** Flow Meters & SMART Covers
5. **Sampling Program;** FOG, Creeks & Streams, Flow & Loadings
6. **Safety Equipment Maintenance;** Supplied Air Respirator System, Confined Space Entry Gear, Air monitoring & Ventilation Gear
7. **Smoke Testing Program**

Attachment D: Example Plan

Individual Succession Plan

Employee/Position: Regulatory Compliance Coordinator

Check all strategies would be appropriate for this position. See *Matching Strategies to Risks*.

X

Create training programs that prepare current employees for promotion through technical and leadership training.

X

Encourage employees to take advantage of opportunities to advance their education.

X

Create opportunities for employees to gain experience through more challenging assignments.

X

Cross-train employees in critical skills and give them experience by rotating work or making temporary assignments

Capture knowledge of experienced employees and design a training program to transfer knowledge.

Create promotional paths that allow you to hire employees with the basic skills/attributes and promote them as they demonstrate additional competencies

Be ready to recruit. Update recruitment materials. Know what knowledge, skills and abilities you need in new hires. Prepare effective testing materials.

X

Plan to overlap exiting employee with the new employee for several months to allow time for training

Improve on-boarding processes so new employees are effective faster.

Improve and automate processes to make them easier to document and train

X

Document and test work process through Standard Operating Procedures, process maps, desk manuals, etc.

Create inter-agency agreements for emergency back-up of critical functions

Use a contractor or consultant to cover key tasks

Other:

Action Plan:

Since this position would most likely be filled internally, the action plan focuses on backing-up critical tasks in

case of an unplanned separation and preparing staff, especially the Source Control Inspectors, for promotion.

The RCC has created an extensive list of his duties (see attached) which explains how key tasks are backed-up,

which could be a model for other positions. The main back-up for all tasks is currently the Source Control

Inspector. The second inspector position is expected to become vacant this year, creating an opportunity for

advancement from the Maintenance or CCTV staff.

Attachment D: Example Plan

Individual Succession Plan

Employee/Position: Regulatory Compliance Coordinator

Task Action (Be specific)

Affected

Employee(s)

When

All Plan to overlap exiting employee with the new or internal employee(s)/ Candidates for several months to allow time for training & replacement of exiting employee

RCC, New SCI When new

Coordinator is

hired

All Try out potential candidates before promotion through interim assignment

All Update SOPs, incorporating video; prioritize and plan to update at least 3 SOPs this calendar year.

RCC, SCIs By 12/31/15

All Include SC Inspectors in key tasks according to Master Duties List; make assignments that give SCIs experience in Coordinator's functions.

SC Inspectors Ongoing

All Encourage potential candidates to prepare for promotion through continuing education; include in SCI's annual development plans

RCC, SCIs

Safety The safety consultant (DuAll) could perform most duties until replacement is trained

Safety Maintain certification (Brian, Jed)

Offer opportunities to get certification to additional employees

SC Inspectors and
potential SCIs
Ongoing

Attachment F: Leadership Development

Many utilities have a tradition of promotion from within which encourages employee retention. However, promotion from within can result in employees being promoted without all the management and leadership skills they will need to be successful in their new roles.

Employees who have indicated an interest in moving up in the organization can be developed through a program of internal and external training, combined with opportunities to take on more challenging assignments.

If your workforce is unionized, it is important to involve the Union when creating an in-house leadership development program in order to avoid any appearance of favoritism or unequal opportunity. Some agencies use an application process to select a set number of employees for a leadership program, while some offer the opportunity to all interested employees.

Internal training and mentoring

Internal training offers the opportunity to expose potential leaders to utility specific management philosophy and processes.

This internal employee development can be offered through a combination of:

- Internal training taught by utility managers on topics such as budgeting, delegation, goal setting, supervision and planning.
- Coaching by managers of their direct reports along with assignments of increasing responsibility and complexity.
- Mentoring of employees by a manager that they do *not* report to.

External management and leadership training

Certificate programs in business management are available through local community college programs, many of which are taught on-line. College courses can be taken on the employee's own time, on District approved time or a combination, and funded through the existing tuition reimbursement program.

There are several business management programs offers by Bay Area community colleges:

- Ohlone College offers two levels of certificates and AA degrees in Supervision & Management.

Most classes are taught on-line. www.ohlone.edu/instr/bsm/

- Chabot College offers an on-line Management certificate program.

www.chabotcollege.edu/BUS/ProgramPages/CertAchievementManagement.asp

- DeAnza College offers an in-person certificate program in Business Management

www.deanza.edu/counseling/pdf/degrees/management.pdf

Appendix G: Additional Resources

These resources are provided in order to share best practices across the industry. Please contact the appropriate agency for more information.

Strategy Example

Focus training programs on preparing current employees for promotion through technical and leadership training.

Union Sanitary District (USD) Leadership
School

Water & Wastewater Leadership Center
Cal State Fullerton Public Agency Program
Orange County San BLAST program and

Leadership Academies

West Bay Employee Development Interest Form

Encourage employees to take advantage of opportunities to advance their education.

USD Education reimbursement policy (zero interest loans)

Create opportunities for employees to gain experience through more challenging assignments.

USD Alternate Staffing Program

Cross-train employees in critical skills and give them experience by rotating work or making temporary assignments

USD Acting Lead Rotation

Capture knowledge of experienced employees and design a training program to transfer knowledge.

USD competency-based training system

Create programs and promotional paths that allow you to hire employees with basic skills and attributes you need and train them in specific jobs.

USD Operator III Training Program

USD Alternate Staffing Program

Orange County San College Intern Program

Partner with community colleges to offer courses and advertise positions

Bay Area Consortium for Water and

Wastewater Education (Solano College)

Orange County San College Intern Program

Improve on-boarding processes so new employees are effective faster.

West Bay Maintenance Worker Checklist

Orange County San Onboarding/Orientation

Appendix G: Additional Resources

Strategy Example

Document and test work process through Standard Operating Procedures, process maps, desk manuals, etc.

USD Competency Standards and Standard Operating Procedures

Contacts:

Union Sanitary District:

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Orange County Sanitation District:

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Bay Area Consortium for Water and Wastewater Education: www.bacwwe.org

BAYWORK (Bay Area Water/Wastewater Workforce Development Collaborative): www.baywork.org

Cal State Fullerton Public Agency Program:

<http://extension.fullerton.edu/leadershipdevelopment/current-programs>