



2022 – 2027 Strategic Plan

Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority

Adopted February 21, 2022



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Letter From the General Manager

The Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority (CCMWA) was established by the Georgia Legislature in 1951 for the purpose of acquiring sources of water supply, treatment, and wholesale distribution of drinking water to customers in Cobb County and the surrounding region. Since that time, CCMWA has grown to be the second largest producer of drinking water in the state of Georgia and a recognized leader in effective utility management on a national level having earned the “Gold Award” for exceptional utility performance from the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies in 2021.

Since implementation of CCMWA’s 2016 Strategic Plan, significant capital investments have been made and new initiatives have been implemented to increase reliability and enhance sustainability. CCMWA replaced its original drinking water treatment plant (Quarles Plant No.1), implemented programs for replacement of aged pipelines and appurtenances, furthered implementation of “Smart Water” infrastructure, all while maintaining a sustainable rate program and AAA bond ratings. Most recently, CCMWA received recognition of “made inflows” into Allatoona Lake by the United States Army Corps of Engineers securing water supply for decades to come. Long-term strategic planning has proven vital to success at CCMWA and will continue to be essential in the future.

At CCMWA we believe effective utility management and operation is key to sustained success. As a result, we continually strive to improve. Building upon our core values of service, stewardship, and professionalism, CCMWA staff have collaborated to develop this Strategic Plan which concentrates on four strategic initiatives in which to improve upon: Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Workforce Development, Water Quality, and Stakeholder Engagement.

CCMWA is recognized as a leading water utility in the areas of product quality, customer satisfaction, employee and leadership development, operational optimization, financial viability, community sustainability, enterprise resiliency, infrastructure strategy and performance, stakeholder understanding and support, and water resource sustainability. This Strategic Plans aims to continue and further the proud heritage of achievement at CCMWA. Our future is bright, and our mission is clear.

Principles of Excellence

Our 2016 Strategic Plan established nine strategic initiatives that would serve as our areas of focus and development over the next five years. These areas included Safety Culture, Water Quality, Workforce Development, Financial Strength, Preparedness & Security, Infrastructure Sustainability, Communication Enhancements, Information Management, and Water Resources. Each of these initiatives had two to five corresponding goals and numerous action items to support their success.

During the summer of 2020, the Executive Team reviewed our 2016 Strategic Plan and determined, while all the strategic initiatives and their respective goals were vital to the success of the Authority, some had evolved and migrated from one-to-five-year objectives to standards, or Principles of Excellence. These Principles of Excellence are an established norm and requirement for our internal processes and procedures and reflect the Authority's commitment to excellence.

Financial Strength

- Maintain a sustainable rate structure
- Preserve our AAA bond rating and a strategic level of bonding capacity
- Maintain a sustainable rate structure

Water Quality

- Meet or exceed regulatory requirements
- Meet or exceed stakeholder expectations
- Plan for future regulations and associated treatment requirements

Workforce Development

- Develop a highly competent, committed, and supported workforce
- Improve employee engagement and morale

Preparedness/ Security

- Maintain continuity of service
- Protect personnel
- Ensure infrastructure sustainability
- Maintain a sustainable capital infrastructure program
- Maximize reliability

Our Mission and Values

Mission and Values

The mission of Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority is “to provide sustainable and reliable drinking water that supports public health, public safety, and the economic vitality of the region”. Although CCMWA does not have residential customers, it values the importance of keeping water consumers satisfied and well-informed. CCMWA has built a strong reputation of success by investing in the protection of our precious water resources through conservation programs while maintaining dependable customer service and consistent product quality.

CCMWA’s Strategic Plan outlines the three categories of values that are integral to our operations:

Core Values

Core Values (how we act at all times, regardless of the circumstances or impact on our mission)

- Service: Preserving the trust of customers and stakeholders by exceeding their expectations
- Stewardship: Responsible and sustainable management of resources and assets
- Professionalism: Exhibiting high standards in personal conduct and technical knowledge with a commitment to quality

Permission-to-Play Values (how anyone should act to be allowed to provide water service)

- Integrity: Acting honestly and consistently
- Trust: Confidence that employees will do the right thing while safeguarding the confidence that others have in us
- Technical Excellence: Acquiring, developing, and maintaining expertise needed to support our purpose

Aspirational Values (what we would like to improve in, so we're taking strategic steps to get there)

- Safety Culture: Protecting our employees and the public through an ingrained mindset of safety
- Transparency: Open and clear decision-making process; information is easily available and readily shared
- Innovation: Translating new technology, ideas, business processes, and systems to improve our services and work environment



SERVICE



STEWARDSHIP



PROFESSIONALISM



INTEGRITY



TRUST



EXCELLENCE



SAFETY



TRANSPARENCY



INNOVATION

Plan Definitions and Updates

Definitions

The following terminology is used throughout the Strategic Plan document and has been defined to ensure clarity and understanding of all CCMWA goals.

