2018 RURAL COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS
Here’s what you have said about your rural needs
LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

My wife Kelli and I took a short trip this summer. We decided to get off the interstate and travel almost exclusively on two-lane roads. We went through Nebraska, South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa. If you get far enough away from the interstates, you can find amazing little towns all over the region. Being in the water and wastewater business, I always look at the water towers and notice every lagoon. But lately I have been seeing the downtowns, the businesses, and the people. I ask myself, what makes this little town thrive when ten miles down the road, there is another little town with nothing but boarded up buildings and empty houses. What is the catalyst which makes a community grow? Can it be duplicated? What can MAP do to help? What can be done to stop the decline of a small town? I have more questions than answers. There are definitely successes all throughout the Midwest. At MAP we want to do more. We want our rural communities to find a healthy, sustainable future. A trip like this reminds me of just how important our work is to so many people. After several days of antique stores and thrift shops, we made it safely home to northwest Missouri. It was an amazing trip. We met many great people and the food was fantastic.

MAP continues to work with small rural communities throughout our nine-state area. It is hard to believe another year is almost gone. MAP turns forty years old in 2019. In 1979 Midwest Assistance Program, Inc. was founded in Nebraska by Ken Bruzelius who was MAP’s first CEO. Ken served in that position for about twenty-five years. As Executive Director, I hope to set MAP up to be a voice and leader in the rural Midwest for the next 40 years.

Mike Brownfield
Executive Director

Board of Directors at their Memphis meeting in May 2018
New Staff Hires

RICHARD BURCH
Technical Assistance Provider in Nebraska
Dick joined MAP in December 2017. His early experience in irrigation and domestic well drilling, to include both turbine and submersible pump applications, serves as the baseline of his experience in water distribution management. His experience in developing leaders, managing training, and sustaining operations is derived from his nearly 38 years of military experience.

JODI HILSABECK
Technical Assistance Provider in Iowa
Jodi has over 10 years of experience in assisting organizations with budgeting, creating action plans, program development and implementation, staffing, and customer service. Jodi understands the hardships that small communities face today and looks forward to helping rural communities.

ERIN MILLER
Accounting & Human Resources Assistant
Erin joined MAP in 2018 as an Accounting/Human Resources Assistant. Erin graduated in 2003 from Northwest Missouri State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management. She brings 11 years of experience in the office administration and management field.

JERRI ROBERTS
Technical Assistance Provider in Kansas
For eight years Aubrey served as City Clerk in a small, rural community in North Central Kansas. By serving as City Clerk she understands the issues and hardships many smaller, rural communities face on a daily basis. She earned her A.A.S. degree in Veterinary Technology from Colby Community College and completed Pre-Veterinary Medicine courses at Kansas State University.

ALICIA PAZ-SOLIS
Technical Assistance Provider in Montana
Alicia holds a B.S in Civil Engineering from Montana State University and a Master of Water Resources from the University of New Mexico. Previously as a TAP for RCAC, she has worked on infrastructure asset mapping, funding applications, procurement process, capital improvement planning, sanitary surveys, source water protection, storm water pollution prevention, and water utility audits.

BRUCE POPPEL
Technical Assistance Provider in Nebraska
Bruce has 34 years of experience working for local units of government in Minnesota. His experience includes the planning and management of solid waste/recycling programs, water quality/quantity programs, planning and zoning, and onsite sewage treatment systems (septic’s).

SHELLY UNDERWOOD
Technical Assistance Provider in Kansas
Shelly joined MAP in June 2018. She obtained her CMC through WSU Hugo Wall School of Public Affairs and is Water Certified. She has worked as a City Clerk for 8 years. She has experience in grant writing and administration, budget preparation, rate studies, and a vast knowledge in water & wastewater operations and regulations.

RON VANDERPOOL
Technical Assistance Provider in Wyoming
Ron is a Wyoming licensed water, wastewater, and distribution operator along with possessing multiple certifications in building department administration. Ron’s career has spanned many aspects over the last 40 years and he has a comprehensive knowledge in Geographic Information Systems and interactive web-based mapping, providing him the ability to assist rural communities with real-time asset management and sustainability.

