

I'm Stimulated
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With the passage and signing of the Stimulus Bill and its emphasis on infrastructure repair and rebuilding, many Nebraska communities are in line to receive funding for water and wastewater improvement projects. Since the object of the Stimulus Bill is to stimulate the economy and it is designed at doing this in a short period of time, the projects that are lined up to receive funding from this source are now on the fast track to get funded and have the work commence. A result of this is that many systems are scrambling to get the engineering completed so that the projects are ready to begin as soon as possible.

One of the aspects of the Capacity Development Strategy for the State of Nebraska is measuring the success of the program. This is being accomplished by completing financial and managerial assessments of systems receiving funding for water improvement projects prior to the beginning of the project. Two or three years after the project has been completed, a follow-up assessment is completed to determine if the capacity of the system has been improved by the project. It is expected that the follow-up assessment will show a marked improvement in the system's capacity to operate as a viable business, and these results can be reported to the funding agencies to show that the dollars spent on Nebraska water systems are helping the systems to achieve financial and managerial capacity.

As part of the contract the Nebraska Rural Water Association has with the State of Nebraska, I have been very busy completing initial assessments for the communities receiving Stimulus funding for their projects. The assessment usually involves the water operator and the clerk, and generally takes one to two hours to complete. Occasionally the auditor needs to be contacted to complete a few of the questions, but that is the exception rather than the rule. Once the assessment has been completed, it is typed up and mailed to the system to verify the responses are correct. The assessment is then filed until the follow-up assessment can be completed one or two years after the project has been finished.

I have had the chance to complete some of the follow-up assessments for communities that received funding in the past several years. It is nice to report to the Town Boards on the results of the two assessments, showing them the improvements their community has made and restating suggestions for improvements that have not yet been adopted. The results imply to me that Nebraska systems are making good use of the funding they receive and are becoming more businesslike in their operations.

Systems do not have to be receiving funding to have an assessment completed. Any system requesting an assessment will receive one as time permits. When the assessment is completed, it can be presented to the system owner with suggestions on ways to improve the capacity of the system. Systems should keep in mind that these are **only** suggestions and are in no way mandatory for the systems to adopt. If you would like an assessment completed on your system, call the NeRWA office to set up an appointment to have one completed.