



**DESERT
WATER
AGENCY**

STRATEGIC PLAN

2025-2030

Board Approved

November 18, 2025

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INTRODUCTION

OUR MISSION

To responsibly manage our water resources, ensuring ongoing sustainability and effectively delivering safe, reliable water for current and future generations.

OUR VISION

To ensure a sustainable water future through sound fiscal and policy management, employee and customer engagement, efficient operations, reliable infrastructure, and strategic partnerships.

OUR VALUES

RELIABILITY	Providing trustworthy, responsive, consistent, and dependable service to colleagues and the community
INTEGRITY	Demonstrating respect for others, engaging in honest, transparent communication, and striving to maintain the highest standard of ethics and quality of work
SAFETY	Focusing on and investing in proactive system maintenance and monitoring, training, equipment, emergency preparedness, and community outreach for employee and public safety
ACCOUNTABILITY	Being honest and taking ownership of one's actions, fostering trust and respect among colleagues and the community
TEAMWORK	Working towards a common goal through respectful discussions, collaboration, and consideration of all viewpoints to execute Desert Water Agency's mission

MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER



I am honored to introduce Desert Water Agency's first five-year Strategic Plan, a foundational document that will guide our operations, priorities, and investments from 2025 through 2030. This plan is an important step forward in shaping our future with intention, clarity and purpose.

The development of this plan reflects months of thoughtful engagement, identification of needs, and collaborative planning. This effort included extensive engagement, including the Board of Directors and all Agency staff, to develop a 360-degree view of the Agency's needs and goals. Throughout this process, more than 219 individual actions were proposed, evaluated and discussed. Ultimately, through categorization, consolidation, prioritization and evaluation of feasibility, these individual actions were distilled down into four strategic goals, 17 objectives and 42 initiatives outlined on pages 10-15.

As the water supply, demand, technology and regulatory landscapes continue to change, it is essential that we align our efforts around shared priorities. This plan is designed to align our collective efforts in achieving our mission, while reflecting our vision and values.

This plan is organized around four strategic goals, each representing a core area of focus. These include Sustainability, Operations, Modernization and Engagement. Each of these strategic goals are supported by measurable objectives and initiatives that will serve as benchmarks for progress and accountability. This framework will enable us to make informed decisions, allocate resources effectively and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Esther M. Saenz'.

