

Impact of the Rural Community Development (RCD) Program in Nebraska

Training & Technical Assistance to Support Safe, Affordable Water & Wastewater Systems



About RCD

The [Rural Community Development \(RCD\)](#) program within the Office of Community Services (OCS) is dedicated to reducing the causes and consequences of poverty, increasing opportunity and economic security of individuals and families, and revitalizing communities.

RCD provides training and technical assistance grants to build capacity to create, expand, and maintain safe, affordable water and wastewater systems in rural areas. RCD serves very small communities in sparsely populated areas made up predominately of residents with low income who lack safe water and wastewater treatment services and often even indoor plumbing. Many of these communities have populations of less than 2,500 people and face barriers in funding, building, or operating water infrastructure.

There are currently [eight RCD grant recipients](#)—six regional organizations and two organizations that support tribal communities—which collectively serve all regions of the country.

Program Outcomes

Since the beginning of Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, RCD grant recipients:¹

- Helped over 14,000 residents in rural, low-income communities gain access to safe drinking water;
- Helped over 12,000 residents in rural, low-income communities gain access to sanitary sewer systems;
- Conducted over 10,000 management, technical operations, and compliance trainings to ensure effective operation of water and sewage systems, resulting in over 3,000 technical certifications; and
- Leveraged over \$448 million in additional public and private resources to invest in safe and affordable water and wastewater services.

Highlights in Nebraska

RCD grant recipients, Midwest Assistance Program, Inc. (MAP) and Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. (ITCA), use RCD funds to implement training and technical assistance services to build technical, managerial, and financial capacity for rural water and wastewater systems. MAP serves the Midwest United States and provides services including emergency response plan development, water management training, and education about water and wastewater infrastructure needs. ITCA serves tribal communities and provides technical assistance services including standard operating procedure creation, source water protection, and water management training.

For households not served by community drinking water and wastewater facilities, MAP and ITCA, support communities' planning and development of reliable and compliant systems. Communities with existing infrastructure receive training to increase their operational capacity as well as assistance in planning and development of safety, security, and sustainability upgrades.

Elwood, NE (MAP)

MAP helped the town of Elwood, NE, build financial capacity to maintain the water system that supplies water to 707 people from the Ogallala Aquifer. The perception is that water in this location is forever plentiful. Water rates in Elwood were among the lowest in a 70-mile radius, and residents had access to an unlimited amount of water for a flat rate. The unmetered system created excessive water use, which resulted in high amounts of water loss. Revenue could not keep up with the cost of maintaining the water system.

MAP trained Elwood officials on the importance of regulating water and how meters help regulate water use and loss.

¹ Based on data pulled February 2023



Using RCD funds, MAP's technical assistance helped the village create a three-phase meter project to implement meter usage in the town. This phased approach will allow water rates to increase to a competitive but reasonable rate that will be phased in over the next two years. Village leadership expects all system users to have meters by 2025 ensuring Elwood has reserves and needed funds for future infrastructure projects.

Omaha Tribal Utilities (ITCA)

ITCA used \$32,000 of RCD funding to provide technical assistance to the Omaha Tribal Utilities (OTU) Department in Nebraska. The Omaha Tribe Public Water System serves 1,800 people through three groundwater wells, a mechanical treatment plant, chlorine gas disinfection, and a 90-mile pipeline distribution system. ITCA conducted a Tribal Utility Tune-up Workshop for OTU personnel in 2018, and participants selected several Effective Utility Management attributes for improvement action plans.

To address the needs identified in the improvement action plans, ITCA completed three technical assistance projects with RCD grant funding. First, it administered the Annual Tribal Operator of the Year Awards project and chose the Omaha Tribal Utilities Department Director as the 2021 Tribal Operator of the Year. Second, it developed a Water Rates Awareness Brochure with the goal of improving public understanding and openness to the OTU use of water utility rates. Finally, it contracted a subject-matter expert to assist with the Water Loss Control Study, which is a prelude to developing a water loss control program.

These projects aim to improve public health, community sustainability, and the capacity of tribal water utilities and water utility personnel.