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## Succession Planning

# Building a workforce of future certified operators

*By Chris McCord, Operator Certification and Training Section Manager*

There were more than 70 people in the Sacajawea Room when I began my presentation on succession planning at the Evergreen Rural Water of Washington fall conference in August.

I wanted some quantitative information, so I asked everyone to stand, then those eligible to retire in one year to have a seat...about 5 to 7 did. Next, I asked those eligible to retire in two to five years to have a seat, about 20 to 25 did. Finally, I asked those who will be eligible to retire in 10 years to have a seat and only 12 were left standing.

Those 12 operators will be the managers, supervisors and lead operators for the industry 10 years from now. More importantly, we got a graphic depiction of what the water industry might face in the next decade.

After a short presentation, everyone discussed three questions about ways utilities and the state can ensure a viable pool of qualified waterworks operators is available to replace those who could retire in 10 years.

### How can we build a viable pool of future operators?

- Market the water industry in high schools as a career path.
- Attend military job fairs and career days at high schools and colleges.
- Look at the level of experience required for entry-level positions.
- Use satellite management agencies and contract operators.
- Implement school programs, such as field trips, work-study, job shadowing and junior achievement internships.
- Retired operators can mentor, serve as back-up operators, and provide training to other operators.

*"Succession planning is the process an organization uses to ensure that employees are recruited and developed to fill each key role within the company."*

### How's your water system preparing?

- Operators reach out to potential future operators (networking or mentoring).
- Internal recruitment offers to promote staff from within.
- Working with internship programs at local community colleges.
- Cross-training existing staff.



*Deni Gray, operator certification program manager, learning how systems are preparing for the future.*

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