



THE UTILITY OPERATIONS PLAYBOOK

From reactive to **ready for anything.**

A practical playbook for municipal utility leaders. Assess your operational maturity, find your biggest gaps, and define Phase One of an EAM rollout you can actually deliver.

How to use this playbook

Work through it with your engineering, operations, and leadership team. Diagnose how you manage work today. Place your utility on the maturity curve. Score yourself across ten operational categories. Then define the minimum practical scope for Phase One. Every section ends with a worksheet, so take notes as you go.

You do not need to finish in one sitting, and you do not need a vendor in the room. The output is yours either way.

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Who this is for

Directors and general managers who need to defend a budget. Operations and maintenance managers who run the work. IT leads who have to support whatever gets chosen. And the crews who decide, every morning, whether a system is worth using. Each of you will read different sections first. Section 8 tells you which.

Executive Summary

Municipal utilities face pressure from every direction at once: aging infrastructure, constrained funding, rising regulatory complexity, emerging contaminants, and a staffing pipeline that is not replacing institutional knowledge as fast as experienced people retire. In AWWA's 2026 State of the Water Industry, aging infrastructure remained the sector's most pressing challenge, and the sector's five-year outlook fell to its lowest level in nearly a decade [1].

\$625B 20-year U.S. drinking water infrastructure need [2]	\$630B 20-year wastewater and stormwater need [3]	~10% of water sector employees are under age 24 [4]	10,700 operator openings projected per year through 2034 [5]
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The problem is not only that infrastructure is aging. Many utilities still manage that infrastructure reactively, through fragmented records, dated systems, manual workarounds, and processes that depend on specific people. That creates avoidable risk: missed inspections, inconsistent work execution, weak asset history, low visibility into what is due, and difficulty proving compliance or defending funding decisions.

Against that backdrop, you need a practical way to modernize operations, not an abstract ambition to do EAM. This playbook supports that practical conversation. It helps your team assess your current state, identify where you are most reactive, define what ready looks like for your utility, and scope a right-sized Phase One that creates operational value without trying to solve every problem at once.

Treat Phase One as the first operational step in a broader EAM journey, not the whole destination. The goal is to identify the first workflow, the first team, the first records, and the first modules that create real value and build a foundation you can expand.

Key sector signals

Signal	Current evidence	Why it matters
Infrastructure and outlook	\$625B in 20-year drinking water needs and \$630.1B in wastewater and stormwater needs [2][3]. AWWA's 2026 five-year outlook is at its lowest in nearly a decade [1].	You need better prioritization, better work execution, and capital and O&M decisions you can defend.
Staffing pressure	About 10% of water sector employees are under age 24 [4]. BLS projects roughly 10,700 operator openings a year through 2034, largely replacements [5].	Knowledge capture and repeatable workflows matter more as experienced staff retire, and new people need to be productive faster.

Signal	Current evidence	Why it matters
Regulatory clocks	Lead service line replacement, backflow recordkeeping, and provincial asset management rules all carry hard dates and evidence requirements [9][10][11].	Compliance programs are the most concrete place to start, because the records you need are already defined for you.

WORKSHEET

What is the pressure on our utility right now?

The three pressures we feel most (infrastructure, funding, regulation, staffing, service expectations):

The last time we could not answer a question from council, a regulator, or an auditor:

What we would need in hand to answer it next time:

Why Utility Operations Need a New Starting Point

Operational pressure never arrives as a single issue. Infrastructure condition, field workload, compliance obligations, staffing limits, and data fragmentation all collide at once. AWWA summarized the moment this way in 2026: "Aging infrastructure, new regulatory requirements, workforce availability, and emerging contaminants are colliding at the same time" [6].

The EPA's Effective Utility Management framework reinforces the same point from a management perspective. It names infrastructure strategy and performance, operational optimization, regulatory and reliability performance, and employee development as core management attributes [7][8]. Those are exactly the areas where fragmented systems and reactive work create the most friction.

The implication matters for every municipal utility buyer: a modern EAM initiative is not just a software project. It is an operational improvement initiative, and it should begin where your utility can gain control fastest.

Why so many EAM projects stall

A lot of utilities have been through this once already. The last software project ran long, the crews never picked it up, and the office ended up re-entering what the field wrote on paper. The pattern is almost always the same: the scope was the whole platform, the go-live was a year out, and nobody owned the Monday after.

Phase One is the antidote. Pick one workflow, one team, and one set of records. Go live on it. Learn from it. Then expand.

