

## AGENDA ITEM MEMO

**BOARD MEETING DATE:** December 15, 2022

**TO:** Board Members

**THROUGH:** Jeff Walker, Executive Administrator  
Ashley Harden, General Counsel

**FROM:** Jessica N. Peña, Deputy Executive Administrator, Water Supply and  
Infrastructure  
T. Clay Schultz, Ph.D., Director, Regional Water Project Development

**SUBJECT:** Plan to prioritize improvements to the project review process

### **ACTION REQUESTED**

Consider approving a plan to prioritize improvements to the project review process.

### **BACKGROUND**

The July 2022 Sunset Advisory Commission's Staff Report with Commission Decisions on the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) made recommendations regarding inefficiencies in the project review process. In its report, the Commission directed the TWDB to develop a plan to prioritize improving its project review processes, including identifying tasks needed to achieve improvements and implementation timelines, to eliminate inefficiencies and inconsistencies.

### **KEY ISSUES**

The required plan has been prepared as directed by Management Action 1.3 of the Sunset report. The Executive Administrator is required to present the plan to the Board for approval by December 31, 2022 and to submit a copy to Sunset Commission and applicable legislative oversight committees.

The attached report provides a plan to prioritize improvements to the agency's project review process. Included in this plan are measures currently underway, tasks needed to achieve improvements, timelines for these initiatives, and the measures the TWDB has already taken to make improvements.

#### **Our Mission**

Leading the state's efforts in  
ensuring a secure water future  
for Texas and its citizens

#### **Board Members**

Brooke T. Paup, Chairwoman | George B. Peyton V, Board Member  
Jeff Walker, Executive Administrator

**RECOMMENDATION**

To meet the requirements in Management Action 1.3 of the Sunset report, the Executive Administrator recommends approving the plan to prioritize improvements to the project review process.

Attachment

1. Prioritization of Improvements to Texas Water Development Board's Project Review Process

# Prioritization of Improvements to the Texas Water Development Board's Project Review Process

December 31, 2022



# **Prioritization of Improvements to Texas Water Development Board's Project Review Process**

**Brooke T. Paup, Chairwoman**

**George Peyton V., Member**

**Jeff Walker, Executive Administrator**

**December 31, 2022**



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Attachment: Prioritization Plan

## Introduction

The July 2022 Sunset Advisory Commission's Staff Report with Commission Decisions on the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) made recommendations regarding addressing inefficiencies in the TWDB's project review process. In its report, the Commission directed the TWDB to develop a plan to prioritize improving its project review processes to eliminate inefficiencies and inconsistencies. Specifically, Management Action 1.3 of the Sunset Report directed the TWDB to:

1. Review and reconsider the Freese and Nichols (FNI) recommendations to reduce staff workload and identify steps that can be taken immediately, such as potentially eliminating biddability and constructability reviews.
2. Identify policies, training manuals, external guidance and other documents that need to be updated to reflect changes associated with any new project management system the agency procures.
3. Identify areas where stakeholder input may be useful or needed before making changes to the project review process, such as developing guidance and rules for highly technical areas like alternative delivery methods.
4. Identify any statutory barriers to improvements and whether the agency will need additional resources.

This report provides a plan to prioritize improvements to the agency's project review process, including identifying tasks needed to achieve improvements and implementation timelines. Included in this plan are measures the TWDB has already taken to improve its project review processes, including measures underway or implemented prior to the submittal of the TWDB's Sunset Self-Evaluation Report in September 2021. This report is organized following the format of Management Action 1.3 as listed above.

The Sunset Commission required that this plan be submitted to the board for approval by December 31, 2022, and a copy provided to the Commission and applicable legislative oversight committees.



Review and reconsider the Freese and Nichols (FNI) recommendations to reduce staff workload and identify steps that can be taken immediately, such as potentially eliminating biddability and constructability reviews.

The FNI report, dated May 4, 2021, identified five findings which have all been reviewed and reconsidered. Several have been fully implemented and all others are underway. Information on the implementation of each is provided below. Additional suggestions were given in the report that were deemed not to be in the best interest of TWDB.

