Water Residential Assistance Program Evaluation:
Program Successes and Opportunities for Improvement

Maggie Pallone and Eric Pardini

Public Sector Consultants

Great Lakes Water Authority Audit Committee

Friday, October 23, 2020

PSC

PUBLICSECTORCONSULTANTS.COM

About Public Sector Consultants

- Nonpartisan research and public policy consulting firm
- Mission: Improve the quality of life for residents of Michigan and beyond through the development and implementation of innovative, actionable public policies

Project Overview

Goal: Strengthen the Water Residential Assistance Program's effectiveness by assessing operations and considering delivery improvements

- Outcomes assessment
  - Analyzed annual program reporting data
  - Compared available data to establish goals and performance measures
  - Summarized program performance relative to goals, identified data collection and reporting improvements, and documented key findings
- Process evaluation
  - Reviewed program documentation and solicited feedback from key stakeholders
  - Developed evaluation framework and corresponding discussion guide for stakeholder engagement
  - Identified program success and opportunities for improvement

Key Findings—Program Successes

- The program provides essential financial support to households with low incomes, reaching more than 22,000 households since 2016.

- Customers stated that combining monthly assistance, arrearage payments, and conservation services is impactful.

    - Incentivizes on-time bill payment

    - Helps customers struggling with large past-due balances

    - Reduces in-home water consumption

- Requirements for income and eligibility are flexible and make accessing assistance easy.

- Periodic program changes/updates have helped better serve customers.

Key Findings—Opportunities for Improvement

- Program uptake and adoption has been limited in some communities.
  - A one-size-fits-all approach to service delivery does not meet customer need.
  - There is limited program participation in Oakland and Macomb Counties as well as limited program awareness.
  - Local oversight of program administration and delivery can help achieve program goals by providing tailored solutions for community engagement, marketing, and outreach.

Key Findings—Opportunities for Improvement

- The program should be available to all Great Lakes Water Authority customers whether municipalities have opted in or not.
  - There is need in every community.
  - GLWA should investigate a direct services model for the program.

Key Findings—Opportunities for Improvement

- Program structure may not be suitable for addressing all various forms of household need.
  - The program provides a fixed monthly amount that may be insufficient for households with limited or no income.
    - Additionally, the structure does not offer options to serve households that may have an immediate crisis or shorter-term need.
  - GLWA should work with stakeholders to determine whether program changes are necessary to meet a wider range of household needs.

Key Findings—Opportunities for Improvement

- Program reporting is insufficient to determine progress on desired outcomes.
  - Current reporting is predominantly process related and does not necessarily demonstrate program effectiveness or impact.
  - Lack of benchmarks for program performance further complicates the process for determining program success.
  - Program reporting requirements should be based on desired performance measures and established benchmarks.

Key Findings—Opportunities for Improvement

- More can be done to support program expansion, administration, and reporting
  - GLWA can play a bigger role in program administration by:
    - Providing ongoing support to member partner communities (recruitment and retention)
    - Providing ongoing program performance monitoring
    - Developing stronger internal processes for reporting and oversight
    - Overseeing the implementation of program changes

Next Steps

- Review draft evaluation report with the GLWA Board of Directors
- Prioritize changes that should be incorporated into program design
- Develop a workplan to implement recommendations, including expected costs and timeline
- Develop a revised scope of work for program administration

Questions?

PSC | PUBLIC SECTOR CONSULTANTS