Area of Focus: a broad subject or focal point of concern or interest; a strategic priority for the organization

Strategic Initiative: goals that align with an organization's top strategic priorities and facilitate growth towards an organization's vision

Action Items: steps that support the achievement of the strategic initiatives

Key Performance Indicator (KPI): critical indicators of progress toward an intended result

Communication Strategy and Plan Updates

The Strategic Plan is a living document that evolves as we work towards achieving our goals and putting new ideas and processes into practice. To keep staff abreast of our progress, the Strategic Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis. The Executive Team will regularly communicate the status of our initiatives to the divisions. Our goal is that all CCMWA employees understand how their role within the Authority contributes to the overall success of not only our Strategic Plan but also our Organization and Mission. Under each strategic initiative, there is a progress chart segmented by year. This chart will be updated and redistributed annually to reflect our progress. Additionally, as we navigate our strategic initiatives, our KPIs may change as we better understand what these standards mean for our employees and our business.

2022 Strategic Plan Snapshot

Over the last year, through the efforts of staff members at all levels across the Authority, the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan was developed. Both the planning and development process was 100% internally driven, and its respective outcome reflects the ideas and goals of employees in all divisions and at all levels. The Executive Team headed the planning process by first reviewing our 2016 -2021 Strategic Plan and identifying our successes and our areas for opportunity. Five SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis workshops were held to determine the Authority's current standing internally and externally. The data collected from these workshops was then utilized to lead discussions to generate areas of focus and develop our strategic initiatives and their corresponding action items and KPIs.

Areas of Focus and Strategic Initiatives



Safety and Emergency Preparedness

- Improve Safety Culture
- Increase awareness of safety compliance to better detect risk and potential threats to employees.
- Develop a staff that is prepared, organized, and consistent in their response to emergency situations.
- Develop and expand company-wide cyber security policies to address specific risks.



Workforce Development

- Refine leadership skill development opportunities for non-supervisory staff and current leaders.
- Enhance workforce diversity.
- Formalize succession planning program to fill key roles within the Authority.
- Enhance internal communication at all levels by developing and implementing regular, scheduled communication.



Water Quality

- Address declining source water quality and prepare for anticipated future regulations.



Stakeholder Engagement

- Create and implement processes to communicate financial, strategic, and CIP related information to all stakeholders.



Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Where have we been?

In our 2016 Strategic Plan, Safety and Preparedness were separated into two areas of focuses: one with an emphasis on safety culture and the other with a focus on securing our business and processes during an emergency scenario. Two safety committees were created with the hope of increasing overall safety awareness and engagement. A Safety Training Matrix was developed to organize and identify all safety-related training required for each role within CCMWA. In conjunction with our Director of Operations, the Safety and Security Coordinator developed CCMWA's emergency response plan and implemented tabletop exercises to identify areas of improvement within the organization. In 2018, after a major pipeline failure at our Quarles Treatment Plant and another pipeline failure that resulted in CCMWA's first boil water advisory in over 30 years, a Crisis Communication Plan was drafted and implemented to ensure that all internal and external stakeholders received timely communication. The decision was made in 2019 to restructure the Safety and Security Department. The Safety and Security Coordinator role was unfilled for a year while the executive team determined the best course of action for the position.

Where are we currently?

In late 2020, the decision was made to restructure the Safety and Security Coordinator and dissolve the Safety and Security department. The Security Technician role was moved to IT, and the coordinator role was revised and moved to Human Resources. The Safety and Emergency Preparedness role was officially posted in late 2020 to emphasize emergency response and organizational preparedness. The role was filled in February 2021. Over the last ten months, efforts have been made to move from general safety awareness to strategy, aiming for a proactive approach to safety rather than a reactive approach. A formalized safety program has begun to take shape as our Safety and Emergency Preparedness Coordinator has updated forms, created SOPs and reference materials, and developed a centralized hub to store information.

Where are we going?

Although we have streamlined our areas of focus to encompass both Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CCMWA has not placed less emphasis on the importance of safety in the workplace. Over the next five years, under the direction of the Safety and Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, CCMWA will continue building upon its Safety Program by unifying safety protocols across divisions, reinforcing safety regulations, increasing staff accountability and responsibility, and building enthusiasm and engagement amongst staff.



Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Strategic Initiative #1: Improve Safety Culture.