#### 1.1 Team structure contributed to inconsistencies of the review process

The report notes the design of the team structure organization in the Regional Water Project Development (RWPD) division promoted a "Single Point of Contact" and staff familiarity for communities seeking financial assistance from the TWDB. While this approach is still favored, the report recognized that within the team structure the number of tasks undertaken by the team created workload issues and inefficiencies. TWDB management had previously discussed separating the application review task from project oversight and in April 2022, a restructure of RWPD was implemented to provide for increased efficiencies, improved consistency, greater managerial oversight, and to reduce the workload of engineering staff to focus their efforts on engineering tasks and project management/oversight.

The restructure included creating an application and closing team, a disbursement review team, an administrative team, and hiring an assistant director and a management analyst. While the engineering positions on the application and closing team have not yet been filled, the creation of this team has consolidated the financial analysts, loan specialist, and program specialist responsible for application intake onto a single team under a single manager, TWDB's Credit Manager, to improve processes and consistency. Once the engineering positions are filled, this team will take the application review and closing related duties off the project implementation teams to lessen their workload and allow them to focus on reviews associated with project planning, acquisition, design, and construction.

The Disbursement Review Team (DRT) was created to take the responsibility of review and approval of outlays (disbursement requests for projects funded through certain programs) off the engineering staff. The review and approval of outlays does not require an engineering license or background and removing this task from the engineering staff

will shift a tremendous amount of work from the engineering staff. The DRT is currently supporting a reduced number of teams due to staffing constraints. Management has requested three additional Full Time Equivalents for this team to allow them to take on the outlays of all seven teams.

A new assistant director position was created to provide oversight to the application and closing team and administrative assistant teams. In addition, the assistant director has taken on the responsibility of putting together staff development and training plans and has been working with the disciplines in RWPD to identify mission essential tasks and supporting tasks to help inform a broader staff development and training plan for each discipline. The assistant director works closely with RWPD management and staff to help identify areas for improvement and efficiency. The assistant director's role also includes working with the division's management analyst on tracking ongoing initiatives throughout the division, including many discussed in this document.

A management analyst was hired in the spring of 2022 as part of the restructuring. Since joining RWPD in the spring of 2022, the management analyst has been working closely with the various disciplines to develop project workflows and to review and update all discipline procedures (currently underway). The management analyst has also led the division's efforts to improve and develop standards for RWPD's uses of MS Teams applications. This initiative is currently underway with a planned transition to an RWPD-All team and SharePoint site to replace the multiple sites currently being used. One of the management analyst's primary duties since joining RWPD has been to serve as the division's primary point of contact in the development of a new project management system. The addition of the management analyst to the division has proven extremely beneficial and critical to successfully implementing improvements.

**Implementation Status:**

- ✓ Implemented, yet not fully functional due to staffing constraints



## 1.2 Project reviewers perform a broad range and too many functions

The creation of the Application and Closing Team as well as the Disbursement Review Team will allow project implementation teams to concentrate on post-closing project oversight and review tasks by removing application reviews and review and approval of outlays (both of which were mentioned in the FNI report as possible functions to move to other team members). Once fully staffed, the addition of these teams will allow the project review staff on the project implementation teams to focus their efforts on proactive management of their assigned projects and review of project documents from planning through project closeout.

Staffing continues to be a challenge, with nearly 40% of RWPD's engineering positions vacant as of November 18, 2022. Redistribution of project management and engineering tasks, as needed for active management of workload, are topics within the RWPD biweekly managers meeting. This has proven to be particularly important given the number of vacancies in RWPD. RWPD management and senior engineering staff have been reviewing all vacancies and postings to evaluate options to broaden the potential applicant pool, including potentially using different classifications for some positions and evaluating ways to attract more entry level candidates, including interns and college students nearing graduation. In addition, the agency has hired a recruiter to help fill positions and the Assistant Deputy Executive Administrator (ADEA) of Water Supply and Infrastructure has been tasked with coordinating efforts to fill positions and with assisting hiring managers as needed. The ADEA augments the hiring managers by serving as a member of the interview panel when needed, completing necessary documentation for the selection process, and coordinating with the agency's human resource office to ensure accuracy and completeness of the entire selection process. The ADEA along with the Assistant Director and RWPD management have also participated in job fairs with the agency's recruiter.

