

## **The Importance of Public Power**

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October is a time when public power is given some recognition and celebrated. The American Public Power Association (APPA) celebrates Public Power Week in the first full week of October, but the Brownsville Public Utilities Board (BPUB) extends that week to a full month. With public power or municipally owned utilities (MOUs) being recognized this month, you might wonder what public power is and why it's so important.

Put simply, municipally owned utilities are when a public entity, like a city, town or county, owns and runs the utility. There are more than 2,000 municipally owned utilities in the United States. Those utilities provide electricity to 49 million people in 49 states and 5 U.S. territories. In 1907, Brownsville voted to create a municipal utility system, and in 1960, voters chose to stay public and created BPUB.

There are several advantages to a public power utility, the first being investment into the system. Unlike privately held utility companies, MOUs are nonprofit. That means they don't have to answer to stockholders. Instead, money brought in through billing goes back into ongoing operations and continued development of the system. Ultimately, that means a robust infrastructure capable of providing for its current customers while preparing for future growth.

But ultimately, the advantages of public power go back to the people. Management operation and control is delegated to elected or appointed officials. In BPUB's case, decisions are made by a board composed of seven members. Six of those members are appointed by the City Commission while the Brownsville mayor serves as the seventh member. Certain issues also require a vote from the City Commission. By putting elected and appointed officials in this role, citizens can go to the voting booth to hold officials accountable for their decisions and shape the city's future.

In addition, BPUB provides a forum for customers to voice their opinions or concerns through its Public Utilities Board Consumer Advisory Panel, or PUBCAP. The panel consists of 11 members representing different community interests, like industrial, residential and small business. Ten members are selected based on recommendations made by PUBCAP members, and the eleventh members being a BPUB employee acting as a liaison.

And let's not forget all the people who help bring utility services to customers. When it comes to an MOU, those aren't just workers. They're local; they're a part of the community. They're your friends, family and neighbors. They're also here. That means fast response times when there are problems and a dedicated workforce ready to face any challenge. Most are familiar with line workers since they are visible out in the field, but there are many different roles throughout BPUB, all of which serve a unique part in bringing the best possible service to its customers.