



- 🏠 **Location:** Microsoft Teams
- 📅 **Date:** Tuesday, February 8, 2022
- 🕒 **Time:** 9:00 am
- Robin Barnes
- Tamika Duplessis
- Lynes “Poco” Sloss
- Maurice Sholas
- Janet Howard

Strategy Committee Meeting Agenda

[February 2022 Strategy Link](#)

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Phone Conference ID: 402 100 803#

PUBLIC COMMENT WILL BE ACCEPTED VIA EMAIL TO BOARDRELATIONS@SWBNO.ORG.

ALL PUBLIC COMMENTS MUST BE RECEIVED PRIOR TO

9:30 AM ON February 8, 2021. COMMENTS WILL BE READ VERBATIM INTO THE RECORD.

I. Roll Call

II. Presentation Item

- a) Strategic Plan and Implementation Workplan Final – Darin Thomas, Raftelis

III. Action Item

- a) Resolution (R-016-2022) Approval of the Sewerage and Water Board Strategic Plan

IV. Public Comment

Public comments received until 30 minutes after the presentation of the Agenda will be read into the record.

V. Adjournment

This teleconference meeting is being held pursuant to and in accordance with the provisions of Section 4 of Proclamation Number JBE 2020-30, extended by Proclamation 7 JBE 2022, pursuant to Section 3 of Act 302 of 2020.

Sewerage & Water Board

STRATEGY COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD – STRATEGIC PLANNING
DELIVERABLES

February 8, 2022



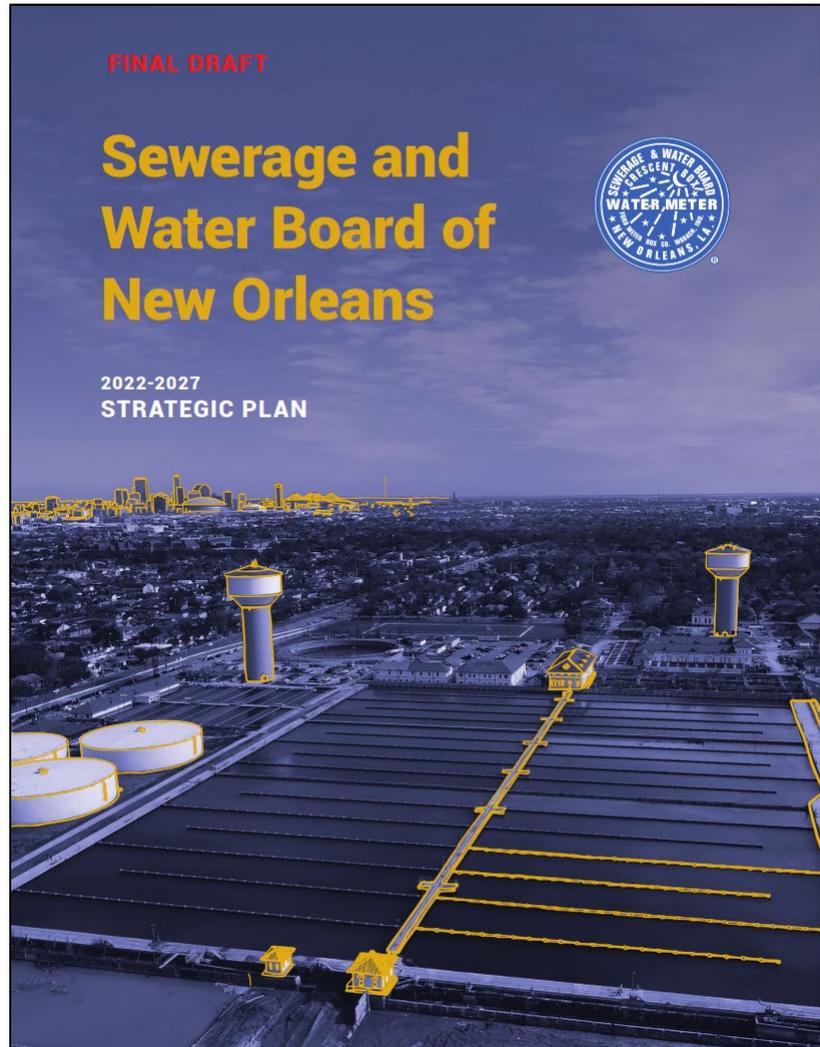
Agenda

- 1. Welcome/Today's Objectives**
- 2. Final Draft Strategic Plan**
- 3. Final Draft Implementation Plan**
- 4. Wrap-up**

Final Draft Strategic Plan



The SWBNO Final Draft Strategic Plan



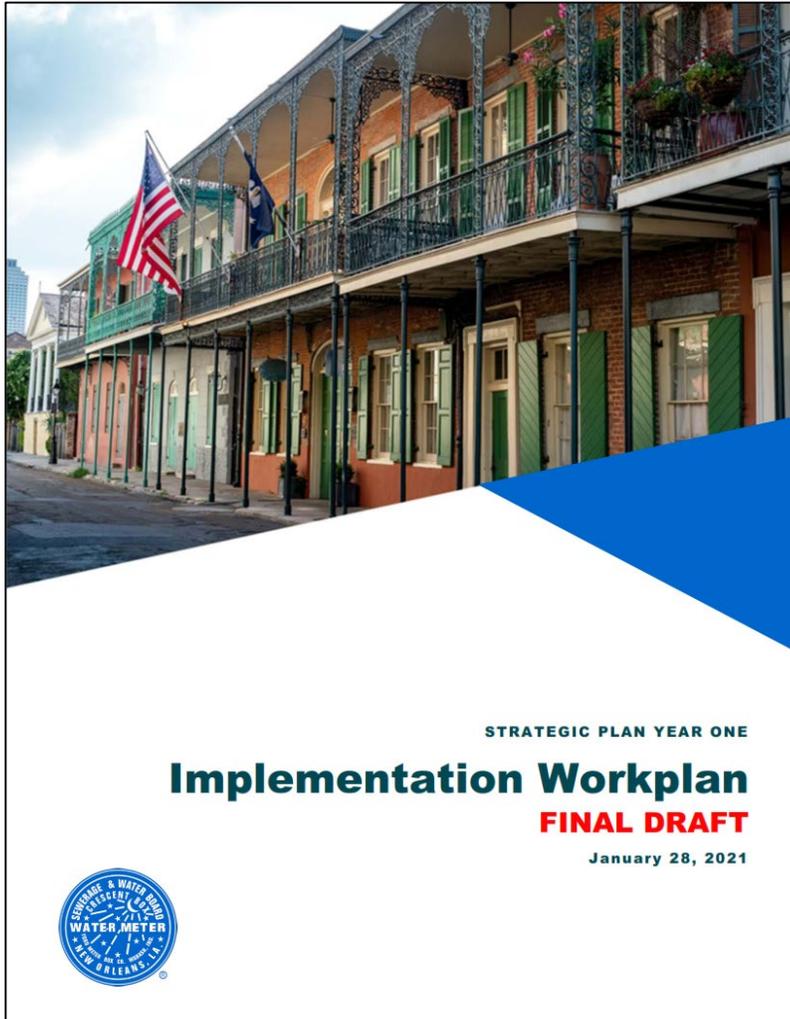
Key Updates

1. Finalized Letters from Executive Director and Mayor
2. Added “key issues” on pages 21, 23,25, 27, 29, and 31
3. Restructured strategic framework pages 33 and 34
4. Expanded discussion on implementation activities page 35
5. Expand discussion on communications page 36

Final Draft Strategy Implementation Plan



The SWBNO Draft Implementation Plan



Key Updates

1. Reviewed and revised implementation plan activities and start dates
2. Reviewed for writing consistency
3. Added missing information and position titles for strategy leads
4. Updated the layout of the framework to match the framework in the strategic plan

Wrap-Up



Next Steps

- Incorporate feedback from today
- Finalize deliverables
- Begin active implementation
- Provide periodic implementation progress updates to the Board



STRATEGIC PLAN YEAR ONE

Implementation Workplan

FINAL DRAFT

January 28, 2021



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Introduction

The Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans' (SWBNO's) 2022 Strategic Plan provides a framework for SWBNO's future. The Plan identifies long-term focus areas and organizational goals to achieve SWBNO's vision of being "a model utility that earns and holds the trust and confidence of our customers, community, and partners through reliable and sustainable water services." The Plan identifies strategies to advance this vision in each of six focus areas: Financial Stability, Technology Modernization, Workforce Development and Enrichment, Customer Service Excellence and Stakeholder Engagement, Infrastructure Resiliency and Reliability, and Organizational and Operational Improvement.

This Implementation Plan focuses our efforts for the first eighteen months of the Strategic Plan, and identifies specific, actionable strategies in each of the Strategic Plan focus areas. Each focus area has a standing working group that meets quarterly to update progress and ensure accountability. The groups will continue to set new tactics each year to continue improving within every strategy.



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

FOCUS AREAS

Vision
To be a model utility that earns and holds the trust and confidence of our customers, community, and partners through reliable and sustainable water services.

Mission
Our team of experts serves the people of New Orleans and improves their quality of life by reliably and affordably providing safe drinking water; removing wastewater for safe return to the environment; and draining stormwater to protect our community.

Core Values
The SWBNO Team is committed to making these shared values our reality.

We are:
Customer Focused
Accountable
Safety Minded
Transparent and Honest



Financial Stability
Practice strong fiscal stewardship and ensure timely revenue recovery while balancing affordability with investments necessary to deliver critical services



Technology Modernization
Modernize technology and system integration to improve reliability and efficiency of operations and enhance customer service



Workforce Development and Enrichment
Support and develop a high-performing team that is skilled, committed, inspired, rewarded, engaged, and accountable



Customer Service Excellence and Stakeholder Engagement
Continuously meet and exceed the service needs of our customers and proactively communicate and engage stakeholders



Infrastructure Resiliency and Reliability
Improve efficiency and resiliency of current and future infrastructure by leveraging partnerships and innovative approaches to funding and sustainable design



Organizational and Operational Improvement
Optimize organizational structure, alignment, and capacity to ensure safe operations and efficient service delivery

STRATEGIES

RESULTS

- 
- 1. Optimize capital and operational spending
 - 2. Enhance budget development and management processes
 - 3. Improve timely revenue recovery and leverage new and alternate revenue sources
 - 4. Enhance affordability programs to better meet community needs

- 
- + Fewer capital project change orders
 - + Lowered accounts receivable
 - + Reduction in unbilled (non-revenue) water
 - + Increased utilization of assistance programs

- 
- 5. Identify and update critical/core technology software solutions and resources
 - 6. Enhance cybersecurity and technology systems resiliency
 - 7. Improve adoption and integration of current and new technology systems

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- + Increased customer self-service utilization
 - + Increased customer service efficiency
 - + Fewer billing errors
 - + Increased employee adoption of core technology systems

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- 8. Evaluate workforce model options, including Civil Service and others, and determine an appropriate approach for SWBNO
 - 9. Enhance resources for employee training and development
 - 10. Motivate and train supervisors and leaders to improve employee and team performance
 - 11. Strengthen internal communication and information sharing to increase collaboration across departments
 - 12. Improve knowledge capture, transfer, and succession planning

- 
- + Increased workforce productivity
 - + Reduction in open positions
 - + Increased and improved employee training
 - + Increased employee morale

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- 13. Foster a culture of customer service throughout the organization
 - 14. Expand convenience systems and capabilities to improve self-service options for customers
 - 15. Elevate core customer service delivery performance
 - 16. Advance proactive communication and outreach programs

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- + Reduction in customer complaints
 - + Increased customer service first call resolution
 - + Increased customer satisfaction rating
 - + Increased social media interactions
 - + Improved positive media sentiment

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- 17. Shift maintenance planning and workflows from reactive to preventative through comprehensive asset management
 - 18. Replace and renew aged infrastructure using integrated approaches
 - 19. Successfully deliver all critical capital improvement projects by improving collaboration with project partners
 - 20. Respond to climate change through innovation and green infrastructure projects

- 
- + Increased time spent on preventative maintenance
 - + Increased feet of pipeline replacement
 - + Fewer water main breaks
 - + Fewer sewer overflows
 - + Increased number of green infrastructure projects

- 
- 21. Evaluate and modify organizational structure and staffing levels
 - 22. Enhance and elevate safety of culture
 - 23. Implement programs and training related to change management, process standardization, and continuous improvement
 - 24. Develop and share organizational performance metrics internally and externally

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- + Improved service delivery
 - + Fewer workforce accidents and injuries
 - + Increased number of specific operational process improvement projects



FOCUS AREA

Financial Stability

Practice strong fiscal stewardship and ensure timely revenue recovery while balancing affordability with investments necessary to deliver critical services.