Lastly, the agency continues to offer a \$5,000 recruitment bonus for licensed Professional Engineers external to TWDB.

In October 2022, an increase to the University of Texas at Arlington's (UTA) contract budget was approved to continue engineering services through the end of fiscal year (FY) 2023 to assist with workload and performance of tasks otherwise done by RWPD's engineering staff. This contract includes review of project plans and specifications, site visits of projects under construction, review of Clean Water State Revolving Fund project

information forms, and assistance with reviewing contract closeout documents and preparing certificates of approval.

In mid-October 2022, management approved eliminating the biddability and constructability review process (a task specifically noted in the FNI report and Management Action 1.3 of the Sunset Report). In place of this review, a line has been added to the plans and specifications submittal checklist (TWDB-0300) with a statement from the engineer of record certifying that a biddability and constructability review has been completed.

**Implementation Status:** Implemented, yet not fully functional due to staffing constraints

- The Application and Closing Team has been created and partly staffed; however, vacancies continue to exist due to the overly competitive job market.
- The Disbursement Review Team has been created and staffed with a manager and two reviewers with three additional FTEs recently approved to be posted. These are expected to be posted in December 2022.
- ✓ In September of 2022, the TWDB hired a recruiter to help fill vacancies.
- ✓ Biddability and Constructability Certification: October 2022

**Additional Resources Needed:**

- The TWDB's 2024-2025 Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR) Project Management and Risk Mitigation Exceptional Item included additional Full Time Equivalents to assist with increased workload from growing demand on financial assistance programs as well as additional resources to make salaries more competitive with the market and other state agencies.

1.3 Inconsistent Trainings related to the use of checklists, guidance documents, communication protocols, document management in TxWISE all contributed to reduced efficiency: and

1.4 Inconsistent process execution processes contributed to reduced efficiency and difficulties with resource sharing and project handoff

### **Outdated training**

Each professional discipline in RWPD, including engineering staff, environmental review staff, financial analysts, administrative assistants, and program specialists has well-documented policies and procedures that guide project reviews. RWPD is currently reviewing and updating all discipline procedures, including identifying and preparing any new procedures that need to be developed. The Management Analyst is leading this effort which also includes migrating all resource material from discipline shared folders to an RWPD-ALL SharePoint site for improved access and better organization.

As procedures have been updated or developed, training has been held as needed to help ensure staff are up to date on procedures and to help ensure consistency across the teams. Examples of recent trainings include a training on updated engineering application review procedures led by senior engineering staff, training for the administrative assistant team on new and updated procedures related to application intake and review, use of a new checklist for documenting completion of application and commitment phase tasks, training on a new WPD for managers on review of documentation associated with engineering work products, and training for the financial analysts on updates to the internal risk score process and review. In addition, the RWPD senior engineers hold regular senior engineer office hours where they address questions and conduct trainings on topics that come up.

While these ad hoc trainings are beneficial, RWPD has recognized the need for a more formal training/professional development program and is currently developing a division-wide training program for all staff. The Mission Essential Task List (METL) noted above will help guide development of the training program by focusing trainings on essential and supporting discipline tasks. As currently proposed, the program will be overseen by the senior technical representative for each discipline and will be developed and taught by peers. This will ensure that all efforts are standardized and aligned with all work process documents. The draft training program requires further analysis of requirements, frequency, and specific details on the training to be conducted. This effort

is being led by the Assistant Director and is being informed by the discipline leads, RWPD management, the management analyst, and the METL. Implementation of the new professional development program is planned for the second quarter of FY 2023.

In addition to improving internal training, RWPD staff and management are encouraged to attend external trainings and conferences. For example, the October 2022 EPA Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Clean Water/Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Implementation Training was held in Austin and was widely attended by RWPD staff.

