

CASE STUDY



How Small Program Budgets Keep Up with Increasing Demand

Three small water utilities struggled to expand conservation programs due to limited resources.



CHALLENGE:

Three small water utilities across the country had a lot in common. Each were members of the Alliance for Water Efficiency. They were expanding their conservation program portfolio while facing limited staff resources. And, all three were struggling with time consuming paper applications for their water conservation rebates.

While their conservation programs were making an impact, it was taking a toll on their 2-4 total staff members. "We had to manually type out everything from the paper applications into our database. It was a lot," said Andi Couet, Water Conservation Program Coordinator at the City of Tempe, AZ. members.

"There was a lot of paper involved and we were trying to minimize our waste. It was very time-consuming to receive the hard-copy application and then have to import it into our database," said Couet.

"There was no way for people to apply to the internal database. We needed to save time and make things more streamlined and eliminate the 'Now we have to read someone's handwriting, oh look, there's no email address.' Stuff like that," he said.

Profile: Bernalillo County, NM
City of Tempe, AZ
City of Spokane, WA

Total Customers: 300,000

Location: New Mexico, Arizona, and Washington

Primary objective: Promote sustainable water use through water conservation practices.

BEFORE

- Limited staff resources
- Time consuming paper applications
- Manual approval process

AFTER

Eliminated human error

Online applications

Streamlined process

(Continued)

Four hundred miles east, in Bernalillo County, NM, Megan Marsee, Water Conservation Program Lead, had a very similar experience.

“We were doing paper application forms and tracking program participation on spreadsheets,” Marsee said. “We had multiple staff who have roles in administering programs, so tracking their work on any given application was very challenging. The interface and handoff between staff caused errors and delays because of the manual process we were using.”

To the northwest, the Spokane, WA, Water Department was gearing up to grow their program. “After updating the City’s Conservation Master Plan, our program experienced rapid expansion, incorporating a diverse array of rebates,” said Spokane’s Water Conservation Program Manager Kristen Zimmer. “Before, there was a lot of back end maintenance, and we would have to manage on spreadsheets. We had to store files and didn’t know where to store the receipts or other material we were asking for.”

SOLUTION:

Brillion partnered with the Alliance for Water Efficiency to develop a budget-friendly program management platform on Brillion Fulfill.

Brillion collaborated with the Alliance for Water Efficiency (AWE) to provide a Brillion Fulfill environment as a member benefit. “We knew we wanted some sort of online database. The offer through AWE looked like a great match for us,” said Marsee. “We liked the way it was simply packaged. It worked very well for us because we’re very small. We don’t need all the bells and whistles because we don’t have a lot of funding. We needed something that could fit within our budget,” she said. “By leveraging the robust AWE Cost Benefit Analysis Tool, we crafted our program incentives. With Brillion grounded in the same data-driven approach, the decision was effortlessly clear,” recalled Zimmer.

Brillion configured an environment on Fulfill where the Tempe, Bernalillo County, and Spokane teams can only see their data. As the overseeing member organization, however, AWE has access to the comprehensive data across all utilities in the system so they better understand overall program performance and cost allocations. “We don’t even notice we’re in a shared environment,” said Marsee.

Before the utilities were in the system, the Brillion team preconfigured data objects that each utility needs, such as programs, dashboards, reports, and projects. The partner sat



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WATER CONSERVATION
PROGRAM LEAD**



down with each utility to gather requirements on what they wanted, measures they used, programs they run, different project statuses, and automations. Brillion also configured different application forms specific to the programs each utility wanted to run.

Couet with the City of Tempe said, "It's a lot easier for us to track how many rebates we've provided and how much money we've spent on rebates. It's a big improvement, being able to create reports and see those numbers."

Marsee at Bernalillo County agrees, "There are so many functions we have now that we didn't have with our old process. For reporting, we're using Brillion Fulfill to figure out how many people we're serving, what we're providing them, and the savings associated with that."

RESULTS:



Minimal Training and Easier Handoffs

"We often hire seasonal staff and Brillion Fulfill makes it easy to review current and old customer interactions and participation data. It's nice to be able to hand off rebates to seasonal employees because it takes minimal training to get the hang of," said Zimmer.

"Brillion Fulfill ensures we don't miss anything in the hand off of applications from the first step—an eligibility check by admin—to the second step—water efficiency consultation—to finally me—who provides the water conservation incentives. It's easy to make sure nothing got dropped," said Marsee.



6X Faster Processing Times

"Our biggest problems solved were time issues. We're a small team of four, only two of us regularly handle rebates. So it's really just a big time saver to have Brillion," says Tempe's Couet. "There's been a decrease in how much time it takes to process rebates. It's gone from two to three hours per week to half an hour to an hour per week."

Bernalillo County's program was expanding when they implemented Brillion Fulfill. "Our timelines have stayed the same, but we increased the complexity of our programs significantly," said Marsee. "I don't think we would have been able to maintain the same level of service if we had not had a way of managing this process and data."



Improved Customer Satisfaction Scores (CSAT)

Paper applications were a hassle to deal with, for everyone involved. "The online application was a big improvement for our customers," remembered Marsee. "The ability for everyone to easily see an application status at any point in time was huge."

Kristen Zimmer notes the accessibility for customers is a game changer—"They can go in and apply at any time and get an auto-response." Couet, on the other hand said Brillion has created better visibility all around. "Customer satisfaction has increased because they can go online, fill out their rebate, upload photos, and submit it. It's all in one place, and they get an automated email letting them know we've received their rebate. Customer complaints have gone down significantly—by at least 50%."



ABOUT THE ALLIANCE FOR WATER EFFICIENCY

The Alliance for Water Efficiency is a partnership organization that is a voice and platform for water use efficiency and water conservation, committed to promoting the efficient and sustainable use of water. Founded in 2007, AWE works to support and enhance water conservation efforts, providing benefits to water utilities, water conservation professionals, planners, regulators, and consumers.