Circuit Rider Program

A Part of the Center for International Water and Sustainability

A proven methodology that provides assistance to local committees for the long-term sustainability of water, sanitation, and hygiene services.

The Problem
The WHO and UNICEF estimate that 2.5 billion people lack improved sanitation facilities and that 768 million people use unsafe drinking water sources. Insufficient access to safe water and sanitation services in addition to poor hygiene practices kills and sickens millions of people, most of whom live in rural, isolated communities.

However, coverage rates fail to tell the full story of the functionality of these facilities and the quality of the services that they deliver. In fact, most small water systems still struggle to provide a consistent and safe water supply.

Facts
The majority of rural communities in the developing world rely on small water and sanitation systems that serve from 50 to 10,000 people.

The large number and isolation of rural water systems can make it difficult to provide an adequate supply of water.

Small water systems struggle to provide safe water due to a lack of funding and qualified staff, as well as weak governance, poor tariff settings, and the lack of a supply chain for spare parts and supplies.

The Solution
The “Circuit Rider” approach provides support to small water facilities by using a group of qualified technicians that travel to communities and build local capability by providing advice and training on issues of sustainability, governance, treatment technologies, operations, and maintenance. Circuit Riders do not do the work for the community, but rather ensure trained personnel are available to make repairs and that the water committee and community assume responsibility for the proper operation of their WASH systems.

Historically, Circuit Riders travelled throughout the western U.S. on a circuit to provide many services to smaller communities, which is the origin of the title. Today, Circuit Riders are similar to county extension agents who help rural farmers improve their agricultural output.
The Circuit Rider Program focuses on building the institutional capabilities of local water boards and rural WASH committees to run their own systems by providing on-site support and training in three key areas:

**TECHNICAL:** Repairing water and sanitation systems and providing instruction on disinfection procedures, source water protection, and water quality sampling and monitoring protocols, as well as advice on upgrading and expanding water services. Technical training is designed for local water system operators, such as plumbers and operation and maintenance technicians.

**ADMINISTRATION:** Circuit Rider improves WASH governance, tariff setting and collection, basic accounting and bookkeeping, and accountability to users. Administrative training is designed for water board treasurers and other scheme managers.

**COMMUNITY:** There is a need to promote safe water handling and best hygiene and sanitation practices. Training is designed to build the capabilities of water board committee members to do WASH promotion activities among water users.

Additional training covers the principles of Integrated Water Resources and Watershed Management that include topics such as: water source protection, water conservation and system efficiency, water quality and safety planning, improved groundwater recharge, planning for climate change, and agroforestry techniques for soil cover protection and improvement. Another benefit is the support system created among the network of water boards that participate in the Circuit Rider program.

### Sustainability

External financial dependency has been one of the main obstacles to the implementation of WASH programs around the world. In the case of the Circuit Rider program, excessive reliance on donations has caused budget fluctuations that have affected the quality of assistance provided by the program in the past. However, the experience gained during the last decades of work has shown that the diversification of income sources is essential in the long term.

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to the sustainability of any program. DRI has developed a four level data collection methodology and M&E framework to assess, monitor and evaluate Circuit Rider Programs. Data collected at the program, association, community water system, and end user levels helps Circuit Rider program staff to measure impact and adapt their work to their individual settings.

### About CIWAS

The Center for International Water and Sustainability at the Desert Research Institute has created a training program to help build the capacity of non-governmental organizations and local governments to implement the Circuit Rider framework.

The overall vision of CIWAS is to grow DRI's capacity to provide both information and the technical capacity to governmental and non-governmental organizations working to identify and solve problems related to human health and management of environmental resources, especially water. Offering efficient and positive WASH solutions can be done through effective use of technology by raising awareness through media coverage, using the latest methods and equipment, and the transference of knowledge and information through short courses and workshops.