The creation of the administrative assistant team under the direction of a team lead and consolidation of some document management duties with that team has helped address issues related to inconsistencies with document management and communication protocols across RWPD. This has also helped to standardize the intake of documents/review requests from TWDB's customers and their consultants. A new FTE has been approved to serve as a records specialist in RWPD to further improve and enhance the management of documents submitted to and approved by RWPD. As currently planned, this position will provide oversight of project records as projects progress from the application phase through project closeout to help ensure records are complete and documented in accordance with agency policies and procedures.

Lastly, WSI has undertaken a deliberate, comprehensive review of external program guidance manuals and final review and approvals are underway. This is expected to be completed with the updated guidance documents posted to the agency website in December 2022.

**Implementation Status:**

- Program Guidance Manuals: In progress, estimated completion December 2022.
- ✓ Mission Essential Task List: completed and ready to use to plan RWPD's training and professional development program. Note: the METL is a living document and will be routinely assessed and updated as needed.
- Training and Professional Development Program: In progress, estimated implementation second quarter FY 2023

**Additional Resources Needed:**

- None at this time.

1.5 Lack of project management/collaboration tools in TxWISE leads to significant effort with little benefit to project delivery functions

The agency's current project database (TxWISE) was not designed to be an efficient project management system and does not meet the project management needs of an agency managing more than \$18 billion in active projects. Development of a new project management system is underway to allow project tracking, review, and reporting. Once complete, the System for Tracking, Reviewing, and Monitoring, referred to as STRM (pronounced stream), is expected to provide for increased transparency via an online customer portal, a standardized and reliable method for document submittal and project-related communications, and increased project management, collaboration, and oversight functionality. All of this is lacking in TxWISE.

From December 2021 through March 2022, TWDB collaborated with a vendor to complete the discovery phase for development of STRM. This phase focused on identifying the needs associated with the proposed system. Phase one of five of the development of STRM started in July 2022 and is currently underway with phase two of five scheduled to begin December 5, 2022. Based on the current schedule, development and user testing is expected to be completed and STRM is expected to be in use before the end of the current fiscal year.

While TxWISE will remain the database of record for all archival information, for the time being, this new project management system is intended to provide the full complement of project management and communication tools and resources not found in TxWISE. It is important to note that the initial five phase project is focused on addressing the most pressing and immediate project management needs of RWPD and will not fully replace TxWISE. For example, the budgets for TWDB-funded projects will remain in TxWISE for the time being, as will outlay processing. TWDB anticipates undertaking future enhancements to the system to integrate other project management related tasks and business areas. TWDB's LAR Exception Item includes funding for continued development, implementation, and maintenance of STRM.

RWPD has implemented an interim process for intake of review requests and documents until STRM is in place. This process includes requiring submittal checklists for many of the document submissions received by RWPD to help ensure complete submittals and help with reviews. Management in RWPD now receives a weekly list of all review requests received in the division. The administrative assistant team monitors this intake process to help ensure that all review requests/documents are recorded in TxWISE.

**Implementation Status:**

- ✓ Document Intake Interim Process: Implemented
- STRM: In development, estimated completion of initial production ready application in fourth quarter FY 2023
  - Development Deliverables and Timeline:
    - Phase 1: Initial environment setup, development licenses procured, data architecture defined, data model drafted, business process flow created. (June-December 2022)
    - Phase 2: Revision of data model and business process flow, development of TxWISE integrations, internal focus groups (December 2022 – February 2023)
    - Phase 3: Additional focus group testing, Okta (user authorization) integration, development of external user interface (February 2023 – March 2023)
    - Phase 4: Build reporting functionality, develop management dashboards, begin user acceptance testing. Application will be moved to production environment for final phase. (March 2023 – April 2023)
    - Phase 5: Platform refinement, final user acceptance testing, project closeout. STRM will be fully online and available for internal and external users. (April 2023 – May 2023)



- Beyond Phase 5: Evaluation and refinement of application. Discussion and planning for enhancements and future development (Q4 FY23)

**Additional Resources Needed:**

- The TWDB's LAR Exceptional Item includes funding for the continued development, implementation, and maintenance of STRM.