FOCUS AREA CHAMPION:

Grey Lewis

Chief Financial Officer

STRATEGY 1:**Optimize capital and operational spending**

Strategy Lead: Cashanna Moses, Purchasing Director

Strategy Impacts: Being strategic with capital and operational spending through more comprehensive and consistent policies and procedures, more extensive financial control, and increased transparency, will maximize the impact of SWBNO's investments and lead to increased accountability and more efficient spending. Implementing this strategy will also protect the organization from risks like inefficient and inconsistent spending due to out-of-date policies, organizational confusion, and negative vendor relations.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>New</u> Inventory and analyze significant spending across vendors and prioritize relationships with vendors that have the most advantageous terms for SWBNO	Shalita Sells	Mar-22	120	Staff time
<u>Underway</u> Review commodity purchasing and develop controls and policies to increase accountability for purchases made against corporate accounts	Cash Moses	Mar-22	60	Staff time Executive approvals policy
<u>New</u> Develop a requisition process for requiring budget approval prior to purchases	Dexter Joseph	May-22	60	Communications and getting buy-in from staff Possible policy revisions Updated requisition form
<u>New</u> Work with departments to develop, update, and regularly share policies, processes, and guidelines for operational vs. capital spending (e.g., capitalization policy, Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA] reimbursements)	Cash Moses	Jun-22	180	Coordination with involved departments Policy updates Coordination with peer utilities
<u>New</u> Investigate financial modules to improve capital and operational spending transparency	Cash Moses	Jun-22	270	Work with the Information Technology Department (IT) on Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software implementation
<u>Underway</u> Understand and align funding sources/revenues (Pay As You Go and external funding sources) with projects and spend categories for better monitoring and reporting	Kevin Garrison	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing collaboration with existing consultant support from PFM

STRATEGY 2:**Enhance budget development and management processes**

Strategy Lead: Kevin Garrison, Planning and Budget Chief Accountant

Strategy Impacts: Enhancing and standardizing the processes used to develop and manage the budget will lead to increased transparency, greater collaboration between the Finance Department and other departments at the organization, and more consistent implementation of financial controls. Implementation of this strategy will require an update to existing financial software to allow for the use of enhanced technology tools.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Analyze monthly budget reports to identify variances and be more proactive (e.g., by holding regular budget feedback meetings with departments)	Kevin Garrison	Ongoing	Ongoing	Executive leadership to enforce policies and procedures ERP software
<u>New</u> Designate and consistently work with organizational "go-to" financial resources to increase transparency and accountability with departments in support of financial planning	Kevin Garrison	Mar-22	180	Executive leadership to enforce policies, procedures, and budget constraints
<u>New</u> Identify peer organizations that have effective budgeting practices and implement practices as possible	Dexter Joseph	Mar-22	90	Contacts at industry associations and peer organizations
<u>New</u> Increase financial controls to ensure that spending is aligned with projections	Grey Lewis	May-22	180	Controller position

STRATEGY 3:**Improve timely revenue recovery and leverage new and alternate revenue sources**

Strategy Lead: Monique Rainey, Project Development Unit Director
LaTressia Matthews, Finance Administrator

Strategy Impacts: Timely revenue recovery and the identification of diversified revenue sources will increase SWBNO's ability to generate revenue and will lead to better utilization of existing revenues and increased financial stability. The strategy will require significant organizational capacity to implement, as well as technological advancements to better implement and track revenue recovery strategies.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Designate and expand the role and staffing of the Project Delivery Unit (PDU) to look more broadly for grants (e.g., from the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act [WIFIA]) and opportunities (e.g., Infrastructure Act funding)	Jovan Walker	Mar-22	180	Additional staff - grant writers / managers
<u>Underway</u> Use industry resources (American Water Works Association [AWWA], etc.) to identify and implement successful strategies from other utilities	Tamika Hyde	Apr-22	365	Staff time
<u>New</u> Create a process for organizational grant coordination prior to applying for funding	Monique Rainey	May-22	180	Staff time
<u>New</u> Create a process to evaluate opportunities to generate additional revenues (sell services to other regional entities, better utilize the Mississippi River, etc.)	Tyler Antrup	Mar-22	180	Staff time
<u>New</u> Evaluate and update policies and processes to increase revenue recovery (e.g., delinquency recovery, theft reduction, and institutions that have historically received free water)	Stephanie Thomas	Mar-22	270	Data analysis and research into delinquency, metered by unbilled, etc.

STRATEGY 4:**Enhance affordability programs to better meet community needs**

Strategy Lead: Tyler Antrup, Director of Planning and Strategy

Strategy Impacts: Expanded affordability programs will help low-income residents of SWBNO's service area better afford their bills, protecting community health and safety while helping ensure that water bills do not place an undue burden on residents. Affordability programs will still need to support revenue sufficiency.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Include affordability outcomes in the rate study and the next rate case	Tyler Antrup	Ongoing	Complete by August 2022	Black and Veatch contracted to develop an enhanced customer assistance program and integrate it into the rate study
<u>Underway</u> Monitor and consolidate resources on external affordability programs (e.g., federal/state programs, renter programs, community action group funding)	Christy Harowski	Ongoing	Ongoing	Working with Total Community Action (TCA) and Federal and State partners to identify resources and consolidate
<u>Underway</u> Evaluate and investigate opportunities to increase revenues for affordability program (e.g., bill round-up)	Tiffany Julien	Mar-22	60	Staff time



FOCUS AREA

Technology Modernization

Modernize technology and system integration to improve reliability and efficiency of operations and enhance customer service

FOCUS AREA CHAMPION:

Dave Callahan

Chief Administrative Officer

STRATEGY 5:**Identify and update critical/core technology software solutions and resources**

Strategy Lead: Melinda Nelson, Director of IT

Strategy Impacts: It is vital for high-functioning organizations to maintain technology tools that meet operational needs. Identification of critical technology resources will help SWBNO better understand its technology needs, and updates to these technology needs will help protect SWBNO from cybersecurity threats and allow it to function as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Inventory current software/systems and post list of major software on intranet	Melinda Nelson	Mar-22	30	Staff time
<u>Underway</u> Document and prioritize the list of technology updates that are underway or may be considered	Melinda Nelson	Mar-22	100 (first list)	IT/Operational Technology (OT) Governance Committee members
<u>New</u> Develop a user-friendly map of the new major software programs and their capabilities	Curtis Clark	Mar-22	180	IT Technical Writer - time
<u>New</u> Complete a needs assessment for the Asset Management and new Financial software systems	Melinda Nelson	Mar-22	180	Project managers for each system
<u>New</u> Determine data categories for SWBNO data	Yolanda Grinstead	Mar-22	180	Additional document management legal staff capacity

STRATEGY 6:**Enhance cybersecurity and technology systems resiliency****Strategy Lead:** Guy Lombard, IT

Strategy Impacts: Cybersecurity is one of the most important priorities for any organization, but especially for a water utility that has a responsibility to safeguard water quality and protect public health. Effective implementation of these strategies will help prepare staff at all levels to help protect SWBNO's technology systems and help ensure that all of SWBNO's infrastructure is effectively prepared to face cybersecurity threats.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>New</u> Document cybersecurity policies, communicate relevant policies, and provide training resources	Guy Lombard	Mar-22	180	Staff time
<u>Underway</u> Continue to implement the recommendations of the AWIA assessment	Guy Lombard	Nov-21	365+	Staff time Resources
<u>New</u> Expand the orientation module on cybersecurity for new employees (and include user agreement)	Melinda Nelson	Jan-22	90	Management approval
<u>Underway</u> Continue to implement the initiative to provide Board hardware with mobile capability to all employees (laptops)	Melinda Nelson	Mar-22	365+	Time to replace Board hardware as it naturally wears out
<u>Underway</u> Increase the use of video technology for operational/safety/security use	Jason Higginbotham	Dec-19	365	Fiber run at the Drainage Pumping Station (DPS) and Sewer Pumping Station (SPS)
<u>Underway</u> Develop a plan to expand the fiber networks so that SCADA, security, and IT have separate dedicated fiber networks	Rebecca Johnsey	Jan-21	365	Expansion of the fiber network to included security at DPS and SPS
<u>Underway</u> Complete firewall installation	Curtis Clark	Jan-21	365+	Staff time

STRATEGY 7:

Improve adoption and integration of current and new technology systems

Strategy Lead: Melinda Nelson, Director of IT

Strategy Impacts: Effective technology means ensuring that staff are equipped to make appropriate use of that technology. Implementation of this strategy means offering training to all staff to ensure that they are prepared to use SWBNO's technology tools as well as developing job descriptions that take into account technology proficiencies required to effectively fill specific positions.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>New</u> Provide a program for those who haven't received the training during orientation to review Board technology, use of technology, and resources available	Melinda Nelson	Mar-22	180	Staff time Resources Executive commitment for extending orientation
<u>New</u> As a component of the training program, complete an assessment of the technology-related skills needed by job position or department	Veronica Washington	Apr-22	180	Additional training staff (already budgeted for 2022)
<u>New</u> As a component of the training program, implement a skills assessment to understand areas of training needs based on the desired skills for a position	Veronica Washington	May-22	180	Additional training staff (already budgeted for 2022)
<u>New</u> As a component of the training program, develop targeted training based on the skills assessment and needs	Veronica Washington	Aug-22	180	Additional training staff (already budgeted for 2022)



FOCUS AREA

Workforce Development and Enrichment

Support and develop a high-performing team that is skilled, committed, inspired, rewarded, engaged, and accountable

FOCUS AREA CHAMPION:

Christy Harowski

Chief of Staff

STRATEGY 8:

Evaluate workforce model operations, including Civil Service and others, and determine an appropriate approach for SWBNO

Strategy Lead: Christy Harowski, Chief of Staff

Strategy Impacts: Evaluating different models for workforce operations will help SWBNO determine the most appropriate model for its organization. This could mean comprehensive change across the organization, which will require momentum and buy-in from staff and leadership.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>New</u> Create a stakeholder working group to facilitate and guide the process of identifying and implementing the workforce model that best supports SWBNO and its mission	Christy Harowski	Mar - 22	30	Collaboration with Board/Departments
<u>New</u> Define and document the challenges with the existing Civil Service workforce model	WG	Apr - 22	30	WG and departmental time and input
<u>New</u> Engage an external consultant to assist the SWB in developing a viable and effective workforce model for the SWB	WG/	May - 22	60	Funding for consultant
<u>New</u> Prepare a study analyzing options for workforce model	Consultant	Aug - 22	120	Funding for consultant; WG time and coordination/staff outreach
<u>New</u> Engage SWBNO staff, Board, and other relevant parties to gain feedback	WG	Nov - 22	45	
<u>New</u> Develop a proposed workforce model and WG recommendation for the board	Consultant/ WG	Dec - 22	60	Funding for Consultant/WG time and effort
<u>New</u> Work with consultant to develop an implementation process for selected option and begin implementation	WG	Mar - 23	180	Funding for Consultant/WG time and effort

STRATEGY 9:

Enhance resources for employee training and development

Strategy Lead: Labarron McClendon, Human Resources Director

Strategy Impacts: Leveraging existing and creating new opportunities to ensure employees have the appropriate resources and benefits to do their jobs and feel appropriately compensated. If implemented correctly, the result will be increased employee morale, more efficient operations, and better performance utility-wide.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>New</u> Initiate Market Study to propose updates to the Uniform Pay Plan ¹ and bring wages up to industry standards	Jackie Hadley-Boatman, Lenia Segura	Mar-22	180	Consultant Support (budgeted 2022)
<u>New</u> Research options to create Employee Development Fund to allow flexibility in budgeting for growth opportunities like competitions, conferences, and tuition reimbursement	TBD Finance/CS	Mar-22	200	Staff Time
<u>Underway</u> Continue to communicate the value and criticality of work to employees across the organization through improved onboarding, employee tours, and educational opportunities	Employee Relations / Miera Moore	Ongoing	180	Comms/GSO support Staff Time
<u>Underway</u> Create employee profiles that summarize compensation including wages and benefits to communicate complete package of benefits pay	Sonji Skipper	Jun-22	TBD	Consultant Support Staff Time

¹ Uniform Pay Plan changes must be approved by the Civil Service Commission.