Action Item(s):

- (a) Provide scheduled training to all CCMWA staff to improve knowledge of safety practices and procedures.
- (b) Implement incentive and recognition programs for safety suggestions and solutions made by employees.
- (c) Assign a safety officer to each division/ department to serve on the TASC committee.

Key Performance indicator(s):

- Provide seventeen hours of safety related training per employee per year.
- 90% of employee will pass safety quizzes on their first attempt.
- Review safety training matrix annually to ensure that content is up-to-date and relevant for each position in the Authority.

Progress:

Year One:
Year Two:
Year Three:
Year Four:
Year Five:



Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Strategic Initiative #2: Increase awareness of safety compliance to better detect risk and potential threats to employees.

Action Item(s):

- (a) Maintain a regular training schedule for risk and threat detection.
- (b) Enhance position-based training to include site-specific hazards, evacuation plans, and safety.
- (c) Include safety assessments in weekly and/or monthly department meetings.

Key Performance Indication(s):

- Provide two hours of emergency response training per person per year.
- After action reports generated after 100% of all emergency responses and training.
- 25% of items resolved each quarter following the safety assessment.

Progress:

Year One:
Year Two:
Year Three:
Year Four:
Year Five:



Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Strategic Initiative #3: Develop a staff that is prepared, organized, and consistent in their response to emergency situations.

Action Item(s):

- (a) Schedule regular drills and/or tabletop exercises for emergency scenarios and include a debriefing session after each exercise.
- (b) Semi-annual emergency communication system training and testing.
- (c) Formalize Incident Command System (ICS) structure.
- (d) Review Crisis Communication Strategy.

Key Performance Indication(s):

- Establish quarterly tabletop exercises followed by mandatory after-action debriefings.
- 25% of staff in each division participating in quarterly tabletop exercises with 100% of staff participating in at least one exercise per year.
- 100% of ICS roles assigned by the end of 2022.
- 100% of NIMS training completed by all ICS staff by the end of 2024.
- Conduct one crisis communication tabletop exercise per year.

Progress:

Year One:
Year Two:
Year Three:
Year Four:
Year Five:



Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Strategic Initiative #4: Develop and expand company-wide cyber security policies to address specific risks.

Action Item(s):

- (a) Reach AWWA J100 compliance by December 2026.
- (b) Lead one cyber security-focused tabletop and debriefing session per year.
- (c) Enhance cyber security training.

Key Performance Indication(s):

- 20% annual increase towards AWWA J100 compliance.
- 100% AWWA J100 compliance by end of 2026.
- Maintain ten or less items listed as critical or high on the annual cyber security assessment.
- Quarterly cyber security training with 90% of the staff receiving a 70% or higher on the initial exam.

Progress:

Year One:
Year Two:
Year Three:
Year Four:
Year Five:



Workforce Development

Where have we been?

In 2017, CCMWA hired its first full-time Human Resources Director, marking a notable shift in the emphasis placed on people development and retention. Over the last three years, the department has expanded to include a coordinator role that focuses on the HR Generalist function and training and development as well as a Risk Management coordinator. The Authority's commitment to employee development also grew into an employee and leadership-led committee focused solely on workforce development. With the guidance of our HR Director, this committee developed CCMWA's performance appraisal process, which is still utilized currently. CCMWA has also worked towards diversifying our team, hiring both our first person of color and our first female director within the last five years.

Where are we currently?

Over the last five years, CCMWA has experienced a wave of retirements. Since 2018, 15 employees have retired, and another 36 are eligible for retirement over the next 5-10 years. We have also seen a significant turnover in our leadership. During this same period, 8 of our 23 leaders have been newly promoted within the last five years, with most of the promotions happening within the previous three years.

Where are we going?

In anticipation of more retirements, especially those within our leadership team, CCMWA will begin to focus heavily on leadership development by identifying competencies that align our leaders with our mission and values. By creating these competencies, we will better prepare leaders to navigate our changing and growing landscape and better prepare future leaders to assume their new roles. CCMWA will also continue to commit to diversity, ensuring that we recruit the best and the brightest from all walks of life.



Workforce Development

Strategic Initiative #1: Refine leadership skill development opportunities for non-supervisory staff and current leaders.

Action Item(s):

- (a) Implement a Leadership Competency Model.
- (b) Create a job shadowing program.
- (c) Create a formal onboarding process for new leaders.
- (d) Expand and encourage opportunities for volunteering and community service.
- (e) Foster interagency connections including business and political connections with staff at all levels within the Authority.