Identify policies, training manuals, external guidance and other documents that need to be updated to reflect changes associated with any new project management system the agency procures.

As STRM is developed, RWPD's management analyst will work with management and discipline leads in RWPD to review and identify all policies and procedures that will require updates when the new system is in place. In addition, the management analyst will coordinate with other areas of the agency as needed to ensure all relevant policies, procedures, and guidance documents are updated. In the interim, guidance has been developed for external customers on how to submit review requests to RWPD following the interim submittal process and using a document intake form.

**Implementation Status:**

- STRM is in development with estimated completion of an initial production ready application in fourth quarter FY 2023. As development of STRM continues, procedures, guidance, etc., will be updated and training will be provided to TWDB staff and stakeholders.

**Additional Resources Needed:**

- None at this time.

Identify areas where stakeholder input may be useful or needed before making changes to the project review process, such as developing guidance and rules for highly technical areas like alternative delivery methods.

Rule development follows the required rule making process, which includes posting in the Texas Register and public comment.

TWDB continues to evaluate and include stakeholder input, when necessary, when developing guidance documents. Recently, the TWDB worked to update its alternative delivery guidance and has held three successful stakeholder meetings. Staff started the process by holding a large group meeting in August 2022 to go over the details of the proposed revised guidance, followed later by two smaller workgroup meetings to work through additional recommended changes.

Throughout this process, staff have reviewed proposed procedural changes and coordinated with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the Texas Board of Professional Engineers to make changes that should address the biggest hurdles to using alternative delivery when financing a project through the TWDB. The proposed revised guidance was presented to the Board for discussion and posted for public comment on November 17, 2022. Thus far, the proposed revisions have been well-received by stakeholders.

In 2022, WSI initiated a comprehensive assessment of the environmental review process similar to the FNI assessment of the engineering review process to determine statutory requirements and identify inefficiencies in the environmental review process. This contracted effort will include seeking stakeholder input on the agency's environmental review processes.

**Implementation Status:**

- The draft revised guidance and proposed rules associated with use of Alternative Delivery was presented to the TWDB's board on November 17, 2022, and posted for public comment. The public comment period for the draft guidance ends December 19.
- A public comment period for the revised guidance will run concurrent with the proposed rulemaking. The proposed rules will be posted in the Texas

Register on December 2, 2022, beginning a 30-day comment period on the proposed rules.

- Watearth, Inc. was selected to perform the assessment of the environmental review process and it is currently underway. A comprehensive assessment of all applicable laws, regulations and TWDB's work process is ongoing, and interviews of the environmental reviewers have commenced.

**Additional Resources Needed:**

- None at this time.

Identify any statutory barriers to improvements and whether the agency will need additional resources.

The TCEQ's flexibility regarding plan and specification reviews for wastewater projects has proven successful for managing increased workloads and expediting important infrastructure projects in Texas. Currently, TCEQ statute and rules grant alternatives to full reviews of all wastewater plans and specifications submitted via either the acceptance of a summary transmittal letter sealed by a licensed professional engineer or delegation of authority to certain municipalities who meet specific criteria.

The TWDB is seeking similar flexibility for conducting its engineering reviews for wastewater projects. This will improve efficiency in the review processes, increase customer satisfaction and expedite the construction of TWDB-funded infrastructure projects in Texas. Allowing this flexibility is also a recommendation of the Sunset Commission Staff Report dated March 2022.

TCEQ does not currently have this same flexibility for review of water infrastructure projects and reviews all projects submitted for review. While the Sunset report does not differentiate between water and wastewater projects in its discussion of authorizing a "risk-based approach" to project review, the flexible approach is recommended for wastewater projects only and TWDB processes should remain consistent with TCEQ requirements for water projects.

**Implementation Status:**

- The TWDB's Biennial Legislative Priorities Report includes a request for statutory changes to TWC §17.276(d) to give it the same flexibility and discretion as the TCEQ regarding plan and specification reviews.
- The Legislative Priorities Report includes changes to §17.278 and §15.104 to allow release of construction funds at a certain level of design completion to increase efficiencies in alternative delivery projects.

**Additional Resources:**

- None at this time.