What this means for a Phase One discussion

- Start with a real operational workflow, not a long software feature list.
- Focus first on where poor visibility, inconsistent execution, or compliance risk hurts most.
- Define the smallest scope that creates usable records, repeatable work, and reliable reporting.
- Treat Phase One as the foundation of an EAM rollout, not the entire destination.
- Name who owns the workflow after go-live. A system nobody owns drifts back to spreadsheets within a quarter.

WORKSHEET

The last time we tried this

The last system or software project we ran, and how big the scope was:

What happened the Monday after go-live, and who owned it:

What we would do differently this time:

Compelling Events and Compliance Clocks

Compliance programs make unusually good Phase One candidates for one reason: the regulator has already told you which records you need, how often you need them, and what evidence has to sit behind them. You are not designing a workflow from scratch. You are catching up to one that already exists. Three programs are driving more Phase One conversations than any others right now. The full list of thirty-three follows, so you can check which ones apply to you.

Lead service lines: LCRR and LCRI

The EPA's Lead and Copper Rule Revisions required every community water system to complete an initial service line inventory by October 16, 2024. The Lead and Copper Rule Improvements go further: an updated baseline inventory, a replacement plan, and a requirement to replace lead and galvanized-requiring-replacement service lines within ten years, with a compliance date of November 1, 2027 [10].

What that means operationally: the inventory is not a spreadsheet you file once. It is an asset registry with a material classification, a location, a customer-side and system-side record, an inspection history, and a work order trail for every replacement. If your inventory lives in a standalone file, every replacement crew touches becomes a manual reconciliation problem.

Backflow and cross-connection control

The EPA states that cross-connections and backflow can create potentially serious public health hazards, and that an effective backflow prevention program depends on legal authority, trained personnel, and recordkeeping that covers testing, repairs, personnel certification, inspection dates, and results [9]. That combination makes backflow an ideal Phase One use case: the workflow is concrete, the compliance stakes are clear, and the data foundation expands naturally into broader work and asset management.

Ontario: O.Reg 588/17

For Ontario municipalities, Asset Management Planning for Municipal Infrastructure sets out what an asset management plan must contain: an inventory, current levels of service, lifecycle activities and costs, and a financial strategy. Since July 1, 2025 the plan has to cover all municipal infrastructure assets, not just core assets, and it has to be reviewed and updated on a fixed cycle [11].

The plan itself is a document. What makes it defensible is the operating data underneath it: asset condition, the maintenance actually performed, and the cost of that maintenance. A utility that runs work orders against a structured registry can update its plan from live records. One that does not will rebuild it by hand every cycle.

Program	The clock	The records it needs	Natural Phase One scope
LCRR / LCRI	Baseline inventory and replacement plan by Nov 1, 2027; ten-year replacement window [10]	Service line registry, material classification, location, inspection evidence, replacement work orders	Assets, Locations, Work Orders, Mobile, Dashboards
Backflow	Annual test cycles, tester certification, and follow-up on failures [9]	Device registry, test results, certification data, due dates, corrective work	Backflow, Assets, Locations, Work Orders, Dashboards
O.Reg 588/17	All assets covered since Jul 1, 2025; plan reviewed at least every five years [11]	Asset inventory, condition, lifecycle activities, maintenance cost history	Assets, Locations, Work Orders, PM, Dashboards

Compliance is the entry point, not the ceiling

Every one of these programs starts with the same three things: a registry of assets, a location for each one, and a work order every time somebody touches one. Get those right for one program and you have the foundation for all of your operations. That is the whole logic of Phase One.

The full list: thirty-three programs with a clock, a driver, or a dollar attached

Not every one of these applies to you. Work down the list for your utility type, tick the ones that do, and write down how you manage each one today. If the answer is "a spreadsheet and one person," that is a candidate. Dates were verified as of July 2026; several programs are in active rulemaking, so confirm the current date before you plan around it.

Water, wastewater, and stormwater

#	Program	What is driving it	Key date or driver	Applies?	How we manage this today
01	Lead service line inventory and replacement	Regulatory mandate plus funding deadline	Nov 1, 2027 LCRI baseline; FY2026 final BIL tranche	☐	
02	Cross-connection control and backflow	State programs tightening	CA handbook revised Apr 21, 2026; tester certification gates 2025 to 2027	☐	
03	PFAS and water quality sampling	Regulatory mandate	Initial PFAS monitoring complete by Apr 26, 2027; UCMR 6 proposed Jul 1, 2026	☐	

#	Program	What is driving it	Key date or driver	Applies?	How we manage this today
04	AWIA risk and resilience, emergency readiness	Statutory five-year cycle	RRA due Jun 30, 2026; ERP due Dec 31, 2026 (systems 3,301 to 49,999)	☐	
05	Hydrant, valve, and flushing program	Operational plus ISO fire rating	Ongoing; ISO PPC review cycles	☐	
06	Meter, AMI exception, and non-revenue water	Revenue recovery plus state water-loss audits	Annual validated audits required in CA, TX, GA, and growing	☐	
07	CMOM and collection system compliance	EPA national initiative plus consent decrees	EPA NECI FY2024 to 2027; active decrees with 2026 milestones	☐	
08	Lift station and pump station reliability	Enforcement risk plus operational	Ongoing; decree schedules where applicable	☐	
09	Industrial pretreatment, FOG, and commercial discharge	40 CFR 403 program plus audit exposure	Ongoing; state and EPA program audits	☐	
10	Stormwater MS4 and BMP inspection	Permit reissuance cycles	2021 MSGP expired Feb 28, 2026; state MS4 permits reissuing with measurable terms	☐	
11	SRF funding readiness and asset management plans	Funding condition plus state mandates	State AMP mandates in force; Ontario O.Reg 588/17 five-year cycle	☐	

Electric

#	Program	What is driving it	Key date or driver	Applies?	How we manage this today
12	Wildfire mitigation plan execution and evidence	Mandate plus liability plus insurance	TX 16 TAC 25.60 effective Dec 4, 2025; first muni and co-op WMP filings 2026	☐	

#	Program	What is driving it	Key date or driver	Applies?	How we manage this today
13	Pole inspection, testing, and joint use	Mandate plus liability plus BEAD attachment surge	NTIA Jan 2026 BEAD terms bind co-op and muni pole owners	☐	
14	Vegetation management program	NERC compliance plus WMP commitments	FAC-003-5 ongoing; WMP filings 2026	☐	
15	Substation and protection system maintenance (PRC-005)	NERC compliance, audit and penalty exposure	Ongoing; audit cycles	☐	
16	Transformer and critical materials management	Supply chain	Lead times about 30 weeks to 4 years; prices up about 95% since 2019	☐	
17	Storm hardening and grid resilience capital program	Funding programs plus state hardening mandates	BRIC apps due Jul 23, 2026; DOE GRIP Round 3 2026; FL SPP and TX 25.62 filings	☐	
18	Reliability and outage response improvement	Performance regulation plus benchmarking	PBR active in 9+ states; about 35 states require index reporting	☐	

Gas distribution

#	Program	What is driving it	Key date or driver	Applies?	How we manage this today
19	DIMP records and vintage pipe risk	Standing mandate plus new enforcement focus	PHMSA vintage-plastic advisory Jan 23, 2026; annual report due Mar 15	☐	
20	Leak survey and patrol compliance	Standing mandate plus state methane rules	192.723 cycles ongoing; CA, CO, NY methane mandates in force	☐	
21	Valve, regulator station, and odorization compliance	Standing mandate plus post-Merrimack rulemaking	192.747 annual valve inspection (15 months max); distribution rule pending	☐	

#	Program	What is driving it	Key date or driver	Applies?	How we manage this today
22	Operator qualification and covered task compliance	Standing mandate, chronic audit finding	49 CFR 192 Subpart N; records retained current plus 5 years	☐	
23	Cross bore identification and inspection	Latent risk plus DIMP threat obligation	Ongoing; threat treatment expected by auditors	☐	

Municipal public works

#	Program	What is driving it	Key date or driver	Applies?	How we manage this today
24	Sign and pavement marking retroreflectivity	Hard federal date	Pavement marking method deadline Sep 6, 2026; MUTCD 11th Ed. binding since Jan 18, 2026	☐	
25	ADA sidewalk and curb ramp transition plan	Mandate plus litigation exposure	PROWAG adopted by USDOT Jan 17, 2025; DOJ web rule Apr 26, 2027 (50k+ pop.)	☐	
26	Pavement management and infrastructure reporting	Financial reporting plus state funding conditions	GASB 34 modified approach; CA SB1 lists due Jul 1 annually; O.Reg 588/17	☐	
27	Bridge and culvert inspection (NBIS/SNBI)	Regulatory data transition	SNBI field data from Jan 1, 2026; full dataset Mar 15, 2028	☐	
28	Winter operations and liability defense	Liability plus insurance	Ongoing; every claim season	☐	
29	Disaster documentation and FEMA reimbursement	Funding condition, post-disaster	PAPPG v5.0 applies to declarations on or after Jan 6, 2025; BRIC reopened 2026	☐	
30	Urban forestry and tree risk management	Liability plus pest emergency plus grant deliverables	EAB active in about 37 states; ongoing storm liability	☐	

Cross-utility

#	Program	What is driving it	Key date or driver	Applies?	How we manage this today
31	811 locates and damage prevention	Operational cost plus state enforcement	CGA DIRT 2024: 196,977 damages; index worsening	☐	
32	Fleet compliance and readiness	Compliance plus risk pool plus downtime cost	CDL and drug and alcohol rules apply to municipal drivers; state annual inspections	☐	
33	311 and customer request operations	Service expectations plus accessibility mandate	DOJ web accessibility Apr 26, 2027 (50k+), Apr 26, 2028 (under 50k)	☐	

Our top three compelling events

2. The program where an audit, a claim, or a funding application would hurt most:

3. The program we manage today with a spreadsheet and one person:

What Reactive Looks Like in Practice

Reactive is not just a maintenance philosophy. It is an operating condition. A utility can have good people, dedicated crews, and hardworking supervisors and still operate reactively, because information arrives late, incomplete, or disconnected from the work itself. Seven patterns show up again and again.

Asset visibility is weak.

Your team cannot easily answer what you own, where it sits, what condition it is in, what class it belongs to, or what work has run against it.

Work starts inconsistently.

Calls, emails, spreadsheets, paper forms, and hallway conversations all generate work, but never through the same intake discipline.

The after-hours call falls through the cracks.

A customer calls at 11pm about water in the street. It goes to an answering service, a voicemail, or the on-call phone. By morning it may be a service request, a sticky note, or nothing at all. The first time anyone hears about it in the office is when the customer calls back angry.

Planning is thin.

Work orders get created without standard job content, clear priorities, or enough context for dispatch and field execution.

Field work depends on memory.

Crews rely on experienced staff, handwritten notes, or separate systems to know what to do, what parts they need, and what happened last time.

Compliance is hard to prove.

Inspection results, device records, certification data, due dates, and follow-up work spread across folders, files, and point tools.

Reporting is retrospective.

Leadership sees static reports and spreadsheets after the fact, instead of live operational signals that support intervention.

The 2am test

Here is a fair way to check whether you are reactive. A main breaks at 2am. Can the on-call lead pull up that asset, see what happened the last two times it was touched, see which valve isolates it, and open a work order from the truck? If any part of that answer is "call the person who has been here twenty years," you already know where Phase One starts.

Which of these are us?

Pattern	This is us	Where we see it	Who feels it most
Asset visibility is weak	☐		
Work starts inconsistently	☐		
The after-hours call falls through the cracks	☐		
Planning is thin	☐		
Field work depends on memory	☐		
Compliance is hard to prove	☐		
Reporting is retrospective	☐		

The Reactive-to-Ready Maturity Model

Use the model below to place your utility on a practical operational curve. We wrote it from an engineering and operations point of view, not an enterprise software point of view. Nobody needs to reach level five everywhere. The goal is picking the right next level for the workflows that hurt most.

Level	Description	Typical signs	What Phase One usually targets
1. Reactive / Manual	Core records and work live in spreadsheets, paper, inboxes, and staff memory.	Little asset standardization. Ad hoc work creation. Inconsistent field documentation. Weak audit trail.	Create a basic system of record for assets, locations, and work.
2. Basic Digital / Fragmented	Some systems exist, but they do not create a connected operating model.	ERP records do not support operations well. Compliance sits in separate tools. Duplicate entry is common.	Connect one operational workflow end to end and reduce manual handoffs.
3. Operationally Connected	Assets, work, inspections, and basic field execution trace through one operating workflow.	More consistent work records. Some PM discipline. Better visibility into overdue work.	Strengthen repeatable planning, mobile execution, and dashboard visibility.
4. Proactive / Planned	Planning standards, PM triggers, and work readiness run across targeted operations.	Job plans get reused. Scheduled work runs more reliably. Parts and labor readiness is more visible.	Expand to additional programs, broader asset classes, and richer analytics.
5. Ready / Optimized	The utility operates with strong visibility, less dependency on individuals, and better intervention timing.	Cross-functional trust in records. Defensible performance reporting. Better decision support.	Optimize, expand, and layer in more advanced capability over time.

Most of the utilities we talk to sit at level one or two, and most of them sit at different levels for different workflows. A utility can run a disciplined backflow program at level three while its corrective work sits at level one. Score by workflow, not by utility.

Where does our utility sit today?

Score by workflow. Write the level you are at now, the level you need next, and one sentence on what would get you there.

Workflow	Level today (1 to 5)	Level we need next	What gets us there
Corrective work and work orders			
Preventive maintenance			
Inspections and compliance programs			
Service requests and intake			
Storeroom and parts			
Reporting to leadership and council			

The Utility Operations Scorecard

Score your utility across the ten categories below, 1 to 5, using the anchors for each. You are not chasing a perfect score. You are hunting for the one or two categories where better records, better execution, and better visibility would change your week. That is where Phase One starts. Record each score on the tally sheet at the end of this section.

1. Asset visibility and data quality

1	Asset information is incomplete, inconsistent, or hard to trust.
3	Core assets exist on record, but hierarchy, class, and history are uneven.
5	Assets are consistently structured, classed, and usable downstream for work, PM, and reporting.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- Can the team quickly find the right asset?
- Can it see what happened to that asset last time?
- Are class, status, and ownership consistent enough to support planning?

2. Location and spatial readiness

1	Work locations are vague, informal, or inconsistent.
3	Major locations are known, but field context is still patchy.
5	Locations are reliable and support dispatch, inspections, and field routing.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- Do crews know where the work is happening?
- Can you tie assets and work to the right site or network point?
- Is your GIS good enough to use in the field, and does the work system talk to it?

3. Inspection and compliance management

1	Due dates and evidence live in separate trackers and files.
3	Inspections get scheduled and recorded, but follow-up work is inconsistent.
5	Due work, results, exceptions, and follow-up activity are visible and defensible.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- Can you identify what is due, overdue, passed, failed, and outstanding?
- Does the evidence attach to the source record?
- Can the program survive staff turnover?

4. Work intake and work order discipline

1	Work gets created ad hoc with inconsistent detail, and requests arrive through five different channels.
3	Work orders exist, but priorities, classifications, and status discipline vary.
5	Requests from any channel, including after hours, become work orders that get planned, executed, and closed with usable history.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- Is work intake standardized, including calls that come in overnight?
- Do approved requests convert cleanly into work?
- Do supervisors trust the status of open work?

5. Preventive maintenance maturity

1	PM is informal, driven by memory, or not trusted.
3	Some PM plans exist, but consistency and execution are uneven.
5	Time-based PM is structured, due work is visible, and generated work is actionable.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- What recurring work is genuinely repeatable?
- Have you defined PM triggers and intervals?
- Does generated work show up in a usable way?

6. Scheduling and dispatch readiness

1	Work gets assigned manually with limited context.
3	Some schedule views exist, but readiness and assignment are loose.
5	Ready work reaches dispatch with enough detail for reliable field execution.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- Does dispatch receive complete work?
- Are urgency, dates, and assignment windows clear?
- Can schedulers tell draft work from executable work?

7. Field execution readiness

1	Crews rely heavily on calls, paper, and memory.
3	Some mobile or digital execution exists, but it is incomplete.
5	Crews receive, update, and close work with the right asset, location, checklist, and evidence in one flow.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- Can crews update work in the field, including where there is no cell coverage?
- Can they capture notes, photos, labor, and results?
- Do they have the context to get the job done right the first time?

8. Parts and material readiness

1	Parts visibility is weak or disconnected from the work.
3	Basic storeroom data exists, but issue and consume discipline is inconsistent.
5	Crews and supervisors see needed parts and record material usage against the work.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- Can the team tell whether the job is materially ready before leaving the yard?
- Are commonly used parts available in a controlled list?
- Can you link consumption back to the work order?

9. Reporting and operational visibility

1	Reporting is retrospective and spreadsheet-dependent.
3	Some dashboards exist, but they do not consistently guide action.
5	Supervisors and leaders see the few key operational signals that matter, every day.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- What needs attention now?
- What is overdue?
- What is trending in the wrong direction, and could you show council?

10. Institutional knowledge resilience

1	Critical process knowledge lives in a few people.
3	Some knowledge is documented, but not embedded in the work itself.
5	Standards, records, and work history carry enough context to onboard new staff faster and reduce dependency on memory.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- If a senior operator left tomorrow, what would become hard to execute?
- Where does your operation depend on what one person remembers?
- What belongs in records, plans, and checklists instead?

Scorecard tally sheet

Enter each score, then mark the two categories where a better score would change your week the most. Those two are your Phase One shortlist.

#	Category	Score (1 to 5)	Phase One shortlist?
01	Asset visibility and data quality		
02	Location and spatial readiness		
03	Inspection and compliance management		
04	Work intake and work order discipline		
05	Preventive maintenance maturity		
06	Scheduling and dispatch readiness		
07	Field execution readiness		
08	Parts and material readiness		
09	Reporting and operational visibility		
10	Institutional knowledge resilience		
Total (out of 50)			

Total	Where you probably sit	What to do next
10 to 20	Level 1, reactive and manual across most workflows.	Phase One is a system of record: assets, locations, work orders, and one team on mobile.
21 to 34	Level 2 or 3, some systems, uneven discipline.	Phase One connects one painful workflow end to end and retires the spreadsheet that backs it.
35 to 50	Level 3 or 4, connected operations with gaps.	Phase One targets the weakest category directly, usually PM, parts, or reporting.

WORKSHEET

Our Phase One shortlist

The two categories where a better score would change our week:

Why those two, and what changes if they improve:

Where the room disagreed on a score, and why:

Field Readiness: Can the Work Actually Get Done?

Field readiness deserves special attention, because many operational programs fail in execution, not strategy. A work order that looks complete in the office still carries risk if the crew lacks the context, mobile access, materials, or authority to complete it correctly in the field.

Work quality improves when the same source records carry context from intake to planning to scheduling to execution, instead of forcing teams to recreate context at every handoff.

Evaluate field readiness with a practical lens. The question is not "Can we deploy every field feature?" The question is "What does the crew need in hand to execute the target workflow consistently?"

Readiness component	What good looks like	Why it matters
Complete work context	The crew sees asset, location, priority, due date, and relevant history.	Reduces avoidable calls, guesswork, and repeat visits.
Standard work content	Job plans, checklists, and expected steps attach where needed.	Improves consistency and makes quality less people-dependent.
Mobile evidence capture	Notes, photos, results, and completion details get recorded at the source.	Improves auditability, follow-up, and handoff quality.
Offline capability	The app works in the pump house, the vault, and the back forty, and syncs when coverage returns.	A mobile tool that only works in town gets abandoned on the first rural job.
Labor and time capture	Field activity links to the work performed.	Creates usable history and better cost visibility.
Parts and material awareness	The crew can identify and record materials used, at least at a lightweight level.	Improves work history and keeps planning connected to execution.
Simple status discipline	The team knows what counts as draft, ready, in progress, and complete.	Builds trust in the work queue and supervisor dashboards.

The crew decides whether it worked

Field crews do not sign the contract, and they decide whether the project succeeds. When technicians actually use the system in the field, work orders close accurately, asset history builds automatically, and the data directors and ops managers need becomes reliable. If the crew does not use it, nobody benefits. Design Phase One for gloves, sunlight, and one free hand.

Field readiness self-check

Ask a crew lead to fill this in, not a supervisor. The answers will be different.

Readiness component	Have it	Partly	No	What the crew says
Complete work context	☐	☐	☐	
Standard work content	☐	☐	☐	
Mobile evidence capture	☐	☐	☐	
Offline capability	☐	☐	☐	
Labor and time capture	☐	☐	☐	
Parts and material awareness	☐	☐	☐	
Simple status discipline	☐	☐	☐	

Prioritizing Where to Start

Do not start Phase One by asking for every module you may eventually want. Start by asking which operational workflow would create the clearest value if it became more visible, more repeatable, and easier to execute.

Good Phase One candidates share three traits

1. The workflow is concrete and painful today.
2. The workflow produces data you can use immediately.
3. The workflow creates a foundation for broader EAM expansion later.

Common starting points

Starting point	Why it works	Typical modules	Expansion path
Backflow / compliance	Clear due dates, public health stakes, and evidence requirements make the workflow easy to define.	Backflow, Assets, Locations, Work Orders, Dashboards	Follow-up work, inspections, PM, broader asset and field operations
Service line inventory (LCRR / LCRI)	The registry, the replacement plan, and the compliance date are already defined for you.	Assets, Locations, Work Orders, Mobile, Dashboards	Distribution asset registry, corrective work, capital planning
Short-cycle corrective work	Supervisors gain fast value from cleaner intake, work order discipline, and field closeout.	Service Requests, Work Orders, Assets, Locations, Mobile, Dashboards	Scheduling, PM, storeroom, broader operations programs
Recurring maintenance	Time-based recurring work is easier to standardize than every ad hoc task.	Planning, Work Orders, Assets, Locations, Scheduling	Mobile execution, materials tracking, more advanced PM
Field inspections	Inspection programs expose weak data, weak evidence capture, and weak follow-up discipline quickly.	Assets, Locations, Work Orders, Mobile, Dashboards	Compliance, PM, corrective follow-up work

Decision prompts

- Where is your utility most exposed to missed work, missed inspections, or poor visibility?
- Which workflow would create the clearest before-and-after result in 90 to 180 days?
- Which workflow requires the fewest integrations and dependencies to stand up?

- Which workflow could become the foundation for additional modules in later phases?
- Which workflow has a regulatory date attached that makes the decision for you?

Who belongs in the room

One economic decision, four different conversations. Each role reads this playbook for a different reason, and Phase One only sticks when all four have a stake in it.

Role	What they are worried about	What they should own in Phase One	Read first
Utility Director / GM	Reactive maintenance eating the capital budget. Council asking about asset condition with no data. The last software project ran 18 months over.	The problem statement and the success measures.	Sections 1, 3, and 11
Operations / Maintenance Manager	Work orders in spreadsheets and text messages. Handoffs that break. PM plans that exist on paper but never run.	The target workflow, the roles in scope, and the dashboards.	Sections 4, 6, and 9
IT Lead	Servers, patches, and integration with GIS, billing, and financials. Security. Vendor lock-in and data portability.	Integration scope, SSO, and what stays explicitly out of Phase One.	Sections 9 and 10
Crew Lead / Technician	Assigned work by printout or group text. Asset history that means asking whoever has been here longest.	The mobile workflow and the field checklist. They test it first.	Section 7

Write in up to four candidates from the starting points above, or your own. Score each trait 1 to 5. A regulatory date is worth noting but not scoring; it usually decides ties.

[illegible]

Defining Phase One of an EAM Rollout

This section helps you put a box around Phase One. The output should be specific enough to inform a pilot or an implementation statement of work, but focused enough to keep Phase One from turning into a full-enterprise design exercise.

Phase One, defined

Phase One is the minimum practical operational scope your team can deploy, use, and learn from. Then improve it and expand.

The Phase One scoping worksheet

Worksheet area	Prompts	Our answer
A. Target workflow	What is the first workflow or program you want to improve? What problem will it solve?	
B. Roles in scope	Which teams and roles need to use the system in Phase One?	
C. Assets and locations in scope	Which asset classes, facilities, areas, and locations come first?	
D. Work types in scope	Which short-cycle work and which recurring work belong in scope?	
E. Modules required	Which modules does this workflow need to run end to end?	
F. Data needed	What minimum records, lists, classes, and imports must exist to make Phase One usable? What can come from GIS?	

Worksheet area	Prompts	Our answer
G. Dashboards and visibility	What are the 3 to 5 daily signals supervisors and leaders need to see?	
H. Integrations	What has to connect in Phase One (GIS, billing, financials), and what can wait?	
I. Explicit exclusions	What stays out of scope until later phases, on purpose?	
J. Success measures	How will you decide Phase One is working? Pick three numbers.	

Typical Phase One module pattern

A practical Phase One centers on a small set of connected modules, not the full platform. The table below reflects how AssetCore is structured, but the logic applies to any modern EAM.

Module area	Typical Phase One?	Notes	Our call
Assets	Usually yes	Foundational system-of-record layer for downstream work and reporting.	
Locations and GIS	Usually yes	Needed when work, inspections, and field execution depend on place context. Where you already run Esri, the map is the starting point, not a later integration.	
Work Orders	Yes	Core execution record for short-cycle work and follow-up activity.	
Service Requests	Often yes	Useful when Phase One includes intake and triage. Include after-hours intake if overnight calls are falling through the cracks today.	
Planning / Job Plans	Usually yes	Supports repeatable work and standard execution.	
Preventive Maintenance	Often yes	Best limited to time-based PM in Phase One.	

Module area	Typical Phase One?	Notes	Our call
Scheduling	Lightweight	Keep to basic readiness, assignment, and dispatch. Avoid over-design.	
Mobile Field Execution	Often yes	High value where evidence capture and field closeout matter. Offline where crews leave coverage.	
Storeroom / Parts Inventory	Lightweight only	Use for item master, balances, and issue and consume tracking where needed.	
Procurement / Receiving	Usually no	Better reserved for later phases.	
Backflow	If chosen as entry point	Strong Phase One candidate where compliance is a top pain.	
Fleet	Usually no	Vehicles and heavy equipment are assets too, but they rarely define the first workflow.	
Analytics / Dashboards	Yes, but narrow	Focus on the few operational signals that guide action.	
In-app assistance and automation	Not required	Help crews find answers faster once the records exist. Should not define the first operational scope.	

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Phase One in Practice: Weeks, Not Years

A lot of utilities assume an EAM go-live is a year-long project because that is what the last one was. It does not have to be. When the scope is one workflow and one team, the timeline looks less like a software program and more like a well-run construction job: a short planning phase, a defined build, a hard date, and someone on site the first week.

Phase	Typical window	What happens	What you own
Scope workshop	Week 1	Work through this playbook's worksheet with the vendor. Lock the target workflow, roles, assets, and exclusions.	The one-page output in Section 11.
Data prework	Weeks 1 to 3	Assemble the minimum records: asset list, locations, GIS export, crew roster, PM intervals, and any compliance registry you already keep.	Clean the lists. Name a data owner.
Configuration	Weeks 2 to 4	Configure the workflow around how you actually work: work types, statuses, checklists, priorities, and dashboards. Load the data.	Review sessions. Say no to scope creep.
Field pilot	Weeks 4 to 5	One crew runs the real workflow on real work for a week or two. Fix what they trip over.	Pick the crew that will be honest with you.
Go-live	Weeks 5 to 6	The workflow moves off the spreadsheet for good. Role-based training, recorded. Vendor on call for the first week.	Turn off the old process. Do not run both.
First 90 days	Weeks 6 to 18	Measure the three numbers you picked. Tune. Decide what Phase Two is.	The Monday-after owner keeps it alive.

What tends to go wrong, and how to head it off

Risk	What it looks like	Head it off
Scope creep	Phase One quietly becomes the whole platform.	Write the exclusions down in the workshop. Revisit them, do not renegotiate them.
Data perfectionism	Go-live waits for a complete, clean asset registry.	Load what you have. The registry gets better because crews use it, not before.
Running both	The spreadsheet stays alive as a backup.	Set a date to retire it. Two systems of record means no system of record.
Nobody owns Monday	The project team disbands at go-live.	Name the owner in the workshop. Put the 90-day review on their calendar before go-live.
Office-first rollout	Supervisors get trained; crews get a PDF.	Train the crew first. If they adopt it, the office follows.

Live with the team you already have

Phase One should not require a platform team, a dedicated administrator, or a year of consultants. A cloud-based system configured around your workflow can be run by the people who run your operations today. If a vendor's plan needs headcount you do not have, the scope is wrong.

WORKSHEET

Our Phase One commitments

Workflow owner after go-live (a name, not a department):

Target go-live date, and the crew that pilots it first:

The three numbers we will measure, and the date of the 90-day review:

What we are explicitly leaving out of Phase One:

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The One-Page Output of a Phase One Scope Workshop

By the end of a scope workshop, your team and your vendor should be able to fill in every line below. If you have worked through the worksheets in this playbook, most of the answers are already written down. Copy them here.

Phase One scope	Our answer
The operational problem Phase One solves	
The roles, assets, and locations in scope	
The short-cycle and recurring workflows in scope	
The core modules required	
The minimum data and configuration to launch, and where it comes from	
Integrations in, and integrations explicitly out	
The dashboards and reports supervisors and leadership need	
What stays out of scope until later phases	
Who owns the workflow after go-live	
Success measures: three numbers, and the date we check them	

That one page becomes the bridge between assessment and action. It gives your team, and any vendor you talk to, a shared definition of Phase One, and it feeds directly into a draft statement of work for a pilot or implementation.

Want a working session on this?

AssetCore runs free Phase One scope workshops: ninety minutes with our team, working your real workflows through this worksheet. You keep the output either way. Book at assetcore.ai or write to info@assetcore.ai.

Want to hear how other utilities made the move? Our September 2026 panel, From Reactive to Ready for Anything, brought together an implementation advisor and an operations leader to talk through what separates projects that land from projects that stall, and what the Monday after go-live really looks like. The recording is available at assetcore.ai.

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AssetCore is a cloud-based EAM platform built specifically for small and mid-size municipal utilities. It connects work orders, assets, crews, and storerooms in one system, so the work that needs to get done actually gets done, tracked, and reported. Utilities go live in weeks and run it with the team they already have.

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