



Orange Water and Sewer Authority

OWASA is Carrboro-Chapel Hill's not-for-profit public service agency delivering high quality water, wastewater, and reclaimed water services.

OWASA's Strategic Plan

Workshop #4: Task Force Recommendations for Goals and Strategic Initiatives

Date: June 23, 2022

Workshop Agenda

Goal: To discuss staff's recommended goals and strategic initiatives and, if possible, finalize a draft strategic plan to present to OWASA staff and the community for feedback

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Brief Presentations on Recommended Goals and Initiatives, Followed by Questions and Discussion (5 minute presentation, followed by 10 minute discussion)
 - Employee Recruitment, Retention, and Development
 - Equitable Services
 - Climate and Land Use Change Adaptation
 - Community Engagement
 - Emergency Management and Cybersecurity
 - Service Reliability and Resiliency
4. Next Steps

Introduction

The following document summarizes the goals and strategic initiatives recommended by staff to advance the strategic priorities identified in OWASA's updated strategic plan. It also summarizes the process used to arrive at these recommendations. This document is written to provide the rationale for strategic goals and a high-level summary of each initiative. Staff invites the Board of Directors' feedback on these recommendations.

Background

On [November 18, 2021](#), the OWASA Board of Directors and staff Leadership Team received and discussed the results of a comprehensive scan that included a survey of OWASA employees,

stakeholders, current and past Board members, and the community we serve. It also included a literature review of strategic plans and a departmental assessment of OWASA's strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and (desired) results. This scan was designed to serve as the foundation for the development of the strategic plan.

On [December 16, 2021](#), the OWASA Board of Directors and staff Leadership Team discussed and informed a draft vision, mission, and set of values for OWASA. These were subsequently refined to be the following:

Vision: To be our community's trusted partner for clean water and environmental protection.

Mission: Our dedicated Team delivers valuable water and sewer services that are essential to our community's health, environment, and economy through the stewardship of infrastructure and natural resources.

Values:

- Integrity – We can be counted on to use sound judgement and follow-through on our promises.
- Reliability – We are committed to consistently providing high-quality products and services.
- Teamwork and Partnership – We work together to achieve shared goals.
- Diversity and Inclusion – We are committed to creating an inclusive workplace that promotes and values diversity.
- Innovation – We take a creative approach and adapt to changing circumstances.
- Stewardship – We make wise and efficient use of the financial and natural resources with which we are entrusted.
- Equity – We work to ensure fair access to and delivery of our essential services.

On [January 26, 2022](#), the OWASA Board of Directors discussed a suite of strategic priorities that were identified in one or more element of the scan. The group worked through a process to identify the top six focus areas of the organization for the next five to six years. On [February 24, 2022](#), the OWASA Board of Directors reviewed and approved the following final list of strategic priorities:

Employee recruitment, retention, and development

Equitable services

Climate and land use change adaptation

Community engagement

Emergency management and cybersecurity

Service reliability and resiliency

During the months of March and April 2022, staff organized six separate task forces around each strategic priority. Each task force met three separate times with the ultimate objective of setting goals for each priority and identifying the most effective strategic initiatives for achieving those goals. At least one member of the Leadership Team was assigned to each task force. Other members included members of the SPARC Team and other subject matter experts on staff. The task forces identified a total

of twenty-five (25) goal and strategic initiative combinations. This was determined to be an overwhelming number of initiatives to pursue.

In May 2022, the Leadership Team and operational managers¹ reviewed, discussed, and prioritized the entire suite of strategic initiatives, ultimately identifying the following fifteen (15) strategic initiatives. The group ruled out seven (7) initiatives that were determined to be low or medium impact and three (3) high-impact initiatives that, when compared to the other initiatives, were determined less of a priority and/or challenging to pursue in-parallel with other initiatives.

Discussion Considerations

Staff invites the Board of Directors' feedback on these recommendations. For each strategic priority, the Board is asked to consider the following questions:

- Do the recommended goals and strategic initiatives address the need for each strategic priority?
- Are there strategic initiatives missing that you think are a high priority for OWASA to address in the next five to six years?
 - How would you prioritize these against the recommended initiatives?
- Are there recommended strategic initiatives that you need clarified?