[Additional actions taken to support evaluation of project review process.](#)

A review of existing performance measures was conducted to identify trends, potential bottlenecks in the process and implement goals, based on direct guidance from the Sunset Reviews, as well as Vice Chairman Holland and other reporting requirements.

**Implementation status:**

- Development of performance goals and utilization of newly developed metrics to analyze trends and measure progress is ongoing.

**Prioritization of Improvements to the TWDB Project Review Processes**

Priority	Task	Action	Status	Implementation Date
1	Evaluation of Team Structure	The creation of application and closing team and the disbursement review team to remove some functions from engineering workloads	Implemented, yet not fully functional due to staffing constraints which may lead to further evaluation	Apr-22
2	Evaluation of Engineering classifications	Identify options to broaden the candidate pool of applicants	Underway	On-going
3	Hiring of a Management Analyst	Onboard new Full Time Equivalent	Implemented	Mar-22
4	Hiring Assistant Director of RWPD	Onboard new Full Time Equivalent	Implemented	Apr-22
5	Review existing performance measures	Identify trends, potential bottlenecks and implement goals.	Underway	Dec-22
6	Update Alternative Delivery Guidance	Review current processes and identify proposed procedural changes for alternative delivery projects. This includes coordination and feedback from stakeholders including TCEQ and the PE Board.	Underway	Jan-23
7	Creation of an administrative assistant team to standardize the intake of documents/review request from customers	Address issues related to inconsistencies with document management and communication protocols across RWPD	Implemented	Apr-22
8	Develop Interim Document Intake Process	Create a process for intake of review requests and documents until STRM is in place. Requires submittal checklists. Includes weekly list of all review requests received provided to management.	Implemented	Sep-22
9	Development of a new project management System for Tracking, Reviewing and Monitoring (STRM) for project tracking, review and reporting to increase transparency via an online portal, document submittal and project related communications, increasing project management, collaboration and oversight.	Phase 1: Initial environment setup, development licenses procured, data architecture defined, data model drafted, business process flow created.	Completed	Dec-22
10	Hire recruiter and trainer to assist with Agency-wide efforts	Assist with filling positions and developing training resources agency wide	Implemented	Sep-22
11	Elimination of the biddability and constructability review process	Review process to determined process was not a programmatic or statutory requirement	Implemented	Oct-22
12	Comprehensive review of external program guidance manuals	Creation of resource of program specific information for external customers	Underway	Dec-22
13	Improve and develop standards for uses of MS Teams application	This effort will create consistency among teams and replace multiple sites currently being used.	Underway	Dec-22
14	Creation of the Mission Essential Task List	Develop a resource to guide development of the training program by focusing trainings on essential and supporting discipline tasks. Updates will be on-going.	Underway	On-going
15	STRM	Phase 2: Revision of data model and business process flow, development of TxWISE integrations, internal focus groups	Underway	Feb-23
16	Review environmental review process	Review current processes to determine statutory requirements and identify inefficiencies in the environmental review process.	Underway	Jun-23
17	Development of formal training/professional development program	Develop a RWPD wide training program for all staff.	Underway	Mar-23
18	Hire a records specialist in RWPD	Improve and enhance the management of documents submitted to and approved by RWPD	Underway	Feb-23
19	STRM	Phase 3: Additional focus group testing, Okta (user authorization) integration, development of external user interface		Mar-23
20	STRM	Phase 4: Build reporting functionality, develop management dashboards, begin user acceptance testing. Application will be moved to production environment for final phase.		Apr-23
21	STRM	Phase 5: Platform refinement, final user acceptance testing, project closeout. STRM will be fully online and available for internal and external users.		May-23
22	Review and identify all policies and procedures post STRM	Identify all processes that will require updates when the new system is in place, including coordination with other areas of the agency.	As STRM progresses	As development of STRM progresses
23	Review and update all discipline procedures	Identify and prepare new procedures and migrate all resource materials to a central shared locations for improved access and organization	Underway	On-going
24	Trainings for updated procedures	Training for staff on revised or new procedures as they are updated/created.	Underway	On-going