



PRAP Assistance Grant Supports Operational Effectiveness

November 2014 Snapshots

After 34 years working for the Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD), Administrator Bruce Albright sometimes felt like the district was an island. “You don’t always get the chance to step back and look at operations and costs and compare them with other organizations,” said Albright.

The Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD) has existed since 1960. During that time, it has undergone two expansions, once in 1976 and once in 2012. These expansions both increased the geographic area the district serves and increased the size of its board. After the most recent expansion, many felt the time was right to invest in a strategic planning process. After undergoing expansions in 1976 and 2012, which expanded the area it serves and also increased the amount of board members to seven, many felt the time was right for a strategic planning process. Following the board’s recommendation, the BRRWD applied for and received a Performance Review and Assistance Program (PRAP) grant through BWSR to hire a strategic planning consultant.



Members of the Buffalo-Red River Watershed District Board gather to kick off their strategic planning process, supported by a BWSR PRAP Assistance Grant.

The PRAP Assistance Grants program is available to agencies within BWSR’s local government unit (LGU) delivery system – 240 soil and water conservation districts, watershed districts, water management organizations, and counties – that desire to improve their performance or operational effectiveness. The need-based grants are intended to assist partners with organizational improvement and can include activities such as staff capacity assessment, strategic planning, conflict resolution, and reorganization.

In the BRRWD’s case, Albright said the process focused on immediate, short-term, and long-term needs, including catching up on annual reporting for BWSR and preparing

for a smooth transition as Albright approaches retirement. At the end of the process, the BRRWD produced both strategic planning and succession planning documents.

Another key question the BRRWD wanted to tackle was rejoining the Red River Water Management Board. Strategic planning allowed the watershed district to begin the process of making this decision, including engaging county boards and citizens to consider pros and cons.

BWSR receives about \$50,000 annually for the grant assistance program, and has awarded 11 grants to local government partners so far. All grants are made on a cost-share basis, with a cap of \$10,000 per grant. While results vary depending on the LGU’s goal, in general, participants have offered positive feedback about the program.

“I feel that it’s very valuable,” said Albright. “We look forward to doing it again.”

The strategic planning process was so successful, the BRRWD plans to repeat the process every five or so years, building on past work.

“It’s not that you do it once and it’s good for 30 years – we’d like to do this on somewhat of a regular basis,” said Albright. “We’ve got a good product, but we can only get better as we go on.”