By serving as City Clerk she understands the issues and hardships many smaller, rural communities face on a daily basis. She earned her A.A.S. degree in Veterinary Technology from Colby Community College and completed Pre-Veterinary Medicine courses at Kansas State University.
Every few years we try to get a feel for what is really happening in our states. Midwest Assistance Program (MAP) covers a nine state region as a part of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP). We currently have about 30 staff assisting rural communities, utilities, and tribes in these nine states. We primarily deal with water, wastewater, and solid waste issues. Although we receive really good information on individual communities, it is not always a good picture of what is happening everywhere in our region. We conducted a needs survey and tried to get participation from as many of the small, rural communities as is possible.

We sent out nearly 7000 surveys. Many came back undeliverable. We believe roughly 4,500 surveys reached their proper destination. We received over 1,100 responses to our survey through the mail, email, fax, or online. It was wonderful to see so many community leaders take the time to respond.

817 of the surveys we received were from towns of 1,000 or less in population. The average size of the communities overall was 435.

Here are the results from the surveys.

**State Survey Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
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The biggest factors influencing a community’s growth or shrinkage are:

1. Nearby Jobs & Work Opportunities: 69%
2. Quality Housing: 44%
3. Enough Housing: 40%
4. Schools for Children: 29%
5. Access to Medical Services: 23%
6. Quality of Water/Sewer Service: 17%
7. Other: 16%
8. Internet Service: 15%
9. Quality of Community Leadership: 13%
10. Cell Phone Service: 12%
11. Electrical Services: 6%

Communities that chose Growing or Slightly Growing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>6%</td>
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</table>
The availability of good, nearby jobs is the overwhelming number one factor facing all of our communities. Good job opportunity means growth. Other top issues for growth are good schools and housing. A large factor for communities who are struggling is housing or lack of quality housing.

So now we know what affects community growth. When asked what is most important to them in regards to getting assistance to move forward, they responded as follows.

**Communities ranked the following as their #1 need:**

- Economic Development 41%
- Water and Wastewater 27%
- Streets 22%
- Emergency Services 6%
- Internet and Cell Phone Service 5%
- Solid Waste and Recycling 1%

Economic development creates growth through jobs and opportunity. Not every community is ready for that step. Many communities still require basic needs of infrastructure, good roads, and a quality internet service.

Most communities know funding is available to them from state and federal agencies. However, nearly one-third do not. The lack of knowledge in this area is often due to turnover in staff or when institutional knowledge disappears after individuals leave.
While economic development was identified as the biggest need, most communities want help with infrastructure first.

**What type of Federal/State programs would be most helpful?**

1. Infrastructure Projects (Roads, Water, Wastewater) 49%
2. Economic Development 28%
3. Housing Development 13%
4. Community Facilities (Ex: Firefighting Equip) 8%
5. Community Planning 7%

Is there a difference between the very small communities and everyone else? For those with a population of 500 or less, assistance with infrastructure is more critical than all other issues.
For communities over 500, economic development and community planning are where they want assistance.

The loan and grant structure is different for every project. Grant dollars are becoming more and more difficult to find. This is where the communities see themselves in their ability to pay for infrastructure projects.

The size of a community is a critical factor in the ability to pay off loans. The cost of a loan spread out over a few citizens, requires higher utility rates. Most of the communities with a population of less than 1,000 believe they can only handle new infrastructure projects where 25% of it is a loan.
Most small communities do not even have enough funds to take care of pre-planning and preparation for an infrastructure project. We estimate it generally costs around $10,000 to get a project started.

- Communities less than 500 population:
  - 41% are able to afford and 59% cannot afford
- Communities over 500 population:
  - 81% are able to afford and 19% cannot afford

73% of communities do not have a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), and for those who do, the average age of their CIP was just over 5 years old.

We believe for growth in our rural areas to be successful, it has to be deliberate. For it to be deliberate, there must be a plan. The plan must be current. There were a few communities in our survey results with plans over 30 years old. A good Capital Improvement Plan should be reviewed on an annual basis.