Recommended Strategic Goals and Initiatives

The following sections summarize the recommended goals and strategic initiatives recommended by each task force and prioritized by the OWASA Leadership Team. The Leadership Team invites the Board of Directors' feedback on the following:

Employee Recruitment, Retention, and Development

OWASA's mission requires a dedicated team. The following initiatives are recommended to make advancements beyond the myriad of important HR efforts underway. This priority has a high-level of overlap with OWASA's organizational value of Diversity and Inclusion. The task force identified how each initiative would integrate with the ongoing D&I program.

Goal: Increase the number of applicants for entry-level and/or high-turnover positions

Ensuring that OWASA is attracting a high volume of diverse and promising applicants, particularly to our entry level and high-turnover positions, has become increasingly important and challenging as the labor market tightens and OWASA faces unprecedented levels of retirement eligibility. The attrition rate over the past 16 months in OWASA's largest division, Distribution and Collection, was more than 3 times higher than it was in FY20 and FY19.

¹ Operational managers were included because it was difficult to get operational representation on all task forces due to the time commitment.

Strategic Initiative: Develop a recruitment strategy for entry-level and high-turnover positions

In pursuing this initiative, OWASA will conduct a position scan to help focus our initial efforts on those positions that are the most challenging to fill. From there, the effort will involve the identification of goals, benchmarks, and strategies that will help increase the number of applicants and the diversity of those applicants for entry-level and/or high-turnover positions. The task force began brainstorming various strategies in their discussion. This effort would include, but not be limited to expansion of the proposed apprentice program, as well as further development of partnerships with under-represented communities and professional organizations.

Goal: Achieve and maintain competitive compensation

Recruiting and retaining dedicated employees requires competitive compensation. It is best practice to conduct a pay and class study every three to five years; it has been over ten years since OWASA conducted one.

Strategic Initiative: Conduct and implement a Pay and Class Study

A Pay and Class Study is proposed in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget. This study will not just include market-comparisons of like positions, but would also include an evaluation of OWASA's skill-based pay program. It will be important when conducting and implementing the study to consider and address disparities between demographics and other equity issues. It is anticipated that implementation of the study's findings will require significant financial resources.

Goal: Ensure staff are prepared, informed, and engaged to lead OWASA into the future

Throughout the scan, employees repeatedly called for additional training and time to pursue it. Training needs ranged from leadership training to cross-training to core and soft skills. Recognizing that about 1/5 of OWASA's workforce will be eligible for retirement in the next five years, a formalized approach to succession planning and knowledge transfer is critical to achieving OWASA's vision. Moreover, training can directly translate to retention by giving employees a sense of growth and fulfillment, as well as improving promotability and morale.

Strategic Initiative: Develop and institute an Employee Development Plan

This initiative will require a comprehensive review of what training is needed across the organization and how to meet those needs, including how to create the organizational capacity to make time for training. Some employees pointed out that development opportunities were not equal across the organization, a formalization of a comprehensive Employee Development Plan will help ensure equal opportunities for all.

Equitable Services

This priority focuses on assisting those in our community who face challenges with obtaining and paying for our services. The following goals and initiatives were identified as near-term opportunities to increase the equity of OWASA's life-critical services.

Goal: Decrease number of disadvantaged/underserved households not connected to OWASA's services

During the scan, the question was asked how many households are in OWASA's service area, but for the cost of connecting, are not connected to OWASA's water and/or sewer service. Subsequent analysis has estimated that over 1,200 households in OWASA's service area are not connected to water and/or sewer service. Additional analysis is required to determine the reason they have not connected.

Strategic Initiative: Identify affected households and pursue outside funding to connect

The state of North Carolina received nearly \$200 million to invest in water and sewer service for disadvantaged and underserved communities through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). This recommended initiative would involve developing a proposal to utilize this funding to connect interested households that otherwise could not afford to extend service lines. If awarded funds for this purpose, connecting these customers will likely be a significant undertaking. However, connecting disadvantaged and underserved community members to service could make a meaningful impact on public and environmental health.

