

State Water Infrastructure Authority
July 14, 2021 Meeting
Agenda Item L – Approval of Educational Component Required Under Session Law 2020-79

Division of Water Infrastructure Staff Report

Background

Session Law 2020-79, entitled in part “An Act to Improve the Viability of the Water and Wastewater Systems of Certain Units of Local Government...”, requires that any local government unit (LGU) designated as distressed by the State Water Infrastructure Authority (Authority) and the Local Government Commission (LGC) participate in initial training and education for elected officials and utility staff [G.S. 159G-45(b)(2)]. The purpose of this staff report is to request Authority approval of the initial education scope and delivery mechanism. Note that the LGC will review and approve this item at its July 13, 2021 meeting.

Summary of Initial Education Content

The initial education, entitled Utility Management Best Practices: First Steps for the Viable Utility Program (UMBP) will be utilized to fulfill the education requirements of the Viable Utility (VU) program. It will consist of a set of four modules. These modules are:

- Utility Management Basics
- Infrastructure Best Practices
- Organizational Best Practices
- Financial Best Practices

The Utility Management Basics module will cover the basics of utility management (e.g., water and wastewater treatment processes, the value of water, and the definition of a viable utility). The remaining three modules will delve into each of the best management practice areas from The Master Plan. These three modules will contain “first steps” that LGUs can undertake within a few weeks of training to begin making changes within their water and / or wastewater utilities. For a more detailed outline of the UMBP curriculum, please refer to the staff report from Agenda Item J of the March 10, 2021 Authority meeting.

Division staff recommend that the Authority approve the content of the UMBP training.

Summary of Education Delivery Mechanisms

Division staff have determined that the UMBP may be delivered in two formats: in-person or via on-demand, online training.

The in-person training will be provided by Division staff and resource agencies at no cost to LGUs. It will be regionally based to minimize travel by attendees. Classes will have around 30 attendees. It will consist of a full day (e.g., six hours of instruction with breaks and lunch) of

class that consists of interaction between the entire class and within table groups via discussion and case studies. The Utility Management Basics module will contain a keynote speaker who will vary depending upon the region of the state. Resource agency staff such as staff from the Southeastern Rural Community Assistance Project (SERCAP), the NC Rural Water Association (NCRWA) and the UNC Environmental Finance Center (EFC) will assist in teaching the modules. Assessment of knowledge will consist of pre- and post-class quizzes.

A second delivery mechanism for the UMBP will be as part of the Advanced Municipal Leadership (AML) training that the NC League of Municipalities (NCLM) offers to its local elected officials. Broadly speaking, the AML training offers online, on-demand courses related to aspects of local government that local elected officials need to know. The UMBP will be one element of the overall AML training. The cost of the UMBP portion of the training will be determined by the NCLM. The AML version will keep the four-module structure as described above. However, differences will exist. The keynote speaker will be videotaped and included as part of the first module. At the end of each module, those taking the training will be required to pass a quiz before moving to the next module. Part of the AML course will also include mandatory attendance at a webinar discussion.

Division staff recommend that the Authority approve the delivery mechanism for the initial education.

Next Steps

Once the Authority and LGC approve the initial education component, Division staff will move forward with planning in-person trainings to begin in late August or early September. Resource agencies have volunteered to attend and assist in these trainings as needed. For elected officials and utility staff utilizing the AML training version, this will commence in accordance with the NCLM's schedule, most likely in September. It is anticipated that training will be completed by the end of FY 2021-2022. Division staff will keep the Authority apprised of training progress over the course of the next several months.

Recommendations

Division staff recommend that the Authority approve the following:

1. The scope of the initial education as discussed above where the four modules (Utility Management Basics, Infrastructure Best Practices, Organizational Best Practices, and Financial Best Practices) will serve as a basis for the training.
2. The method of education delivery via in-person on a regional basis or via the AML training offered by the NCLM.