Sustainable Management of Rural and Small Systems: Training the Trainer Webinar Transcript

January 14, 2014

Speakers:

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Transcript:

Rob Greenwood

Slide: Sustainable Management of Rural and Small Systems: Training the Trainer Webinar

What I'd like to do is to move us into the main aspects of the webinar.

Slide: Presenter Introduction

First, I'd like to introduce the team here that will do the main presenting today. As I've already indicated, I'm Rob Greenwood. I'm a principal with Ross Strategic. Ross Strategic is an environmental, natural resources, public health consultancy from Seattle, Washington. I've been involved in providing primary consulting support to EPA and USDA on effective utility – various effective utility management efforts. I've been involved in helping to produce the Small Systems Guidebook and also to support the Sustainable Management of Rural and Small Systems Workshops, the workshops that we'll discuss today. And within the context of those workshops, I was the primary facilitator for those. I'd like to just turn things over momentarily here to my colleague, Morgan Hoenig, so that she can introduce herself to you all, as well.

Morgan Hoenig

Good morning and good afternoon, everyone. As Rob said, I'm Morgan, and I have been working to support the Rural and Small Systems effort with EPA and USDA for a little over a year now. I've also been working on water and wastewater policy with Ross Strategic for about three years. Prior to joining Ross, I worked in sustainability in the hospitality industry, and I also do triple bottom-line analysis for the City of Seattle. So welcome.

Slide: Webinar Logistics

Today, as you have probably already noticed, everyone is entered in mute mode. We had a little bit of a reverberation, and that's what happens when we have too many folks unmuted at once. So to reduce background noise, we will keep everyone in mute. There will be a number of times throughout the webinar where we will open up for question and answer, and you are able to submit questions in your control panel. If your control panel has disappeared, you'll see a little red arrow up at probably the top right of your screen. And if you click that, it will bring your control panel back. And then that bottom red box that you see is where you can submit questions during the question and answer time. We will work to answer as many questions as possible during the webinar today, but we will also send out a brief questionnaire at the end of the webinar, and that will be used – that will be another opportunity for you all to submit questions, and then we will respond to those via e-mail later. So Rob, back to you.

Rob Greenwood

Slide: Webinar Agenda

Terrific. Thank you, Morgan. I would again just like to mention here -- and as I'm sure you're all aware – USDA and EPA have been the sponsors for the workshops. They're also the sponsors for this webinar today. Our original intension was for both EPA and USDA to make opening remarks as part of the webinar, but, again, we've had some audio difficulties that, at least at this point in time, are preventing us from bringing them in to make those introductions. If that problem changes through the webinar, we'll take a break to bring them into the discussion here.

All right. So let's then talk about our agenda today for the webinar. It's a multi-part webinar, and as Morgan mentioned, you will be in a listening mode. We will take questions via the question function and look to respond to those as we move through. We'll first talk about the materials and the background and objectives for the webinar. We'll move from there to talk about the context for the workshops themselves. From there we'll move to talking about preparing for a workshop, putting you in the role of the organizer and facilitator and talking you through how to think about preparing for a workshop. We'll move from there into conducting your workshop. This is the major presentation portion of the webinar. We'll have a break right around the middle of the discussion there, and we're targeting approximately 11:00 a.m. Pacific Time for that break. But again, give or take probably ten minutes on either side of that, depending on our progress. That segment, the conducting your workshop segment, should run approximately 90 minutes to two hours in terms of presentation and some of the question and answers that we have there. Then we'll move into a couple of wrap-up items on the webinar, post-workshop activities, a brief presentation there. And then we'll move into the last two items, quiz questions and a final question and answer opportunity.

The – something that I would just like to stress here in terms of the quiz questions that we have throughout, those are to test as much us here as presenters as it is your uptake of the information. It's a way for us to see if we have not been clear communicating on any key topics during the webinar. And then, if that turns out to be the case, we can double back around and cover the material a second time again to make sure that we've done a good job of communicating with you all.

Slide: Webinar Materials

All right. So I'd like to talk about the key webinar materials for today. There are two in particular. The Rural and Small Systems Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management, that's depicted on the left-hand portion of your screen, and the Workshop in a Box. These materials were developed by EPA and USDA in 2013 through a Memorandum of Agreement to jointly support a series of activities to help rural and small systems improve performance and effectively provide sustainable services to their communities. The documents were based on four pilot projects which we, Ross, supported, and the content of this webinar will reflect our experiences at these workshops. We'll also reference these documents and additional materials that are provided within the context of the Workshop in a Box throughout the webinar. We'll pause at various times to provide an opportunity for those of you on the webinar to look, actually, in these documents to the extent that you have them handy and in front of you as we conduct the webinar.

Slide: Multi System vs. Team Workshop

There's something that I would like to first note as we move into – as we move into the webinar. The Workshop in a Box material supports two types of workshops. The first is a multi-system workshop format where an outside facilitator conducts the workshop for participants from multi-utility systems, and the participants learn from each other's experiences. A separate form of workshop that's supported by the Workshop in a Box is a team workshop. And here, participants at the workshop are from the same utility system, and the facilitator is typically an in-house staff person. When you look at the screen here, you can see some of the key distinct differences between these two forms of workshops. So for example, attendees. With the multi-system workshop, you'll see that we have participants from multiple utilities, water or wastewater. And with the team exercise workshop, the participants are directly associated with the utility, potentially including utility staff, board members, or community stakeholders. Another key difference you can see here is with the objectives, again, introducing multi-systems to the ten management areas and equipping them to use the self-assessment exercise with their own utility. The team exercise, again, is an in-house activity where an in-house team would be moving through the self-assessment activity. The important thing here is that today, this webinar is geared towards the multi-system workshop track in the Workshop in a Box guide. But it can still be helpful to those who seek to run a team workshop, as well. But again, our focus today will be on the multi-system workshop. I'll just note that this slide that you're seeing on your screen right now is included in page 5 in the Workshop in a Box materials. So again, it's something that is available to you in that guide.

Slide: Feedback from Previous Workshops

Continuing in the way of background for the workshops, what we'd like to stress with this slide is that the feedback for the four pilot workshops was very positive. You can see here just a couple of statistics, but pretty much across the board – pretty much across the board, we were given very strong feedback. We had anywhere from 20 to 40 participants at the webinars, and typically no more than a single individual gave any type of low rating to the questions. We bring this up because that feedback has left USDA and EPA very comfortable with the content as it has been prepared for these workshops, both the structure, the flow, and the actual materials available in the workshops. And as a result, there's a request that those of you that will be moving forward to facilitate these workshops adhere closely to the materials that have been developed as materials that have been proven, again, through the pilot testing. Let me just check here. One thing, again, just to note, and we'll talk a little bit about this, is there are templates that are available in the Workshop in a Box. And there is tailoring that is available to you within the context of those templates. And again, we'll speak to that a little bit furtherer in a moment. So this is not a completely by rote exercise by any means, but, again, those core materials have been well tested.

Slide: Objectives for Today's Webinar

Okay. Let's then talk about the objectives for today's webinar. The first is that we'd like to cover the critical elements of the Rural and Small Systems Guidebook and the Workshop in a Box. And as I mentioned previously, we will look to reference specific pages and aspects of those materials as we move through this. We'd also like to discuss the key facilitation techniques. These workshops are – we are – the workshops, as a facilitated activity, depend quite a bit on effective facilitation, and so we will spend time on that. And then finally, at the end of the day here, we're really hoping that you as participants will feel very well prepared to facilitate future workshops.

Slide: Rural and Small Systems Workshop Objectives

Okay. Here we'll pivot now, and we'll begin to talk about the multi-system workshops themselves. And we'll start with the objectives for these workshops. First, helping small and rural systems to improve their performance. That is the overarching objective. The hope here is that, having attended these workshops, participants will have improved their sense of what it means to run an effective and sustainable system, will have received ideas on how to better do that, and feel equipped to run a self-assessment exercise as they return to their utility. During the course of the workshop, they will complete a preliminary self-assessment based on the Guidebook. They'll be talking about how to improve in certain of the management areas, and that's designed to then help them prepare an improvement plan when they return to their own utility. We hope that they'll also be able to use the Guidebook with staff and stakeholders in their own communities and that they will have learned from their peers about practical solutions to challenges that small and rural systems face.

Slide: Setting the Workshop Context: Intended Audience

So importantly, the audience that attends these workshops is critical to the success, and the material is very much geared around a particular type of participant -- first and foremost, utility managers. This is very much geared towards those individuals at the utility that have management responsibilities, understanding that when we're talking about small and rural systems, sometimes there may only be one or two individuals that are responsible for the entirety of the system. So again, there's an understanding of that. But importantly, the person you very much will want in the room is the person with the broad management responsibilities for the system. In addition to that, we've had great success with other participants, as well, other utility staff members who can contribute to or benefit from exploring management issues and challenges. What we've seen is some utilities will come with two or three or four individuals and have a team there at the workshop, and that's worked very well for those utilities. Utility board members have come, and that's been a great opportunity for utility board members to learn more about what it means and what it takes to run a system well. And then finally, local decision makers such as elected officials. We've had mayors, we've had council members and others that have also attended. And again, I think they have found it productive, and certainly they've contributed well to the dialogue that's taken place.

Slide: Setting the Workshop Context: The Three Major Guidebook Components

In terms of the context for the workshop, there are three major components of the Guidebook. And again, the Guidebook is the key background material overall for the workshops. There are key management areas, ten, that are contained in the Guidebook, there's a self-assessment exercise contained in the Guidebook, and there is creating an improvement plan contained in the Guidebook. Now, as I've mentioned previously, and we'll talk in more detail, both the key management areas and the self- assessment exercise are very much covered as part of the workshop. Creating an improvement plan is something that we look to equip participants to undertake on their own or with their own internal team after they've returned to their utility.

Slide: Setting the Workshop Context: Key Management Areas

So just a brief mention here about the key management areas. As I've said, there are ten key management areas, and these are viewed as key building blocks for utility performance improvement. It's where utilities should focus and what they should be striving for. That's how we define those management areas within the context of the Guidebook. There's no implied priority or order for the management areas. This is determined on an individual system-by-system basis. Most water – what we have found is that most water and wastewater utilities pay attention to these areas and likely perform well in at least some of them. But the purpose of these workshops is to bring a more acute focus to the management areas so that utilities consider improvements in areas that they are not already addressing or that they determine are a weakness at their utility. If you take a moment now, if you have the Guidebook handy and in front of you, and you turn to pages 3 through 5, you'll see the primary discussion of – you'll see the primary discussion of the key management areas. So again, I'd like to just provide you a moment to just quickly glance over those pages, again, to the extent that you have that document in front of you. And again, what you'll see is that each of the management areas is defined with anywhere from three to four sentences, and this acts as the fundamental building blocks around which the workshop has been created and, for that matter, the Guidebook is built.

Slide: Setting the Workshop Context: Utility Self Assessment Exercise

Okay. So moving forward to the second important area of the Guidebook, it is the utility self-assessment exercise. The Guidebook covers this self-assessment process, and it can be used in various settings to improve understanding about utility operating and capital requirements and build support for needed performance improvements. The self-assessment -- and we will speak to this in more detail as we get further into the webinar -- the self-assessment is covered on pages 6 through 9 in the Guidebook. So again, if you'd like to just take a moment and glance at that in your Guidebook, you'll see that there's a set of directions and a set of process steps that are laid out in the Guidebook for completing the self-assessment.

