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Your Capital Plan Says Proactive. Your Asset Data Says Reactive.

Maturity isn't a slogan. It's a measurable gap — and most utilities already know where they stand.

Almost three-quarters of utilities report an asset management plan fully implemented or in progress. On paper, the sector looks mature. But the framework utilities use to self-assess actual management maturity tells a different story — and the gap between the two numbers is the real state of the industry.

74%	22%	4% vs 12%	Top 4–10
UTILITIES WITH AN AM PLAN FULLY IMPLEMENTED OR IN PROGRESS (AWWA SOTWI 2025)	UTILITIES THAT HAVE FULLY OR LARGELY IMPLEMENTED AWWA'S EUM FRAMEWORK	SMALLEST VS. LARGEST UTILITIES REPORTING EUM FULLY IMPLEMENTED (SOTWI 2025)	WHERE 'PROACTIVE ASSET MANAGEMENT' RANKS AMONG UTILITIES' OWN PRIORITIES

Sources: AWWA State of the Water Industry 2025 (Tables 5, 15; Figure 2) · AWWA Beyond the Replacement Era: Balancing Compounding Infrastructure Needs with Household Affordability (Raftelis / One Water Econ, 2026) · AWWA Effective Utility Management Framework · AWWA does not sponsor, endorse, or affiliate with third-party companies, products, or services.

Guy Barlow, President
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SECTION 1 OF 3

The Plan Exists. The Practice Doesn't (Yet).

Almost three-quarters of utilities report having an asset management plan fully implemented or in progress — alongside capital improvement plans at nearly 80%. On paper, the sector looks mature.

But AWWA's own Effective Utility Management (EUM) framework — a 10-attribute model utilities use to self-assess management maturity — tells a different story: only 22% of utilities say EUM is fully or largely implemented at their organization.

PLAN VS. PRACTICE

74% have a plan

Asset management plan fully implemented or in progress — the headline number utilities report.

22% have the practice

Fully or largely implemented AWWA's EUM framework — the actual maturity behind the plan.

The gap is the argument

A plan existing and a plan operationalized into how capital decisions get made are two different things.

> *Having a document that describes proactive asset management is not the same as practicing it.*

A plan existing and a plan being *operationalized* into how decisions actually get made are two different things, and the gap between 74% and 22% is exactly that distinction. The EUM Ten Attributes framework exists specifically because AWWA recognized utilities needed a way to measure the difference.

This isn't unique to asset management. Digital transformation strategy sits at 40.9% implemented, integrated water resource planning at 38.1% — the pattern of plans outpacing operational maturity shows up across nearly every strategic initiative AWWA tracks. Asset management is simply the clearest version of it, because AWWA built a dedicated maturity framework to measure exactly this gap.

SECTION 2 OF 3

Size Determines Maturity, Not Intent.

The EUM data breaks down further by utility size, and the pattern is stark. Among the smallest utilities, only 4% report EUM fully implemented and consistently achieving goals — and 56% don't practice it at all. Among the largest, 12% are fully implemented and just 24% don't practice it. Maturity rises step by step with size at every tier in between; the sidebar breaks out the full distribution.

This isn't a story about which utilities care more. "Implement proactive asset management" shows up as a top-4-to-10 strategic priority across every utility size segment in AWWA's own survey — it's universally recognized as important. It just never ranks above cybersecurity, drinking water protection, or system resilience, which means it consistently loses the budget and attention fight to more immediately urgent priorities.

Maturity tracks resources, not intent — and most utilities are sized in a way that puts proactive asset management permanently in second place.

EUM MATURITY BY UTILITY SIZE

Smallest (0–3,300 connections) **4%**

Fully implemented; 56% don't practice EUM at all

Small/Medium (3,301–10,000) **7%**

Fully implemented; 46% not at all

Medium/Large (10,001–100,000) **8%**

Fully implemented; 43% not at all

Largest (>100,001 connections) **12%**

Fully implemented; 24% not at all

SECTION 3 OF 3

What the Gap Costs, and How to Close It.

Plan-Practice Gap Cost

A documented plan that isn't operationalized into actual prioritization and scheduling doesn't change a capital decision. It satisfies a checkbox, not a maturity requirement.

Resource Concentration Cost

Maturity clustering at large utilities means the majority of U.S. water systems — small and mid-sized — are structurally behind, not behind by choice. Closing this gap requires tools proportionate to their resourcing, not just more aspiration.

Priority Crowding Cost

When proactive asset management consistently loses to nearer-term regulatory and resilience priorities, the deferred investment compounds — it's the same deferred-maintenance cycle AWWA's own *Beyond the Replacement Era* research is built to address.

Replacement Era Lock-In Cost

Utilities stuck reacting to aging infrastructure won't exit that cycle by writing a better plan document. They exit it by operationalizing the practices the plan describes — connecting prioritization, scheduling, and capital decisions into one system instead of one document and one separate way of actually working.

FOUR MOVES TO OPERATIONALIZE

01 Stop measuring progress by whether a plan document exists. Measure it against AWWA's EUM Ten Attributes — or a comparable maturity framework — to see where practice actually stands.

02 If you're a small or mid-sized utility, don't benchmark against the largest utilities' tools. Benchmark against what's operationally achievable at your resourcing level, and build from there.

03 When proactive asset management loses a budget fight to a more urgent priority, document what that deferral costs in future replacement-era pressure — make the trade-off visible instead of silent.

04 Treat your asset management plan and your CIP prioritization process as one system, not two. A plan that lives separately from the tool that makes capital decisions isn't operationalized yet.

None of this means the plans utilities have written were wasted effort. It means the plan was never the finish line — operationalizing it is the part of the work that's still ahead for most of the industry.

About Invizion

Guy Barlow is President of Invizion, a purpose-built capital lifecycle management platform for water utilities. Invizion integrates CIP management, prioritization, scenario planning, and performance tracking in a single unified system — closing the gap between an asset management plan and an asset management practice, regardless of utility size.

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