STRATEGY 10:**Motivate and train supervisors and leaders to improve employee and team performance****Strategy Lead:** Veronica Washington, Employee Relations Director

Strategy Impacts: Equipping supervisors and managers with the knowledge and resources they need to best support and lead their teams will increase morale for both supervisors and their employees. If implemented successfully, this strategy will also increase employee accountability by creating more capacity for performance management among supervisors, thereby enhancing organizational efficiency overall.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>New</u> Inventory existing leadership development and training requirements	Veronica Washington	Mar-22	60	Personnel Training Vendor
<u>New</u> Identify required skills and competencies for supervisors and leadership positions	Veronica Washington	Jun-22	60	Personnel Training Vendor
<u>Underway</u> Create and deploy support and performance management resources for supervisors and managers (e.g., presentations, training, etc.)	Veronica Washington	Ongoing	Ongoing	Additional support from managers and staff to utilize existing resources
<u>New</u> Identify internal and external leadership training and development opportunities	Veronica Washington	Jun-22	60	Personnel Training Vendor
<u>Underway</u> Identify staff who do well and can train others on performance reviews/management	Veronica Washington	Ongoing	Ongoing	Personnel

STRATEGY 11:

Strengthen internal communication and information sharing to increase collaboration across departments

Strategy Lead: Corwin Washington, Environmental Project Manager

Strategy Impacts: Enhanced internal communication will lead to better coordination and collaboration across departments as well as greater capacity to identify issues and opportunities across operational areas. Different departments have different areas of focus and access to different technology tools and areas of expertise, which may create barriers to collaboration, but also creates opportunities for shared initiatives that utilize these diverse strengths.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>New</u> Inventory internal communication channels	Grace Birch/HDR	Mar-22	120	Staff time
<u>New</u> Work with HDR Engineering to develop an internal communication strategy	Grace Birch	Mar-22	120	HDR is already under contract
<u>Ongoing</u> Maintain a complete staff directory for intranet and emergency call trees	Employee Relations/HR	Mar-22	120	Staff time
<u>New</u> Develop corporate norms around email responses (out of office responses, time to respond service levels, etc.)	Corwin Washington	Mar-22	120	Upper Management support and participation
<u>New</u> Assign personnel in each department to ensure that project updates are current in shared folder to support inter-departmental collaboration	Becca Johnsey	Mar-22	120	Department Head support and mandates More computers Personnel to type notes from log book into electronic document for redundancy and quick searchability

STRATEGY 12:

Improve knowledge capture, transfer, and succession planning

Strategy Lead: Irma Plummer, Director of Economically Disadvantaged Business Program

Strategy Impacts: Succession planning will help ensure that SWNBO has the resources in place to minimize the impact of employee turnover. The impact of this strategy will be to retain the knowledge held by SWNBO's long-standing employees even after employee turnover. Institutional knowledge capture helps train new employees, provides a reference for existing employees, and helps ensure that operations are consistent with best practices. Succession planning also helps reduce the financial and operational impact of staff turnover.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>New</u> Research how to tweak the Deferred Retirement Option Plan (DROP) program to support and enhance succession, including reforming eligibility requirements, knowledge capture, and reducing hiring duration	Yolanda Grinstead	Mar-22	120	State agencies, peer organizations, best practices resources
<u>New</u> Develop a policy for succession planning to strengthen accountability, especially with DROP positions	Veronica Washington	Jun-22	180	Collaboration with the Pension Committee
<u>New</u> Adapt/enhance the current exit interview process to capture knowledge from departing employees	Veronica Washington/ Byron Iverson	Mar-22	ongoing	Staff assignments
<u>New</u> Consider a policy to freeze open positions in a department when there is a double encumbrance under DROP to reduce budget impact	Dave Callahan	Mar-22	180	Coordination with Budget
<u>New</u> Train key personnel in each department on how to write Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)	Christy Harowski	Jun-22	180	Management training course offered twice per year
<u>Underway</u> Resume mid-level manager/supervisor training	HR	Ongoing	Ongoing	Annual Human Resources initiative
<u>New</u> Assemble metrics to ascertain retire/resignation vulnerability (agencywide and within departments)	HR	Apr-22	45	Staff assignment and/or consultant assist
<u>Underway</u> Continue to advance higher Civil Service pay for critical positions	LaBarron McClendon	Ongoing	Ongoing	Collaboration with Civil Service
<u>New</u> Implement a mandatory reduction in repetitive overtime by requiring hire-ins	Dave Callahan	Mar-22	Ongoing	Staff time



FOCUS AREA

Customer Service Excellence and Stakeholder Engagement

Continuously meet and exceed the service needs of our customers and proactively communicate and engage stakeholders

FOCUS AREA CHAMPION:

Rene Gonzalez

Chief Customer Service Officer

STRATEGY 13:

Foster a culture of customer service throughout the organization

Strategy Lead: Rene Gonzalez, Chief Customer Service Officer

Strategy Impacts: A culture of customer service means developing the workforce's skill set in engaging with customers. This not only increases staff's confidence in their ability to assist customers in a variety of situations but also enhances the customer experience. In order for this strategy to be successful, new employees should receive customer service training as part of their onboarding and existing staff should receive continuous training. Success also depends on staff's willingness to adapt, grow, and be accountable for their part in creating a culture of customer service.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>New</u> Inventory existing training and technology used to support customer service representatives	Nichol Green	Mar-22	60	Staff time
<u>New</u> Conduct a gap analysis between current and desired skills and competencies	Rene Gonzalez (+CS Leadership)	Apr-22	60	Staff time
<u>New</u> Identify and deploy training and tools that can help bridge the gap, including refresher training	Rene Gonzalez (+CS Leadership)	Apr-22	60	Staff time
<u>New</u> Create an on-boarding program for all employees focused on customer service	Matt LaFrance	Mar-22	90, then ongoing	Staff time Collaboration across departments
<u>New</u> Deliver regular refreshers and share expectations for all employees in customer-facing positions	Rene Gonzalez (+CS Leadership)	May-22	Ongoing	Staff time
<u>New</u> Create a trainer position for Customer Service	Rene Gonzalez	Mar-22	60	Cost and budget Collaboration across departments Staff time
<u>New</u> Implement a continuous improvement program in Customer Service	Rene Gonzalez, Gabe Bordenave	Mar-22	60	Staff time

STRATEGY 14:**Expand convenience systems and capabilities to improve self-service options for customers**

Strategy Lead: Waldeen Mitchell, Contact Center Supervisor

Strategy Impacts: Customer self-service options are beneficial for both customers and staff. Customers have the benefit of convenience as well as fast service. Staff do not have to spend as much capacity on straightforward tasks, allowing them to devote more time to higher-level issues, work-planning, and other responsibilities. The result is increased efficiency and productivity, as well as enhanced customer service.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>New</u> Investigate additional customer payment options	Tiffany Julien	Apr-22	60	Staff time Research and analysis
<u>Underway</u> Procure Verint support for Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software	Gabe Bordenave	Mar-22	90, then ongoing	Staff time
<u>Underway</u> Increase availability of multi-lingual resources (website, printed materials, etc.)	Waldeen Mitchell	Mar-22	90	Staff time Contractual terms Potentially cost
<u>New</u> Evaluate opportunities to expand and promote Fidelity Express and increase customer payment locations	Stephanie Thomas	Mar-22	90	Staff time Contractual terms Potentially cost
<u>New</u> Implement a mobile customer service center	Rene Gonzalez, Kendra Jones	Mar-22	60	Staff time

STRATEGY 15:

Elevate core customer service delivery performance

Strategy Lead: Monique Chatters, Utilities Meter Service Manager

Strategy Impacts: In order for customer service delivery to be as successful as possible, it is important to ensure that the core aspects of the service, such as communication to customers and meter reading, are as effective and accurate as possible. Implementation of this strategy helps cultivate a strong customer service foundation on which SWBNO can build future initiatives.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Identify and procure vehicles to resource Meter Readers	Rene Gonzalez, Monique Chatters	Apr-21	550	Automobile chips
<u>New</u> Create customer-facing resources to help customers understand high and estimated bills	Patricia Davenport	Mar-22	Ongoing	Staff time Meter Reading Billing Staff Member
<u>New</u> Revisit the meter reading incentive programs	Monique Chatters, Patricia Davenport, Andrea El-Mansura	Apr-22	180	Meter Reading Human Resources Civil Service
<u>New</u> Develop and deploy customer service surveys - transactional and full customer base	Rene Gonzalez	Mar-22	90	Money Staff time
<u>Underway</u> Implement a quality control/audit program for meter reading accuracy	Andrea El-Mansura	Ongoing	Ongoing	Staff time Department Field Supervisors
<u>Underway</u> Review and streamline the customer dispute process	Tiffany Julien, Chris Robertson	Ongoing	180	Staff time Money for hardware Possible Cogsdale assistance outside of the support structure
<u>Underway</u> Share information to appropriately set customer expectations with regard to customer service	Rene Gonzalez, Grace Birch	Ongoing	180	Staff Time CS / Comms coordination

STRATEGY 16:**Advance proactive communication and outreach programs**

Strategy Lead: Grace Birch, Interim Director of Communications

Strategy Impacts: Effective implementation of this strategy involves educating the public on SWBNO Customer Service's offerings and processes and proactively communicating to customers. Consistent, transparent communication builds trust with customers. If customers trust the process, they will be less likely to dispute bills, which will make the process of issuing bills and collecting revenue more efficient.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Identify organizational communication and outreach needs and resources	Grace Birch	Sep-21	60	Communications and HDR Funding for implementation costs
<u>New</u> Develop a gap assessment and communication roadmap for internal and external customers	Grace Birch	Mar-22	60	Internal communications plan Communications and HDR Approval by the Chief Customer Service Officer (CCSO) Funding for implementation costs
<u>New</u> Identify department-specific content creators and message ambassadors	Grace Birch	Mar-22	30	Communications ID ambassadors CCSO time
<u>New</u> Inventory external stakeholders and use this information to create tailored messaging	Grace Birch	Mar-22	30	Communications to collect assets HDR to create a stylebook Funding for printing costs
<u>Underway</u> Develop and deliver a comprehensive communication outreach plan	Grace Birch	Sep-21	60	To be determined, based on scope defined in the 2022 budget
<u>Underway</u> Develop customer-facing dashboards with data that is meaningful for them	Grace Birch	Mar-22	90	IT and HDR time



FOCUS AREA

Infrastructure Resiliency and Reliability

Improve efficiency and resiliency of current and future infrastructure by leveraging partnerships and innovative approaches to funding and sustainable design

FOCUS AREA CHAMPION:

Ron Spooner

General Superintendent

STRATEGY 17:

Shift maintenance planning and workflows from reactive to preventative through comprehensive asset management

Strategy Lead: Fred Tharp, Networks Chief
David Cappel, Support Services Director

Strategy Impacts: More reliable infrastructure can be achieved through disaster planning, real-time updates of infrastructure repairs and replacements, development of a repository for asset inspection, scheduling of asset repairs, and the integration of asset mapping with asset attributes. If implemented successfully, the result of this strategy will be less reliance on contractors for maintenance activities and a reduction in employee downtime because of the implementation of a comprehensive preventive maintenance schedule.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Identify requirements through a needs assessment for a new asset management system	Kaitlin Tymrak	Mar-22	60	Consultant support
<u>New</u> Partner with the City of New Orleans to procure an asset management work order system	Tyler Antrup	Mar-22	300	Staff time
<u>New</u> Inventory all assets and create comprehensive asset registry	Ron Spooner	Software Required	To Be Determined	Asset management system Trainable personnel Staff time Initial consultant support
<u>New</u> Train employees to update asset attributes and fill in gaps in registry	HR	Software Required	To Be Determined	Asset management system Trainable personnel Staff time Consultant support
<u>New</u> Inventory key business processes related to asset management and maintenance practices	Ron Spooner, Kaitlin Tymrak	Software Required	To Be Determined	Asset management system Trainable personnel Staff time
<u>New</u> Identify desired employee skillsets and recruit/train employees to meet future needs	HR, Fred Tharp, David Cappel	Software Required	To Be Determined	Asset management system Trainable personnel Funding

STRATEGY 18:

Replace and renew aged infrastructure using integrated approaches

Strategy Lead: Steven Giang, Network Engineering Department Head

Strategy Impacts: The use of integrated approaches to renew aging infrastructure will result in less reliance on reactive maintenance and greater implementation of proactive maintenance structures. This will allow maintenance staff to focus on residential needs and emergency issues. An asset management system and an infrastructure replacement model will also allow leaders and other stakeholders to gain a better understanding of facilities issues and which facilities require replacement or improvement.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Catalogue resource needs across water, wastewater, and stormwater drainage systems	Kaitlin Tymrak	Mar-22	730	Staff time Money Software Management
<u>Underway</u> Ensure sufficient resources for integrated planning efforts by communicating needs and value to the Board, stakeholders, and the public	Ron Spooner	Mar-22	Ongoing	Staff time

STRATEGY 19:

Successfully deliver all critical capital improvement projects by improving collaboration with project partners

Strategy Lead: Chris Bergeron, Civil and Mechanical Engineering Department Head

Strategy Impacts: Successfully delivering critical capital improvement projects means finishing projects on time and on or under budget. The impact of successful implementation of this initiative will be fewer change orders and more accurate budgets. Successful implementation depends on organizational buy-in as well as the ability to attract and retain talent.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When	Necessary Resources		
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Finish existing capital projects	Chief of Engineering ²	Ongoing	900	Project managers Capital funding for existing obligations
<u>New</u> Conduct an assessment of contract management process to improve consistency and streamline processes	Mark Van Hala	May-22	180	Dedicated staff for assessment Improvements to internal processes
<u>New</u> Create designated resources for capital project management and resources (Explore PDU becoming a permanent project management group)	Monique Rainey	Mar-22	550	Operations & Maintenance (O&M) funding for additional personnel (PDU is FEMA-reimbursable) Incentive to retain staff as PDU staff is unclassified and paid at higher rates than the comparable classified positions
<u>New</u> Develop standard tools (e.g., flow charts) for contract management	Matthew Movahed	Sep-22	365	Dedicated staff for assessment and improvements to internal processes Requires Tactic 2 to be mostly completed
<u>Underway</u> Review and assess existing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)/processes to identify gaps and areas for improvement	Kaitlin Tymrak	Aug-20	780	Dedicated staff for assessment and improvements to internal processes

² Position vacant as of December 2021

STRATEGY 20:

Respond to climate change through innovation and green infrastructure projects

Strategy Lead: Ann Wilson, Environmental Affairs Director

Strategy Impacts: The impact of successfully implementing green infrastructure projects in response to climate change is more resilient operations and processes that can quickly adapt to emergency events, as well as more efficient disaster recovery. SWBNO will realize cost savings and be able to deliver services to the City reliably, even during major client events.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Assess weak links during actual emergency operations	Kirk Burrell	Annual	Ongoing	Staff time Department cooperation on sending data back to Emergency Management
<u>Underway</u> Use the assessment data to refine acceptable risk levels	Jason Higginbotham	Aug-19	365	Staff time Committee cooperation on attending the meetings and providing feedback
<u>Underway</u> Complete the sewerage model	Steven Giang	Sep-14	120	Stantec contracted support
<u>Underway</u> Update models and implement plans for stronger storms	Jason Higginbotham	Annual	Ongoing	Staff time Money for upgrading the Weather Stations and services
<u>New</u> Develop strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to target levels	Felicia Bergeron	Mar-22	100	Planners Research on other similar facilities Inventory on all greenhouse gas-producing assets



FOCUS AREA

Organizational and Operational Improvement

Optimize organizational structure, alignment, and capacity to ensure safe operations and efficient service delivery

FOCUS AREA CHAMPION:

Kaitlin Tymrak

Business Services Lead

STRATEGY 21:

Evaluate and modify organizational structure and staffing levels to improve service delivery

Strategy Lead: Kaitlin Tymrak, Business Services Lead

Strategy Impacts: Effective organizations rely on clearly defined organizational structures that clearly define the scopes of different functional groups and ensure that managers and supervisors have appropriate spans of control. Analyzing SWBNO's organizational structure will help the organization identify gaps and areas of overlap among functional groups, allowing for clearer definition of roles and responsibilities and of staffing needs, cost and time savings, and more efficient decision-making.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Complete</u> Complete the General Superintendent's Office (GSO) structure assessment to realign staff with needs	Kaitlin Tymrak	Mar-21	90	Relationship with Civil Service
<u>Underway</u> Complete job studies for Deputy General Superintendents and USSA/SEDM/USA/EDM level for GSO	Miera Moore	Aug-21	180	Staff support to write job studies (Business Services and Human Resources [HR])
<u>Underway</u> Obtain approval from civil service for Deputy General Superintendents and USSA/USA/SEDM/EDM levels	LaBarron McClendon	Oct-21	180	Relationship with Civil Service
<u>Underway</u> Develop Project Management series classifications and obtain approval from Civil Service	Rebecca Johnsey	Nov-21	365	Staff support to write job studies (Business Services and HR)
<u>New</u> Establish a qualification/training program and transition plan for staff assigned to power/pumping operations (from current operating paradigm to West Power Complex)	Kaitlin Tymrak	Mar-22	365	External consultant (obtained through the Request for Proposals process) to develop the program
<u>New</u> Targeted recruitment to fill positions	Miera Moore	Mar-22	180	Staff time
<u>New</u> Prioritize future assessments of other Executive Departments, utilizing the GSO structure assessment as model	Ghassan Korban	Mar-22	180	Input from Leadership Team

STRATEGY 22:**Enhance and elevate safety culture**

Strategy Lead: Chad Fava, Safety Manager

Strategy Impacts: Safety is a guiding principle for all of SWBNO's actions. Enhanced safety training will equip staff to do their jobs as safely as possible, resulting in cost savings and improved worker welfare due to a reduction in the number of injuries and days off work, as well as enhanced employee morale. Successful implementation of a safety program will require effort from safety advocates at all levels of the organization as well as funding for staff resources to develop and implement the program.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Review the existing 'Safety Liaison Program' for effectiveness and impact	Chad Fava	Oct-21	90	Staff time
<u>Underway</u> Review structure and composition of the Safety Department in order to align with actual and future needs and to achieve the vision of the Department	Chad Fava	Oct-21	90	Staff time
<u>Underway</u> Establish a safety rewards program	Chad Fava	Oct-21	90	Budget for awards and purchasing/legal support
<u>New</u> Develop a set of Safety Guiding Principles for the organization and present them to leadership for buy-in and widespread communication	Chad Fava	Mar-22	365	Executive support
<u>New</u> Collect feedback on what safety and environmental compliance information would be valuable to include in new employee orientation	Sonji Skipper	Mar-22	180	Feedback from Safety and Environmental Department heads
<u>New</u> Develop a plan on safety orientation for new employees and present the plan to leadership	Sonji Skipper	Mar-22	180	Support from Safety Department

STRATEGY 23:

Implement programs and training related to change management, process standardization, and continuous improvement

Strategy Lead: Jackie Spencer, Risk Manager

Strategy Impacts: Regular review of programs and processes is an essential tool for ensuring that the programs are functioning as effectively and efficiently as possible, and that implementation of the program is standardized throughout the organization. Implementing continuous improvement programs, as well as change management programs to oversee implementation of new processes, increases consistency and efficiency in both internal and public-facing operations.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>Underway</u> Fund and fill the Continuous Improvement Officer (CIO) position	Christy Harowski	Oct-21	180	Budget authority Civil Service approval
<u>New</u> Create a business analyst position to support data gathering, monitoring, and reporting (supports continuous improvement and dashboards)	Kaitlin Tymrak	Mar-22	365	Feedback from departments
<u>New</u> Identify up to 5 high yield/low effort processes that can be reviewed and improved in the next 12 months	Jackie Spencer	Mar-22	180	Managers to allow staff to participate in small groups
<u>New</u> Identify small teams to review and improve the five high yield/low effort processes	Jackie Spencer	Jul-22	180	Feedback from other focus group leaders
<u>New</u> Gather input across strategic plan focus group to build inventory	Jackie Spencer	Mar-22	180	CIO position filled
<u>New</u> Determine the approach to inventory existing processes and identify gaps across the organization	Jackie Spencer	Oct-22	180	Budget authority Recruitment support from HR

STRATEGY 24:

Develop and share organizational performance metrics internally and externally

Strategy Lead: Ann Wilson, Environmental Affairs Director

Strategy Impacts: Developing and sharing performance metrics utilizing easily understood graphs and charts increases awareness of SWBNO's projects, processes, and services. Utilizing dashboards and other common reporting tools aims to collect and consolidate data in a consistent and effective manner. It will be important to set specific performance targets so that we can monitor process, illustrate progress towards targets, and compare ourselves to other similar utilities.

Tactics (12 to 18 Months)	Who and When			Necessary Resources
	Tactic Owner	Start Date	Duration (Days)	
<u>New</u> Solicit feedback from the Leadership Team (or designees) on what data they feel is important to share internally and externally for performance management	Ann Wilson	Mar-22	90	Staff time
<u>New</u> Based on responses from the Leadership Team, inventory existing data availability and data location	Ann Wilson	Jun-22	180	Feedback and cooperation from departments
<u>New</u> Identify specific measures to benchmark against the industry and peer utilities	Tyler Antrup	Apr-22	180	Access to national industry resources (WEF/AWWA memberships)
<u>New</u> Identify targets for performance data shared via dashboards	Ann Wilson	Oct-22	180	Industry guidance and feedback from departments
<u>New</u> Track the strategic plan implementation process	Tyler Antrup	Mar-22	365	Funding for additional staff/consultant support Continuous Improvement Office creation



FINAL DRAFT

Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans



**2022-2027
STRATEGIC PLAN**





Message from the Executive Director

To the people who call New Orleans home, to the millions of people who visit each year, and to the businesses that help our community to thrive – we hear you.

In its long history serving this community, the Sewerage and Water Board has been an innovator and leader, but in order to focus on the future, we must recognize our current shortcomings. The teamwork and resilience that allowed us to continue to come together to address the devastating effects of hurricanes and climate change remain, but our progress is compromised with each of these major disruptions.

It can be argued that as a city and as a utility we have been operating in a reactive manner which has compromised our ability to look to the future. Each day we are faced with repairing our infrastructure in the face of limited resources and little time to waste. The last several decades have been marked by underinvestment, not only in our infrastructure, but also our technology and our workforce; and the impacts are being felt by our customers in the form of infrastructure failures, increased rates, irregular bills and frequent organizational turnover. While these are common issues, faced by most urban water systems in the United States, our customers deserve better.

Our challenges are well-defined, but not insurmountable. Over the last few years, we've established a new leadership team with the expertise and energy to change the course of our utility. Transformational change takes time; however, our efforts are already underway, and

you'll see many of them featured in this plan. Efforts like upgrading to smart water meters will give customers more information about water consumption, catch leaks faster, and most importantly ensure billing accuracy. Installing green stormwater infrastructure is a proven path to mitigate flooding and reduce the stress on our drainage system; and increasing the resiliency of our electrical generation systems and pursuing low-cost funding options through the EPA's infrastructure loan programs are steps to secure our future resilience. And, as you'll also see, there's more to come – we have big plans for the next five years across each of six critical focus areas.

Through this combination of new and existing initiatives, dedicated leadership, engaged employees and a supportive Board of Directors, SWBNO is committed to improving its operations and addressing its longstanding challenges. I'm proud of the level of commitment and input that we received as we developed this plan, which created this roadmap for our path forward and seeks to meet the needs of our customers, now and in the future. We will continue our work to become a model utility that earns and holds the trust and confidence of our customers, community, and partners with reliable and sustainable water services.

We have heard you. This is our commitment to action for you and for our future generations.

Ghassan Korban
Executive Director of SWBNO



Message from the Mayor

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am thrilled to introduce this Strategic Plan that sets a course for improving the Sewerage and Water Board. When I took office four years ago, I promised our residents that restoring trust in SWBNO would be my top priority. In that time, we've brought in a new leadership team, helped secure a historic agreement to dedicate our fair share of tourism dollars to SWBNO's infrastructure, and leveraged State and Federal monies to create a resilient power system for our pumping and water systems. This is our time.

When Hurricane Ida struck our region as a Category 4 storm this summer, this utility was able to sustain on its own self-generated power and continued to provide our residents the safe water they needed as temperatures rose. That would not have been possible without bold leadership, dedicated staff, and millions of dollars spent to harden the power supply for precisely this situation – they did exactly what they were supposed to do. This is proof, as clear as it can be, that we can rely on the things in which we invest. When the dollars are there to build and maintain large scale projects they hold up, literally.

Together, we are championing sustainable solutions and utilizing federal investments to rapidly implement green, blue and traditional grey infrastructure improvements in a city with some of the oldest, most neglected streets and deteriorating water, sewer and drainage lines in the country. We are learning to live with water in New Orleans and that is evident through investments in these projects that allow us to utilize parks, vacant lands, and innovative streetscaping to hold rain during severe weather events while our pumping system catches up.

While we've made tremendous progress on some of our biggest challenges, we still face several years of hard work to ensure this utility is the model we all know it can be. The effects of climate change, which we feel already, paired with the historic underinvestment in our infrastructure citywide has left us in an especially difficult position. The time to kick the can down the road is over, and this utility and its Board of Directors is dedicated to picking it up and moving us forward. I can't think of a better way to help us do this than implementing all six focus areas in this strategic plan.

As we move toward implementation, we thank and celebrate the dedicated employees of this utility for their extensive involvement in developing this plan while continuing to do the essential work they do every day. I am confident that the future of this utility and this city is brighter today that is has been in a very long time.

LaToya Cantrell
Mayor of the City of New Orleans
President of SWBNO

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Introduction

The Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans (SWBNO), like many utilities, has long faced challenges - operational, financial, geographic, and workforce-based, to name a few. In 2021, the utility initiated a strategic planning process to serve as a catalyst for organizational change and to guide the next phase of rebuilding the organization for the future.

The strategic framework included in this document represents both the challenges faced by the utility and SWBNO's response. It will guide organizational goals, support budget development, and provide a structure for regular progress updates to ensure that progress is being made against the organization's long-term focus areas over the next five years.



This is New

The City of New Orleans is located in Louisiana on the Mississippi River, near the Gulf of Mexico. The city has an estimated population of 383,997 according to 2020 Census data, and occupies 180 square miles including the urban center, residential neighborhoods on both sides of the Mississippi River, and the Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge. Since the early settlement in 1718, the city's location has been vital to its character and growth. Initially, the city provided

trade access to much of North America through the Mississippi River and the rest of the world through the Gulf of Mexico. Now, through these channels and access to major railways and roadways, as well as close proximity to the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, the city provides multimodal connectivity for international commerce. New Orleans' strategic location along the Mississippi River and unique culture continue to be its strongest assets.

The City, which celebrated its Tricentennial in 2018, is known worldwide for its unique architecture, food, music, and its dynamic cross-cultural and multilingual heritage. This culture was developed over nearly 100 years of French and Spanish influence. The Louisiana Purchase helped establish New Orleans as the principal Southern City as a result of commodities trading from surrounding sugar and cotton plantations.



Orleans

At the turn of the 20th century, New Orleans reinvented itself modernizing transportation, ports, and developing a manufacturing sector. During this time, the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans emerged as a global model in governance reform and innovation, combining water, sewer, and drainage under a single, independent, and public agency.

The population of the city today is both young, with a median age of 38 years, and diverse. According to the "US Census 2019 American Community Survey," the population is 59.5 percent Black or African American, 33.9 percent White, 2.9 percent Asian, 0.2 percent American Indian and Alaska Native, 1.9 percent two or more races, and 5.5 percent Hispanic or Latino.