Slide: Setting the Workshop Context: Creating an Improvement Plan

All right. And the third piece of the Guidebook, or the third building block of the Guidebook, is creating an improvement plan, and it's a critically important part of the Guidebook. And here you can refer to pages 17 and 18 in the Guidebook to have a description of that process. And the improvement plan is also an important component of the internal team workshop, which we mentioned earlier, although, again, that type of workshop is not the focus of this webinar today. Participants in the multi-system workshops should feel equipped to complete their own improvement plans as a result of the workshops. You will, at the tail end of the workshop, introduce the improvement plan. But there will not be time – there's not time allotted in the agenda for individual systems to work through creating this particular improvement plan. Okay.

The – I'm going to hand things now to Morgan Hoenig, who is going to talk through the basics of preparing for your workshop. Morgan?

Morgan Hoenig

Slide: Preparing for Your Workshop

Thanks, Rob. So as Rob has talked about, there are a number of key materials that you want to have prepared for your workshop, and we'll go through that in a moment. And then we'll also talk about the templates and the documents that are included in your Workshop in a Box and then also talk about other general logistics.

So in addition to support from EPA and USDA, the first four pilot workshops also have local sponsors. So for instance, there was a workshop held in Georgia, and the local partner was the Georgia Rural Water Association. So it's great to consider reaching out to these partners to work with you for promoting and inviting folks to your event and then also helping out with some on-the-ground logistics, so that can be securing meeting space, bringing in AV equipment as needed, those kinds of things. You can work with EPA and USDA to help identify folks for you to partner with. You can also reach out to local technical assistance providers. Many of you may actually be technical assistance providers. So it's just kind of working with your contacts and helping to network the event.

Also as you're thinking about preparing for your workshop, it's great to reach out to as many people as possible. A good turnout really helps with discussion. An ideal number for these workshops is somewhere between 35 and 40 participants, but you can certainly work with fewer if you have a smaller community. You probably wouldn't want to run the workshop with fewer than eight or ten. With fewer people than that, you don't get as rich of a discussion. So if you're getting eight to ten or less, you might want to try to do more outreach. And then, in addition, it helps to have a number of different systems represented at the workshops so that folks can learn from each other's experiences. And at each table, you probably want to have around five or ten participants, again, just to help that discussion move along.

Slide: Preparing for Your Workshop: Materials

As Ron mentioned, there are many different supplemental materials included in your Workshop in a Box. Some of these are labeled as documents, and some of them are labeled as templates. The documents are meant to remain more static as content. So for instance, the Guidebook itself is a document. It's not meant to be modified by you all. But then there are templates that you want to look at that can be changed for your workshops and your specific needs. We've highlighted, as you can see, areas in the templates that you might consider revising. So all those blue highlighted spaces are places where you would fill in your information tailored to your participants' needs. And these materials will go into your participant packets which you'll handout during the meeting.

Slide: Preparing for Your Workshop: Participant Packets

So the participant packets will include the Guidebook itself as well as the worksheets, so the self-assessment worksheet that Ron covered; the improving outcomes worksheet, which we'll get to later; a list of resources for small and rural systems; an improvement plan worksheet; and then a feedback form, which is optional but often very helpful.

Slide: Preparing for Your Workshop: Room Configuration

As you're getting ready for your workshop, day of or perhaps day before, you will want to set up your room in a roundtable setting. The roundtable setting really helps participants have an easier discussion. In classroom style or theater style rooms, there's not as much interaction or interactivity opportunities available. And then you want to have at least one flipchart in the front of the room, but you could have two, maybe one on each side, in addition to a projector screen so that you can walk through the workshop slides. So with that, I will turn it back over to Rob, and he's going to talk about conducting the workshop itself.

Rob Greenwood

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop

Thank you, Morgan. Let's go ahead and advance the slide.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Workshop Agenda

So let's go ahead and start with the basic workshop agenda. The workshop agenda is template 1-A from the Workshop in a Box materials. And if you have that handy, terrific. It's not necessary that you do. I will, as we move through, point out and link the items that I'll present on specifically back to the sessions in template 1-A.

So the workshop, just to do quickly a very high level, beginning with welcome and introductions, of course, moving through workshop objectives. And then the agenda moves you into Session 1, the overview of team management areas presentation. This also includes a discussion of potentially other important management areas for sustainability, and I'd like to come back and discuss that bullet in a moment, even before we advance this slide. The agenda then moves participants into the self-assessment exercise, which is really the core of the interactive aspect of the workshop. This is Session 2 on the agenda template, template 1-A. It also includes a discussion period which is covered in Session 3 on the agenda template.

Typically, the workshops have had a working lunch, and that working lunch has been used for a variety of purposes, sometimes to have an outside or additional presenter come in. In particular, we had local technical assistance providers come in and present on some of their offerings that related to the management areas. Sometimes we've used that working lunch period to catch up if we fell behind a little bit or if participants were interested in attempting to end early and didn't mind having a working lunch. So we kept that really as optional and floating, depending on the dynamics of participation and the participants. That's really your choice. If you prefer to fix that from the outset, certainly that's a fully appropriate and acceptable way to move forward.

After lunch, you move into an improving outcomes exercise. These are Sessions 4 and 5-A on the agenda template. And then from there, discussion about practices, tools, and measures. That's Session 5-B on the template. And then into feedback session. Again, this is something that's optional in these workshops going forward although certainly strongly encouraged and advisable. And that's covered in Session 6 on the template, the agenda template.

Just to make a note, and I'll reinforce this one additional time as we move through the webinar, with regard to the area of other important management areas for sustainability, that fourth bullet point on this slide that I mentioned previously, this can create a challenging facilitation context. And for the previous four workshops, our experience there would suggest that it's not necessarily needed to conduct a successful workshop. The reason why we bring it up on this webinar is because it is included as part of the agenda template and included as part of the discussions in the Workshop in a Box.

The original idea with the four pilot workshops was we weren't fully confident that the four – I'm sorry, that the ten key management areas would fully resonate with participants or that they would feel that some of the management issues that they face were captured within those ten areas. So we deliberately opened it up to a dynamic facilitation context where we had that discussion with them to see if they wanted to in any way modify the framework that we would use moving into the self-assessment. As it turns out, in those four workshops, we never had a request for a major modification, and what we really received was feedback that all of the participants were quite comfortable working within the framework of the ten management areas. So again, this is an optional area for you to think about as you facilitate the workshops. Just keep in mind that this is one of those places where, if you have one or two participants that are strongly opinionated and vocal and they decide to challenge the key management areas, you'll have to manage that discussion and not have the workshop derailed. So again, there's a bit of a risk there to move down that path. Again, at the same time, it can be very effective in terms of getting participant buy-in. But again, this is your choice as you move forward. As we advance the slide, I did just want to mention that the overall working time will be approximately five to six hours, depending you how you make your specific time allocations within each of the sessions for the workshop.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Welcome & Workshop Objectives

In terms of handling the welcome and workshop objectives, a couple of things to keep in mind. I, as a primary facilitator, found it very effective to introduce myself to all participants as they entered the room just to establish rapport, get to know them a little bit, have an opportunity for people to get to know me a little bit. As a stranger coming into a community where many of the people in the room knew each other through their state association, Rural Water Association, for example, I certainly felt the need to do that. You may have less of a need to do that to the extent that you work locally and work with these systems on a regular basis. I still think it's a good idea to meet people as they enter the room and introduce yourself.

As you begin, it's important to have the workshop participants themselves make introductions, and it's very helpful to have them describe their roles at their utilities to each other. That way everyone really has a good understanding of the types of individuals that are in the room and the expertise, for that matter, that's in the room. It's also very important as part of the introduction to describe what we've labeled the workshops as a "joint learning model," and I'd like to take a moment to describe that.

The way that we've – the way that we've presented this is to say that there's three aspects of learning that take place at these workshops. The first is utilities learn from what EPA and USDA have compiled from utility experience. And that comes to the workshop participants in the form of presentation materials that typically the facilitator will make unless you decide, as a facilitator, that there's a separate local resource or individual that you'd like to invite in to do that. The Workshop in a Box slide material has the information for presentation. The second is that there's a very good opportunity for the participants to learn from each other during the team-based table discussions, and we consistently received feedback that this was one of the best aspects of the workshops, was the peer-to-peer learning aspect. We'll talk more about how to best facilitate that to happen as we move farther into the webinar. And then finally, there's an opportunity for the participants to learn from local technical assistance providers.

And in particular, again, as I mentioned, we used a working lunch context, for example, to have an opportunity for technical assistance providers that would be servicing the community of participants that are in the room to present about their offerings and provide tips to the participants. You can layer that type of expertise into your workshop in any way that you think would be most effective, but certainly we encourage that you look to do that. Just one note before we move on. Slide 3 in the Workshop in a Box presentation materials contains the descriptive notes for how to talk through the objectives and the joint learning model. It basically gives a little bit more detail than I just have verbally, so, again, be sure to take a look at notes on that particular slide.

Side: Conducting Your Workshop: Reviewing the Key Management Areas (1)

Okay. So with more of that background out of the way, we now dive right into the detailed content of the workshops. Here I'm beginning to present relative to Session 1 of the workshop -- and on the template 1-A, Session 1 is labeled "Overview of key management areas." And Session 1 is, again the area where – and really is the primary area where you as a facilitator or an individual that you designate will do a presentation from the slide materials provided in the Workshop in a Box.

So what happens here? The ten management areas are covered as part of this session. Each of them is covered with a slide from the Workshop in a Box materials. Some important things to note here is, first, that there's no explicit or implied hierarchy or priority among the management areas, and it's very important to mention and stress this as part of your presentation. Need and priority are totally driven by the individual utility's operating environment, and, again, that's a second point to stress, both that there's no hierarchy or priority among the management areas and, again, that priority is very much driven by the local context. And finally, as I've already mentioned, these materials are included in the slides in the Workshop in a Box. The management area review is covered in slides 4 through 18 in the workshop presentation materials, and slides 5 through 7 set the stage for the management areas by describing common challenges faced by small systems and how the management areas respond to these challenges.

Also, just a quick reference back to the Guidebook, these are covered on pages 3 through 5 of the Guidebook. What I'd like to do before we advance our slide here is, for those of you that might have the Sustainable Management of Rural and Small Systems Workshop Multi-System Workshop PowerPoint slides in front of you or handy, is to just give you a moment to flip through slides 4 through 18 just to develop a sense of what's there. And as I mentioned, there are – in particular, slides 5 and 7 set the context for the presentation that you'll make. So I'll pause here for just a minute to allow people to just flip through and see what's there.

Okay. Just before we advance the slide, you will have seen, again, that there are a few slides up front that set context around common challenges for utility managers. You may very much have a strong feel of which of these challenges might be of highest interest or relevance to the audience that you'll be working with, and so you can very much tailor your remarks around your read on what will best resonate with those participants. And then we move into the ten key management areas, and we provide a slide for each of those along with some notes for each slide to help you present on those areas. And again, I'm sure that you'll find it useful to reference back in terms of your preparation to the Guidebook itself and where these key management areas are covered there.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Reviewing the Key Management Areas (2)

Okay. Continuing with the discussion around Session 1, we wanted to very much stress that it can easily be the case that participants in the workshop can feel overwhelmed by the notion of ten management areas to focus on. There is a chance that many of those areas -- they will see many of those areas as weak, from their management perspective. So what we very much ask that you stress is that taking this one bite at a time, performance improvement, is very important. Hopefully during the course of the self-assessment exercise that they'll conduct, they'll be able to isolate around one or two management areas that will be of most importance to them initially and, as a result, again, be able to take this a step at a time rather than be left with a sense of being overwhelmed. I'd also again just like to note one last time that the multi-system workshop slides provided with your Workshop in a Box materials suggest that the list of management areas can be adapted for your workshop. And again, that would be done on a facilitation basis at the workshop itself, and it's a decision you'll need to take as to whether you want to move into that type of a dynamic facilitation mode around the ten key management areas or not. Again, it is absolutely not necessary for workshop success, from our perspective.