82% of all respondents said they would welcome assistance in completing a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The rural community leaders understand the importance of a CIP and want help making it happen.

What is the staffing situation like in our rural communities?

We work with many communities who experience continued turn-over from Clerks and Operators. For many small towns, a replacement operator or clerk is impossible to find. Part-time operators and clerks are the norm in our small rural areas. It is amazing how many systems are run by volunteers.

![Clerk Staffing](chart1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-Time</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
<th>Volunteer</th>
<th>Contracted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

![Clerk Longevity](chart2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less Than 1 Year</th>
<th>1-2 Years</th>
<th>3-5 Years</th>
<th>Over 5 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>55%</td>
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One of the biggest roles of the staff at Midwest Assistance Program is training and assisting new clerks and operators. It is not unusual for us to work in the same community year after year training new people.

### Staffing Compared to Population

#### Less than 500 population

- **Clerks**
  - Full-Time Staff: 21%
  - Part-Time Staff: 62%
  - Volunteer Staff: 10%
  - Contracted Staff: 7%

- **Operators**
  - Full-Time Staff: 40%
  - Part-Time Staff: 43%
  - Volunteer Staff: 7%
  - Contracted Staff: 10%

#### Over 500 population

- **Clerks**
  - Full-Time Staff: 65%
  - Part-Time Staff: 24%
  - Volunteer Staff: 3%
  - Contracted Staff: 8%

- **Operators**
  - Full-Time Staff: 75%
  - Part-Time Staff: 17%
  - Volunteer Staff: 1%
  - Contracted Staff: 7%

As you can see, smaller communities struggle to employ full-time workers. The financial capacity is just not there. We often find in our rural communities that the person operating the water and wastewater system is the same person in charge of many other community functions. Their commitment to their rural community is astonishing and worthy of recognition.

### The biggest limitation community staff face when trying to obtain training:

1. Time Away from Work  52%
2. Travel to Trainings  22%
3. Availability of Trainings  14%
4. Appropriate Content for Trainings  13%
When asked what type of training would be best for their community, they said regional workshops (37%) and on-site trainings (37%) are the preferred method of learning. However, online training is still vital (26%).

It is evident all methods of providing training are critical in order to reach all people.

According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the definition of broadband internet is a minimum of 25mb speed internet.

Only 34% of communities said their internet speed was over 25mb. 618 out of 940 communities that responded to this question had less than 25mb speed internet.

Most business today is done over the internet or requires quality internet service to operate. If 66% of all of our rural communities have inadequate internet service, they will continue to struggle to keep up.

**MAP’s Take On The Survey Data**

The survey provided us with some very good information. Most of the statistics reveal what we expected. One item interesting to us was the number of communities doing very well. The survey also confirms just how much some areas in our region are struggling. There is much work to be done to get our less fortunate rural communities into a good place. The passion for rural success is what drives all of us at MAP. It is going to take a true team effort to make rural communities sustainable throughout the Midwest. MAP has many partners in the rural world with the same or similar goals ranging from local regional planning councils and development districts to federal agencies such as USDA Rural Development, the EPA and Health and Human Services.

They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. As we move forward, we hope to emulate the successes of our small rural communities to help all rural areas in the Midwest prosper. Much of this effort will likely come from those communities who are thriving. The collaboration and sharing of ideas between communities will be fundamental in the future growth of our rural areas.

We really appreciate all of the effort taken by community leaders to complete the survey and provide us with so much vital information. If you would like more information, please contact MAP on our website www.map-inc.org or email us at map@map-inc.org.
The Midwest Assistance Program (MAP) is a member of The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (network). RCAP is made up of a total of six regional partners including MAP.

MAP has been helping communities and tribal nations meet their infrastructure and development needs through information, resource management, expertise and technical assistance since 1979. MAP provides solutions to more than 400 such communities each year in Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North and South Dakota and Wyoming. Through individualized support from MAP staff, residents are given the knowledge and tools to revitalize their communities. MAP staff members live in the communities served and have a deep commitment to the strength, vitality, and future of rural America.