Goal: Increase adequacy and accessibility of customer assistance funding

In the scan, sustained assistance for low- and fixed-income customers was identified as a need. Currently, OWASA's customer assistance program is designed to address occasional need for assistance; it is not designed, nor sufficient, to provide sustained assistance.

Strategic Initiative: Evaluate and update Care to Share program

Donations to Care to Share have increased by five-fold over the last five years. The current program is not designed to distribute this level of funding efficiently or effectively. Alternative models exist and there has been much research and analysis done over the last four to five years. These models are worth consideration.

Climate and Land Use Change Adaptation

Climate change readiness/adaptation was universally identified as a high priority by OWASA staff, Board, community, and stakeholders. In the strategic priority-setting workshop, climate change mitigation was differentiated from adaptation: adaptation was rated a very high priority to address, mitigation was not. Additionally, recognizing the interplay between climate change and land use change (particularly on hydrology), land use change adaptation was folded into this strategic priority.

Goal: Increase drought resilience

In the NC Climate Readiness Report, the NC Department of Environmental Quality stated that it was likely that severe droughts will become more intense with climate change. Given the dependency of OWASA's services on water availability, increasing drought resiliency is a critical goal for OWASA's readiness for climate and land use changes.

Strategic Initiative: Implement most viable Jordan Lake alternative

OWASA has made great progress in identifying and evaluating alternatives to increase the resiliency of our water supply to drought. With Jordan Lake being the most viable alternative, it

will require additional resources (staff and financial) to pursue the most viable Jordan Lake alternative.

Goal: Prepare for organizational impacts of climate and land use change

There are a number of ways in which climate change and land use change could impact OWASA, including climate migration, workforce productivity, and increased inflow and infiltration into the wastewater collection system. While the consideration of these risks is not new to OWASA, the organization has not undertaken a comprehensive evaluation of these risks and considered their impact on OWASA's planning and operations.

Strategic Initiative: Develop Climate Action Plan

A Climate Action Plan would help to comprehensively incorporate climate change science and projections into OWASA's plans and operations to help ensure that OWASA and our community's water and wastewater services and infrastructure are prepared.

Community Engagement

Achieving and maintaining the trust of our community requires that we effectively engage with them and respond to their needs. The community survey identified some informational gaps regarding OWASA's commitment to environmental protection, sustainability, and infrastructure construction. In addition to continuing to pursue and refine OWASA's Communications and Community Engagement Program, the following goals and initiatives were prioritized to further enhance our engagement with the community.

Goal: Increase the quality and use of community feedback

Community engagement is a two-way street. Without a reliable baseline and benchmark for community understanding, appreciation, and needs, it is very difficult to gauge the impact of community engagement efforts and to address the questions, concerns, and needs of the community.

Strategic Initiative: Develop and implement regular community survey

Throughout the years, OWASA has sporadically developed and put-forward a survey of the community, including the one done as part of the scan in developing this strategic plan. The questions asked on these surveys were not standardized; the distribution was not designed to produce statistically significant results; and the frequency of distribution and analysis was not regular. Through this strategic initiative, OWASA would work with a third party to develop and execute a regular community survey that can be used to evaluate and adapt OWASA's community engagement efforts.

Goal: Streamline customer account experience

Much of the community's interaction with OWASA is in paying their bill. One of the best ways that OWASA can develop and maintain the trust of the community and to demonstrate the value of our services is to show a high-level of competence in our everyday engagement with our customers. OWASA's recent adoption of Advanced Metering Infrastructure and corresponding customer portal is a success story of the most recent strategic plan. However, currently, OWASA's online bill payment is not

integrated into our water use portal. This leads to an awkward customer experience that fails to connect customer water use to their bill.

Strategic Initiative: Integrate online billing and water use portals

Over 80% of OWASA customers receive an electronic bill. More seamlessly integrating OWASA's online billing platform with the Agua Vista web portal will help to better connect customer water use to their bill and create a more unified customer experience. However, to fully execute this initiative, OWASA will need to update its outdated and near-obsolete billing system, which is a significant undertaking for an organization. Doing so will also allow OWASA to bill in increments smaller than thousands, further connecting a customer's water use to their bill and improving the ability for customers to budget for bill-payment.