Slide: Webinar Logistics

All right. So we're going to move into our first question and answer period. What I'm going to do is turn things over to Morgan Hoenig, my colleague, for a moment to describe that process, and then we'll ask participants to submit questions. We'll be looking over those questions and look to pick some. And we'll look to spend about ten to 15 minutes as part of answering questions. So Morgan?

Morgan Hoenig

Great. Thanks, Rob. So again, this is just to look at that graphic that I showed you earlier. Many of you have already submitted some questions, but for those of you who didn't see this in the beginning, you can submit questions in the bottom of your control panel, right there where that red box is. So if you want to go ahead and do that, we will look through them for just a couple of minutes and then cover as many as we can in the time that we have and then move on through the next section. So again, go ahead and just start typing in your questions, and we will look through them.

Rob Greenwood

Okay. So we have questions coming in, so I'd like to take those, again, a few of them and move through.

The first is: "Do you have suggestions for getting board members and decision makers to attend?" That's a great question, in part because, again, when we did have a board member or decision makers attend, I think they both signaled – I don't think -- they did signal that they very much appreciated the workshop and that they learned a lot. And I think that the utility manager that was there was very appreciative of then having someone in the community that had a broader understanding of what it takes to run a utility well. In terms of recruitment for those members, typically that took place at the local level. So the utility manager was the person that reached out and recruited those individuals to come. The message was – the messaging there, at least in part, and seemingly effective, was the notion that both, for example, the local town mayor or the board member has a fiduciary responsibility in terms of the effective management and delivery of services from the utility and that this was an opportunity to better understand what it takes to meet that duty. So that was, I think, a key piece of messaging that was used. The other was, to the extent that there was a new board member or a new elected official that had shown strong interest in the utility, there was an opportunity to say to them effectively that this is a very sort of concentrated training where they'll learn a lot across a broad swath of what it takes to manage a utility effectively.

Okay. There's a question here, and I'll go ahead and read this out. There's a question here: "Why the new terminology, SUM versus EUM and attributes versus management areas? Having talked with small utilities about EUM before the SUM workbook was released, this makes future communication more challenging." So again, let me speak to that. The effective utility management effort and that initial work drew very heavily on medium and large systems for developing the initial case work that then led to those materials. And so an important aspect of the shift in terminology was a strong interest in creating materials that were specifically tailored to small and rural systems, and there was a belief in part that the shift in terminology would signal, again, that very deliberate focus and intent. So that's what has driven that shift, and the hope is, again, there's an opportunity to communicate that to the extent that you've already been communicating around EUM, effective utility management.

There's a third question here: "Should there be a fee for the seminar, and can there be?" These first four workshops were sponsored by the USDA and EPA. The local sponsors at times charged a modest fee, primarily directed at covering the lunch expense so there was an ability to – so there was an ability to have lunch there and keep people in the room rather than have them have to go off site for lunch and risk a late start. So that was the approach during those workshops. Certainly, your need to cover core costs is a consideration for how you would think about any type of fee that you would charge.

Another question: "What has been the average length of one of these trainings?" Typically, the trainings have run between five and six hours. We've deliberately kept them that timeframe. Our belief has been that it's about a minimum of five hours to effectively present the material and have an opportunity for robust discussions to take place among participants. And at the same time, going beyond six hours, you wind up with exhausted participants, and it can make it much more difficult for people to travel in for a day session, for the day's session. So again, we've targeted five to six hours for them.

Another question: "Do you recommend this training for systems under 200 connections?" Our experience with the four pilot workshops is that a pretty broad – we had a pretty broad range, including systems that had fewer than 200 connections, all the way up to systems that were running in the 3,000, 2,000 to 3,000 range. We did not detect any difference in either the participants' ability to engage and contribute to the discussion nor in their sense of the value of the workshop. So our read based on the four workshops is that, yes, going down to 200 connections, possibly even fewer, the workshop is well geared to serve – to speak to and effectively engage participants from those types of systems.

Okay. So we're going to take, at this point, one more question. Now, we have had a lot of questions submitted, as you might expect. We have very high attendance for the webinar. But again, we'll need to move on here to stay on time. The question is: "Should you break up utility attendees to different tables?" The answer to that is it depends. Certainly, what we found was, during the self-assessment portion of the – of the workshop, having the utility – members from the same utility team together allowed them to compare notes and build their self-assessments together. That seemed like a very effective approach. At the final workshop that we did, I think we had one utility that came with either four or five staff members, and they functioned very well as a team. When you move to the improving outcomes portion of the workshop, it can be more effective to have people split up in terms of being able to share their experiences with others at the workshop. So what I would say is, unless there's really high push-back from the team that's shown up in terms of being split up among the tables, lean into allowing them to work together during the self-assessment exercise, and lean into splitting them up when you get into the improving outcomes area.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: The Utility Self Assessment Exercise (1)

Okay. Thanks for submitting those questions. I apologize to the extent that we did not move through all of those at this point. Again, we have – we want to make sure that we get through the core work. Keep in mind that we have additional question and answer sessions, and so if you posted a question for this session that didn't get answered, and it still remains of high interest after we've done further presentations and materials, please post it again, and we'll see if time won't allow us to get to it.

Okay. So here we're now moving into what is Session 2 of the multi-system workshop agenda on template 1-A. This is the utility self-assessment exercise. So just in the way of background, the first thing that I'd like to do is just reference the self-assessment worksheet, which is provided as part of the Workshop in a Box materials. The self-assessment worksheet is what you'll have to provide as a handout to participants and what they can directly work on as they go through the self-assessment exercise at their tables.

Now, in terms of the utility self-assessment exercise, a couple things to note. The self-assessment exercise is designed to help utilities to better understand where they are strong and where they have room for improvement relative to the ten key management areas. That is its core purpose. In conducting the self-assessment exercise. They will do two basic things. They will rate their level of achievement in each of the management areas, and they will then rank the priority of each area to their system on a high, medium, low scale. And then they'll move on to plot the results in the matrix shown here.

So again, you have a screen shot of the table, and that table appears on page 2 of the self-assessment worksheet. So this is, again, a direct screen shot from those materials. It's something that the participants will have in front of them, and you'll be able to use it as part of your explanation of how to conduct the self-assessment exercise. We'd like to note that participants at some of the workshops have had difficulty with the plotting exercise, which I'll talk about in more detail in a moment.

So it's very imperative that, during your presentation of how to complete the self-assessment, that you take your time there, you use some examples and explain it quite thoroughly. At one of the workshops, we had as many as, I'd say, a quarter of the participants that I needed to actually move to their table and explain the concept of moving material from the table that you're currently seeing on your screen into the matrix where they're plotting. Others, immediate uptake, no problem at all. But again, this just proved to be an area that was a little bit more difficult. What we did do during the first two workshops, we had a system using one-to-five ratings. And we found that that seemed to add to the confusion. So for the last two workshops, we simplified. And again, the materials in the Workshop in a Box use a more simplified approach of the basic low, medium, high scale. The – if you refer to pages 6 through 10 in the Guidebook and slides 19 through 26 in your Workshop in a Box Multi-System Workshop Presentation, you'll see the materials for presenting and discussing the utility self-assessment exercise. So again, let me just pause for a moment for those of you that have those materials handy. Again, I'll repeat that. Pages 6 through 10 in the Guidebook and slides 19 through 26 in your Workshop in a Box Multi-System Workshop Presentation.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: The Utility Self Assessment Exercise (2)

Okay. This slide depicts the process of plotting the self-assessment results, and, again, I'd like to note that this slide is a screen shot also taken from the self-assessment worksheet that you will hand out at the workshop. It's on page 4 under step 3, plot results.

A couple of notes that I'd like to make here. When you look at what we've provided in terms of this example, you'll see that the way this is plotted – and here I'll focus on water resource adequacy, the water resource adequacy key management area -- that for this example, achievements was rated low, and the priority was rated high. And so, moving that into the actual matrix that's provided for the participant to fill out, you wind up with water resource adequacy plotted into the red cell where – I'm sorry – yeah, into the red cell. What does that signal? It signals a high priority area, has low achievement. It's an important area for further development. What you'll see is that all the other management areas are plotted in a similar fashion, and you can refer to page 9 in the Guidebook -- that's page 9 in the Guidebook -- and slide 24 in the Workshop in a Box Multi-System Workshop Slides for further information on this exercise.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: The Utility Self Assessment Exercise (3)

Okay. We'll go ahead and move forward. So this is a screen shot of the matrix itself, and this appears on page 5 of the self-assessment worksheet that you'll hand out. It doesn't have any information filled in. It's blank for participants to complete. You'll note that there's three zones. The white signals low need for attention, the yellow signals medium need for attention, and the red signals a high need for attention, where achievement is low and the priority is high. Once the overall management areas are plotted the participants' areas for initial focus will be quite – will be quite obvious.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: The Utility Self Assessment Exercise (4)

Okay. Let's move forward. So a couple of things to note about the self-assessment exercise that are very important that you explicitly cover with the participants. We found these to be areas where, during the first couple of workshops, we did not cover these as clearly as would have been helpful, and I wound up needing to walk around to the tables and provide further explanation. So again, this is coming straight from how the workshops ran in terms of things that are important to note. So the first thing to keep in mind is, in the rating portion, the rating portion of the self-assessment exercise, there is a dual focus on practices and performance ratings, and both perspectives need to be considered.

So here we'll use water resource adequacy as an example, but you will see this in each of the key management areas. So the first bullet point under water resource adequacy, which reads, "My system is able to meet the water or sanitation needs of its customers now and for the foreseeable future," that is, in effect, a performance -- a bullet point that relates to performance. They can or they can't meet or they can partially meet. So they're at a certain level of performance relative to meeting those needs. So that has a performance orientation. The second bullet, "My utility or community has performed a long-term water supply and demand analysis," that analysis, performing that analysis, is a practice. So they've undertaken that, some form of that, or not. What's important here is explaining the difference to participants and indicating to them that as they're making their rating, they need to factor that in. So for example, high performance without any practices back behind it could be vulnerable. They might just be getting lucky. And so, if they don't have certain practices in place, as reflected in the bullet points relative to the key management areas, their performance, even their high performance, may be vulnerable. So what we've suggested to the participants is, if you're feeling like you're covered from a performance perspective but you don't have practices in place, you probably want to use at least a medium rating, and possibly even a low rating if there are no practices in place. So our sense was that having those practices in place backing up performance is an important message to send and a way to help the participants think about how they would rate their achievement in each of the key management areas. If you take a look at slide 21, the notes section, this is described in more detail. So we do call it out quite explicitly in the PowerPoint slides that you'll be using that are provided in the Workshop in a Box. And again, it's the note sections of slide 21 where that information resides.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: The Utility Self Assessment Exercise (4)

Okay. A few additional things to keep in mind with respect to the utility self-assessment exercise. You'll notice that each of the management areas in the actual form or table that participants will fill out has more than one bullet point. Basically, they have either two or three bullet points. And the question consistently came up, "Well, which of these bullet points do we use for making our assessment of both our achievement and our priority?" And our answer was – and this worked well – was to use the bullet that shows your lowest achievement as your indicator. So if you feel like you have high achievement or medium achievement in – for two of the statements but it's low for the third, then you would use low as your rating. And the same goes for priority. If two of them connect to a sense of medium priority but one to a high priority, then again, you would use that bullet point that speaks to high priority. So what you're attempting to do is to really, in effect, bias the outcome in a conservative way that they're likely to have more areas that come up as needing attention rather than fewer. Now, that needs to be then balanced against the earlier statements that I made about caution with overwhelming systems with too many priorities.

Another key thing to keep in mind is – and requires specific explanation to participants relates to how to think about priority. What we found is that the participants, if they had high achievement in an area, they had a tendency to say automatically, "Well, gee, that is not a high priority for us because we already have high achievement." What we recommended for the self-assessment exercise is to treat achievement and priority as independent. So high achievement does not, by definition, create low priority. So for example, the financial viability area is likely to be high priority all the time. It's an area that needs ongoing critical focus. Even if they have high achievement in that area, they should indicate that that's high priority for them if, in fact, that's the case. So again, treat priority, the actual ranking of priority, independent from the achievement rating.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: The Utility Self Assessment Exercise (5)

Okay. So on the next slide, we'll look at just an example of the second point that I've just made. And then we'll be moving into a couple of our – we'll be moving into another question and answer period. Again, we'll take ten or so minutes for that. And then we'll move into our first set of interim quiz questions. And again, I want to emphasize that those quiz questions are for us to understand have we communicated effectively up to this point in the webinar. So we'll go ahead and advance the slide. And again, just to reiterate here, as you'll see, if the utility rates itself as high for having performed a long-term supply and demand analysis, that's bullet two, but low for meeting the needs of its current customers, bullet one, it should rate its overall achievement as low for this management area.

Slide: Questions About the Self Assessment?

Okay. So we'll once again move into a question and answer period. Please, at this point, submit questions that you'd like to see answered. Again, we'll take as many of them as we can. And feel free to resubmit previous questions if you would like.

Okay. Rob Greenwood from Ross Strategic back here with you. We've got questions pouring in as well as some, I think, some observations that we can turn into the form of a question but, I think, are quite valuable. So the first here, again, provided in the form of an observation says: "To clarify performance versus practice, the practice could be standard operating procedures, telling who, what, and when, et cetera, and the performance is the result of implementing those standard operating procedures." Let me say my compliments to the individual that submitted that as an observation, and I'd like to just reinforce I think that's a terrific way to provide an explanation for the distinction between practice and performance. And then again, it will be important to you, as the one facilitating, to have gone through the table where the bullet points reside for each of the key management areas and have, in your own mind, discerned which of those relate to a performance outcome and which of those relate to a practice outcome. So thank you for that.

Good. Okay. Another question: "For the discussion portion of the self-assessment, is that usually each table independently or the group as a whole?" This is something that we'll cover in a bit more detail as we move further into the webinar, but just very quickly, the self-assessment portion of the workshop agenda essentially has three components. There's a period of time where individuals, at their tables, fill out the – complete the self-assessment for their utility. And again, if there's two or three individuals from the same utility, they may work at a team on theirs. The second portion is table discussion, and there's a set of questions, and the participants around the table talk to each other about their self-assessments and what they found and why. And then the third portion of the self-assessment area for the workshop is plenary discussion, where we have some report out from the tables, and we move into back-and-forth observations among all of those participating.

Okay. Another question: “Has this training been utilized for tribal utilities, and, if so, did you feel like it was well received?” The answer is yes, it has. The fourth workshop was geared quite directly towards tribal utilities. The feedback that we received from that workshop was essentially identical to the feedback that we had received from the previous workshops and was very, very positive. So I’d say you can feel very comfortable that this workshop works well in that context.

Another question: “Do you advise that utilities conduct a self-assessment prior to participating in a multi-site workshop? And if so, why?” For the four workshops we conducted, we did not advise doing a self-assessment in advance. And my read on that is – well, I’m thinking about that for a moment. I think that either way will work just fine. We did not have a problem introducing the self-assessment exercise and having participants get right into it. To the extent the participants had come in and had done some forethought and some previous work, I think that potentially that could enrich their experience at the actual workshop. So what I would say is not necessary, but potentially helpful.

Another question is: “Have you considered asking about priority before asking about achievement?” And the observation is: “This might help systems keep the ideas separate.” During the course of conducting the four workshops, we did not consider doing that. Our overall experience was that, again, with a little extra attention, we were able to explain that difference. So the key here is we don’t have any experience with flipping those, and I think that’s – so I would advise caution with flipping those since, again, we have very good results from these workshops. But I also understand the question and how potentially it could be helpful to reverse that, again, the priority versus the achievement.

Another question is: “Should workshops be designed for systems of similar sizes? Example, a workshop for systems under 500 connections, another for systems 500 to 2,500?” Good question. We did not seek to design within that small systems range, the up to 3,000. And I think what we found was that all of the systems, particularly when we had a diversity, the systems were able to learn quite a bit from each other. What we didn’t run into, which might be a potential concern here behind this question, is did systems with 200 connections or 250 or even down to 400 or at 400 connections find what the 2,500 connection systems say relevant to them? And I’d say, across the board, there was a sense of relevance, that these were participants that related pretty well to each other, if not very well. The other advantage was that, for these systems that started to move into the 1,000, 2,000 and higher connection range, they, by definition, typically had more management capacity and resources and so were able to -- often had experimented more or tried new things more. Those things that they tried appeared, for the most part, to be relevant to the much smaller systems, but it was then their peer group that was talking about what they had tried and what had worked and what hadn’t worked. And there’s very high credibility in the context of that type of peer sharing. So I think, on the whole, our experience would suggest there is not a need to gear in that manner, number one. And number two, there might actually be a little loss of information sharing opportunity if you were to go that direction. I will say, at the same time, you all will be much more familiar with your local context and the local dynamics among systems. And so if it’s your strong sense that getting a group together that’s 500 or fewer, for example, will both provide an opportunity for some good peer-to-peer sharing and create a higher sense of relevance in the discussion, then that would be a good idea.

Another question here is: “What are your recommendations regarding the evaluation component? For this, is a pre- and post-test appropriate?” For these workshops we did not build in a participant evaluation component. So we don’t have any specific advice about how to approach that. Again, we did not have that. We do recommend following up with participants to see if they’ve implemented what they’ve learned at the workshop. But again, we did not set this up in any kind of a test type context where, gee, have you successfully completed this workshop by demonstrating an improvement in your knowledge base?

Another question: “Have you found working with boards and councils in training to be better attended at nights or weekends?” We don’t have any direct experience with that in the context of these workshops. These were all run during normal business hours, so in between 9:00 and 3:00, Monday through Friday. So again, we don’t have any experience with that. To the extent that you’re hoping to gear your workshop to audiences that you know are typically more available at those times, certainly thinking about alternative timing would make a lot of sense. I can easily see where, for boards and councils in smaller communities, where those typically are going to be part-time jobs where the member has a full-time job during the day and it’s very difficult to get away, that could make a lot of sense.

Sure. Another question is asking: “Can you expand a little more on the working lunch concept?” So sure, I’m happy to do that. At a couple of the workshops – now, keep in mind that I was the primary facilitator for these workshops. I am not someone that regularly works on the ground with small and rural systems. I’m based in Seattle, Washington, and these workshops were conducted in other parts of the country. So I’m not a familiar face, nor will I be around after the workshop to provide direct services to the participants. So in a couple of the workshops, working with our local sponsors, we used that working lunch period to bring in outside local technical assistance providers to speak to the services that they – to the services that they provide, number one. Number two, at one of the workshops, we invited a couple of the participants – now, this was arranged in advance – a couple of the participants to talk about their experience with making management improvements. Our thought there was that these individuals were likely to have very high credibility in terms of peer-to-peer credibility with the group, and, in fact, both of the individuals that we asked to do that made very nice presentations and I think they were very helpful to the quality of the overall workshop. So that’s one way to think about that working lunch, is to bring in some outside expertise. The other way is just to catch up time. I think, in one of the workshops, the self-assessment -- given the numbers that we had, the self-assessment exercise ran longer. We allowed it to run longer. But in doing that, we asked if participants would be okay with a working lunch or a compressed lunch. They agreed to that, so we used it to catch up. And then in one of the workshops, we had a request, “Gee, can we make it a working lunch and end early?” And we provided that flexibility and went that direction. So again, those are the three areas that we do.

Okay. Great. So we’re going to go ahead and move into the next portion of the webinar. Again, this is time-driven. We do have other questions here, but as a matter of time, we’ll move forward. We have had quite a few questions coming in about having the slides from today’s webinar available, and the answer is yes, those slides will be available after the webinar. And it’s both the slides and some of the detailed notes -- actually, most of the detailed notes that I’m speaking from today are also included in those slides. And again, we’ll make a version of the slides available that have those.

So what we'd like to do now is move into our light touch quiz portion of the webinar, and so we'll go ahead and post that and ask for your responses. We'll take a look at the responses, and we will – and we'll see if any follow-up is needed. We'll then take our ten-minute break at that point in time, once we've finished with this session. So those of you that are eager for a break at this point, from my voice, or need a walk across the hall or whatever it might be, again, we'll talk that break in probably anywhere from ten to 15 minutes, and it will be for ten minutes. Okay.

Morgan Hoenig

Slide: Quiz Question 1

Great. So this is Morgan Hoenig again. And as you can see up on your screen, we have our first quiz question pulled up. For this question, we will use the polling feature on GoToWebinar. So in a moment you will see that poll come up on your screen. Unfortunately, GoToWebinar doesn't allow us to display images as a part of the poll, so we'd like to you first just read through this question and then come up with your answer, keep that answer in your head, and we will pull up the poll question. And then you can input the answer that you have come up with.

So our first question is: "If water resource adequacy is rated as low achievement and ranked as high priority, where should it be plotted?" So the question is, if you look at that top box, and you see the low rating and the high ranking, which one of those boxes in the bottom grid should it be plotted in? So should it be in one, two, three, or four? And we'll give you about 30 more seconds just to give this some thought, and then we will launch the poll and you can input your number.

Slide: Poll 1

Okay. So with that number in mind, we're going to start the poll. And you should be seeing that on your screen now. And go ahead and vote, and then we will take a look at the results. Okay. So we're going to have this open for about another ten seconds. So if you have not voted yet, please do so. Great. So we are going to close the poll and share the results.

Rob Greenwood

Slide: Poll 1 Results

Okay. So let me first say that, overall, it looks like 82 percent of you that are participating on the webinar voted. We can all see the results at this point.

The correct answer is two, and so we'll go ahead and jump back to – we'll go ahead and jump back to that slide.

Slide: Quiz Question 1

So the correct answer here was two, that you have a low achievement and a high priority ranking. So we still had some folks out there that missed this, so let me just quickly reiterate this, again, this process.

In the – when you're looking at the vertical axis of the matrix, this is where achievement is being plotted. And so, for water resource adequacy, you're looking at low achievement. And so you're, on that vertical axis, you're working with the lowest portion of that vertical axis under achievement, off to the left-hand side there, where it says low. So that's your first plotted point.

The second plotted point relates to priority. And priority relates to, again, our horizontal axis, moving from low to medium to high along the horizontal axis. And again, our plot point here is high, high priority. So when we put those two together, moving both on the vertical and horizontal axis, we plot into that red shaded area, and that is a signal that there is – this is an area that should be of high interest to the participant that had these results.

<u>Morgan Hoenig</u>

Slide: Quiz Question 2

Okay. So you will see your second quiz question up on the screen. And same thing with the first one, just go ahead and take a look at this question, and then have your answer in your head and we will open the polling.

So, "If a utility is currently meeting the water needs of its customers," which refers to bullet one, "but it has not performed a long-term water supply analysis," and that's bullet two, "which of these two bullets should you be using to rate this utility's achievement in water resource adequacy?" So the options will be bullet one and bullet two, and we will open that poll in just a minute after you've had some time to think about it. Great.