Esther M. Saenz
General Manager

WHO WE ARE

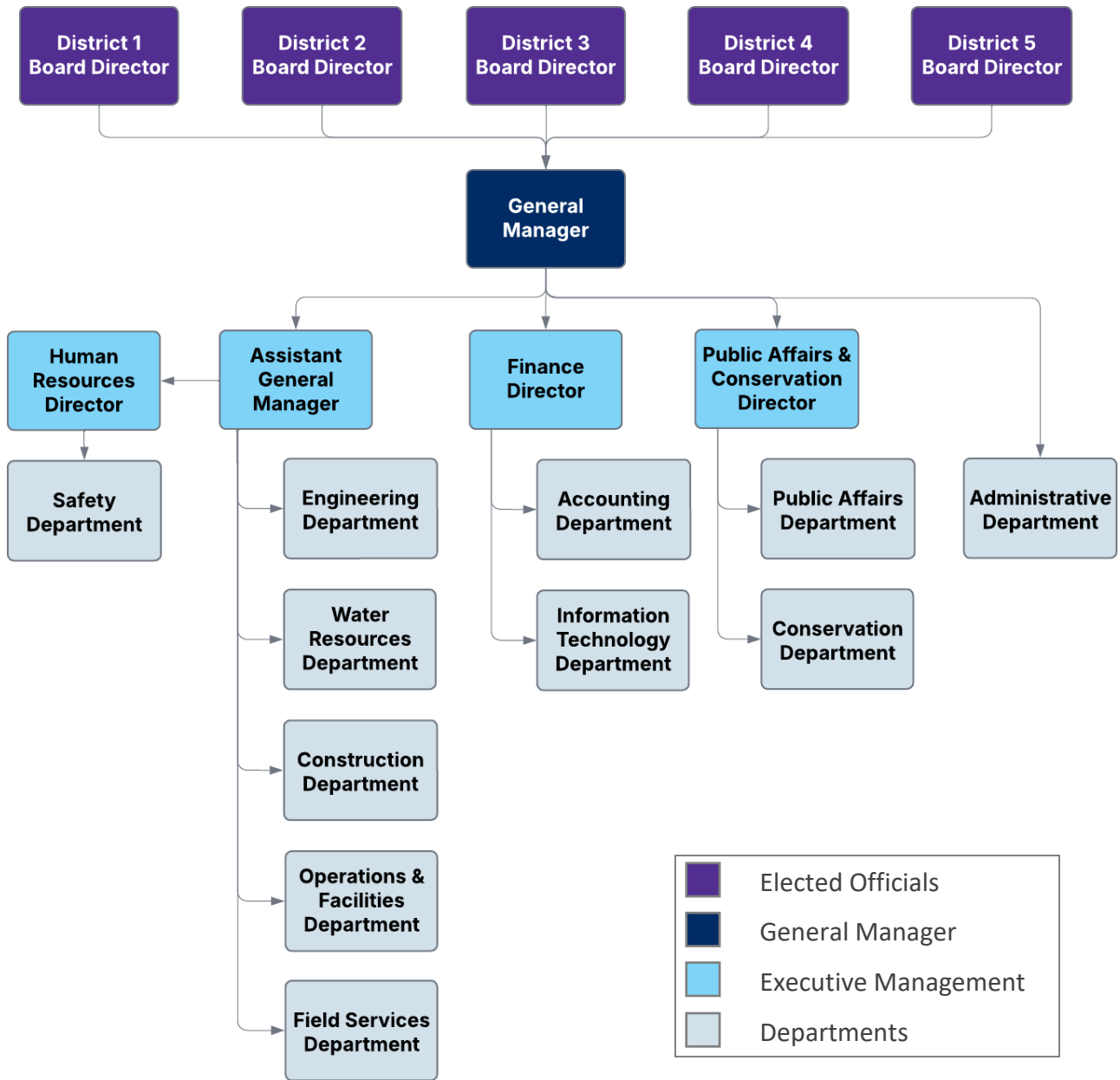
Desert Water Agency (DWA or Agency) is a special district in the state of California. Founded as a groundwater management agency in the western Coachella Valley in 1961, DWA started providing water service to customers in Palm Springs and Cathedral City in 1968. DWA is one of only 29 State Water Project Contractors in California. This gives the Agency the ability to import water, which is used to recharge our groundwater basin (the primary source of water in our desert). We currently have about 24,000 domestic water connections that serve approximately 75,000 people (including seasonal population).

DWA also provides recycled water service to 10 metered customers. These customers use recycled water to irrigate golf courses, parks, street medians, and the Palm Springs High School athletic fields. The Agency's recycled water plant provides the additional tertiary water treatment to the City of Palm Springs wastewater effluent, meeting the California Title 22 water reuse standards. DWA provides wastewater collection and conveyance services for customers in a small portion of Cathedral City (Dream Homes Development, Downtown Cathedral City, and the Cathedral City Cove). The wastewater collected by the Agency is transported to wastewater treatment facilities operated by other entities (Coachella Valley Water District and City of Palm Springs).

Our highly committed team is comprised of 95 employees. The Agency is governed by a five-member Board of Directors, elected by division within DWA boundaries. The General Manager oversees the day-to-day operations of the Agency in accordance with resolutions, ordinances, and policies established by the Board of Directors.



ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



As of November 18, 2025

WHAT WE PROVIDE

DWA is a not-for-profit government agency. Although we are not a city department, we work closely with our counterparts at the cities of Palm Springs and Cathedral City to deliver a variety of services.

- GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT
- DRINKING WATER
- SEWER SERVICE (IN PARTS OF CATHEDRAL CITY ONLY)
- RECYCLED WATER
- CONSERVATION

GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT

Nearly all the water used in the Coachella Valley comes from a groundwater basin, or aquifer, located beneath the ground's surface. This aquifer is estimated to have a capacity of about 39 million acre-feet of water. DWA manages the groundwater for Palm Springs, Desert Hot Springs, parts of Cathedral City and unincorporated Riverside County areas.

The groundwater is of such high quality that it requires very little treatment. However, per state regulations, DWA chlorinates the water for disinfection purposes and then delivers it to residents and businesses. Minimal treatment is a significant cost savings that we pass on to consumers.



DWA pumps water using wells drilled to a depth between 1,000 feet and 1,200 feet, with pumps placed up to 500 feet deep. To foster the sustainability of the basins, DWA also replenishes the aquifer with water from the State Water Project. As there is no direct pipeline from the State Water Project to Palm Springs, DWA and CVWD exchange water, gallon for gallon, with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. This water comes from the Colorado River Aqueduct, which CVWD and DWA use to fill the recharge ponds located at the Whitewater River and Mission Creek Replenishment Facilities.

DWA is also an exclusive groundwater sustainability agency (GSA) identified in the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and is tasked with sustainably managing groundwater supplies and resources with other local GSAs. The Agency participates in the Indio Subbasin Alternative Plan, the Mission Creek Subbasin Alternative Plan, and the San Geronio Pass Subbasin Alternative Plan.



DRINKING WATER DWA provides about 29,000 acre-feet of drinking water a year to about 24,000 active service connections in Palm Springs, parts of Cathedral City and unincorporated Riverside County areas. DWA’s drinking water is supplied through a vast distribution system that includes more than 425 miles of pipeline, 25 reservoirs, and 27 active wells. The drinking water sources are comprised of water from our groundwater aquifer and mountain streams including Chino Creek, Snow Creek, Falls Creek, including imported water, and water from the Whitewater River for irrigation only.

DWA is committed to serving healthy, safe drinking water. The DWA team samples water daily, performing approximately 2,700 water quality tests a year to ensure it meets strict standards. The Agency’s annual Consumer Confidence Report or Water Quality Report is available every July.

SEWER SERVICE DWA provides sanitary sewer services to approximately 2,300 customers within Cathedral City using 29 miles of sewer lines and two lift stations. The sewage is collected and conveyed to wastewater treatment plants operated by the City of Palm Springs and Coachella Valley Water District. The City of Palm Springs’ treated wastewater is returned to DWA for further treatment at DWA’s Recycled Water Facility before the Agency distributes it to non-potable/recycled water customers for large-scale irrigation purposes.



RECYCLED WATER Recycling water improves groundwater quality. When used on landscapes, it reduces the amount of fertilizer needed because it is rich in minerals. Less fertilizer is applied, meaning less of it percolates into our groundwater, protecting groundwater quality. Additionally, recycling water saves energy. Recycled water uses 75% less energy than pumping groundwater.

DWA recycles nearly all of the wastewater within the Agency's service area. In 2010, DWA completed construction of a half-million-gallon reservoir, expanding the storage capacity of the plant. The Agency also constructed two shallow wells at the recycling facility in 2015. These wells capture water that sits just beneath the ground's surface around the recycling facility. Even though this water is not suitable for drinking, it supplements the recycled water supply.

CONSERVATION Since the beginning of DWA’s conservation programs, the Agency has invested more than \$12.5 million dollars in rebate programs, including turf grass conversions, replacements of inefficient water fixtures (toilets, washing machines), and the installation of smart irrigation controllers, among other programs. DWA continues to invest in conservation rebate programs as well as seeking grant funding opportunities to bolster offered programs. The Conservation Department also offers commercial, industrial, and institutional customers “water walkthroughs” to identify water inefficiencies and encourage water efficient practices.

In July 2024, the State Water Resources Control Board adopted the “Making Conservation a California Way of Life” regulation that aims to increase water efficiency across the state by creating individualized water use budgets for all public water agencies. DWA remains committed to encouraging conservation of its water resources both internally and with customers in order to meet hefty state goals by 2040.



PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2025, DWA requested the creation of a Five-Year Strategic Plan. A five-year plan intends to create a sustained focus over multiple years that is well-aligned with strategic initiatives, building momentum to achieve significant objectives. This strategic plan creates direction for policy and day-to-day operations.

This strategic plan serves as a tool that defines what is critical to the Agency's success and the initiatives necessary to guide DWA towards achieving its goals. This plan is a roadmap to guide DWA's long-term direction, priorities, and resource allocation. Its purpose is to ensure the Agency can sustainably and effectively deliver water service while giving consideration to the unique needs of the community and adapting to future challenges.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

APPROACH TO DEVELOPING THE FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

DWA engaged The Centre for Organization Effectiveness to assist with the development of the strategic plan. To create the plan, Management took an inclusive approach by inviting each employee from the Agency to provide input and develop strategies, goals, and objectives. Additionally, this process created multiple touch points to cross-validate the input provided across other groups to identify the most efficient ways to operationalize the plan. Touch points included the following groups:

- Board of Directors Interviews
- Board of Directors Ad Hoc Committee
- Technology Consultant
- Brand Refresh Consultant
- Staff Workshops
- Department Workshops
- Department Head Workshops
- Management Team Meetings

There were multiple steps in developing the plan:

1. In September 2024, the Board of Directors and Management individually embarked on an exercise to define the Mission, Vision, and Values (MVV) of the Agency.
2. The MVVs were synthesized and cross-validated by further review and input from the Ad Hoc Committee and Management.

3. The drafted MVV was presented to each department for review and revision. The department's input was consolidated and vetted through Management for further refinement.
4. The MVV was presented back to staff for final input and revision.
5. Following the revision of MVVs, each department provided its recommendations for the top three to five areas of focus (strategic goals) to include in the strategic plan.
6. The MVV and strategic goals were presented to Management for review and revision and then shared with the Ad Hoc Committee for guidance and direction.
7. The feedback from the Ad Hoc Committee was shared and workshopped with Management to present a working draft at the Board of Directors meeting.
8. Upon approval of the Board of Directors on the MVV and strategic initiatives, Management took a deep dive into the specific strategic goals and objectives.
9. A series of meetings and workshops with Agency departments were held where staff discussed and proposed 219 separate strategic actions.
10. Utilizing staff's proposed actions, Management identified key themes and synthesized these individual actions into specific strategic objectives and initiatives to support the identified strategic goals.
11. The draft Strategic Plan was presented to the Ad Hoc Committee. The committee recommended presentation of the Strategic Plan to the full Board for consideration.
12. On November 18, 2025, the Strategic Plan was presented to and adopted by the Board of Directors.



2025-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

STRATEGIC GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND INITIATIVES

This plan focuses on four strategic goals, each with its own overarching theme. These goals provide the framework to outline strategic objectives, identify key actions, pinpoint appropriate timelines, allocate necessary resources, and set outcome measures to track progress. Each goal spans the entire organization, discouraging silos across departments and enabling other stakeholders to work together, increasing equity and inclusion, and ensuring each employee and stakeholder sees how their contributions lead to the overall success of the Agency.

STRATEGIC GOALS



SUSTAINABILITY

Responsibly manage resources to provide safe, reliable water and services for current and future generations



OPERATIONAL

Invest in operational readiness to meet current and future demands



MODERNIZATION

Continuously improve to provide efficient and effective services



ENGAGEMENT

Cultivate collaborative relationships and increase understanding of Desert Water Agency's role in the water industry and the community

GOAL 1 - SUSTAINABILITY

RESPONSIBLY MANAGE RESOURCES TO PROVIDE SAFE, RELIABLE WATER AND SERVICES FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

