



DWSD Suburban Customer Outreach Overview

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) Wholesale Customer Outreach initiative started in 1997 as a partnering program with Suburban Wholesale Wastewater customers to implement a CSO Plan and develop a fair and equitable approach for allocating \$1.2 Billion to execute the plan. Based on achieving a court approved CSO funding plan, DWSD initiated a similar partnership process in 2003 with its 80 plus Wholesale Water Customers in conjunction with the development of a 50 Year Comprehensive Water Master Plan.

Project Innovations has consistently developed and lead the DWSD wholesale customer outreach initiatives. Since 2005, Project Innovations has been the prime contractor for the CS-1445 Wholesale Customer Outreach Project. Project Innovations' President, Charlie Fleetham has lead the project as the Chief Strategist and Project Innovations' Senior Consultant, Teresa Weed Newman has facilitated and project managed the multi-year (2005-present), multi-million dollar initiative.

The partnerships between DWSD and their wholesale water and sewer customers, now more than 10 years old, have proven highly effective in decreasing conflict and building momentum toward progressive and collaborative relationships. DWSD has taken the initiative seriously by involving staff in a joint decision-making and problem-solving process. The customer community has responded favorably to the improvements in two-way communication between DWSD managers and utility managers, administrators and elected officials.

Customer participation has increased steadily in the outreach. A key turning point occurred with the implementation of a customer/DWSD designed water model contract in 2008. The majority of DWSD's wholesale water contracts were expired. As a significant majority of the water customers (75) have now executed new 30 year contracts, DWSD is in a stronger strategic position today. Customer complaints about rate volatility have declined. Customer planning has increased and DWSD is more able to fine-tune its Capital Investment Plan to reflect customer reliability, security and growth needs.

On the wastewater side, a two year customer/DWSD effort to simplify the wastewater rates has just concluded. In the process, 30 plus years of settlement agreements have been simplified and aligned with modern operating objectives. The new rate model will significantly strengthen DWSD's cash position and will reduce costs.

The outreach is supported by a Customer Outreach Portal (www.dwsdoutreach.org), designed and managed by Project Innovations, it warehouses all outreach documents and meeting management functionality. Recently, DWSD conducted a water wholesale customer satisfaction survey and received high marks on communication, service, and rate understanding. Overall, the customers perceive that DWSD has launched a new spirit of partnership and open communication.