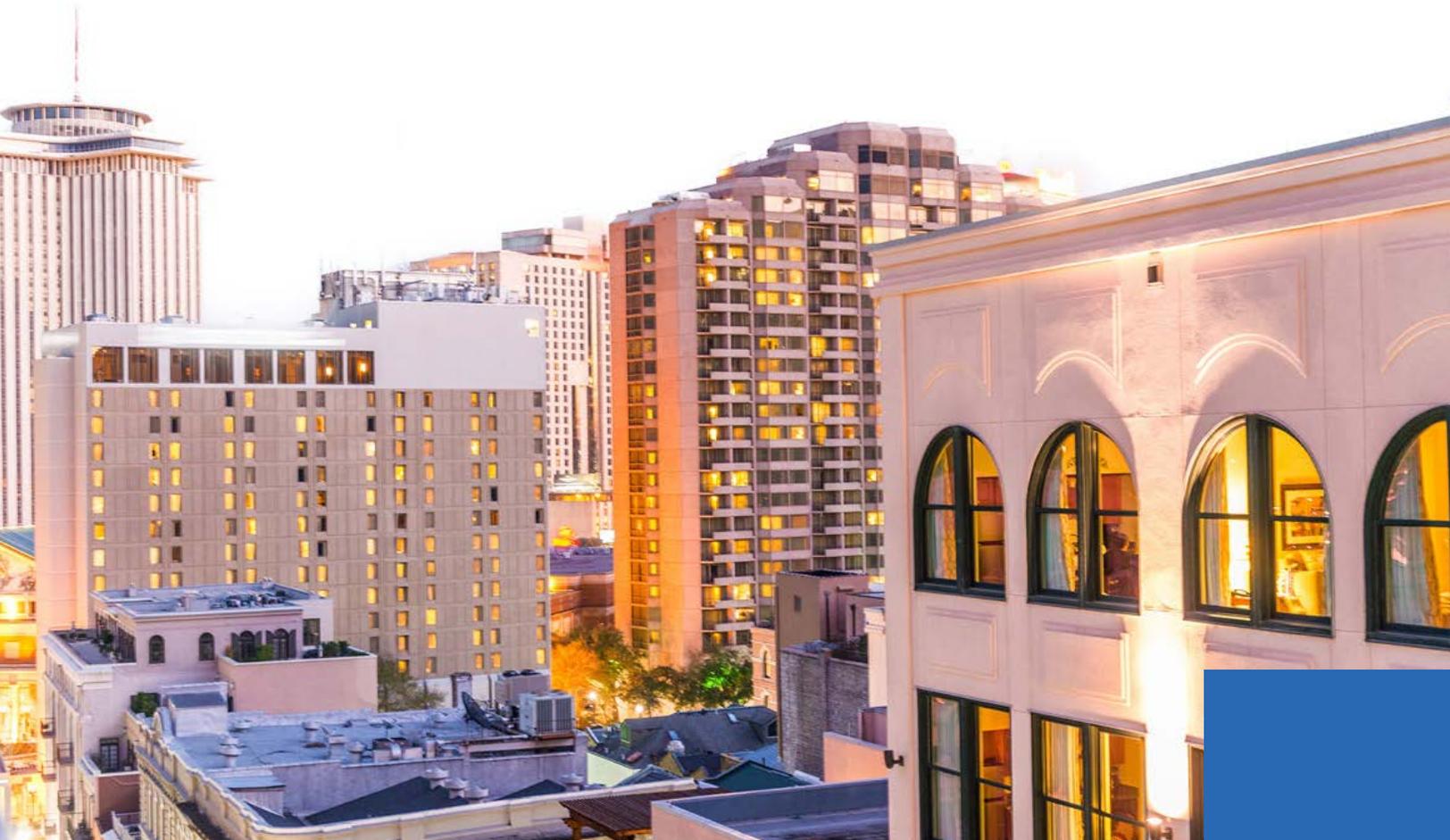
This diverse mix of people built the culture of New Orleans, making it one of the most unique cities in the world.





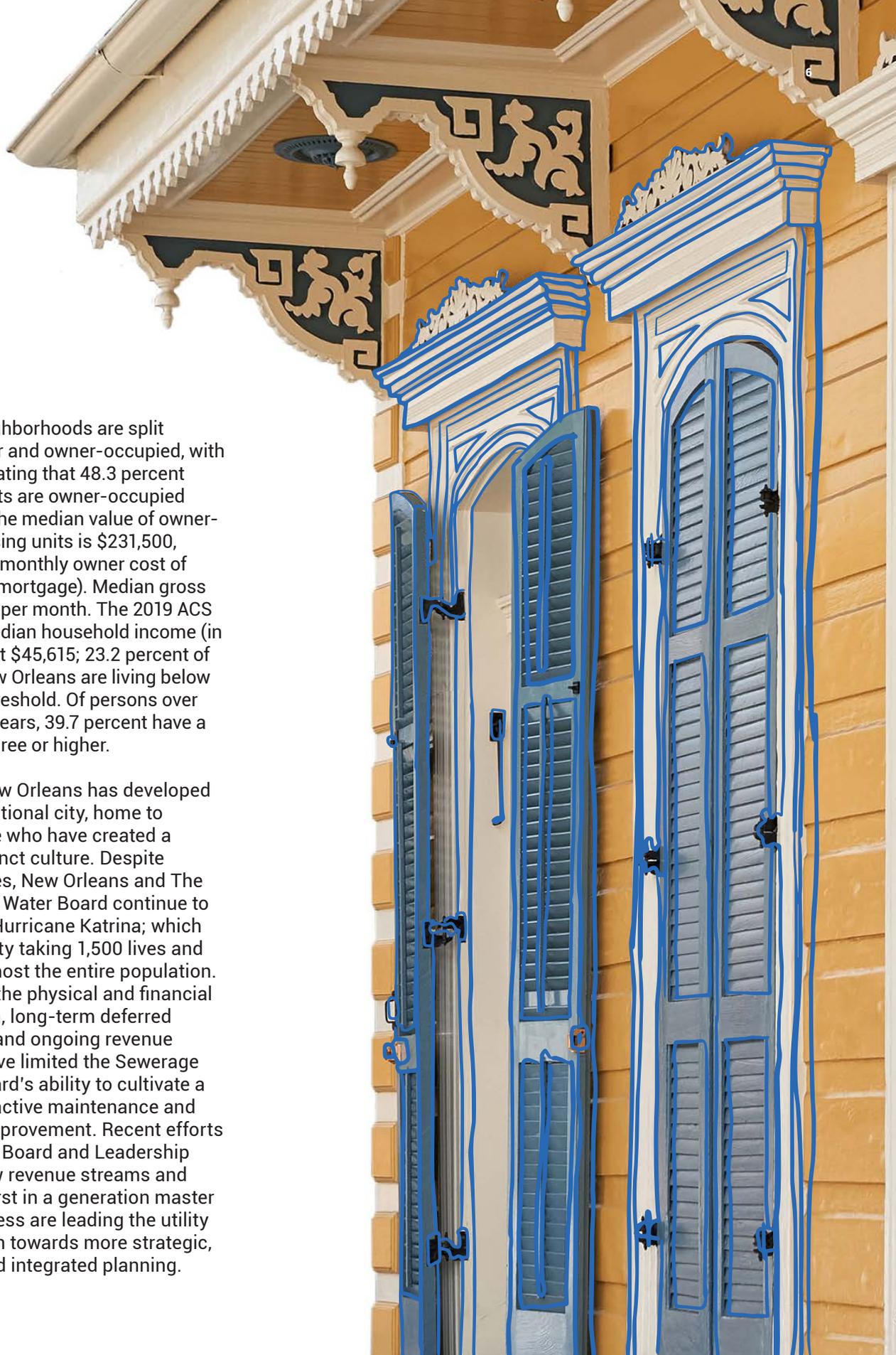
As New Orleans has grown, the city has emphasized the retention of its historic buildings and distinct architectural style. Today, New Orleans is home to both centuries-old shotgun homes and modern skyscrapers.

The major economic sectors in the city are energy, advanced manufacturing, international trade, healthcare, and tourism, with the largest companies including the Ochsner Health System, Tulane University, Entergy Corporation, Whitney Holding Corporation, Lockheed Martin, and Boh Bros Construction. The Port of New Orleans is the 4th largest port in the United States, and also hosts the 6th largest Cruise Ship Terminal, which support nearly 20,000 direct jobs and generates approximately \$4 billion in output locally. The presence of universities, hospitals, legal firms, and other professional services further diversifies the city's economic base. The success of each of these economic drivers can only be supported with high performing water, sewer, and drainage infrastructure. Tourism is a driving force of the City's economy. Attractions such as the French Quarter, Mardi Gras events, festivals, cultural arts performances, professional sports, and special events draw millions of visitors to the City annually. Visitors and residents alike enjoy the multitude of local restaurants, art galleries, boutiques and antique stores, and live music. Prior to the Covid-19 related slowdown in tourism, the City saw nearly 18 million visitors annually, with a \$8.7 billion contribution to the economy.



The City's neighborhoods are split between renter and owner-occupied, with the ACS estimating that 48.3 percent of housing units are owner-occupied (2015-2019). The median value of owner-occupied housing units is \$231,500, with a median monthly owner cost of \$1,714 (with a mortgage). Median gross rent was \$998 per month. The 2019 ACS reports the median household income (in 2019 dollars) at \$45,615; 23.2 percent of persons in New Orleans are living below the poverty threshold. Of persons over the age of 25 years, 39.7 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher.

The City of New Orleans has developed into an international city, home to diverse people who have created a deep and distinct culture. Despite their successes, New Orleans and The Sewerage and Water Board continue to recover from Hurricane Katrina; which ravaged the city taking 1,500 lives and displacing almost the entire population. In addition to the physical and financial loss of Katrina, long-term deferred maintenance and ongoing revenue challenges have limited the Sewerage and Water Board's ability to cultivate a culture of proactive maintenance and continuous improvement. Recent efforts by the utility's Board and Leadership to identify new revenue streams and undertake a first in a generation master planning process are leading the utility in the direction towards more strategic, innovative, and integrated planning.



Sewerage and Water Board

The history of New Orleans has been shaped by water, and the Sewerage and Water Board has played an integral role since its founding. When New Orleans was initially settled by the French in 1718, the settlement was located on high ground adjacent to the Mississippi River, just 14 feet above sea level. The topography meant the city was subject to periodic flooding from the Mississippi River, Lake Pontchartrain, and the high intensity rainfall in the region. Residents were often forced to wade through streets or be rowed in small boats to take care of daily business. Added to the unique flooding challenges were the typical challenges of a growing 19th century city: the need for clean drinking water, access to water for fire protection, and safe sewage collection and disposal. City leaders recognized that further growth would depend on addressing these issues and began planning for the drainage, water, and sewerage systems in 1893.

In 1896, the New Orleans Drainage Commission was organized to implement the master drainage plan for the city. Three years later, at the request of voters, the Sewerage and Water Board was authorized by the Louisiana Legislature to construct, operate, and maintain a water treatment and distribution system and a sanitary sewerage system for the city. Then, in 1903, the Drainage Commission merged with the Sewerage and Water Board, consolidating the drainage, water, and sewerage programs under one agency for more efficient operations. This combined organization maintained all drainage, water, and sewerage responsibility until 1991, when management of the local drainage system, including 1,600 miles of smaller drainage pipes and more than 85,000 catch basins, was transferred to the city's Department of Public Works.

Today, the Sewerage and Water Board continues to serve as a model for "one water" governance and is directed by an 11-member Board, consisting of the Mayor, the chair of the Public Works, Sanitation and Environment Committee of the New Orleans City Council or their designee, two members of the Board of Liquidation, and seven citizen members who meet various expertise and area-distribution requirements. This governing body is responsible for overseeing the utility's operations and management, setting policy, and proposing rates and bond issuances to the Board of Liquidation and City Council.



The men and women of the utility faced this challenge with experience, with dedication, and more importantly resolve. It was amazing to watch our team calmly – and with a lot of confidence – prepare for the challenges of the storm.

When we say 'All Hands on Deck,' that means in excess of 400 employees reporting to duty... But one thing that cannot be lost on us is that our folks left their families at home or sent them away to be safe and then reported to work, not knowing how long they were going to be at work, stranded, because we didn't know the impact of the storm. And again, that is true dedication to leave your family... there are not enough words to acknowledge that sacrifice.

Ghassan Korban
Executive Director of the
Sewerage and Water Board

Spotlight on Hurricane Ida and the SWBNO

On August 29, 2021, Hurricane Ida became the second-most damaging and intense hurricane to make landfall in the State of Louisiana, behind only Hurricane Katrina in 2005. While New Orleans' levees worked as designed, nearly all of the city and more than a million people in Louisiana lost power, due to major damage to transmission lines. Power was not fully restored for more than a week after the storm.

With generators serving as New Orleans' only power source, there were significant concerns for SWBNO's pumping system, which relies on electricity to power drainage. Prior to the storm, Turbines 4, 5, and 6, as well as additional back-up generators, were in place to support 96 drainage pumps around the city. When all Entergy power was lost, SWBNO teams shifted quickly to self-generated power sources, which allowed the utility to continuously drain stormwater and provide uninterrupted drinking water to the city. For nearly a week after the storm, SWBNO was the only water utility in the Metropolitan area supplying potable water to its residents and was also supplementing the needs of surrounding communities in partnership with the State of Louisiana.