Slide: Poll 2

So we will open that poll now. Go ahead and vote as you did before, and then we will discuss. Okay. Just a couple more seconds. It looks like about 80 percent of you have voted so far. If you have not, please do so.

Slide: Poll 2 Results

Okay. So we are going to close the voting now, and you should be seeing those results on your screen in just a moment. And it looks like about 77 percent of folks got this question right, so I'll turn it to Rob to just discuss for a moment.

<u>Rob Greenwood</u>

Slide: Quiz Question 2

Okay. So again, let me go back over the rationale for bullet two as the correct answer. As you'll remember, we spoke previously that, in terms of selecting which of – or in terms of making the assessment for rating and for priority, the directions that you would provide are the following: For rating achievements, you look to the bullet where the system believes it has the least – the least level of achievement, and you use that to guide how you think about achievement. So here, we said that the utility is currently meeting the water needs of its customers, bullet one, so its achievement in this area is certainly medium, if not high. That's bullet one. So achievement there, if they were using bullet one, would be medium or high. However, when we look at the second bullet, the way we've characterized the second bullet, we say, "but this utility has not performed a long-term water supply analysis," which is bullet two.

So if we just isolate on bullet two, we would say they have low achievement. They have not undertaken this practice. And so, again, just isolating on that bullet, they would have low achievement. The overall directions are, when making the rating for achievement, is to use the bullet that shows your lowest achievements. And so in this case, between bullets one and two, that is bullet two. So that's how that winds up as the bullet that would guide the indication of achievements. I'll also just mention – again, we had the earlier discussion or earlier presentation and then a question that looked to draw this out more clearly – is that distinction that we made between performance and practice. And the first bullet is a performance-oriented bullet. They're saying that their achievement relative to performance is high. But their achievement relative to a practice that's critical to supporting sustainable performance over time is low. And as we said, you should be explaining to utilities that, even if their performance is high, if their practices or procedures back behind that are weak, they should probably be looking at rating themselves at least medium, if not low.

Okay. So thank you very much. It seems like the polling certainly works as we had hoped, and hopefully it was useful to you all to both have those light touch questions and then some further explanation for what are some key areas. We'll be moving now to a ten-minute break.

Slide: Webinar Break

This is Rob Greenwood from Ross Strategic, and welcome back to the second half of the Sustainable Management of Rural and Small Systems, Training the Trainer Webinar. I hope everyone had a nice restful ten minutes before we move into the last approximately 90 minutes of the webinar. For those of you here at the very front end of the webinar, you will have noted that we had intended to have EPA and USDA make opening remarks. We were having audio difficulties at that time. We resolved those audio difficulties, and so what we'd like to do at this time is, before moving back into the next phase of the substance of the webinar, create the time for those opening remarks to take place. I'll be turning things over here in just a moment to Jim Horn from the Office of Wastewater Management. So Jim, if you'll just pause for 15 seconds, we will have your audio privileges in place. And Jim will also be inviting Kent Evans to provide some opening remarks for USDA. Jim, wait ten seconds, and then go ahead.

Jim Horne
Okay, Rob. Okay?

Morgan Hoenig
Yep, Jim, you're good to go.

Jim Horne
Okay. Thank you. Good afternoon, folks. This is Jim Horne with US EPA, and sorry we had that little glitch at the beginning. But thanks to Rob and Morgan, it looks like we've fixed it.

So I'll just say a few remarks to put this whole thing in context from our perspective, and I think we share this with our partners at USDA. And then I'll just turn it over to Kent to say a few words on behalf of USDA, and then we'll get back into the rest of the training.

We've been monitoring the questions pretty closely, and I'm impressed by not only the attendance figures, which you can see, but also kind of the quality of the questions. So we appreciate that level of participation.

Let me just say kind of our long-term objectives in why we wanted to do this webinar. It seems to me, from our perspective, there were two things we wanted to do. Obviously we wanted to equate – acquaint people that kind of are in the service-providing business -- and I'll say it that way -- service providers, states, some of – many of our regional counterparts here at EPA and USDA staff who work closely with small systems. We wanted to acquaint them with these materials that we've been developing over the last 18 months or so. And as Rob mentioned, all the materials had extensive input from small systems managers through these four pilot workshops and the processes that we used to develop the actual Guidebook. So again, it's a well-tested approach. But we wanted to acquaint people with the materials, obviously, but our longer term goal is really to build a cadre of trained personnel out there all over the country that feel comfortable with and are excited about hosting workshops and working with small systems, using the documents that US EPA and USDA have spent a lot of time working on. And that's why this webinar is so important. We are, to put it mildly, very, very pleased with the number of people on the line. I haven't looked at the final breakdown by states, but as of two or three days ago, we had people from 47 states, very high participation from people affiliated with RCAP and National Rural Water, which is great use. So again, thanks a lot for being here, and we hope it's going to be useful. I think it will be, and, again, I'm very pleased with what we're seeing so far.

There was a question that came over the wires, as we say, a minute ago about, well, sort of what's going to happen next? Are there going to be additional workshops? Well, yes, there are going to be additional workshops. At this point we're budgeted to do an additional four workshops in 2014. That would be kind of a combined EPA/USDA sponsorship. But it's important to note that we're going to have people, hopefully, that have been through the training that you've gotten on the webinar today be the people that actually facilitate those workshops. That's what we want to do. We want to (inaudible) to work with you and broaden – sort of broaden the reach of this stuff. So we will make sure that, as we work with local sponsors and work with our regional counterparts, that we get people that have been through the webinar today and are comfortable with facilitating the workshops. So we plan to do four, at least four. You know, the budget situation at the federal level is always sort of up in the air. It's about to come down, we think, and get some clarity, and we're hopeful that we can do more than four. But again, we'll follow that model. We want to get local facilitators that have been through the training to begin to carry the ball and work with small systems afterwards.

The last point that I would make is that this gives you kind of a flavor of what this assessment is about. You'll obviously want to work in more detail with the small systems, either at the workshop or, even more importantly, in many cases, as a follow-up to the workshop because what you'll find is, even at the workshop, the five- or six-hour workshop that Rob has been walking you through, they're getting sort of an introduction to the assessment, but we will really encourage them to go back and spend a little more time on it back at their facility and really set – develop a work plan for how they're going to move forward based on the priorities they set. And we'll cover the work plan development process later on in this webinar, but that's a very, very important part of this whole initiative, from EPA and USDA's point. We can do workshops, as we say, till the cows come home, but the real test is whether small systems use the results of these assessments to really make necessary improvements that they select themselves. It's in their hands to make those decisions. So again, I'll just wrap up by again saying thanks so much to everybody for being on. We'll share the slides after the webinar. The webinar will be recorded or is being recorded, as Rob mentioned, and we're very, very pleased with your participation today. So again, thanks very much. We look forward to working with you going forward. So let me now turn it over to my colleagues at USDA for a few remarks, and then we'll jump right back into the webinar.

Morgan Hoenig
Kent, you should be unmuted and good to go.

Kent Evans
Okay. Thank you. Hello out there, everybody. On behalf of our assistant administrator, Ms. Jackie Ponti-Lazaruk, and our administrator, Mr. John Padalino, we'd like to say thank you for taking the time to attend this very important webinar. You know, USDA and EPA has worked closely with rural and small systems and gathered the input from those operators and managers. And with the input that they got, they developed the tools you heard about today, or are still going through right now, to help these utilities ensure that their communities are strong, safe, and sustainable. And I think, over the last few days, we all have heard about that story that's still ongoing that probably grabbed every one of our attention who's participating in this webinar today. So we see more importantly what it means for our communities, our water systems to be strong, safe, and sustainable. But USDA and EPA are very excited about the direction that this project is taking. And as Rob said early on, the feedback that we got from the communities that have attended our pilot workshops has been extremely positive, and we look forward to even more communities having the opportunity to attend the workshops with you and you being the key providers. And I myself and, I'm sure, LaVonda look forward to coming out and working with you as you become facilitators of Workshop in a Box. So we look forward to sharing – you sharing with us your experiences on giving these workshops to the rural and small water and wastewater systems that you work with so closely. Again, on behalf of Jackie Ponti-Lazaruk and Mr. John Padalino, our administrator, we at Rural Development say thank you.

Morgan Hoenig
Great. Thank you, Kent. And again, this is Morgan and Rob at Ross. So we will be getting back into the conducting your workshop portion of the webinar.

Rob Greenwood

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Managing the Self Assessment Group Discussion (1)

So this is Rob Greenwood from Ross Strategic. Welcome back from the break. Jim and Kent, thank you very much for your opening remarks delivered mid-way through the webinar. All right. So as we move forward, just a quick recap of where we've been relative to the multi-system workshop agenda. We've talked through introductions and workshop objectives, the approach to that. We've talked through Session 1, the overview of key management areas, how to think about the presentations there and also cuing you into where you can find that material both in the Workshop in a Box and in the Small Systems Guidebook. We've also talked through the utility self-assessment exercise, and what we focused on is, in effect, the first portion of Session 2 in the workshop agenda that has individuals working at the table, by themselves, or with their own utility systems team to complete the self-assessments. Where we're headed now is into how to approach the group discussion, and basically we're bridging here between Sessions 2 and Sessions 3 in the workshop.

So with that just as a bit of background in terms of where we've been and now where we're headed, a couple things here that I'd like to mention. As a reminder, the self-assessment core of the workshop basically divides out into three building blocks: the individual self-assessment work – again, we've talked through the mechanics of that already; and then there's the table discussion that takes place, where there's an important aspect of peer-to-peer sharing that can take place; and then there is a group discussion, where there's both table report-outs and synthesis with leadership by the facilitator to the workshop. So this slide covers some things that you'll want to keep in mind relative to managing the self-assessment.

The first is, as you have individual participants move into the self-assessment, please stress that the self-assessment worksheets will not be collected. So it's for them to hold on to. We don't want anyone thinking that, "Oh, this is something that, if I'm really candid, it's then going to be shared or collected and used in some way that won't be helpful to me or my system or my community." So again, stress that those sheets will not be collected there. They're to be kept by the participant. After they've completed the assessment, we then ask the table members to share their self-assessment results among themselves. What we're looking for them to do as they're sharing is to identify commonalities and differences among the participants. And there's also an opportunity for the utilities to offer to each other suggestions for how they might address the challenges that they're seeing. It can be helpful, although not necessary, to assign a table captain to manage discussion at the table. You can ask for volunteers. If someone readily volunteers, that's fine. In the past I've also used, just an opportunity, as I kind of got a feel for the different participants at each of the individual tables, if one or two people struck me as individuals that would be comfortable and potentially good as a table captain, I'd approach them as the table discussions kick off and ask, "Gee, would you mind just making sure that this stays organized," in a rather informal manner.

In terms of the time allotments -- and again, these are flexible as long as you're staying on time overall -- individual assessments sometime around between 25 and 30 minutes; table discussion among participants, approximately the same; table report-out, approximately 30 minutes, keeping in mind the number of tables will very much dictate that. So if you have six or eight tables, you need to adjust the amount of time you allow for report-outs. If you only have two or three tables, obviously there's more time overall for the individual report-outs. And then a group synthesis discussion.