Emergency Management and Cybersecurity

The OWASA Board (past and present), stakeholders, and community members all ranked "preparing for emergencies and cybersecurity threats" as one of their top three priorities for OWASA to address over the next five years. However, preparation is only one aspect of emergency management. It is equally important to focus on the prevention of, protection against, response to, and recovery from emergencies and cybersecurity threats. Therefore, this priority was modified to broadly address emergency management. OWASA has a robust emergency management and cybersecurity program. (As such, OWASA staff did not rank emergency preparedness as a top priority.) The following initiatives would enhance existing efforts and help to increase our capacity to manage emergencies.

Goal: Ensure staff are prepared and ready for emergencies of all types

In addition to their day-to-day jobs, OWASA staff serve a dual role of incident command and response during times of emergency. Given that the responsibility of emergency response is shared across the organization and is not the primary focus of any one employee, it is important that there is ongoing commitment to emergency preparation and readiness.

Strategic Initiative: Develop and institute a Continuous Emergency Preparedness Model

The process of assessing, planning, training, exercising, and revising plans for emergency management is never complete. With each iteration, we have the opportunity to adapt and improve. This initiative will involve the formalization of National Incident Management System (NIMS) training, based on a position's role in an emergency, and will ensure regular and strategic use of tabletop exercises. Developing and instituting a Continuous Emergency Preparedness Model will help to promote an emergency preparedness culture across the organization.

Goal: Reduce risk exposure

America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (AWIA) required a risk assessment of OWASA's drinking water system. The standardized process that was used quantified risk as a function of cost of impact, vulnerability, and threat likelihood. This assessment, which was finalized in November 2020, identified an implementation strategy to reduce level of risk to the organization. The recommendations of this assessment were tiered (i.e., prioritized) based on the ultimate risk exposure reduction. Pursuing these recommendations will require time, money, and staff resources.

Strategic Initiative: Assess risk on collection and wastewater system and implement high priority risk mitigation actions for entire system

The AWIA evaluation did not evaluate the wastewater system. This strategic initiative would expand the evaluation to the wastewater system, as well as strategically pursue and invest in risk mitigation strategies for all of our systems.

Service Reliability and Resiliency

Service reliability and resiliency are at the core of ensuring that our water and sewer services are valued and the community's trust is developed and maintained. This requires us to ensure our infrastructure remains in good working order, our investments and operations are data-driven, and we have redundancy in the system. The following initiatives are recommended to increase OWASA's service reliability and resiliency.

Goal: Increase capital project execution

OWASA's capital project prioritization process is designed to identify and propose a capital program that increases the reliability and resiliency of our services. However, historically, it has been difficult to fully execute the adopted capital program due to a range of challenges. Identifying and pursuing strategies to increase capital project execution would help to increase OWASA's service reliability and resiliency.

Strategic Initiative: Develop and pursue project delivery optimization plan

Through this initiative, OWASA would research and put forward a suite of strategies and project delivery models that could help to increase project execution.

Goal: Reduce downtime of critical infrastructure and equipment

OWASA owns and maintains a complex set of assets that provide essential services. Ensuring these assets are in working order and that we are prepared to repair and replace them if they are not in working order is critical to the reliability and resiliency of our services.

Strategic Initiative: Update and execute asset management plan

Last updated in 2020, OWASA's asset management plan identifies a suite of action items to reduce the likelihood and consequence of infrastructure and equipment failure. Ensuring that this plan is updated and executed will help to ensure that OWASA is proactive and strategic in its investments into the maintenance and replacement of our equipment and infrastructure. To do so, we will require a modernized computerized maintenance management system (CMMS).

Goal: Improve the collection and use of real-time data to inform and drive decision-making for the provision of drinking water, sewer, and reclaimed water services

There is an increasing need and opportunity to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of OWASA's operations with the use of real-time data about the performance of our infrastructure. While this could be considered an opportunity across the organization, for the purposes of service reliability and resiliency, the task force focused on operational data and decision-making at both treatment plants.