Key Performance Indication(s):

- Implement phased program rollout beginning in 2022 with department questionnaires to assess the resistance to change.
- Implement Leadership Competency Model by 2023.
- Offer two Authority endorsed volunteering opportunities per year.
- In 2022, track the number of volunteer hours logged and percentage of employees in attendance and reassess metrics in 2023.

Progress:

Year One:
Year Two:
Year Three:
Year Four:
Year Five:



Workforce Development

Strategic Initiative #2: Enhance workforce diversity.

Action Item(s):

- (a) Expand recruiting efforts beyond industry-specific job boards to include minority organizations and diverse applicant pools.
- (b) Diversify interview and hiring panels for all positions.
- (c) Expand diversity training efforts to include more opportunities for team building, group discussions, and diversity appreciation.
- (d) Review water treatment plant and transmission operator positions and consider rephrasing to attract a larger applicant pool.

Key Performance Indication(s):

- A minimum of two staff members from other divisions will be present per interview panel.
- Schedule 4 hours of diversity and inclusion training per employee per year.
- Create a position review panel by the end of 2022 to review Authority job descriptions annually.

Progress:

Year One:
Year Two:
Year Three:
Year Four:
Year Five:



Workforce Development

Strategic Initiative #3: Formalize succession planning program to fill key roles within the Authority.

Action Item(s):

- (a) Create a formalized cross-training program and document knowledge transfer.
- (b) Capture critical institutional knowledge from retirees.
- (c) Update annual review to include a section dedicated to an employee’s future desired role/position.
- (d) Create an I&C Technician trainee position.
- (e) Expand leadership competency model to include competencies for all Authority positions.

Key Performance Indication(s):

- Identify positions for the job shadowing program by the end of the second quarter of 2022.
- Once positions are identified, create a job shadowing template that identifies certifications/ educational knowledge needed for the position, the number of hours required to complete the educational requirements, and the possible number of hours required to shadow the position to reach an intermediate competency level by the end of 2022.
- Identify the highest number of employees that can participate in a job shadowing opportunity per division per year by the end of 2022.

Progress:

Year One:
Year Two:
Year Three:
Year Four:
Year Five:



Workforce Development

Strategic Initiative #4: Enhance internal communication at all levels by developing and implementing regular, scheduled communication.

Action Item(s):

- (a) Publish division KPIs.
- (b) Direct communication of Authority-wide initiatives.
- (c) The General Manager will communicate a “state of the Authority” meeting on an annual basis.

Key Performance Indication(s):

- Identify what percentage of divisions are presenting KPI information on a quarterly basis by the end of the second quarter of 2022. Set target at 100% for third quarter.
- 100% of staff will have access to KPIs published on the Authority intranet site by the end of the second quarter of 2022.
- 75% of Authority employees will be present for “State of the Authority” live stream on the first attempt, with 100% of Authority viewing the recorded event.

Progress:

Year One:
Year Two:
Year Three:
Year Four:
Year Five:



Water Quality

Where have we been?

At the beginning of our 2016 Strategic Plan, both our Quarles Water Treatment Plant and our Wyckoff Water Treatment Plant were 100% in regulatory compliance and had received Gold Awards from GAWP. Wyckoff had also been recognized for the first time of many as Best Operated Plant of the Year by GAWP. Water quality issues pertaining to Total Organic Carbon (TOC) and Disinfection Byproducts (DBPs) were largely limited to Allatoona Lake and were being mitigated by the 2013 installation of Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) at the Wyckoff Water Treatment Plant. Concerns over lead in drinking water were not prevalent; the crisis in Flint, Michigan had not yet gained public attention. The United States Environmental Protection Agency had not published Lifetime Health Advisory Limits for Per and Polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) substances. The World Health Organization (WHO) had not released health concerns about microplastics in water. Harmful algae blooms in bodies of water in North Georgia were not a serious concern.

Where are we currently?

As of 2021, the Wyckoff Plant has won Plant of the Year four times with our Quarles Plant following closely behind, both plants a tribute to CCMWA's commitment to excellence. Water quality issues have continued to evolve. To mitigate increasing amounts of taste and odor causing substances becoming commonplace in the Chattahoochee River, a temporary Powder Activated Carbon (PAC) system was installed at the intake. The bid for the permanent system was just recently approved. GAC is used seasonally at Wyckoff and helped CCMWA respond to an increase in taste and odor complaints from stakeholders. A multiyear corrosion control optimization study is nearing completion. CCMWA is looking to transition from pH and alkalinity adjustment for corrosion control to orthophosphate or zinc orthophosphate for optimized corrosion control to further reduce the potential for lead and copper leaching into the drinking water. Lake Lanier has experienced taste and odor-causing harmful algae blooms in the last couple of years, and trace amounts of PFAS substances have been detected in the Chattahoochee River, neither of which was known to have occurred prior to 2016.



