

## Using Organization Check Ups to Improve Utility Policies, Procedures & Planning

Committed to incorporating the best industry practices for a municipal utility, the City of New Bern in North Carolina brought in the team from Hometown Connections to conduct an Organization Check Up (OCU) twice in the past four years. “We began with the OCU to determine what we were doing well and what areas needed improvement,” said Jon Rynne, Director of Utilities. “We also needed to share with our newly elected governing board validation from a neutral third party that our Electric Utility is operating in a professional and efficient manner.”

The City of New Bern selected Hometown Connections for the organization assessment because the Hometown staff has an extensive amount of experience working with municipal utilities. “We wanted a group that had exposure to a lot of municipal utilities and a good understanding of the public power business model,” Rynne said.



During the first OCU, New Bern and Hometown officials tackled numerous issues regarding customer payment policies, implementation of new technology, and fiscal planning. Four years later the City brought Hometown back for a second OCU to confirm they were implementing suggested changes correctly and to ensure the utility is moving in the right direction.

The City arranged for the senior staff and many front line employees to participate in the OCUs. Included in the process were representatives from the Electric, Water and Sewer Operations; the Utility Business Office; the City Finance Department; and the City IT Departments. Two members from the New Bern City Council and the City Manager also participated in the process.

In preparation for the first OCU, Jon Rynne circulated to all participants the list of topics and some suggested questions specific to the Utility, to get everyone thinking about the issues in advance of the OCU sessions. For the second check up, everyone received the report from the first OCU and a list of new topics for the group to review.

“Our participants were excited to discuss with Hometown what they do and how they do it,” Rynne noted. “We have been making a lot of changes at the utility and the OCU validated for our staff that we are doing the right things. Everyone agreed it was a great experience. Hometown’s staff did a superior job as facilitators. They kept the sessions on topic and provided helpful feedback about the issues that were discussed in each meeting. Hometown provided excellent examples of best practices in each functional area that they had observed at other public power entities.”

Based on the results of the first OCU, the City of New Bern implemented the next phase of its advanced metering deployment and utility technology upgrades. They have deployed an AMI system for electric and water metering, completed a GIS map of the electric system, and upgraded its SCADA system. Today, the City is working towards obtaining an OMS/IVR solution to work with all of the new information systems now in

place. In addition, based on the first OCU, the City changed drastically its policies for payment arrangements, late payments and deposit requirements. “We have seen tremendous results in the reduction of liability of non-paid accounts over the past fiscal year,” Rynne stated.

Steven Anderson, Utility Business Office Division Manager, added, “The OCU is a great opportunity to do a self-assessment of a municipal utility. Having Hometown conduct the OCU provides the opportunity to validate that the initiatives that are present at the utility are in keeping with best industry practices. And, Hometown can provide great insight from other utilities as to what areas need improvement and how to improve them. The OCU provides a valuable roadmap to continuous improvement of a municipal utility and has helped us tremendously.”

For more information:

Jon Rynne, P.E.  
Director of Utilities  
City of New Bern, NC  
252-639-2820  
[RynneJ@newbern-nc.org](mailto:RynneJ@newbern-nc.org)

Steven M. Anderson  
Utility Business Office Division Manager  
City of New Bern, NC  
252-639-2735  
[AndersonS@newbern-nc.org](mailto:AndersonS@newbern-nc.org)