

**The Right Team: Attacking Water Supply Challenges Effectively\***

*By Martin C. Rochelle and Nathan E. Vassar*

Countless endeavors focus on the importance of building the right team and doing so in recognition of the team members' combined strengths. And key to building a team is whether members can mesh their collective talents together to help achieve a clearly identified team goal. In the arena of water supply planning, choosing the right team is every bit as important. Certain challenges demand the right combination of talent and expertise, as water suppliers face regulatory hurdles, political pressures, permitting obligations, protestants seeking to derail a project, all sometimes accompanied by daunting technical issues. Our first water supply planning tools article focused on water supply challenges that may be identified through completion of a water audit, and the opportunities that audits may afford water suppliers. In this article, we outline the importance of developing a team to address known water supply challenges, the means to develop such a team, and the benefits of this kind of collaborative, team approach.

An old adage states if one does not know where he is going, any road will get him there. Accordingly, a water supply "destination" should be clear before drawing up a road map and developing a team. A common mistake in addressing many water supply needs is to pursue a permitting or technical "fix" without thoroughly assessing the full implications of same and/or developing the desired goal. Is obtaining a water rights permit the desired end point, or is providing water to new customers the goal? Is a robust conservation program the real target, or is it merely an intermediate step toward a goal while more efficiently stretching existing

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\* This article is included in a series of water supply planning and implementation articles that address simple, smart ideas for consideration and use by water suppliers in their comprehensive water supply planning efforts.

supplies? Taking the time to develop the ultimate objective can help inform decisions as to the right team and the right path to reach it.

Building a successful team also requires an eye for addressing the chasm that may exist between one's current challenge and the ultimate goal. Given the complexities of water projects in Texas, "cookie cutter" approaches or quick-fixes can often leave a water supplier vulnerable. Although a state-driven regulatory answer may provide a familiar answer for certain projects, federal regulatory issues should also be explored or considered before forging ahead. And just because an approach has been used successfully in the past does not mean it is the right tool for a current challenge, as the facts may be different or the landscape may have changed. Accordingly, the right team should be equipped with backgrounds that can inform implementation strategies and evaluate potential threats and practical alternatives to recommended approaches. These considerations demand an early due diligence process to identify clear goals and search for team members who can recognize challenges and offer a menu of solutions to address them.

A successful team in the water planning arena often begins with the selection of a project manager, whether the manager is "in-house" or an outside consultant to the water supplier. Having someone who knows or can help identify the ultimate goal, and who possesses experience in the arena, is critical to building an effective team. That manager, in concert with the supplier, can help identify the process by which the team is formed and the manner in which the team functions. Depending on the project, team members may come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and hopefully they possess different skill sets. Of course, many water supply issues involve highly technical subjects and require the services of competent engineering firms, both as to design and consulting. The Senate Bill 1 Regional Water Planning process suggests the

inclusion of team members who have familiarity with projects in a particular regional planning area, if not also state-wide. As noted above, the overlay of federal and state regulatory issues may involve the use of legal counsel to help navigate red tape and identify and affect solutions through advocacy and familiarity with the law and the regulatory landscape within which a project might be pursued. Depending upon the issues at hand, the political landscape that may envelop a project, and the public eye, a governmental and/or public relations approach may be needed to help articulate a project's core purpose and its associated "messages"--and to a variety of constituencies: ratepayers, citizens, regulators, lawmakers, and other political subdivisions, to name just a few. Other team candidate participants may vary depending upon the project, the related issues and project goals; however, many projects will require a package of team members that stretch across disciplines in order to appropriately address particular needs and challenges.

Perhaps most importantly, selected team members must be collaborative in order to advance the client's interests and forge ahead toward the established goal. The best team is one where the client's ultimate goal is embraced by members whose specific offerings combine to improve and refine the team's product. And because water projects often take considerable time and resources, a client is best served by a team with some measure of depth, as well.

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