As in Hurricane Katrina, SWBNO employees continued to staff the emergency operations center and triage emerging situations throughout the storm and after. Damages sustained during the storm brought several sewer pumping stations offline, which caused back-ups. As soon as the city was safe to traverse, teams brought mobile, rotating generators to the pump stations to relieve the pressure and prevent overflows.

SWBNO's response to Hurricane Ida and its ability to provide uninterrupted service through severe power outages demonstrates the progress that the organization has made over the last several years.



Operational Overview

The Sewerage and Water Board is an organization employing over 1,300 high-performing individuals who work together to produce drinking water, clean wastewater, and move stormwater for 383,000 residents. On average, customers consume 112.52 million gallons of water every day produced at two water plants in Carrollton and Algiers, which pull source water from the Mississippi River. The two wastewater treatment plants, the East Bank Plant and West Bank Plant, collect, treat, and safely return up to 147 million gallons of clean water a day to the environment. The drainage system boasts 99 major drainage pumps, 21 constant-duty pumps to manage groundwater intrusion in its canals, 24 pump stations, 200 miles of canals, and another 1,500 miles of underground drainage pipes. Uniquely, the Sewerage and Water Board produces its own power to run the majority of water and drainage pumps that are essential to the city's system.

Living in a city surrounded by water will undoubtedly present a unique set of challenges for any utility. Through this strategic plan, the Sewerage and Water Board is committing to focusing on addressing challenges and adapting to changes to ensure a bright future for the city.



The work done at the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans is critical to ensuring the health and safety of residents and visitors to the city.



Industry Trends and Local Context

The services provided by SWBNO are essential to the growth and vitality of the community, as well as the economy of its service area.

To achieve continued success, the organization must recognize its operating context and the external forces that shape future action. As it initiated development of its strategic plan, SWBNO's Leadership Team reviewed a series of regional and industry-specific trends to consider how each may impact the utility into the future.



TREND 1

Local Operating Context

SWBNO operates in a large metropolitan area, which includes a diverse mix of industries ranging from tourism to health sciences to supply chain and logistics. The population of New Orleans is 383,997 according to the 2020 Census, which is a 13.5% increase from the population in 2010 (343,829).

The median household income in the City of New Orleans is \$41,604, as compared to \$49,469 for the State of Louisiana and \$62,843 for the United States, with almost 25% of residents falling below the federal poverty line. With a relatively low-income service area, balancing service affordability with recovering sufficient revenues to maintain and improve SWBNO's systems is a challenge. When the coronavirus pandemic hit in March 2020 and brought further economic uncertainty for residents, utilities around the country, including SWBNO, stopped turning water service off for payment delinquency. The associated loss of revenue for the utility led to negative operational impacts, but the utility continues to focus on increasing its efficiency by maintaining its aging infrastructure, implementing capital projects, and identifying and addressing water loss within its system. Decreased revenues limit SWBNO's ability to invest in capital improvement projects and continued financial challenges could ultimately result in decreased customer satisfaction and confidence in SWBNO.

SWBNO works closely with the City of New Orleans to address financial and political issues that arise. SWBNO's eleven-member Board is appointed by the Mayor of New Orleans to four-year terms, with members serving a maximum of two consecutive terms of office. While SWBNO is responsible for its management and operations, the utility must obtain the approval of both the City Council and the Board of Liquidation prior to issuing debt or increasing water or sewer rates and can only override these bodies if the rate increase is necessary to pay for existing debt. Public desire to keep rates low has created challenges for the utility as it works to provide high-quality, reliable service.

TREND 2

Financial Considerations

Financially, the water, sewerage, and drainage systems have been separated since 1967. As noted in the previous section, SWBNO's reliance on the City Council and the Board of Liquidation for rate increases has historically proven to be a significant challenge for the organization. For the last half-century, the general pattern included sporadic but substantial rate increases, followed by long periods of minimal or no adjustment. Between 1987 and 2007, water rates increased only once, and from 1986 to 2000, sewer rates were not adjusted at all. Long periods of inactivity were preceded and followed by multiple years of double-digit rate increases. The drainage system is supported by tax revenue – meaning drainage services do not appear on the monthly bills customers receive. New Orleans has an unusually high proportion of “exempt” properties due to homestead and non-profit or governmental exemptions leaving roughly 60% of the city's assessed real property value off the tax rolls and paying nothing for drainage service.

During the late 1990s, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sued SWBNO and the City of New Orleans, which resulted in a Consent Decree to address the city's persistent sewer problems. Sewer rates increased annually until 2006 and then remained unchanged until 2013, when programmatic increases of 10% per year over the next eight years were implemented. On the water side, adjustments were tied to bond issuances but receiving City Council approval to fund necessary improvements was generally contentious. For drainage, millage rates were rolled back due to a city reassessment in 2010. SWBNO requested a roll-forward but was blocked by the City Council. Supplemental drainage fees were rejected by voters in 1985 and City Council failed to act on a similar proposal in 1998.

SWBNO has been forced to respond to its financial situation by cutting operating costs, deferring system maintenance, funding some capital projects on a pay-as-you-go basis, and postponing others. The deferred maintenance and capital investment has increased the long-term costs of operating the systems.



TREND 3

Environmental and Regulatory Impacts

Meeting regulatory requirements are part of the core functions of any water utility, and new regulations or changes are always on the horizon. The utility currently complies with all local, state, and federal regulations, but SWBNO expects additional environmental regulations and enforcement actions at the federal level in the future. From an operational perspective, flooding and sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) may continue to increase as infrastructure ages and system needs outpace the utility's ability to invest in preventative maintenance. As SWBNO works to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change, including more frequent and severe storms, it will be increasingly important for the utility to be proactive in external communication and outreach efforts to build trust and community support.

TREND 4

Workforce Trends

New Orleans is a highly competitive labor market. SWBNO is challenged to attract and retain talented employees for skilled trades and other specialty positions, especially as compared to organizations in the private sector. The City of New Orleans' Civil Service directs SWBNO's processes relating to hiring employees, compensation and benefits, and position descriptions or titles. This relationship has slowed the organization's ability to evaluate and modernize position descriptions and classifications to meet its operational demands for the future.

Staff access to training and other professional development opportunities is vital, both to minimize the institutional knowledge loss caused by retirements and other turnover and to ensure that employees are prepared to assume higher-level responsibilities when positions open within the utility. Nationally, the skills and competencies required to operate utility systems are changing; employees are required to have higher levels of certification and technical expertise.

TREND 5

Technology Modernization

Technology is an important tool for maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of a utility's operations and for connecting with customers. While the use of technology can carry risks, particularly related to cybersecurity, it is essential to delivering quality water services. SWBNO has made an effort to replace critical software systems and is in the process of implementing technology advancements to support system integration and collaboration efforts, on both the operational and administrative sides of the business. Investments in technology will also require staff evaluation and training to ensure SWBNO has the capacity to fully utilize and support current and future technology enhancement.

TREND 6

Customer Expectations

Expectations of utility services have increased, with customers demanding services that are fast, high quality, straightforward, and inexpensive. These expectations continue to evolve as new technology is developed and customers prefer additional convenience options with continued service reliability. As New Orleans continues to be affected by climate change, resource demand has increased and many stakeholders expect the current infrastructure to continue to handle environmental challenges, including increased flooding. Building and maintaining customer confidence has challenged the organization as well; process issues related to the utility's customer information system upgrade affected many customers negatively. Additionally, SWBNO's water meters are read manually, which leads to estimated or inaccurate bills when the meters can't be accessed or read by SWBNO's team. SWBNO is continuing its intentional outreach to educate customers on the value of its services and the positive impact that SWBNO has on the community.

TREND 7

Power and Energy

Avoiding extended interruptions in utility service is essential for maintaining public trust and protecting public health and the environment. To provide uninterrupted services, water, and wastewater systems require an acceptable level of power reliability. Every utility is unique with respect to its vulnerability to electric supply disruption and must undertake a critical assessment of the issue based on specific local conditions. While there are known deficiencies in SWBNO's power operations, the utility is developing increased resiliency. SWBNO completed a Power Master Plan in 2020 in which new technology will support enhanced power management and a reduced carbon footprint. Future phases will include automation, battery storage, and electric vehicles. SWBNO will increasingly have opportunities to innovate by leveraging grants and implementing pilot projects.

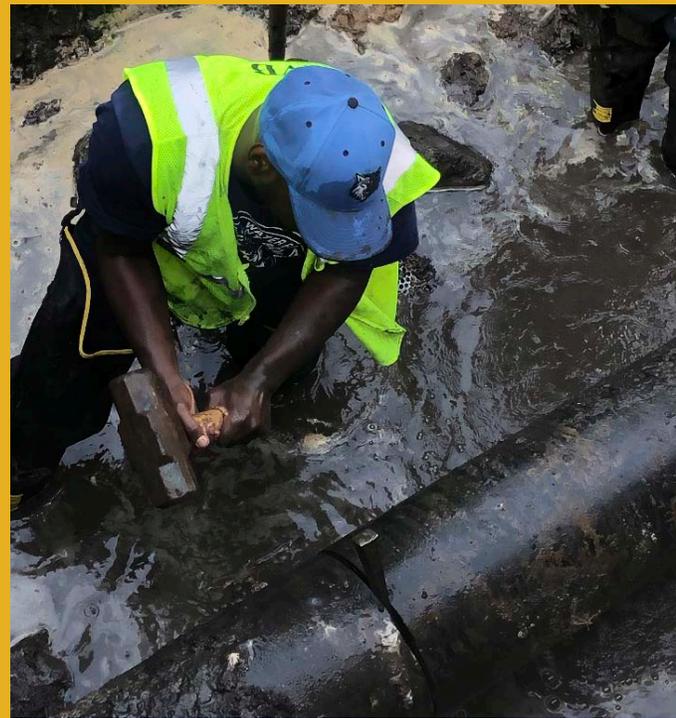


TREND 8

Increased Risk Profile

SWBNO faces many potential risks that could impact its ability to reliably provide safe, high-quality water, wastewater, and stormwater services to its customers. The Gulf Coast region, and New Orleans in particular, has endured numerous natural disasters and extreme weather events in recent years, including hurricanes, tornadoes, ice storms, and flooding from heavy rainfall. These types of events will continue in the future, and their impact is likely to become more intense due to climate change. Other risks faced by SWBNO include cybersecurity concerns, the potential for a malicious attack on the water supply, and the potential for unintentional water supply contamination. SWBNO, like the rest of the world, is also weathering the impact of a global pandemic. Variants of COVID-19 will continue to cause challenges and SWBNO will need to continue to protect employees by monitoring the situation and encouraging safe work practices.





TREND 9

One Water

“One Water” embodies the core principles of water equity, water affordability, and water access. SWBNO is organized to allow for strong coordination between water, wastewater, and stormwater. This “one water” approach considers the total water environment during planning efforts. While the stormwater system is divided, with SWBNO responsible for large diameter pipes and pumping and the City of New Orleans responsible for smaller diameter pipes, the two organizations frequently collaborate to ensure effective service delivery. SWBNO is initiating an integrated master planning process to help leadership and staff communicate the utility’s challenges and goals to customers and stakeholders. In addition, SWBNO is redefining affordability for the 21st century, as well as leveraging private partnerships and investments to address infrastructure needs.

Strategic Planning Process

While the SWBNO did not have a strategic plan prior to this effort, considerable activities were underway across the organization to improve operations, resiliency, and customer satisfaction. Specific goals of the project included:

- + Building trust among internal and external stakeholders
- + Developing actionable strategies and measurable objectives
- + Increasing communication and collaboration across the organization

To ensure that existing initiatives and plans were considered within the context of the strategic planning initiative, SWBNO's planning process involved input from a broad group of internal and external stakeholders. Major elements of the engagement process included:

- + Interviews and work sessions with SWBNO's Board of Directors and the Board's strategy committee
- + Interviews and work sessions with the Executive Director and leadership team
- + Six employee focus groups and an employee survey with more than 325 respondents
- + Individual and group interviews with key stakeholders, including the SWBNO Customer Advisory Committee, Greater New Orleans Foundation, GNO, Inc., Water Wise Gulf South, and the Urban Conservancy New Orleans.

We are members of the community who are personally vested in the success of the agency and the city.

SWBNO Employee



Strategic Framework

This strategic framework, based on an extensive strategic planning process that considers both SWBNO's present circumstances and its future goals, will serve as a blueprint for decision-making moving forward. It contains a vision, mission statement, and values that address SWBNO's current challenges and help ensure continued success in operations and the management of resources and assets.

Vision

To be a model utility that earns and holds the trust and confidence of our customers, community, and partners through reliable and sustainable water services.

Mission

Our team of experts serves the people of New Orleans and improves their quality of life by reliably and affordably providing safe drinking water; removing wastewater for safe return to the environment; and draining stormwater to protect our community.

