



## **5.0 PUBLIC STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT**

Water efficiency and water resource planning processes that are open and transparent can significantly improve the quality and community support of a plan. This is especially applicable to water efficiency planning, where the success of a plan is highly dependent on the public's participation in conserving water.

In Colorado, the development of water efficiency plans is generally conducted by provider staff and/or a supporting contractor. Unfortunately, public reviews can be a reactive process in the sense that the majority of the plan has been developed before the public has the opportunity to comment. Stakeholder processes that proactively incorporate feedback from the public during plan development can improve the quality and overall effectiveness of plans. Additionally, public engagement during the implementation and monitoring processes can significantly increase public awareness and effectiveness of water efficiency activities.

### **5.1 Plan Development with Public and Stakeholder Participation**

There are many benefits associated with incorporating a public stakeholder process during development of a local water efficiency plan. A stakeholder process serves the dual function of providing a feedback mechanism between the provider staff and the public while also serving as a means to educate members of the public on the value of water efficiency. Stakeholder processes can also be used as a vehicle to generate public support for plans and ensure that the plans are representative of community values.

Members of a stakeholder committee should include key staff involved with day-to-day municipal and/or water supply operations in addition to members of the public. This may include the following:

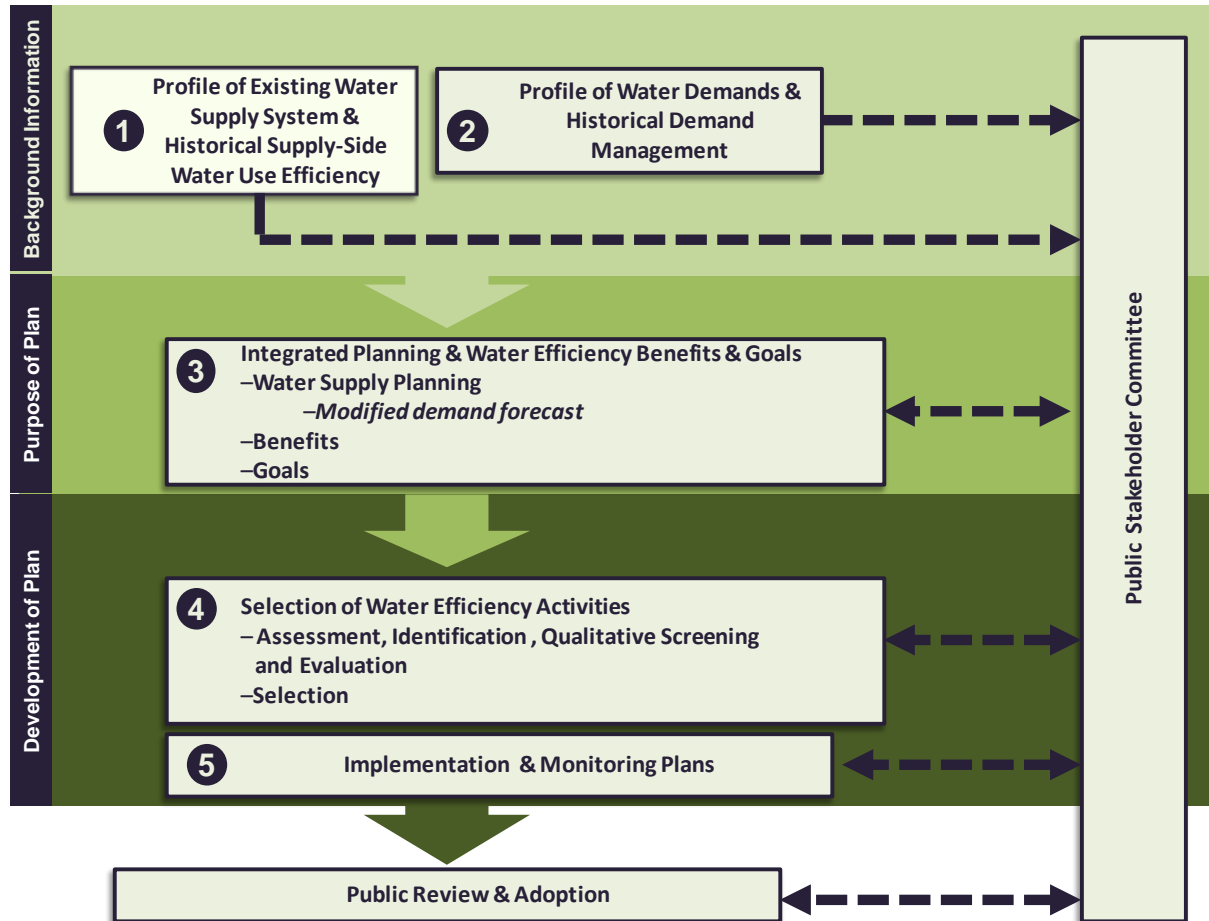
- City or General Manager
- Water treatment and water quality manager(s)
- Water resources manager
- Conservation specialist
- City finance/accounting specialist
- Billing administrator
- Representative of the planning department
- Legal staff
- Communications director
- Residential water consumers



- Commercial, institutional and industrial water consumers
- Environmental and non-profit groups
- Representatives of minorities
- Representatives of other government agencies or departments within the municipality
- Recreational water users
- Representatives of local agriculture
- Educational institutions.