1.1 Objective - Water Planning / Management - Securing Water Sources / Resources

- 1.1.1 Initiative - Monitor and engage with various water management groups, associations, government agencies, and/or committees, as approved by Management
- 1.1.2 Initiative - Continue to seek out additional water resources and engage in the development of additional water resources to support the Agency's supplemental water recharge program, consistent with current and future needs
- 1.1.3 Initiative - Maintain local water supply sustainability, manage and maintain the ability to import water into the West Whitewater Management Area of the Indio Subbasin and Mission Creek Management Area
- 1.1.4 Initiative – Cultivate or Foster cooperative management with Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians

1.2 Objective - Water Planning / Management - Conservation (Demand Reduction)

- 1.2.1 Initiative - Promote conservation and water use efficiency to meet state-mandated conservation targets for the Agency and customers
- 1.2.2 Initiative - Provide tools and resources to customers to proactively monitor and manage their water use

1.3 Objective - Water Planning / Management - Water Quality

- 1.3.1 Initiative - Ensure water quality meets drinking water standards throughout the Agency's distribution system
- 1.3.2 Initiative - Support regional water quality efforts



GOAL 1 - SUSTAINABILITY CONTINUED

1.4 Objective - Revenue Resource Planning - Fiscal and Rate Planning

- 1.4.1 Initiative - Continue to identify areas where operational cost savings can be achieved while maintaining system reliability
- 1.4.2 Initiative - Investigate rate structure alternatives to maintain revenue stability while supporting conservation efforts
- 1.4.3 Initiative - Pursue non-rate revenue sources to support Agency operations, conservation, and customer assistance programs

1.5 Objective - Governance / Board

- 1.5.1 Initiative - Promote increased visibility of Agency staff through structured direct engagement with the Board of Directors
- 1.5.2 Initiative - Establish a framework for Board member onboarding and ongoing governance training to ensure alignment with Agency values, responsibilities, and strategic priorities
- 1.5.3 Initiative - Promote sound Agency governance through establishing and maintaining board-approved policies, resolutions, and ordinances





GOAL 2 - OPERATIONAL

INVEST IN OPERATIONAL READINESS TO MEET CURRENT AND FUTURE DEMANDS

2.1 Objective - Employee Recruitment and Retention

- 2.1.1 Initiative - Provide competitive pay and benefits to our employees to retain a skilled workforce and attract new, qualified talent

2.2 Objective - Employee Development

- 2.2.1 Initiative - Maintain and develop leadership and management skills of current Agency leaders
- 2.2.2 Initiative - Support professional and technical development to enhance job-specific skills and performance
- 2.2.3 Initiative - Conduct proactive succession planning to maintain continuity and minimize skill gaps created by retirements
- 2.2.4 Initiative - Identify and invest in future leaders to maintain a robust talent pipeline to support seamless transitions when retirements and/or resignations occur

2.3 Objective - Facility Expansion

- 2.3.1 Initiative - Provide properly equipped office and meeting spaces for the current and growing workforce to meet state and system operational demands

2.4 Objective - Proactive Maintenance and Repairs

- 2.4.1 Initiative - Implement an asset management system, integrated with other Agency enterprise systems, for the tracking and management of Agency assets
- 2.4.2 Initiative - Utilize technology to identify opportunities for implementation of proactive maintenance and repair programs supported by data
- 2.4.3 Initiative - Review and update management plans for safe operation and risk avoidance

2.5 Objective - Emergency Preparedness

- 2.5.1 Initiative - Develop, enhance, and/or implement emergency and crisis response plans
- 2.5.2 Initiative - Proactively train staff for emergency response
- 2.5.3 Initiative - Engage with local and regional emergency preparedness efforts



GOAL 3 - MODERNIZATION

CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE TO PROVIDE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE SERVICES

3.1 Objective - Infrastructure

- 3.1.1 Initiative - Ensure the ability to continue to effectively serve our retail water customers with the Agency's distribution system infrastructure
- 3.1.2 Initiative - Investigate modernization opportunities at water importation facilities to increase operational efficiencies