Values

The SWBNO Team is committed to making these shared values a part of everything we do. We are:



Customer Focused



Accountable



Safety-Minded



Transparent and Honest



Financial Stability

Practice strong fiscal stewardship and ensure timely revenue recovery while balancing customer affordability with investments necessary to deliver critical services

Strategies

- + Optimize capital and operational spending
- + Enhance budget development and management processes
- + Improve timely revenue recovery and leverage new and alternate revenue sources
- + Enhance affordability programs to better meet community needs

Key Issues

- + Large number of past due and disputed bills, slow to pay vendors, need for more financial predictability
- + Missed opportunities for new revenue and recovery of revenue from existing operations
- + Affordability programs do not address customer needs
- + Policy and procedure disconnect between budget and actual spending, need for more financial accountability

As discussed in the Financial Considerations section, SWBNO exists in a highly political environment and has historically struggled to ensure appropriate funding to support its infrastructure and operational needs. While many utilities find themselves in similar circumstances, a less affluent customer base and pressure to keep rates low has had major impacts on the organization. Ensuring financial stability is paramount to successfully navigating the other challenges that are faced by SWBNO.

The organization has numerous activities underway that support this focus area. For example, budget monitoring has improved through the analysis and communication of monthly budget reports focused on identifying and understanding variances. Additionally, the budgeting process is being streamlined to provide more timely, relevant data, and the budget staff are participating with operations directly to improve understanding of the nature and timing of key initiatives. Other efforts to enhance budget performance include a comprehensive project underway with

Spotlight on Financial Stability

The Sewer System Evaluation and Rehabilitation Program (SSERP) was initiated in 1998 with the goal of addressing the rehabilitation and repair needs of the City's sewer collection system. In August of 2005, SSERP was interrupted by Hurricane Katrina. While much of New Orleans has recovered, the population and associated tax base is still below pre-Katrina levels. This loss of revenue has created challenges for maintaining water, sewer, and drainage services because maintenance and operations costs did not see a similar decline. Despite the many challenges, SWBNO has made great strides to comply with the Modified Consent Decree, systematically improving collection system infrastructure. The FEMA-funded hurricane recovery repairs to the sewer collection system, also known as the Emergency Sewer System Assessment (ESSA) projects, are delivered as part of SSERP.

In 2021, SWBNO closed on a \$275 Million WIFIA loan that allows the utility to better serve the people of New Orleans by meeting the remaining obligations of the Consent Decree and protecting the environment. With this 35-year loan, and SWBNO revenues pledged for repayment, an injection of capital will move SSERP forward immediately. EPA estimates SWBNO will save \$100 million in financing costs over the life of the WIFIA loan versus traditional bond financing. This program is an excellent example of blending previously unused Federal Funding sources, disaster recovery funds, and system funds to efficiently deliver critical projects for SWBNO's customers.

capital budgeting to identify the sources and uses at a project level, developing a mutual understanding of needs, and navigating multiple sources. SWBNO is developing a clearer understanding of budget constraints by clearly tracking the "Paygo" portion of revenues being utilized for cash financing to supplement external funding sources.

Efforts are also underway to leverage federal funding that will enhance the organization's capacity to make investments necessary to deliver critical services. Examples of this include funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Joint Infrastructure Recovery Request (JIRR) program with the City. The JIRR effort is focused on ensuring FEMA funding from Hurricane Katrina is fully utilized by the June 2023 deadline. SWBNO is also leveraging federal funding to complete the Southeast Louisiana Urban Flood Control Project

in partnership with the U.S. Corps of Engineers. This project is 75% federally funded and 25% SWBNO funded. The organization utilized the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) capital financing program to meet sewer consent decree deadlines as well.

To support customer affordability, SWBNO is working with the state and Total Community Action (TCA) to assist customers with federal funding through the low-income household water assistance program.

Moving forward, SWBNO's focus is on continuing to enhance budget management and financial reporting to support improved visibility and financial communication; optimizing spending and identifying alternative and new revenue sources to improve revenue sufficiency; and continuing to enhance affordability programs to meet community needs.



Technology Modernization

Modernize technology and system integration to improve reliability and efficiency of operations and enhance customer service

Strategies

- + Identify and update critical/core technology software solutions and resources
- + Enhance cybersecurity and technology systems resiliency
- + Improve adoption and integration of current and new technology systems

Key Issues

- + Aging legacy software systems that are beyond their useful life which inhibits efficiency
- + Lack of centralization of technology procurement decisions
- + Technology adoption is piecemeal across departments based on user comfortability with tools
- + Need for additional resilience for cybersecurity and disaster preparedness and recovery

One of the results of long-term budget shortfalls is evident in the state of SWBNO's technology. While sporadic system upgrades have occurred, technology investment has generally not been considered a top priority. This has historically led to one-off solutions rather than systematic approaches, deferred projects, and implementation problems. Ultimately, technology has a major impact on how well the organization functions, with a lack of resources in this area causing process inefficiency and a diminished customer experience.

As far as existing technology modernization initiatives, SWBNO has already begun to make key improvements related to upgrades, enhancements, and replacements of current technology systems. Completed projects include updating the call management system for the call center to a cloud-based system and updating the automated accounts payable system for accounting. Upgrades are being planned for the human resources and payroll system and the billing system, and a contractor has been selected to lead the procurement of the new financial system and new asset management system. Additionally, the organization has begun convening a technology governance committee that will focus on strategic decisions for technology enhancements.

Enhancements to cyber security have also been made and will be expanded over the next several years. For example, firewalls have been installed at multiple key locations, such as drainage pump stations, and additional firewall projects are underway in other places, including at the Carrollton plant. Other enhancements that have been completed include segmenting the fiber network at Carrollton into separate networks for SCADA, security, and information systems, setting up dual authentication programs, and rolling out regular security awareness training and phishing tests. A new data center is also being planned for increased security and resiliency.

A major focus area for SWBNO is improving meter and billing accuracy through upgraded meter infrastructure, which is a large multi-year project already underway. SWBNO has begun making immediate improvements to the current meter and billing processes so that the transition to smart water meters will be smooth. SWBNO has coordinated with the City of New Orleans on its Smart Cities effort to ensure these projects align and has connected with Entergy to understand potential coordination points between the systems of both utilities.

To continue to address its challenges and capitalize on the efforts already underway, SWBNO is focused on improving data quality, access, and accessibility; reducing cyber risk, providing accurate bill and meter readings; and ensuring the organization is using advanced and updated technology systems that are well integrated and practical to use. SWBNO is also dedicated to ensuring that sufficient training and resources are provided to employees to support current and new technology.

Spotlight on Technology Modernization

SWBNO is actively responding to customer demand for more accurate water bills. By installing Smart Metering technology (also known as Advanced Metering Infrastructure or AMI), SWBNO is upgrading its systems with proven 21st century capabilities.

With near-real-time consumption information provided by the Smart Metering technology, SWBNO can detect and help customers locate leaks faster, alert customers of unusual water usage, and enable customers to track their actual water consumption on a daily basis. This helps customers make informed water use choices and better manage their water bill. This new system will also help provide easily accessible water use information to customers and customer service representatives, which can expedite solutions to billing and plumbing-related issues.

SWBNO has completed surveying existing meters and project planning. Funds have been identified for the first phase and meter replacements are expected to begin by early 2023.



SWBNO
SMART WATER METERING
PROGRAM



Workforce Development and Enrichment

Support and develop a high-performing team that is skilled, committed, inspired, rewarded, engaged, and accountable

Strategies

- + Evaluate workforce model options, including Civil Service and others, and determine an appropriate approach for SWBNO
- + Enhance resources for employee training and development
- + Motivate and train supervisors and leaders to improve employee and team performance
- + Strengthen internal communication and information sharing to increase collaboration across departments
- + Improve knowledge capture, transfer, and succession planning

Key Issues

- + No present pathway for improving Civil Service outcomes or adopting an alternative solution
- + Lack of basic performance management training for managers to increase staff accountability and development
- + Internal communications are inconsistent and ineffective for many field staff
- + No clear succession planning procedures; DROP program inconsistent with good succession planning principles

Workforce challenges are myriad, for both SWBNO and the utility industry. Nation-wide, approximately one-third of the water sector workforce is eligible to retire within the next ten years, and technologies are increasingly advanced, which means that the workforce of tomorrow will look very different than the workforce of today in terms of skills and competencies. This shift has proven to be challenging for SWBNO, as working within the confines of the Civil Service Commission has hampered the organization's ability to be flexible and adapt to changing conditions to ensure that SWBNO has the workforce it needs in place.

SWBNO is already working to address these challenges. The organization has instituted biweekly meetings with Civil Service leadership to hold strategic discussions on upcoming organizational changes within the city that impact SWBNO. For example, the City Council recently approved a minimum wage increase to \$15 per hour. This increase will impact SWBNO operations in a variety of ways, so the organization worked with Civil Service to share information about the financial impacts to create common understanding of these changes and impacts to the budget.

The meetings between SWBNO and Civil Service Leaders help to maintain transparency in communication and to build clear understanding of the unique needs of SWBNO. They also help provide understanding in how to navigate and utilize Civil Service regulations to attract and retain qualified personnel. These sessions will aid in the evaluation and modifications of the approach to Civil Service that may be necessary to meet the needs of the organization.

The organization has considered ways to increase the number of applicants for many positions. Sometimes, minimum qualifications for certain positions may immediately eliminate a large portion of the applicant pool, but the organization has found that the qualifications are not necessary to start the position and can be attained in the future once employed. To address this, SWBNO is working with Civil Service to update the minimum qualifications for utility positions. These changes will widen the potential candidate pool.

Moving forward, SWBNO's focus is ensuring that employees have access to tools for advancement; developing a clear understanding of career paths and options within the organization; creating strong connections between management and employees; and increasing programs that ensure SWBNO is an employer of choice in the region.





Customer Service Excellence and Stakeholder Engagement

Continuously meet and exceed the service needs of our customers and proactively communicate and engage stakeholders

Strategies

- + Foster a culture of customer service throughout the organization
- + Expand convenience systems and capabilities to improve self-service options for customers
- + Elevate core customer service delivery performance
- + Advance proactive communication and outreach programs

Key Issues

- + Lack of general customer service knowledge, awareness, and expectations across all levels of staff
- + Inconsistent communications with customers, particularly around billing and payments
- + Ineffective internal policies create inefficient service delivery including meter to cash process
- + Communication, both internal and external, is largely reactive and does not address needs

SWBNO customers have often been challenged by SWBNO operations. For example, a somewhat tumultuous billing system implementation in 2016 led the utility to investigate more than 26,000 complaints about high bills over the following two years. Chronic issues with manually reading over 138,000 meters every month continue to lead to high levels of estimated bills.

SWBNO is already making progress in improving in this area. For example, the utility is working with Verint on updates to the customer relationship management (CRM) software to enhance staff and customer experience. Development of an expanded customer service specific training curriculum is also in progress, which will be used for both onboarding and continuation training and will enhance the service provided to customers. Other efforts underway include enhanced leadership training and redistributing and reassigning workloads and responsibilities to better meet and exceed the service needs.

Enhancing meter reading and billing is a major area of focus for SWBNO. To that end, the organization has begun re-purposing existing SWBNO vehicles to accommodate an increase in meter reading staff and is in the process of acquiring additional vehicles. The organization is also hiring laborers to perform meter maintenance and routine cleaning ahead of the meter readings to improve efficiency, productivity, and the quality of meter reads.

Both the Board of Directors and employees have identified increasing both internal and external communication as a top priority for SWBNO. SWBNO has contracted with a public relations firm for communication support to expand its activities and outreach. The efforts of this firm will include sentiment research, website analysis, improvements and updates, increased social media content, educational videos, Lead and Copper Rule messaging, and employee newsletters.

To continue to make progress on resolving billing and other issues facing customers, SWBNO is committed to streamlining the customer experience with opportunities for self-service; improving communication to ensure clear expectations and timeliness of resolution; proactively engaging with customers and stakeholders to strengthen understanding and support; and enhancing overall customer service accuracy and delivery.



Spotlight on Customer Service Excellence and Stakeholder Engagement

While SWBNO has worked to improve phone and online solutions to serve customers, there has still been significant demand for in-person consultation when resolving customer issues and initiating processes, which still requires visiting a customer service center. In early 2021, SWBNO began servicing customers at two satellite offices in the Lower 9th Ward and New Orleans East. These centers allow customers to ask questions about their bills, raise concerns or issues with their accounts, set up payment plans or receive help in paying their bills. This service has allowed the utility to meet customers where they are and improve the customer experience.



Infrastructure Resiliency and Reliability

Improve efficiency and resiliency of current and future infrastructure by leveraging partnerships and innovative approaches to funding and sustainable design

Strategies

- + Shift maintenance planning and workflows from reactive to preventative through comprehensive asset management
- + Replace and renew aged infrastructure using integrated approaches
- + Successfully deliver all critical capital improvement projects by improving collaboration with project partners
- + Respond to climate change through innovation and green infrastructure projects

Key Issues

- + No clear predictive maintenance strategy for infrastructure or asset management system
- + Lack of coordination between infrastructure project partners and stakeholders leads to project outcomes that don't meet customer expectations
- + No centralized strategy for mitigating climate impacts or developing adaptation projects to enhance community resilience
- + High non-revenue water due to infrastructure failures

In 2021, the American Society for Civil Engineers gave America's infrastructure an overall grade of C-. Drinking water infrastructure scored a C-, wastewater infrastructure scored a D+, and stormwater infrastructure only a D. Like other utilities around the country, SWBNO struggles to proactively maintain and manage its aging infrastructure, especially with limited financial resources. For example, almost half of the city's 1,500+ miles of water lines were installed prior to 1940, and recent estimates suggest that SWBNO loses 55% of the water it treats to leaks.