A couple of other things that I'd like to note here is it's very important to have the plenary discussion -- and here I'm referring to this group synthesis discuss for 30 minutes -- to bring out the management areas that will clearly be of most interest to the participants because it's those management areas that will provide the focus for your upcoming improvement outcomes discussion. So you very much want to get to a sense of are there two or three or four or five key management areas that many of the participants seem to be indicating are of high interest for improvement to them? And then you'll look to, as the facilitator, spot what those are, build a little modest consensus with the group, "Gee, I'm hearing that we've got the following three management areas as high interest as we move through the rest of the workshop." That typically has been very easy for the group to say, yes, those seem like a good set of management areas to focus on as we move forward.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Managing the Self Assessment Group Discussion (2)

Okay. So a little bit more on managing the self-assessment group discussion. We have questions that are used to guide the self-assessment discussion. These are found on slide 26 in the workshop presentation. They're also embedded in the template, the agenda template, so they reside right there. The presenter notes included in the Workshop in a Box, the slides, in particular slide 26, are particularly important and useful for this portion of the workshop. But to quickly just take a look at these questions -- and again, we're asking the participants around the table to consider these questions and to share these thoughts with each other.

So where is your utility strong and why? So the idea would be, for example, if there's a table captain, the table captain would tee up that question to the group and ask everyone to make observations. "Gee, I'm very strong in financial viability, and this is why I think I'm strong." Where's the most room for improvement? Same thing. Tee that question up. What are your areas of focus? Why are they a priority? Why is performance low? Is it technical? Is it financial? Is it managerial? And then, after they've had an opportunity to work as a group through those questions and kind of compare each other's experience, just talk about, "So what are we seeing as some of the commonalities and differences among us as table participants?" If you don't have a table captain, then, as the facilitator, what I recommend is that you, from a plenary position on the floor, tee each of these questions up and give approximately five to ten minutes for consideration. So you would say, "Gee, why don't you all tackle the first question? Where is your utility strong and why?" And then walk around, see how the discussion is going. And then, when you have a sense that there's been some good coverage, go ahead and then pick up the next question. So again, either way will work well, table captain or you. At minimum you do need to be walking among the tables to see if the discussion is going well. And in particular, I think, as you all know, in any group there are good listeners, and good listeners typically need to be specifically asked or invited into a discussion to contribute. It's also often the case that those good listeners make some of the most productive contributions. So again, I strongly encourage you to be looking for those quiet good listeners and seeking ways to make sure they engage in the conversation.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Improving Outcomes Discussion (1)

Okay. So with this slide, we now turn to the next major segment of the workshop. Typically, what would have happened is you would have finished the plenary discussion with respect to the self-assessment. There would be a lunch break, and even if it's a working lunch, there will be at least a 15 if not 20-minute break for the participants to get their lunches and get seated again. And it's during that period of time that you need to think through what's come back from those self-assessment discussions and which of the management areas you'd like to see assigned to the tables.

So this is now a discussion and presentation which links to Session 4 on the template and Session 5-A on the template, so those two sessions. Okay. So the – what takes place at this point is you would have made an assignment of the management areas, and the multi-system agenda template provided with the Workshop in a Box materials targets completion of the self-assessment portion of the agenda before lunch, as I've already said, and this, again, will allow you to identify suggestions for the management areas. From the four workshops that we've conducted, likely candidates for those exercises, typically those that generally needed the most attention, were operational optimization, financial viability, infrastructure stability, and stakeholder understanding and support. Now, that's not to say that that will be your experience, but as you head into the workshop, it's probably pretty likely that at least a couple of these will bubble to the surface if our experience with the first four holds at all for you. So you can be a bit pre-prepared to be thinking along those lines. In terms of assigning the management areas to the tables, I have typically approached that as a suggestion to the group. If I have five tables and it seems like there's three management areas that have received a lot of attention during the self-assessment, I would look to just go with those three areas and assign two of them to two tables, for example. So you need not come up with management – a unique management area for every table, again, depending on the tables that you have. It's okay to double up. We've done that, and it's worked perfectly fine. But in general, you want to gauge the number of management areas around the number of tables. If you have three tables, very helpful to have three management areas, three separate management areas to focus on. It's perfectly fine to invite people to change tables, meaning to go in the direction of whichever management area is of most interest to them. But you want to make sure, at the end of the day, that the tables reflect a good mix of participants, both from the standpoint of the utility and from the standpoint of just raw numbers. You need enough people at the table, enough sort of critical mass to have a robust discussion. And I'd say the minimum there is four, and the maximum is probably ten. So that's the range that you'd want to have at each of the tables.

As you move into the discussions and doing the directions, one of the things that you'll want to emphasize is that the discussions should focus on what we have as the questions that appear in bold type on the worksheet. Then, as time allows, they can address others. Again, generally, total discussion time that we've allowed for the tables is approximately 30 minutes, sometimes up to 45 minutes.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Improving Outcomes Discussion (2)

The key template that you'll use is the Improvements Worksheet, which we've now changed the slide to show that to you. Again, this is – comes as part of the Workshop in a Box materials. And as I mentioned in association with the previous slide, what you'll see is that there are five questions that are bolded, the second question, the fourth question, the sixth question, and the seventh question. That's where you have your participants focus first, and then, again, as time allows, they could pick up other questions. They'll be filling the Improvements Worksheet out as a team. What we encourage is for each member of the group to make their own notes -- they'll each have their own sheet – but they're completing it from the perspective of everyone around the table rather than from their individual system perspective. This session of the webinar is meant to bring a focus to improving achievement in specific management areas that are most relevant to the workshop participants. And what we ask is that the participants will be focusing, or we'll have them focusing, on what it means to be high achieving in different management areas, how to reach that high achievement, and how to measure and track performance along the way. In terms of further support to your efforts to both initiate and manage this portion of the workshop, you can refer to pages 11 through 19 in the Guidebook, which speaks quite specifically to improvements, the improvements area, and you'll also be using slides 27 and 28 in the multi-system workshop slide deck. So again, slides 27 and 28 in the multi-system slide deck.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Improving Outcomes Discussion (3)

Okay. I've covered this, a bit of this previously, but I'll go ahead and just be a bit redundant, in part because this is, again, a very important aspect of the workshop. As I mentioned, in general, each table is assigned a different management area. But again, that's not absolutely necessary. Particularly, if there's a management of very high interest and there's more than ten people that are interested, you can assign it to two tables and divide people equally among those two tables.

I already mentioned about the table captain -- that will be helpful, potentially, to assign them -- and that you'll be using the Improving Outcomes worksheet, and the bolded questions are the top priority. When you move to the actual report-outs from the tables, what you're looking to set up is – and let's say we're working with financial viability. The table that's dealt with financial viability, you would ask them to talk about their response to each of these questions. The table captain could do the report-out, or if there isn't a table captain, you could call on someone. Typically, what I would do as a facilitator is, before we broke from table discussions and moved into plenary discussions, I would walk over to each of the tables, remind them that we're going to be doing a report-out, and ask for a volunteer to do that. Or potentially, even, if I've been watching throughout the day, and I have a sense of someone that I think could do a good job, I would just approach them directly and say, "Gee, Steve, would you mind doing just the initial report-out?" And again, that typically has worked well and hasn't created any discomfort among participants.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Reviewing Practices, Tools, and Measuring Results (1)

Once the table has done its report-out what we then do is open up for general discussion among all of the tables. And there what we're asking for are the other participants' experience with this management area. We're asking them to provide their reflections on what they heard from the table that focused on that management area as well as to contribute their ideas about what constitutes high achievement in this area, what kind of changes the utility would need to make to get there, how they could track performance, what are the biggest challenges. This has been, typically, one of the most valuable aspects of the workshop. If you can generate good, robust discussion at this particular point in time, your participants, I think, will come away very pleased with the experience that they have had. So here's where the facilitation skills become very, very important and, again, to be very mindful of the good listeners who often can contribute. So typically, I would call on participants that aren't just volunteering to come into the conversation.

As you move through these, it's also important for you to capture the findings and ideas on a flipchart or, if you prefer, to be typing that in and projecting. For me, for this particular workshop type of setting, I've used flipcharts. That's just worked better. But again, different people have different techniques for capturing and displaying discussion items. But it is important to capture and display so that you – the group can be tracking what they're seeing and what ideas are being shared.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Reviewing Practices, Tools, and Measuring Results (2)

Okay. So we'll move forward now, and we're now moving into Session 5-B on the template, the multi-system template. And here, what we're looking to do is pick up on the results of the previous discussions, number one, and number two, to introduce resources that have been already compiled in support of the workshop. So a couple of items here. You'll be introducing resources that are available to participants from EPA and USDA. There's a resource compilation. I'll talk more about that in a minute. But it's also an opportunity during this session to promote locally relevant guides, tools, and resources. So as the organizer of the workshop, you'll want to think a lot about what you would like to highlight in terms of those local resources and, again, use this as an opportunity. There's also, as part of this session, an opportunity to provide an overview of tips for improving outcomes that have come from previous workshops. We have compiled the tips that came out of the four workshops that we had, and those have been placed in the slides in the slide deck for your use. So overall, the session focuses on presenting information related to materials available to support utility management improvement efforts. This is tied to slides 30 through 35 in the slide deck for the multi-system workshop, again slides 30 through 35. And second, the tips for improving outcomes, those are found on slides 36 through 41. So that's slides 36 through 41 in the provided slide deck. This session is primarily a presentation by the facilitator, but participants should be asked to note additional resources that they are aware of. So again, you can make this fairly dynamic. You'll be doing a fair amount of presenting. But certainly pause and ask for additional thoughts about effective resources that participants are aware of. We've had very good participation with that.

One other thing that I'd like to note, with respect to the slides, slides 30 through 35, where you're presenting information already provided on key management areas, there are three areas that those – three management areas that those slides focus on: operational optimization, financial viability, and stakeholder understanding and support. Again, these are management areas that have come up consistently as an interest, and so preloaded slides that give you resources that you can pass on to this group of participants. When you move into the tips for improving outcomes, slides 36 through 41, there are five key management areas that those slides focus on: stakeholder understanding and support, infrastructure stability, financial viability, employee leadership and development, and operational resiliency. Again, five areas that have come up during the workshops previously. So between those two sets of slide resources, you have a good coverage on a core set of the key management areas, again, that have been of high interest in previous workshops.

Okay. So continuing with Session 5-B and resources for Session 5-B, what we have pictured here is the resource compilation that was produced in support of these workshops. It was a fairly robust effort to identify relevant resources. It is not a hundred percent comprehensive, but it does have very good reach overall. So participants should receive a printed version of the EPA/USDA compilation included – and it's included in the Guidebook and the Workshop in a Box. What we've pictured here is what's included in the Workshop in a Box. The version of this that's in the Guidebook is formatted somewhat differently, but, again, you can reference the fact that this resource is part of the Guidebook. They should also receive a link to the electronic version, and you want to note that the spreadsheet can be filtered by name of resource or by the management area. It's in an Excel sheet that they can manipulate. What you'll note here is that, for each listed resource in the compilation, a checkmark is placed in the management area column to which the content relates. And what you'll see is that many resources cover multiple management areas. So we took the time to go through these resources and identify what type of coverage they provided to which of the management areas as a way, again, to hopefully focus or provide a more efficient means for participants to find relevant resources. The compilation is designed to cover a wide range of helpful resources, but as I mentioned, it is not exhaustive. And definitely encourage participants to seek other resources than those found in this compilation. The key here is to just say don't make this your exclusive source of resources, even as they need to recognize that, again, a fair amount of effort has been put into this. So it's certainly a very strong starting place. For specific references, refer to Appendix 3 in the Guidebook for this. And then this is also, again, part of the Workshop in a Box supplemental materials.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Creating an Improvement Plan

Okay. What we now are presenting in the slide is the System Management Improvement Plan Worksheet. So this worksheet is designed to help utilities to consider next steps for improving outcomes in management areas that they have identified as critical during the self-assessment exercise. Again, this is available in the Workshop in a Box materials. This is, again, a direct screen shot of what's available. It's also available in the Guidebook. You can refer to pages 17 and 18 in the Guidebook for that material. A couple things that are important to note here, in the internal team exercise workshop – again, not the focus of this webinar today -- but in the internal team exercise workshop, there's time built in on that agenda to do this Improvement Plan Worksheet as part of the agenda, basically a team exercise with those participating. But for the multi-system workshops, which is the focus of our webinar today, it is meant to be undertaken by participants as a post-workshop follow up activity. So your job is to introduce the Improvement Plan Worksheet and to point to the portion of the Guidebook that covers this and to encourage the participants to take what they've learned for themselves as part of this workshop and apply it to preparing the Improvement Plan Worksheet once they get back to the – once they get back to their system. In some sense, our job – my job during the first four workshops, your job going forward – is to have effectively equipped each of the participants to fill out this improvement plan quite readily once they get back to their utility, either as the leader of a team exercise, somewhat replicating the workshop that you've just taken them through, or for them to be able and sit down and, for themselves, complete this Improvement Plan Worksheet.