Strategic Initiative: Execute SCADA Master Plan

Both the Water Treatment Plant and Wastewater Treatment Plant are connected to a

centralized control system. A recently-conducted SCADA Master Plan recommended a series of efforts and upgrades to improve our use of this control system. These efforts and upgrades will require a great deal of staff time, knowledge, and financial resources.

Goal: Establish and pursue capital investment goals

Without quantified targets, it can be difficult for the Board of Directors and staff to determine and communicate the amount of investment needed to repair and rehabilitate our infrastructure and the risks associated with underinvestment.

Strategic Initiative: Establish and implement capital investment strategy

This strategic initiative would formalize parameters for the repair and rehabilitation of our plants, pipes, and other infrastructure and use it to inform our long-term financial model. It would help ensure organizational alignment of infrastructure investment.

Attachments

Proposed Content for Draft Strategic Plan (Finalization and Design Pending)

Attachment: Proposed Content for Draft Strategic Plan (Finalization and Design Pending)

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY TO PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

The Orange Water and Sewer Authority has proudly served the Chapel Hill and Carrboro community for over forty-five years. We take pride in the services that we provide to protect the health of the community and our beautiful and bountiful environment. In pursuing our strategic plan, we will work to be our community's trusted partner for clean water and environmental protection for decades to come, taking on the most pressing challenges and opportunities.

Our strategic plan helps to ensure that we are anticipating and preparing for the future that we want and setting a course for aligning valuable resources with our strategic goals and objectives. We utilized the development process as a time to think comprehensively and identify broad-reaching strategic goals and initiatives for the next five to six years, engaging employees, community members, stakeholders, and past and present board members.

Over the next five years, OWASA will plan for and respond to a broad range of issues, from ensuring that we recruit and retain a dedicated workforce to preparing for emergencies and climate change. You can count on us to track and evaluate the effectiveness of our plan and adjust as necessary. This plan will allow us to adapt to changing conditions, while maintaining the highest level of service for our community.

We can't do it alone. We invite you to join us in our stewardship of the community's water and sewer infrastructure and the natural resources that are so critical to our health, environment, and economy. Conserve water. Tour the water treatment plant. Join the Board. Join the Team. We look forward working WITH you to protect public health and environment today and for years to come.

In partnership,

<Photo>

Jo Leslie Eimers
Chair of the OWASA Board

<Photo>

Todd Taylor, P.E.
Executive Director

Introduction

OWASA's Strategic Plan (FY23-FY27) will guide the investment of our time and resources over the next five years and help ensure that we are advancing the priorities of our community and preparing for the future that the community wants for its water and sewer utility. Although condensed into a relatively brief document, this Plan represents an expansive and inclusive review of the most pressing opportunities for achieving a collectively defined vision of what we want to be. The investments that we make over the next five to six years will lay the path for our leadership decades from now. This document, and more importantly the effort of developing this document, helps to assure that we are looking down the pipe and proactively investing in tomorrow.

Development Process

Assisted by OWASA staff and Strategic Planning Consultant Raftelis and informed by a broadly focused scan, the OWASA Board of Directors, Executive Director, and Leadership Team developed the following strategic plan.

Staff engagement was critical to the process. Early on, a Strategic Planning Advisory and Resource Council (SPARC) was formed of staff from across the organization. The SPARC collectively provided feedback on individual steps of the Plan's development and represented the Plan to the entire OWASA Team. Additionally, members of the SPARC helped to design, implement, and analyze components of the scan. They also served as members of task forces to have challenging, yet inspiring, conversations about what is truly needed to advance OWASA's strategic priorities. And as the Strategic Plan has been finalized, the SPARC served as ambassadors for the Plan and will, no doubt, be critical, alongside other Team members, in advancing its initiatives.