Figure 28 presents how information may be exchanged between the developer(s) of the plan and the public or stakeholder committee during the five-step water efficiency planning process. Elements that require a more informed background (e.g. decisions on certain water efficiency activities) may be more appropriate for the stakeholder committee whereas, inquiries on values, for example the aesthetics of xeriscaping vs turf grass, may be more conducive for the general public.

As shown by the hashed arrows in Figure 28, there are many opportunities for the public and a stakeholder committee to participate in the development of a plan in addition to the formal public review process that occurs near plan completion. As discussed in Section 4.0, Steps 1 and 2 primarily consist of background information obtained from other water resource planning efforts. This information, in addition to the modified demands from Step 3, may be conveyed to the stakeholder committee to inform them on how water efficiency efforts can affect municipal demands and, ultimately, future water supply planning. This, in turn, enables the stakeholder committee to develop well-informed opinions and decisions during key aspects of the plan development. The public and stakeholder committee can provide valuable feedback into the development of water efficiency benefits and goals. This can help ensure that the plan and overall direction of the water efficiency program is compatible with the community's values. Step 4 could be a collaborative process where stakeholder input may be instrumental in developing some of the qualitative screening criteria and factors to consider during the evaluation phase. Public participation could also be a key component of the plan implementation and monitoring discussed in Section 5.2. Feedback on the public's role in implementation and monitoring could be obtained during the Step 5 of the plan development.



**Figure 28 Public and Stakeholder Involvement during the Five-Step Water Efficiency Planning Process**

Public opinion surveys or questionnaires on the community's values and perceptions can also be extremely valuable for plan development.<sup>37</sup> Examples of particularly useful information include the following:

- *Reasons for why the public conserves or does not conserve water* – A reason for conserving could be “it is the right thing to do,” while others may not conserve because they believe the saved water simply goes to supporting new growth. This information can be useful in developing public campaigns promoting wise water use.
- *Perception of xeriscaping vs turf grass* – Surveys that provide the public the opportunity to rank various landscaping images comprised of both turf grass and xeriscaping. This can be used as a tool to gauge the public's general preference for xeriscape or turf grass.
- *Level of satisfaction with the service area landscaping aesthetics* – Should there be more trees, more grass, more xeriscaping, etc?

<sup>37</sup> It is important to note that the opinion surveys and questionnaires are an optional tool to obtain additional information on customers' values and perceptions related to water use and landscape. It is not a requirement.



- *How does the public feel about the provider's effort to be water efficient?* – Can the provider save more water through their daily operations?
- *Can the public make more of an effort to conserve water?* – This could include both indoor and outdoor activities and apply to the customer at a personal level as well as their view of the public in general.
- *Designated areas on City-owned parks and open spaces where it would be publicly accepted to change from turf grass to xeriscape* – This can be useful for future landscaping plans.
- *Ability and desire to convert landscaping from lawns to xeriscape* – Would customers be willing to install xeriscaping? If so, how much would they be willing to pay to do so? Would monetary incentives be useful and if so, how much?

## 5.2 Public Participation with Implementation and Monitoring

Including members of the public, and possibly water oriented stakeholder groups, during the implementation and monitoring effort can increase the overall success of the plan. Ongoing involvement can help maintain and build support for achieving the water efficiency goals and can assist in “getting the word out” about the water efficiency effort. Additionally, public participation in monitoring provides system managers with valuable information on implementation challenges and success factors. This feedback can inform the provider of improvements necessary to increase the effectiveness of the water efficiency program.

Examples of activities the provider can implement to promote such participation include the following:

- Hold regular meetings with community members to keep them informed of the municipality's progress in meeting the water efficiency goals.
- Provide a forum (e.g. survey, workshops, blog, etc) for participants to supply input on the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the municipality's water efficiency activities.
- Recruit volunteers (e.g. students and retirees) to assist with monitoring water efficiency efforts such as conducting public surveys on certain water efficiency activities. This can be a cost savings for the provider who does not have to invest in staff time for such services.
- Develop K-12 programs and provide materials and training to teachers on the importance of water efficiency and what the provider is doing to promote water efficiency.
- Use social networking (e.g. Facebook) to get community members engaged.
- Recruit volunteers to solicit signatures in support of water efficiency. This would provide volunteers the opportunity to inform the public of the water provider's water efficiency activities.



- Publicly acknowledge businesses that are meeting a high level of water efficiency. They can use this recognition to promote their business.

Many of the items listed above qualify as Level 3 Two-Way Education activities and can be selected during Step 4 as Education Activities. These activities should be developed and provided during Step 4 of the plan development. Providers that have an extensive list of Education Activities should consider developing a separate public outreach plan that provides the necessary guidance on how each of the activities is to be coordinated and carried out. This public outreach plan may be included as an appendix to the local plan.