Water Quality

Where are we going?

Regulatory requirements will continue to evolve and expand, and in response, the Authority will expand and enhance its source water quality monitoring plans as well as make plans for enhanced treatment techniques and technologies. Water quality in Allatoona Lake, the Chattahoochee River, and Hickory Log Creek Reservoir is expected to be negatively impacted as development in those watersheds continue. Some contaminants could include PFAS, microplastics, and trace amounts of pharmaceuticals in drinking water. CCMWA expects promulgation of new regulations from the USEPA to establish maximum contaminant levels for those substances in the coming years. Big Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant who's treated wastewater effluent enters the Chattahoochee River upstream of the Quarles intake, will also increase impact on the river over the next five years as the plant is expanded. Through the next five-year cycle, CCMWA will need to determine if a GAC system and or other advanced treatment technologies will be needed at the Quarles Water Treatment Plant to help mitigate future water quality issues.



Water Quality

Strategic Initiative #1: Address declining source water quality and prepare for anticipated future regulations.

Action Item(s):

- (a) Establish a river corridor monitoring plan for the Chattahoochee River by 12/31/2023.
- (b) Establish a lake monitoring plan for Allatoona Lake by 07/31/2023.
- (c) Review the Residuals Management Treatment process by 2024.
- (d) Model Allatoona Lake to determine the directional flow by 2024.
- (e) Refine Harmful Algae Bloom (HAB) monitoring Plan by 07/31/2024 for Wyckoff and by 09/30/2024 for Hickory Log Creek.
- (f) Establish regulation committee to monitor the regulatory landscape by 01/01/2023.

Benchmark(s):

- Develop a “normal or accepted” range for the water quality parameters for the Chattahoochee River and establish it as a benchmark.
- Develop a “normal or accepted” range for the water quality parameters for the Allatoona Lake and establish it as a benchmark
- Regulatory Committee will report to CCMWA staff at least twice a year.
- Develop a “normal or accepted” range for the water quality parameters for Hickory Log Creek and establish it as a benchmark.

Progress:

Year One:
Year Two:
Year Three:
Year Four:
Year Five:



Stakeholder Engagement

Where have we been?

Our 2016 Strategic Plan emphasized enhancing our external communication with our customers and the public by enhancing our virtual presence via our website and increasing participation in public outreach events. Since 2016, CCMWA has participated in all WaterSmart events. WaterSmart is a water conservation program that educates water users about the value of water and the importance of indoor and outdoor water conservation, and encourages sustainable, year-round conservation, regardless of climate conditions. In 2018, in response to a Boil Water Advisory, CCMWA developed a crisis communication plan to provide up-to-date and timely information to our stakeholders by utilizing our mass communications software. In 2019, our website was updated to reflect current best practices in terms of function and design. Educational resources such as research, water quality reports, and a virtual tour of our Wyckoff Water Treatment Plant were added to the site to assist our customers and the public to better understand our business.

Where are we currently?

Since the pandemic, we have not been able to host our annual customer meeting in late spring. However, we have maintained open lines of communication with our customers regularly and stakeholders. Our mass communications software is tested biannually to ensure our stakeholders have the most current contact information. Quick reference guides have been developed and distributed to our customers to help with customer complaints or inquiries for common water-related issues. Additionally, our website is updated to reflect any ongoing Authority changes.

Where are we going?

Our goals for the 2022 Strategic Plan focus on improving the information we provide our customers and developing streamlined and concise external reports to provide our stakeholders. The external report will include a snapshot of our organization to provide quick access to subject matter experts, financial information, and water quality data. We will also create an annual “State of the Authority” presentation that will be shared internally and externally.



Stakeholder Engagement

Strategic Initiative #1: Create and implement processes to communicate financial, strategic, and CIP related information to all stakeholders.

Action Item(s):

- (a) Create a streamlined report that provides a snapshot of the organization including financial information, employee directory, CIP & reporting information.
- (b) Develop an annual “State of the Authority” presentation to live stream to all stakeholders.
- (c) Develop a stand-alone CIP document that addresses the scope of work for a specific project.
- (d) Update our Level of Service goals and include customers in the redevelopment process.

Key Performance Indication(s):

- Capture 50% of our customers and stakeholders with the live stream of our “State of the Authority” presentation and 100% of our customers and stakeholders with the pre-recorded second session.
- Develop an internal document that provides a snapshot of the organization including financial information, employee directory, CIP & reporting information by 2024.

Progress:

Year One:
Year Two:
Year Three:
Year Four:
Year Five: