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# “INNOVATOR” CASE STUDIES

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There is steady innovation going on in utilities. Through the APPA benchmarking survey, conducted by First Quartile Consulting (1QC), more than 30 practice initiative areas were identified that are being adopted at varying levels and with varying methodologies. Some of these practices were explicitly surveyed in the questionnaire. Others were volunteered through open-ended questions on improvement initiatives underway. A list of these practice initiatives is included in the attachment.

For the purposes of this benchmarking survey, we defined “innovators” as those utilities who are actively working on initiatives to improve their performance. We did not try to necessarily identify the “most innovative”. In fact, measuring innovation would require a whole benchmarking study by itself: Who was the first to adopt a practice? Who was the most successful in its execution? Who achieved the best results?

What we did do, was to identify utilities that reported especially active and interesting initiatives and then ask them to prepare case studies. We selected big and small utilities from all regions of the country. We also wanted to cover as broad a range of initiatives as could be covered in a small set of case studies.

We worked with the following utilities to prepare case studies:

- Anaheim Utilities – Credit and Collections
- Lakeland Electric - Contact Center (CSR Assignment and First Contact Resolution Measurement)
- Omaha Public Power District – Meter Reading (AMR implementation)
- Tacoma Public Utilities – Billing (Web-based functionality and bill presentment) and Field Service (Mobile Data)

The basic template to construct the case studies was as follows:

- **About the utility:** From the web-site
- **Practices being recognized:** The utility might be doing a lot of good things, but we chose to focus on just a few
- **Discussion of each initiative:** This included
  - Motivation, year started, and expected benefits
  - Software/technology employed
  - Problems encountered/solved along the way
  - Goals for next year and beyond

These case studies are intended as a companion to the statistical results of the benchmarking study. We hope these case studies help to provide context to the quantitative information provided.

## **APPA Benchmarking Initiative Themes**

### **Contact Center**

1. Self Service: IVR, web options; new IVR
2. Quality Assurance (QA): call monitoring/coaching
3. Staff: Training; meetings; testing, incentives, voluntary OT
4. Payments: Credit/debit card usage
5. Queues: Skill-based routing; express queues; contracting overflow calls

### **Meter Reading**

1. Technology: AMR, AMI, RF or optical read meters; convert TOU to modem reads; remote reading; ERT meters
2. Routing: Meter readers identifying rerouting needs; splitting routes; matching routes and cycles
3. Process changes: Using meter readers on other tasks, adjusting roles and responsibilities
4. Accuracy: Removal of previous read from handheld to encourage accuracy; bonus for accuracy
5. Staff: Physical requirements for hiring; training; incentive programs; team leaders and team meetings;

### **Field Service**

1. Metering Technology: Remote disconnect, AMR, AMI eliminates or simplifies getting off-cycle reads
2. Mobile Data: Mobile work management; GPS systems
3. Process changes: Using meter readers for FS work once they've completed their route; adjusting roles and responsibilities
4. Shifts: Late/evening shifts allow FSRs to better meet customer needs.
5. Collections Policy: Credit cards in field; eliminate field collections
6. Disconnects: Increased use of soft disconnects
7. Work Volumes: increase orders worked

### **Billing**

1. Bill presentment software
2. Quality: Added meter readers
3. Processes: Process mapping; adjusted bill editing, exception criteria; moved service orders from CIS to Work Order Management System to speed up billing process; hi-lo parameters
4. Measurement: Menu of reports to identify billing issues and meter errors; billing dashboard
5. Access: Mail and door hanger requests for access

### **Payment Processing**

1. Bill Payment: Internet bill pay; IVR bill pay; automated pay locations
2. Technology: New image processing/sorting equipment
3. Banking: Improvements to processing home banking checks; use of Check 21; use of remote deposit;
4. Staffing: reallocate personnel due to changes in payment preferences of customers

5. Payment options: Additional off-site payment centers; covering fees associated with various payment types; no longer accept cash payments; increased use of credit/debit card; use of pay stations; better processing of pay station payments

### **Credit & Collections**

1. Follow Policies: Follow policies and reinforce with customers that you'll do what you say you'll do
2. Teamwork: Understand that all company personnel are part of the collection process
3. Agencies: Send accounts to collection sooner; add collection agency cost to principal written-off; customer responsible for agency fees
4. Deposits: tiered deposit criteria; accept installments; increased deposit amounts based upon behavior; use credit scoring
5. Positive Identification: adopt policies to prevent fraud; follow FACTA guidelines
6. Disconnects: Prioritize by amount due
7. Scoring: Use of credit scoring
8. Credit Arrangements: Manage arrangements closely
9. Timeliness: switch to monthly billing

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