

Table 33

Proposed Fiscal Year 2016				
Training and Meetings Summary				
(\$s)				
Line Item/Description	Final FY15	Proposed FY16	Δ (\$s)	Δ (%)
Training and Meetings	\$361,019	\$413,714	\$52,695	14.6%
TOTAL TRAINING AND MEETINGS EXPENSES	\$361,019	\$413,714	\$52,695	14.6%

Other Highlights

- Costs cover a variety of meetings, seminars, conferences and training sessions. Most spending supports maintaining professional licenses and certifications, as well as training in the use of specialized equipment, out-of-state site visits (such as water treatment plants that use UV disinfection) and site audits, and health and safety compliance, as well as cyber security training.
- The continued increase in Training and Meeting expenditures over the past few fiscal years is part of an organization-wide strategy to prepare the next wave of MWRA management who will be needed to step in as the impact of retirements is realized. Funding also supports training in emerging technology such as electrical thermography.
- The Authority also budgets \$155,320 for professional development and technical training under professional services in the Human Resources Department.

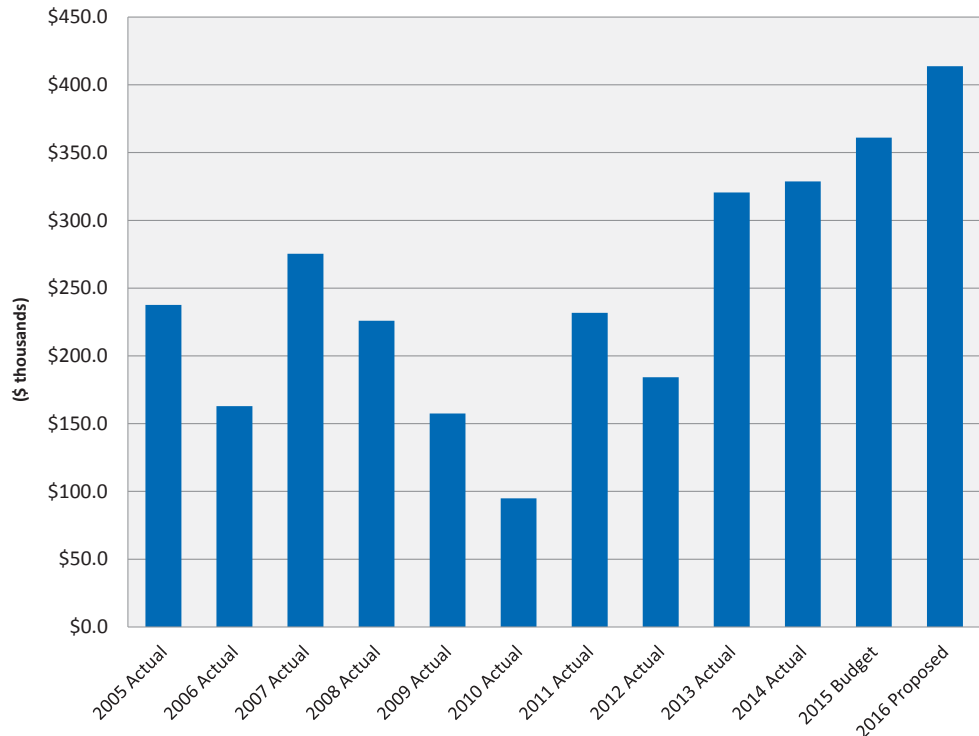


Figure 45

Policy Point

Trainings and Meetings

“Investing in the Most Critical Infrastructure”

When economic times are tough and budgets are instructed to be reduced to meet a target, one of the first areas that almost all entities – public or private – tend to look to immediately are line items associated with training and attendance of meetings. Such was the case after the most recent economic downturn. As seen in [Figure 45](#), the line item had been

curtailed significantly and maintained at lower levels until the last few years. The recent trend in this increase is largely due to one of the greatest challenges facing the MWRA currently and in the coming years: the increased number of retiring employees. The average age of the Authority staff continues to be higher than many other public utilities, and in recent years retirements have trended upward. As noted before, one benefit of the Authority's current workforce has been the "deep bench" of employees who were able to move into senior positions being vacated by retiring individuals. However, the need to make the "bench" deep once more is a new challenge, and providing opportunities and skills for new hires to allow them to move up is equally as important. This includes training for technical licenses that similarly allow for better cross-functionality of the workforce and better coverage when needed. Moreover, in a highly technical industry where equipment and technology is constantly changing, ensuring that employees are up-to-date on the latest techniques available will be important for continuity of service if and when these new technologies are adopted by the Authority. Investing in the Authority's most important resource – its employees – is critical to the success of the agency moving forward.

Meetings are a separate category from training, but also provide benefit to the agency. In recent years, visits to other water treatment facilities, particularly those with existing ultraviolet (UV) facilities, lead to important recommendations during the design phase of the MWRA's UV projects. Similar exchanges with other agencies have also led to a better understanding and generated new ideas at the Deer Island Treatment Plant and the Authority's dam maintenance and safety program among others. By being able to discuss these "lessons learned," the Authority has benefited from the work of other entities who have already adopted certain technologies or practices. Moreover, some of these meetings have also prevented the Authority from adopting some emerging technologies when companies were unable to deliver on their promised services, causing significant operational and financial damages to other systems.

Moreover, the Authority is a very "large player" as water and wastewater systems go, so it should be interacting with other like entities from across the nation, or even overseas. This is not to say that the operations and challenges are identical and that there are no lessons to be learned from smaller and local entities, but the Authority should "cast a wide net" when exploring and evaluating technology, as well as looking for ways to improve its operations.

While the Advisory Board is pleased to see the Authority's increased activity in this area, there still must be checks and balances in place. Certainly, these expenses have potential for misuse and have garnered significant media attention when such abuse has been discovered at other agencies. ***Therefore, the Advisory Board supports and endorses the increased staff training and participation in national groups and organizations provided there are checks and balances to ensure that there is no misuse of funds for these purposes, particularly with regard to out-of-state travel.***