Slide: Conducting Your Workshop: Collecting Participant Feedback

Okay. So we've now completed the presentation around the core substantive aspects of the workshop. And again, just a quick reiteration, we've talked about how you'll present the overview of the key management areas. We've referenced the slides that you'll use for that. And again, just to note that the slide deck also includes very detailed presenter/facilitator notes with the actual slides themselves. We've talked about the utility self-assessment exercise and the mechanics of how you introduce – or the mechanics that you describe to the participants so that they can complete that for themselves. And we've discussed both the individual table and the group facilitation techniques to make the self-assessment portion of the workshop work well. We've moved from there to talk about how you bring the participants into the improving outcomes portion of the workshop. Here again, you're the one that will make the suggestion about the key management areas for further discussion among the tables, and you will help – look to help those tables have strong individual table discussions and then also to have a strong group discussion, where a lot peer-to-peer sharing takes place -- again, critically valuable aspect of the workshop. And then we've talked about, really, how you move towards wrap-up, where there's an opportunity for you to present about some of the resources available and some of the helpful tips that have been picked up by previous workshops, as well as introduce resources, local resources that you're aware of that you think will be important to the participants. So that then brings us to the back end.

During the pilot workshops, we actually went anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes in a feedback session, but that was driven by the fact that these were pilot workshops and we wanted very in-depth feedback. We encourage, but it is not required, that a feedback session takes place. It's an opportunity to improve your approach for any future workshops that you'd like to host. And it also is an opportunity for participants to reflect on the workshop. Some additional good ideas typically will come out of that discussion, and it will also, I think, tend to reinforce the positive aspects of the workshop for each of the individual participants. You can collect the feedback verbally and through the use of a feedback form. The Workshop in a Box does provide a template for collecting feedback. You can use as much or as little of that as you think is appropriate to your particular needs. And if desired, you can collect that feedback to share with EPA and USDA. Again, we want to stress USDA and EPA don't see that as a requirement, but they believe they would benefit if you would be willing to share the feedback that you've received.

Slide: Post Workshop Activities

Okay. So just one more presentation slide here, and then we'll move into the last portion of the webinar, which is a few more light touch quiz questions and a review of those and then into a question and answer period, where we'll look to address as many of your relevant questions as we can. But in terms of the post-workshop activities, a couple of things. The local sponsors that we have worked with have made it a point to follow up with attendees to check on work plan development and implementation. Letting participants know that you have an interest in doing that may actually help motivate them to, in the near term, make use of what they've learned at the workshop. And then, again, as we said, sharing feedback with EPA and USDA would be appreciated but not a requirement. And we've provided here e-mail addresses for Jim Horne at EPA and LaVonda Pernell at USDA.

All right. So let me first say thank you very much for the attention that you've brought to this. My voice is getting a little tired, and I expect you may be getting a little tired of my voice. I've tried to talk slowly and deliberately. That may – that lack of flair may help with clear communication but not with high entertainment value. So my apologies for that, if that's the case. But what I'm going to do now is turn things over to my colleague, Morgan Hoenig, to talk you through a couple of light touch quiz questions. Again, as I've mentioned previously, this is as much to test how well we've done in communicating information as it is to get a sense of how well you out there are doing absorbing the information. After we've gone through these quiz questions, we will then open up, again, a question and answer session, and then we'll turn things over to EPA for a quick – EPA and USDA for quick closing remarks to the extent that they would like to make those. So Morgan?

<u>Morgan Hoenig</u>

Slide: Wrap-up Quiz: Q1 (Poll 3)

Great. Thanks, Rob, and good timing for your voice to give out. Okay, everyone, so we are going to do just a few more quiz questions like we did before, using that same polling feature.

So the first question is up here. Again, we'll give you a moment to read over it and come up with your answer, and then we will open the poll. So the question is: "Which of the following is not a management area?"

So this is those ten key management areas that Rob reviewed earlier in the presentation, and which of these is not one of those ten?

Slide: Poll 3

Okay. So we will open the polling, and go ahead and vote just as you did before. Okay. So we'll give it just a few more seconds. If you haven't responded to that poll, please do so. Okay. And we're going to go ahead and close the poll, and you should see those results.

Slide: Poll 3 Results

So it looks like about 70 percent of you got the correct answer, which is "environmental sustainability." And again, if you have any questions about these, you can go back to your Guidebook and Workshop in a Box materials.

Rob Greenwood

Yeah, so I'd like to – I'd like to just jump in here. To the extent that these results don't reflect just a basic error, coding error on your part, we have a 70 percent correct rate, which is certainly lower than I think we would like. So I want to make a very specific reference here. In the Guidebook you can go to page 3, and if you look at pages 3, 4, and 5, the ten key management areas are listed there, as we described earlier, and the definition for those key management areas are there, as well. So again, please, if you were not one of the 70 percent that got this answer correct, please make an effort as soon as possible after the webinar to go into the Guidebook, identify those ten areas, read through them, and get those well locked in before you head in the direction of looking to initiate a workshop. Okay, thank you. Morgan?

Morgan Hoenig

Slide: Wrap-up Quiz: Q2 (Poll 4)

Great. So moving on to the next question, this relates back to the self-assessment exercise. You've seen this grid before. This question is: "Which of the following is rated as medium achievement and ranked as high – and ranked as low priority?" So if you've got a medium achievement and a low priority, which is that falling into? So is it one, operational optimization, which is abbreviated as OO; two, community sustainability and economic development, which is abbreviated as CE; or three, product quality, which is abbreviated as PQ?

So go ahead and give that some thought for a minute, and then we will open up the polling for you to vote. Make sure that you have that answer in the back of your head so that, when we open the polling, you can respond as you won't be able to see the matrix. Okay. We're going to go ahead and open the polling, so make sure you know which number you would like to use as your response. Okay, we'll give that just a few more seconds. If you haven't voted, please do so.

Slide: Poll 4 Results

Okay, so those responses should be showing up on your screen, and it looks like about 81 percent of you got the correct answer, which is "operational optimization." And we will go back to the slide so that Rob can talk through that.

Rob Greenwood

Okay. So again, high correct response rate here. We had 87 percent of you voting, 81 percent of that 87 percent getting the correct answer. And it looks like the other area that was then most commonly selected was "community sustainability and economic development," so let me just quickly speak to that. The CE resides in the intersection of a low achievement and low priority. So again, it's down in that extreme left-hand bottom cell, correct answer being "operational optimization," which is reflective of a medium achievement and of a low priority.

Just for those of you that missed it, to the extent, again, that it just wasn't a coding mistake on your part, just a quick reminder that in the slide deck that goes with the Workshop in a Box, you're in the territory here of slide 23, slide 24, and slide 25, which, through the notes that are included with those slides in the slide deck, you'll be able to look through the directions for making that – making that plotting activity. And also to note that the self-assessment worksheet, which you'll hand out at the workshop, also contains directions for undertaking this exercise. So those are your two key resources to review and refine your sense of how to provide effective directions for this portion of the workshop.

Morgan Hoenig

Slide: Wrap-up Quiz: Q3 (Poll 5)

Great. Thanks, Rob. So we will go to our second to last quiz question. This one goes back to the very beginning of the webinar, when we were talking about preparing for your workshop: "What is the minimum number of participants for a multi-utility system workshop?" Again, this isn't a hard and fast number, but it's just kind of a good guideline for what would be optimum for discussions. So what number is the minimum number of participants for a workshop?

We will go ahead and open the polling. Okay, we'll give it about ten more seconds. If you haven't voted, please do so.

Slide: Poll 5 Results

Okay. We're going to go ahead and close the poll.

Rob Greenwood

Okay. So you'll see the results portrayed on your screen. The correct answer is eight to ten. Sixty percent of those voting got that correct. So just a couple of things to emphasize here. The question said minimum number. And again, as we've said, our sense is that eight to ten – three systems, three unique systems, and approximately eight to ten individuals are what you would want as your minimum. If you don't have that minimum, you just want to reflect on the ability to generate a robust discussion among participants. Three different utilities, you get a little mix going on in terms of experiences. And eight to ten people, again, the same thing. When I see 25 percent of you answering 15 to 20, in part what jumps to mind is were you thinking, from your perspective, what would be the minimum number that you would like for it to make sense? And what I would say is 15 to 20 is – I would agree with that. If that was your thinking -- gee, that's the numbers I'd really like to see -- then yes, 15 to 20 is a very good number to target. If you get five different, six different, seven different systems and 15 to 20 people in the room, you're highly likely to have very effective discussion. And then the last thing that I would like to emphasize is, once you move beyond 25 participants, it just -- from the amount of time allocated for the workshop and the importance of robust discussion, both at the tables and among them in a full group setting, you start to feel some pressure. You'll feel some time pressure as well as pressure to be inclusive of everybody in the room. So at 30 to 40, you'll just want to think through your time management more carefully than you otherwise would, and you'll want to think about your facilitation technique in terms of engaging all of the participants effectively. Above 40, you will be very challenged to run a webinar that, again, generates that really robust discussion. Okay. So again, eight to ten minimum is the correct answer. That range between 15 and 25, which are answers two and three, I would say is ideal. And going up to 40, if you have that much interest, which is a great news story, just be prepared to think through your facilitation techniques in a little more detail.

Morgan Hoenig

Slide: Wrap-up Quiz: Q4 (Poll 6)

Great. And yep, so just two more questions. The next one is: "How should the workshop room be set up?" Again, this goes back to that preparing for your workshop section of the webinar, back at the beginning, so classroom style, round tables, theater style, or board room style.

And we will go ahead and open the polling. Sorry, I just realized that the slide was not up. Okay. So we will go ahead and open the polling for this one. Okay. So just a couple more seconds. If you have not responded, please do so. Okay, closing the poll.

Rob Greenwood

Slide: Poll 6 Results

Okay. So the results are in. We had 88 percent of you voting and 95 percent of that 88 percent getting the right answer, so I don't think there's really any need to emphasize that further. Go with those round tables. It's a lot about setting up those teams around those tables and getting people to talk, so terrific.

Morgan Hoenig

Slide: Wrap-up Quiz: Q5 (Poll 7)

Great. And moving on to the last quiz question of the day: "When should participants complete the Improvement Plan Worksheet?" So this is thinking about reflecting on their self-assessment that they filled out during the workshop and discussed during the workshop. Are they going to be completing that worksheet before the workshop, during the workshop, or after the workshop?

So we will open the polling now. Okay, just a couple more seconds. If you haven't voted, please do so.

