Industry trends indicate an increasing number of tenured treatment plant operators are reaching retirement age, so developing a new generation of these certified operators is an urgent need for both the Knoxville Utilities Board and the industry as a whole. KUB began developing its Operator Qualification Program in 2013 to address that need, and the program was fully implemented in 2016.

As of 2019, approximately 40% of KUB’s qualified operators have less than three years of on-the-job experience. KUB has trained and qualified 14 operators through the Operator Qualification Program.

The program begins directly after the hiring process and is outlined in new hire packets. Critical tasks, program expectations, and evaluation requirements are clearly delineated.

Within the first year, operators are capable of supporting operations at assigned facilities and cross-trained to be multifunctional across all process areas.

The program is evaluated semi-annually to verify its effectiveness and identify potential changes or improvements as needed.

As someone who learns more by ‘doing,’ I feel like the program brought me up to speed quicker because it gave me more hands-on experience early in my career. This is beneficial because you don’t feel like you are being asked to do too much before you are comfortable, which can often lead to mistakes.

Tyler Webb, KUB Operator