



THE ROLE OF TEAMWORK IN DELIVERING SUCCESSFUL CAPITAL PROGRAMS

By Kerrie Romanow, Director and Chief Sustainability Officer,
City of San José

Building a strong and collaborative team is essential to delivering successful capital programs, especially when they involve large and complex projects at a working facility.

The City of San José has experienced this firsthand as part of a \$1.4 billion, 10-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to upgrade the San José-Santa Clara Regional Wastewater Facility (RWF), operated by the San José Environmental Services Department (ESD). The RWF serves more than 1.4 million residents and 17,000 businesses in a 300-square-mile area in Silicon Valley and has operated 24/7 since 1956.

The CIP, which currently has more than \$200 million of projects in construction, involves multiple City departments, a program consultant and contractors— all of whom must work as a cohesive unit to ensure work safety, uninterrupted service and project delivery.



Vision

Ensuring successful collaboration starts at the top. From the very beginning, leadership must emphasize the importance of teamwork, creating a mission and vision that bonds the group around a common purpose. This message must be shared at all levels of the organization.

This is doubly important when a key project involves consultants. It can be challenging for employees when their organization brings in a consultant with industry expertise. This increases the need for communication and structure. Breaking down barriers between work groups and creating a single team with shared goals fosters a dynamic work environment that enables team members to perform to their full potential.

Planning

It's not enough to talk about teamwork. There must be a plan. In San José, City staff developed a Program Execution Plan and Project Delivery Model that spelled out how four key units – CIP, RWF operations and maintenance, Public Works and the program consultant – would work together.

Engagement

The Program Execution Plan included a robust O&M Staff Engagement Plan that integrated the wastewater facility's operations and maintenance team into every step of the CIP process, including scoping, condition assessments, project meetings, review of plans and specifications, and startup testing and commissioning. The engagement plan also created O&M liaisons and subject matter experts to help guide the engagement process.

The benefit of this approach is clear: weaving O&M staff into capital programs ensures that new or upgraded facilities are efficient to operate and maintain.

Execution

Having a vision and a plan for collaboration pays off when you reach critical stages in capital programs. In San José, one such moment came in 2017 when the City conducted a "black start" test of four new 3-megawatt Emergency Diesel Generators, cutting off power from the PG&E grid and successfully firing up the new generators for the first time.

When everyone is working well as a team, it reduces stress and boosts confidence in the success of the project.

Sharing Knowledge

Bringing in experienced consultants provides a unique opportunity to build the skills of your staff. In San José, the program consultant has established regular project management classes for City staff tailored to the RWF and CIP, with a goal of phasing out the consultant's role at the RWF in the near future. In addition to these formal training sessions, there are informal opportunities to build skills and knowledge every day. When your staff is willing to learn, and outside experts are willing to share, your program and organization benefit.

Building Relationships

Teams that like and respect one another are more likely to thrive. When you care for someone as a person, you're invested in his or her success. It's important for capital programs to provide opportunities for staff from different groups to deepen their professional bonds and develop friendships.

Early in the CIP, program leaders proposed a Team Integration Committee to bring project groups together for activities. Staff have organized events from a breakfast club and happy hours to birthday parties and baby showers. This initiative helped create an environment where members of the CIP team have found friends and mentors outside their ownwork units.

About our Project

The City of San José is in its fifth year of implementing the CIP. The CIP consists of more than 30 projects, the majority of which are currently in design or construction. These completed projects will enable the City of San José to fulfill its commitment to protecting public health and the environment.

The RWF is the largest advanced wastewater treatment facility in the western United States. It treats an average of roughly 105 million gallons of wastewater per day and discharges about 87 million gallons per day of tertiary-treated wastewater into southern San Francisco Bay, which is home to a diverse ecosystem that includes several dozen fish species. The RWF produces approximately 10 million gallons per day of recycled wastewater for industrial and commercial applications. 🍷