Rob Greenwood

Slide: Poll 7 Results

Okay. So again, we have the results portrayed here. We had 82 percent of you voting. The correct answer is "after the workshop." Sixty-seven percent of those voting got that answer correct. But we have a solid 31 percent doing "during the workshop." So let me – and I think here it just may be a matter of terminology, but it is important. During the workshop and during the – starting with Session 4, there is a table exercise entitled Improving Outcomes. And the support material for that portion of the workshop is an Improvements Worksheet, which we previously showed during the slide presentation. And it has a series of questions down the left-hand column and a place to provide answers on the right-hand column. This Improvements Worksheet in this session, this table exercise, is the – will be each individual table tackling a key management area that would have been suggested by the facilitator, and then they'll be focused as a table on that and completing it as a group exercise rather than as an individual utility exercise. They'll bring their individual utility perspective to that discussion, but it's not designed for them to be producing their own improvements results.

Separately, included in the Guidebook and included in the team Workshop in a Box workshop materials, is a System Management Improvement Plan Worksheet. That is to support individual systems, either doing an internal team exercise or an individual at that utility, to complete an improvement plan in response to the key management areas that that utility has uniquely identified as its priority areas for improvement in the future. This workshop, the multi-system workshop, is designed to equip participants to go back to their utility and complete an improvement plan, but there is not time allotted at our workshop, during the actual workshop, for individual systems to complete their own tailored improvement plan. All right. So that's just an important distinction. The improvements discussions that will take place are a table exercise. It's a group exercise. And again, it's not individual utility focused. Okay.

Slide: Final Q & A

So thanks very much. I think, hopefully having those -- just again -- light touch quiz questions have been useful to all of you. It certainly signaled to us areas that we needed to further emphasize some of the approach in the workshops. So what we'd like to move to now is, again, a question and answer session, same format that we've used previously. We'll take anywhere from ten to 15 minutes to move through questions, as relevant. We'll only use the time that's needed. And then I'll turn things over to Morgan Hoenig, my colleague, for a moment for a couple of wrap-up items, and then we'll look to turn to EPA and USDA for any final remarks that they would like to make. So go ahead and submit questions. We'll sit here. We'll need a minute to look through what's coming in and to select among those that we think will be, again, the most broadly useful to all participants on the webinar.

Morgan Hoenig

Great, everyone. So we will start responding to your specific questions in a minute. But just to get us started, a number of folks have asked about the materials that we've referenced throughout the presentation, so that's the Guidebook, the Workshop in a Box, and all those supplemental materials. We provided a link to those materials in a couple of reminder e-mails that were sent out by Jim Horne prior to the webinar. So you can take a look at those e-mails. We will also provide the link again in a follow-up e-mail to the webinar, and the materials are also available on EPA's and USDA's websites. So you can visit any of those three sites to get the materials. Again, we'll provide links in a follow-up after the webinar.

Rob Greenwood

Okay. So I'll go ahead and move in here, and we'll start to take questions that are coming in. First question: "In your pilot workshops, what was a typical number of management areas that were in the red zone per utility?" Typically, we saw anywhere from two to three in the red zone, which, as you might expect, in some sense, that was a useful number. It wasn't – it wasn't none. I don't believe we ever saw none, and it wasn't an overwhelming number, where we had a manager paralyzed by having eight. So again, typically, two or three, and I'm not sure we ever saw more than four overall. So it did seem like the self-assessment exercise did work effectively as a sort of high-level triage for each of the participants.

Second question: "Who's the audience, council, board members, or managers?" The answer to that is the primary audience and the individuals that you want to most emphasize getting in the room will be utility managers, again, those that have as part of their portfolio of responsibilities a broad management purview and responsibility for the utility. That is your primary audience. Key secondary audiences, definitely board members or city council members or mayors that that manager believes would be helpful to have in the room, and typically that's who would make those invitations. And then other staff at the utility, to the extent that it's a utility of the size where there is other staff, invited in so there's an opportunity for the manager to have other staff within the utility exposed to the information at the workshop.

Okay. There's a question here that says: "What management areas do USDA and EPA feel are most lacking in systems?" I won't – I will not respond for USDA or EPA. What I will say is that at the workshops, the four workshops that we conducted, and as I mentioned previously, we did tend to see certain management areas come up repeatedly -- financial viability, operational optimization, stakeholder understanding and support, infrastructure stability. Those were areas that we consistently saw. So I think that's probably the best way to answer this question, is what can you anticipate. And again, this is very much designed to be utility-driven. What does the individual utility think is a priority rather than what does someone else think is a priority?

I want to – there's an observation here that I'd like to also address. The observation is: "I think there should be more focus on elected board members as this is where it all starts and ends." I think what we would say is that's probably a good read of how local decision making takes place. We think that the workshop is primarily geared towards the manager, and in the absence of the utility manager being there, it may not be that effective to just have the board member there. At the same time, we did find it to be very effective to have both. So I would say, to the extent to which, as you organize workshops, you'd like to emphasize the effectiveness of that team in the room, please go ahead and do that.

Okay. "How successful would it be to hold a facilitated multi-utility system workshop remotely, not face-to-face, but through a web meeting?" We don't have any experience with that, so that's a little bit hard to judge. What I would say is that, with the feedback that we received for the workshops, the dynamic discussion among peers was consistently identified as a very high strength of the workshops. So the extent to which you're aware of the technology mechanisms that would enable that to take place, I would say you could probably do okay. But that's the key. Do you feel comfortable that you can enable that kind of robust give-and-take among participants to deliver that peer exchange value? So that's your key deciding factor.

Okay. So here's one. This is a little facilitation technique. "Do you recommend any specific resources for the facilitator/leader of the workshop, tips for dealing with dominating participants, et cetera?" So what I would say, certainly if you're intending to facilitate one of these workshops and you haven't taken just some form of basic facilitation training, I think it's critical to do so. And I would say that, given, again, as I emphasized in response to the previous question, that the robust dialogue has been such an important aspect of the success of these workshops, if you do not have any experience facilitating a diverse group of individuals, it's probably actually not the best idea for you to be leading the workshop, again, because of the criticality of that robust dialogue. Specifically in terms of dominating personalities, the best way, I think, first is to, at the very beginning of the workshop, emphasize to all participants the criticality of everyone being involved in the discussion and that that means two things -- that there will be good listeners in the room and, as a facilitator, you'll look to call on those people, but it will be okay for them to say, "I don't have anything to share right now." So provide them a sense of comfort. And then to also specifically say, "And we all know that, in any group of this type, there will be people that enjoy and are very comfortable getting into discussion and sharing a lot of their thoughts." And you want to say, "We both encourage that, but we also need to recognize the importance of creating space for other individuals to participate." So when one of those types of people begins to dominate a bit, just a light touch reminder of your basic ground rule that says we need to create space for everyone. "Thanks for your contribution, but remember, we've got to create space." That should be enough in a setting of this type. If for some reason it's not, or if you actually have a specifically disruptive personality, call a break. Call a break. Just say, "Gee, I think it's time for a break," and then visit with that individual. And just say, "A lot of people have carved out their very valuable time to be here today, and the way that you're interacting in this room is taking away from their ability to get a return for the investment that they're making. And that's unfair to your peers." Turn it into that type of question. It's not about it's unfair to you, as the facilitator. It's unfair to others that have made that investment. Okay.

Okay. So we're going to do one more question here -- pardon me -- in light of the timing: "What about separate workshops within the utility for different levels of management, and maybe even at the senior operator level, and then compile results for comparison?"

I think that that's – so now we've shifted. Keep in mind here that we're talking about the team, the utility team workshop rather than the multi-system workshop. So I just want to be very clear, my answer now applies to the form of workshop in the Workshop in a Box that we have not discussed in detail today. But in terms of internal, there's really a variety of ways of thinking about that. One would be to specifically meet with different groups within the utility, to the extent that the utility has a staff of that size, and have them do self-assessment results and then compare them. And then have a cross-fertilization meeting and say, "Gee, isn't this interesting? We came up with different results. Why did we?" That could make for a very robust discussion and effective discussion. Another aspect of this team thing could be that the utility manager and some of the staff say let's try to get the board in for two hours or four hours, and let's do this exercise with the board. The utility could have done the internal exercise themselves first, do it with the board, and then say, "Hey, guess what? Here's what we came up with. Here's what you came up with. Gee, look where we're aligned and look where we're not. Let's talk about, in particular, where we're not and why that might be." Also consideration of doing something with external stakeholders. Obviously, anytime you get diverse interest of that type in the room, the challenge of effective facilitation goes up quite a bit. But again, that's another model, potentially, that the utility could use.

Okay. So that wraps up with the time that we can dedicate to questions. Great questions, and I hope my responses were helpful in that context. I'm going to turn things over to Morgan, who's going to talk about how the webinar closes out because you are not done yet. And then she will turn things over to EPA and USDA for some final comments and we, in fact, at that point will be wrapped up. So Morgan?

Morgan Hoenig

Slide: Thank you!

Great. Thanks, Rob. So you are almost done. We just wanted to take a couple minutes to talk about follow-up for the webinar. We would love to hear your feedback on how we did today and then also give a little bit more opportunity for you to share any kind of facilitation techniques or meeting techniques that you've found useful. So we're going to send out a link right now via the webinar chat function. We will also send that link out in a follow-up e-mail, probably early tomorrow morning, along with the other webinar materials. So if you could please take a few minutes, just following the webinar, to fill out that survey, it would be very helpful to us learning for the future. And then also, we will compile any tips or resources that you all share with us and then send that out to the folks who complete the survey.

In addition, we will also be sending out a certificate of completion to the people who stayed throughout the duration of the webinar, participated, so you can look for that with the survey link tomorrow morning. And then, again, the Workshop in a Box and Guidebook materials, including the supplemental materials, are available on both the EPA and the USDA websites. So with that, you should have the link in your chat box.

And if you could fill that out once we wrap up here in a few minutes, I will turn it over to Jim Horne with the US EPA to make a couple of closing remarks and then over to LaVonda Pernell at USDA. So Jim, we will go ahead and unmute you.

Jim Horne

Okay. Thanks again, Morgan. I'll be very brief, folks. Again, just to reiterate what I said an hour or so ago, thanks so much for being here. We're really impressed. A large number of people were able to stay on until the end, almost 300. And so thank you again. I've been looking at all the questions. They've been great. I've responded to a number of you, but I hope we were able to meet your expectations. We hope this is the start of something a lot bigger, and we're really sort of depending on people like you to take this whole effort, as I like to say, from the retail to the wholesale level, because you're the folks that tend to work with these systems on a day-to-day basis. So thanks so very much. We look forward to your feedback.

This is a great partnership between EPA and USDA, and it's been great for us, and we look forward to collaborating with USDA and other outside partners as we go ahead. So again, it's been a good afternoon, and we appreciate the time that you've been able to spend with us. So let me turn it over briefly to LaVonda Pernell, our partner at USDA, for a few concluding remarks, and then we'll wrap it up.

LaVonda Pernell

Good afternoon, everyone. This is LaVonda Pernell, and I'm with USDA. I'm a community program specialist here in the Water and Environmental Program. And I just want to thank everyone for attending today's webinar. I'm so overwhelmed with the number of people who attended, and I just really appreciate it. USDA and EPA have been working very closely on this Workshop in a Box concept, and we are very excited about it. And I am hoping that you all are just as excited, and we are looking forward, as Jim said, to hearing from you about workshops that you all facilitate, hopefully, in the future. So thank you again for attending. Please visit our website for the templates and the documents, the supplemental materials, too, the Guidebook and the Workshop in a Box booklet. And if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call us or e-mail us. Thank you so much.

Rob Greenwood

LaVonda and Jim, thank you very much. And from Morgan and myself here at Ross Strategic, we greatly appreciate your attention and your high-quality questions. Again, please don't forget to fill out the survey. Thank you all very much, and we are officially completed.