3.2 Objective - Technology

- 3.2.1 Initiative - Implement an asset management system, integrated with other Agency enterprise systems, for the tracking and management of Agency assets
- 3.2.2 Initiative - Digitize Agency assets and classifications for use in GIS
- 3.2.3 Initiative - Increase operational efficiencies, capabilities, and data production for management decisions

3.3 Objective - Equipment

- 3.3.1 Initiative - Investigate tools and equipment to improve job functions and create pilot programs to test for effectiveness before full-scale implementation





GOAL 4 - ENGAGEMENT

CULTIVATE COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND INCREASE UNDERSTANDING OF DESERT WATER AGENCY'S ROLE IN THE WATER INDUSTRY AND THE COMMUNITY

4.1 Objective - Education and Outreach

- 4.1.1 Initiative - Increase involvement in local schools
- 4.1.2 Initiative - Update the Agency's strategic communications plan
- 4.1.3 Initiative - Build and maintain connections with customers to foster trust, community equity, and increased awareness of DWA's role and purpose
- 4.1.4 Initiative - Update existing website to meet legal requirements and provide a user-friendly experience

4.2 Objective – Cultivate Employee Engagement

- 4.2.1 Initiative - Provide internal education presentations to foster appreciation for the diverse roles at DWA
- 4.2.2 Initiative - Facilitate events to celebrate employee contributions and encourage cross-departmental collaboration and relationships

4.3 Objective - Legislative Advocacy

- 4.3.1 Initiative - Strengthen and sustain proactive relationships with local, state, and federal elected officials to advance the Agency's mission and influence policy to align with Agency priorities
- 4.3.2 Initiative - Enhance DWA's visibility and influence by positioning the Agency as a trusted and active advocate on legislative and regulatory issues that impact operations and customers
- 4.3.3 Initiative - Establish a government affairs strategic plan that defines the department's vision and provides a roadmap for growth, engagement, and influence

4.4 Objective - External Stakeholders

- 4.4.1 Initiative - Engage in strategic meetings with external stakeholders to support and advance the priorities of DWA

HOW TO ENSURE SUCCESS

MEASURING PROGRESS

There are a few best practices in achieving success with a strategic plan:

1. Ensure all the stakeholders are aware of the elements of the plan and how they can support achieving the plan
2. Align resources appropriately to the goals and objectives
3. Track progress on the goals to determine where more attention or resources are needed and to gain momentum on the successes

Of course, an organization needs to pay attention to the surrounding environment in case there are significant disruptions (e.g., massive natural disaster, major recession, etc.) that require modifications to the plan. Otherwise, the organization needs to stay the course on the identified goal, objectives, and outcome measures. The strategic plan is formal but not rigid. Therefore, Management can adjust specific actions and timelines as resources need to shift and new information surfaces. These detailed changes are the responsibility of the Management and Staff to identify when creating the annual budget to support the implementation of the strategic plan.

DWA staff will regularly monitor and report progress of the strategic plan implementation through four processes:

1. **Monthly Management Meetings:** During monthly Management meetings, management will review and discuss progress on the Strategic Plan and supporting actions.
2. **Regular Board of Directors Meetings:** Throughout the year, reports provided to Directors will reference goals and strategies contained in this plan. This practice will ensure ongoing alignment between policy and operations.
3. **Annual Strategic Plan Review:** DWA will annually review progress on the Strategic Plan and provide the Board of Directors with an annual status update on the objectives included in the adopted strategic plan.
4. **Annual Budget:** The Board of Directors, Management, and Staff will engage in an annual budgeting process and review the Capital Improvement and Extraordinary Expense Program to connect the goal themes and actions identified in the Strategic Plan with the resources allocated for the following fiscal year. This annual process provides insights into how emergent needs influence strategic planning initiatives. The process will inform the Board of Directors and Management on how to keep the Agency vigilant to avoid extraneous activities derailing the strategic planning implementation efforts.

These processes ensure Management, Board of Directors and public are informed on implementation accomplishments and challenges, and if any adjustments to resources need to be made to achieve success.