The organization has made considerable progress in improving its water, wastewater, stormwater, and power infrastructure. SWBNO continues to work with the City of New Orleans to execute the Capital Improvement Program, which includes the Joint Infrastructure Recovery Request (JIRR) Program, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) projects, and more.

Within SWBNO's current Capital Improvement Program, more than ten percent of water mains will be replaced. Pumping stations are also being upgraded, which will improve system reliability. Current emphasis is on replacing the four pumps at Claiborne Pumping Station, with Panola and High Lift next on SWBNO's priority list.

The Southeast Louisiana Drainage Program is ongoing and is focused on improvements to multiple major thoroughfares and canals. Examples of areas under construction currently include St. Ferdinand Street to Peoples Avenue, and Wall Boulevard to Behrman Place. Design and planning are underway for additional West Bank work, including General De Gaulle Drive to Nolan Canal, Donner Canal, and Algiers Outfall Canal. Additionally, Orleans and London Avenue Drainage Basins are being studied for needed improvements.

The Sewer System Evaluation and Rehabilitation Program (SSERP) is ongoing within the South Shore, Mid City, and Carrollton Basin; this work is to be completed by the end of 2025. This program is funded by a loan through the WIFIA program and is related to the sewer consent decree.

Power is an important area for reliability and resiliency for SWBNO. Currently, the West Power Complex upgrades are underway, with C7/C8 site preparation nearly complete.

Moving forward, SWBNO's infrastructure focus is on continued coordination on joint infrastructure projects, utilizing innovative infrastructure approaches, replacing aging infrastructure, and proactively managing infrastructure condition and maintenance needs.



Spotlight on Infrastructure Resiliency and Reliability

SWBNO completed the Stormwater and Nature Center at the Paul Habans Charter School in Algiers in 2021, which consists of a rainwater detention pond, rain gardens, boardwalk, and native trees and plantings, all of which will help mitigate the flooding that can occur when heavy rains fall. The site is designed to hold over 12,000 cubic feet of stormwater and is used daily by Habans students to learn about urban water management in New Orleans.

The project was made possible as a result of the Sewerage and Water Board's Green Infrastructure Grants Program. The grant to Habans and Spackman Mossop Michaels, an international landscape architecture firm, was awarded in 2019 and provided more than \$375,000 to fund the project. Additional support for the Stormwater and Nature Center came from Saving Our Urban Landscape (SOUL) and the Louisiana Green Corps.



Organizational and Operational Improvement

Optimize organizational structure, alignment, and capacity to ensure safe operations and efficient service delivery

Strategies

- + Evaluate and modify organizational structure and staffing levels to improve service delivery
- + Enhance and elevate safety culture
- + Implement programs and training related to change management, process standardization, and continuous improvement
- + Develop and share organizational performance metrics internally and externally

Key Issues

- + Limited adoption of safety standards across departments and levels of staff
- + Organizational structure and staffing limits efficiency and ability to retain highly qualified staff
- + No central data collection source for performance metrics or benchmarking tracking and reporting
- + Business processes and standard operating procedures are inconsistently documented, with no continuous improvement or change management system in place to drive performance

In many ways, SWBNO is a fire-fighting organization. Historically, it has not had the financial, technological, or workforce resources to proactively address the organizational challenges it faces. The final focus area for SWBNO allows for assessment and improvement of both the organization and its operations to provide enhanced service delivery for customers and the city.

Spotlight on Organizational and Operational Improvement

In 2019 SWBNO began the process of shifting from a manual, paper-based Accounts Payable process to an automated system. This decision was driven by inefficiency in the existing process that resulted in frequent miscommunication and delays in payments to vendors.

Benefits of this include increased automation, a significant reduction in paperwork for both department staff and accounts payable staff, and a subsequent reduction in days from invoice receipt to vendor payment. The new system was rolled out in October 2021, with training for staff conducted prior to implementation.

SWBNO has several existing initiatives underway to support this focus area. In relation to organizational structure and alignment, SWBNO has completed a review to ensure staff are aligned with the utility's operational needs. This has resulted in recommendations for new deputy superintendent positions. Additionally, the organization has considered the West Power Complex transition and how this will impact operations. SWBNO has identified that new skillsets and positions are needed for the new equipment that is part of this transition and training opportunities are needed for existing staff, as well as developed standard operating procedures relating to critical operations of the complex. Relating to project processes, the organization has developed a new procurement policy and procedures manual.

Change management is important to the success of new processes and changes to operations. To address this, the organization has created a Continuous Improvement Officer position which will be introduced to the customer service department. In the next few years, the organization will build on this position and determine the best way to manage large-scale changes within SWBNO.

Another area where SWBNO has already made progress is in developing a strong safety program. SWBNO's program is expanding into a Safety Management System, which has benefited from the seamless partnership between Safety, Risk Management, and the Workers Comp Teams. The Safety Management System is a data driven and proactive program, which includes implementing the safety walkthrough inspection program throughout all facilities with a reporting and follow-up system. Changes are also being made to enhance the mishap investigation process, increase the safety knowledge baseline across the whole organization through Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training, and identify standard operating procedure and training gaps in field operations.

Future activities in this area include enhancing access to data and tracking to ensure understanding of current performance and areas for improvement, and increasing collaboration and efficiency across the organization.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

FOCUS AREAS

Vision

To be a model utility that earns and holds the trust and confidence of our customers, community, and partners through reliable and sustainable water services.

Mission

Our team of experts serves the people of New Orleans and improves their quality of life by reliably and affordably providing safe drinking water; removing wastewater for safe return to the environment; and draining stormwater to protect our community.

Core Values

The SWBNO Team is committed to making these shared values our reality.

We are:

- Customer Focused
- Accountable
- Safety Minded
- Transparent and Honest



Financial Stability

Practice strong fiscal stewardship and ensure timely revenue recovery while balancing affordability with investments necessary to deliver critical services



Technology Modernization

Modernize technology and system integration to improve reliability and efficiency of operations and enhance customer service



Workforce Development and Enrichment

Support and develop a high-performing team that is skilled, committed, inspired, rewarded, engaged, and accountable



Customer Service Excellence and Stakeholder Engagement

Continuously meet and exceed the service needs of our customers and proactively communicate and engage stakeholders



Infrastructure Resiliency and Reliability

Improve efficiency and resiliency of current and future infrastructure by leveraging partnerships and innovative approaches to funding and sustainable design



Organizational and Operational Improvement

Optimize organizational structure, alignment, and capacity to ensure safe operations and efficient service delivery

STRATEGIES

RESULTS

- 1. Optimize capital and operational spending
- 2. Enhance budget development and management processes
- 3. Improve timely revenue recovery and leverage new and alternate revenue sources
- 4. Enhance affordability programs to better meet community needs

- + Fewer capital project change orders
- + Lowered accounts receivable
- + Reduction in unbilled (non-revenue) water
- + Increased utilization of assistance programs

- 5. Identify and update critical/core technology software solutions and resources
- 6. Enhance cybersecurity and technology systems resiliency
- 7. Improve adoption and integration of current and new technology systems

- + Increased customer self-service utilization
- + Increased customer service efficiency
- + Fewer billing errors
- + Increased employee adoption of core technology systems

- 8. Evaluate workforce model options, including Civil Service and others, and determine an appropriate approach for SWBNO
- 9. Enhance resources for employee training and development
- 10. Motivate and train supervisors and leaders to improve employee and team performance
- 11. Strengthen internal communication and information sharing to increase collaboration across departments
- 12. Improve knowledge capture, transfer, and succession planning

- + Increased workforce productivity
- + Reduction in open positions
- + Increased and improved employee training
- + Increased employee morale

- 13. Foster a culture of customer service throughout the organization
- 14. Expand convenience systems and capabilities to improve self-service options for customers
- 15. Elevate core customer service delivery performance
- 16. Advance proactive communication and outreach programs

- + Reduction in customer complaints
- + Increased customer service first call resolution
- + Increased customer satisfaction rating
- + Increased social media interactions
- + Improved positive media sentiment

- 17. Shift maintenance planning and workflows from reactive to preventative through comprehensive asset management
- 18. Replace and renew aged infrastructure using integrated approaches
- 19. Successfully deliver all critical capital improvement projects by improving collaboration with project partners
- 20. Respond to climate change through innovation and green infrastructure projects

- + Increased time spent on preventative maintenance
- + Increased feet of pipeline replacement
- + Fewer water main breaks
- + Fewer sewer overflows
- + Increased number of green infrastructure projects

- 21. Evaluate and modify organizational structure and staffing levels
- 22. Enhance and elevate safety of culture
- 23. Implement programs and training related to change management, process standardization, and continuous improvement
- 24. Develop and share organizational performance metrics internally and externally

- + Improved service delivery
- + Fewer workforce accidents and injuries
- + Increased number of specific operational process improvement projects

Implementation Activities

The focus areas, measures, and strategies contain a series of initiatives and projects that, when implemented, will move SWBNO toward achievement of its desired outcomes.

However, it is important to note that for the desired results to be achieved, the strategies must be effectively implemented. Therefore, careful attention and focus on strategy implementation is essential for achieving strategic success.

Elements of the implementation process for SWBNO include leveraging internal subject matter expertise and continuing to use key staff members and small teams that are knowledgeable, energized, and committed to the implementation of the strategies. These subject matter experts and teams will develop implementation plans for each strategy, to include:

- + Tasks necessary for implementation
 - Assigned individuals or groups
 - Due dates for key tasks
 - Resources required
- + Frameworks for monitoring and sharing implementation progress
- + Reporting on implementation progress to SWBNO's leadership and the Board of Directors
- + Reviewing and updating implementation tasks on at least an annual basis

The full Implementation Workplan for 2022 has already been developed and activities are underway. Each year, the subject matter experts and teams will report on progress, celebrate success, and update their workplans for the following 12-18 months.





Communications

Through this strategic plan, SWBNO has committed to improving internal and external communication and collaboration.



Enhanced communications will be a major initiative throughout the organization to ensure that all teams and individuals are working towards SWBNO's ultimate vision and mission.

Effective communication is critical not only for the successful implementation of the plan, but also for SWBNO's overall success. The issue of communication, which surfaced in the stakeholder input process, is called out specifically within the Customer Service Excellence and Stakeholder Engagement focus area, but also cuts across the other focus areas and strategies. Communications could be enhanced through several efforts, including:

- + Collaborating with municipalities, stakeholders, and community groups
- + Increasing brand awareness
- + Engaging employees in SWBNO's work through collaboration, communication, and cooperation
- + Increasing the use of multi-disciplinary teams to manage issues and projects
- + Improving SWBNO's responsiveness to customers' needs
- + Building customer awareness and support for SWBNO's goals and direction



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SWBNewOrleans

APPROVAL OF THE SEWERAGE AND WATER BOARD STRATEGIC PLAN

WHEREAS, the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans (“SWBNO”) is undertaking an ambitious effort to plan for its water, wastewater, and drainage systems in a long-range, integrated fashion in order to direct investments in the systems in a way that solidifies the City’s future, improves quality of life, and provides the greatest community value through multiple benefits; and

WHEREAS, SWBNO’s last utility strategic plan expired in 2019 and part of the overall planning process identified the need to create a new Strategic Plan to define the utility’s direction and goals leading to better allocation of its resources to pursue the strategic direction and achieve the utility’s goals; and

WHEREAS, on June 1, 2021, SWBNO contracted with Raftelis Financial Consultants to facilitate the process of creating a new Strategic Plan for the utility; and

WHEREAS, development of the plan included extensive involvement of SWBNO Board members, leadership, staff, and external stakeholders whose input was critical to the process; and

WHEREAS, the plan updates SWBNO’s Mission, Vision, and Core Values to better reflect the core beliefs of the Board, leadership, staff, and external stakeholders; and

WHEREAS, the SWBNO Strategic Plan’s objectives are to improve performance by orienting decision making around six focus areas identified within the plan which consist of Financial Stability, Technology Modernization, Workforce Development and Enrichment, Customer Service Excellence and Stakeholder Engagement, Infrastructure Resiliency and Reliability, and Organizational and Operational Improvement; and

WHEREAS, across each focus area the plan contains 24 strategies that contain specific tactics for implementation and will lead to improved performance over the next 5 years.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT, RESOLVED, the SWBNO Board of Directors hereby officially approves and adopts the SWBNO Strategic Plan.

I, Ghassan Korban, P.E., Executive Director,
Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans, do hereby certify
that the above and foregoing is a true
and correct copy of Resolution adopted at the Regular
Monthly Meeting of said Board, duly called and held,
according to law, on February 16, 2022.

GHASSAN KORBAN, P.E. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SEWERAGE AND WATER BOARD OF NEW ORLEANS