OWASA undertook a multi-faceted scan to help assess the current organization and environmental in which we are working. This scan included:

- Departmental assessments of OWASA's strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and (desired) results
- Survey of community members
- Sessions with representatives from institutions that OWASA serves and works with, businesses, and other important stakeholders
- Survey of current and past Board members
- Survey of OWASA employees
- Literature review of the strategic plans of leading utilities and businesses across the country, community partners, and utility industry organizations.



We approached the scan with the following questions.

- Who is OWASA?
- What are our strengths?
- What values and priorities do various groups hold for OWASA to consider in our strategic plan?
- What is currently happening or emerging that presents opportunities for OWASA?

The OWASA Board of Directors and staff Leadership used the results of this scan as a foundation for their revisions to OWASA's vision, mission, and values and the identification of the top strategic priorities for the organization over the next five to six years.

Task forces of OWASA staff, including members of the Leadership Team, organized around each of the strategic priorities to identify and prioritize goals for each priority and the initiatives required to achieve them. The OWASA Board of Directors provided input on the recommendations made by OWASA staff in order to finalize a draft strategic plan. Before finalizing the plan, the draft was put forward to OWASA staff and the community for feedback and input.

The result is a Strategic Plan that was collectively developed by the OWASA Board, staff, stakeholders, and community. This inclusive approach to the development and execution of the Plan are critical to its representation and ultimate success.

What we learned: Themes from the scan

The OWASA of the future stands on a solid foundation that was recognized by various groups in the scan. Five commonly referenced attributes of OWASA and our staff included:

- Community-minded
- Customer service
- Commitment to quality
- Reliable
- Continuously improving

This foundation will be critical in guiding OWASA forward in addressing the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead and ensure that we achieve continued success. The scan brought forward a myriad of issues that we face as an organization and community. There were five common themes frequently cited from various angles.

Challenges and Opportunities

1. **Workforce Issues:** OWASA has an excellent and dedicated team; our employees are our most valuable resource. Ensuring that OWASA is attracting a high volume of diverse and promising applicants has become increasingly important and challenging as the labor market tightens and OWASA faces unprecedented levels of retirement eligibility. Once here, employees need engagement, training, and recognition to bring their best selves forward and grow within the organization.
2. **Technology and Innovation:** Technology is a vital tool for maximizing the efficiency of a utility's operations and for connecting with customers, but the use of technology can also carry risks,

particularly for cybersecurity. OWASA has made good and efficient use of technology over the years, but this field is rapidly evolving. Technology is increasingly complex, changes quickly, and will continue to require substantial resources. Additionally, community expectations for technology are increasing, and there is additional pressure for real-time information and data.

- 3. Environmental Protection:** OWASA's operations are intricately intertwined with the environment; we are both affected and affect the environment. Climate change was a frequently cited challenge for OWASA to manage in the future. Participants in the scan recognized the link between land use, watershed protection, and water quality and called for OWASA to prioritize initiatives to advance and communicate our work in environmental protection.
- 4. Communications:** Achieving and maintaining the trust of our community requires that we effectively engage with them and respond to their needs. The community survey identified some informational gaps regarding OWASA's commitment to environmental protection, sustainability, and infrastructure construction. The scan recognized that there is no one best practice to communicate, and that OWASA should be working on a number of fronts to communicate and connect.
- 5. Regulatory Responsibility and Risk:** OWASA operates in a heavily regulated field. We are responsible for meeting the regulations of today and staying ahead of tomorrow's regulations. Additionally, it is critical that OWASA maintains a responsible level of investment in the repair and rehabilitation of our community's water and wastewater infrastructure to ensure the quality and reliability of services, so essential to public health and environmental protection.

OWASA's Strategic Plan (Fiscal Year 2023 – 2027)

Vision: To be our community's trusted partner for clean water and environmental protection.

Mission: Our dedicated Team delivers valuable water and sewer services that are essential to our community's health, environment, and economy through the stewardship of infrastructure and natural resources.

Values:

- Integrity – We can be counted on to use sound judgement and follow-through on our promises.
- Reliability – We are committed to consistently providing high-quality products and services.
- Teamwork and Partnership – We work together to achieve shared goals.
- Diversity and Inclusion – We are committed to creating an inclusive workplace that promotes and values diversity.
- Innovation – We take a creative approach and adapt to changing circumstances.
- Stewardship – We make wise and efficient use of the financial and natural resources with which we are entrusted.
- Equity – We work to ensure fair access to and delivery of our essential services.

Strategic Priorities:

Employee recruitment, retention, and development

Equitable services

Climate and land use change adaptation

Community engagement

Emergency management and cybersecurity

Service reliability and resiliency

Employee recruitment, retention, and development

OWASA’s mission requires a dedicated team. The following initiatives make advancements beyond the myriad of important HR efforts underway. This priority has a high-level of overlap with OWASA’s organizational value of Diversity and Inclusion.

Goals	Initiatives
Increase the number of applicants for entry-level and/or high-turnover positions	Develop a recruitment strategy for entry-level and high-turnover positions
Achieve and maintain competitive compensation	Conduct and implement a Pay and Class Study
Ensure staff are prepared, informed, and engaged to lead OWASA into the future	Develop and institute an Employee Development Plan

Equitable Services

This priority focuses on assisting those in our community who face challenges with obtaining and paying for our services. The following goals and initiatives were identified as near-term opportunities to increase the equity of OWASA’s life-critical services.

Goals	Initiatives
Decrease # of disadvantaged/underserved households not connected to OWASA’s services	Identify affected households and pursue outside funding to connect
Increase adequacy and accessibility of customer assistance funding	Evaluate and update Care to Share program

Climate and Land Use Change Adaptation

Climate change readiness/adaptation was universally identified as a high priority by OWASA staff, Board, community, and stakeholders. In the strategic priority-setting workshop, climate change mitigation was differentiated from adaptation: adaptation was rated a very high priority to address, mitigation was not. Additionally, recognizing the interplay between climate change and land use change (particularly on hydrology), adaptation to land use change is included in this strategic priority.

Goals	Initiatives
Increase drought resilience	Implement most viable Jordan Lake alternative
Prepare for organizational impacts of climate and land use change	Develop Climate Action Plan

Community Engagement

Achieving and maintaining the trust of our community requires that we effectively engage with them and respond to their needs. The community survey identified some informational gaps regarding

OWASA's commitment to environmental protection, sustainability, and infrastructure construction. In addition to continuing to pursue and refine OWASA's Communications and Community Engagement Program, the following goals and initiatives were prioritized to further enhance our community engagement.

Goals	Initiatives
Increase the quality and use of community feedback	Develop and implement regular community survey
Streamline customer account experience	Integrate online billing and water use portals

Emergency Management and Cybersecurity

The OWASA Board (past and present), stakeholders, and community members all ranked "preparing for emergencies and cybersecurity threats" as one of their top three priorities for OWASA to address over the next five years. However, preparation is only one aspect of emergency management. It is equally important to focus on the prevention of, protection against, response to, and recovery from emergencies and cybersecurity threats. Therefore, this priority was adapted to broadly address emergency management. OWASA has a robust emergency management and cybersecurity program. The following initiatives would enhance existing efforts and help to increase our capacity to manage emergencies.

Goals	Initiatives
Ensure staff are prepared and ready for emergencies of all types	Develop and institute a Continuous Emergency Preparedness Model
Reduce risk exposure	Assess risk on collection and wastewater system and implement high priority risk mitigation actions for entire system

Service Reliability and Resiliency

Service reliability and resiliency are at the core of ensuring that our water and sewer services are valued and the community's trust is developed and maintained. This requires us to ensure our infrastructure remains in good working order, our investments and operations are data-driven, and we have redundancy in the system. The following initiatives are recommended to increase OWASA's service reliability and resiliency.

Goals	Initiatives
Increase capital project execution	Develop and pursue project delivery optimization plan
Reduce downtime of critical infrastructure and equipment	Update and execute asset management plan
Improve the collection and use of real-time data to inform and drive decision-making for the	Execute SCADA Master Plan

Goals	Initiatives
provision of drinking water, sewer, and reclaimed water services	
Establish and pursue capital investment goals	Establish and implement capital investment strategy