



*Office of Water*

# Water Workforce Program Highlights

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# Agenda:

- The Building Blocks and Challenges of an Effective Utility Workforce Program
- EPA's Innovative Water Workforce Grant Program
- Examples of Grantee Project Updates
  - Wichita, TMACOG, NRWA
- Workforce Grants Looking Ahead
- Workforce webinars and Case Studies

# The Water Workforce: The Backbone Of Safe Water And Wastewater Services

- America's water sector depends on hundreds of thousands of skilled professionals, "water protection specialists."
- These workers ensure communities have safe, reliable water and wastewater services every day.
- Recruiting, training, and retaining these workers is an increasing challenge.
- About one-third of the workforce may retire within the next 10 years, and new technologies demand new skills.

# The Building Blocks of an Effective Water Utility Workforce Program—the “Pillars”

*Enabling Environment for Effective Water Sector Workforce Development and Maintenance*



United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency

Office of Water

# EPA's Innovative Water Workforce Grant Program

**Purpose:** Expand awareness about different job opportunities in the water sector, build a pipeline, and connect individuals to careers. Grants have 3 years project periods.

**First round: Nine grantees,** collectively receiving \$3.8 million (announced 2022).

East Central University (OK)	Rowan University (NJ)
Wichita State University (KS)	Grand Rapids Community College (MI)
Toledo Metropolitan Area COG (OH)	Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust (WA)
Syracuse University (NY)	RCAP
AWWA	

**Second round: Twelve grantees,** collectively receiving \$15 million (announced 2024).

National Rural Water Association (OK)	Center for Watershed Protection, Inc. (MD)
The Water Tower Institute, Inc. (GA)	Grand Rapids Community College (MI)
University of New Mexico (NM)	American Water Works Association (CO)
Board of Regents Nevada Higher Ed. (NV)	Multiplier/WaterNow Alliance (CA)
Wichita State University (KS)	Rural Community Assistance Partnership (DC)
Baltimore City Dept of Public Works (MD)	Pacific Int'l Ctr for High Technology Research (HI)

<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/innovative-water-infrastructure-workforce-development-program>



# Innovative Water Workforce Grant Program

Authorized under the **American Water Infrastructure Act (AWIA) of 2018**, with Congressional appropriations beginning in FY2020. EPA has held two rounds of grant competitions.

Applicants can apply under these Project Area:

- **Project Area 1:** Internships, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and post-secondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades
- **Project Area 2:** Education programs designed for elementary, secondary, and higher education students that inform people about the role of water and wastewater utilities in their communities
- **Project Area 3:** Regional industry and workforce development collaborations
- **Project Area 4:** Leadership development occupational training, mentoring, or cross-training programs
- **Project Area 5:** Education and training programs, including internship or apprenticeship programs, designed for decentralized water workers



# Examples of Grantee Project Updates

# Grantee Project Update

## **Wichita State University: [Educators Resource Hub](#)**

This newly established resource Hub has over 100 resources that supports future water leaders and utilities. The Educator Resource Hub is a one-stop shop for water education curriculum, videos, information, tools, and other resources. Resources are arranged by type, age group, and learning objective.

### **Outcomes:**

- Educator Resource Hub currently has over 40,000 website visits
- Engaged with over 100 teachers in New York through the Master Teacher event
- Received over 600 impressions and over 200 clicks through social media resources

### **Impact:**

The program engages students at an early age by introducing them to the roles and functions of water utilities.



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**WICHITA STATE  
UNIVERSITY**





# Grantee Project Update

## Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG)

TMACOG is partnering with Owens Community College to develop a water operators' certification program. They also partnered with local water utilities to provide students on the job training and employment opportunities post-graduation.

### Outcomes:

- Three cohorts have completed the training program the third and final cohort began in January 2025, and its outcomes will be included in the Y4Q1 progress report expected by the end of June.
- 71 students have enrolled across all three cohorts and TMACOG anticipates that 65 students have completed the program.
- 28 of the students are already employed by partnering utilities because of their participation in the program
- There was a [webinar](#) held in 2024 that provides additional information.

### Impact:

Directly expanding the regional pipeline of certified water operators and has already placed multiple students in jobs, strengthening workforce readiness before graduation.



# Grantee Project Update

## National Rural Water Association

NRWA is leveraging its 47 years of experience in water and wastewater utilities industry to increase the number of participants in its Apprenticeship Program in communities, ensuring an increase in a well-trained and capable water sector workforce to meet the increasing demands of the water industry and protect public health and the environment.

### Outcomes:

- Increase the number of apprentices in each rural community, with a total of 245 apprentices turned operators over the three-year program
- Have apprentices graduate and receive the National Guidelines of Apprenticeship for Water and Wastewater System Operation Specialists credential, certify them as official operators
- Have apprentices complete 288 technical instruction hours and 4,000 on the job training hours

### Impact:

Directly expanding the pipeline of certified water operators and strengthening workforce readiness before graduation.

# Looking Ahead: Sustaining and Scaling Water Workforce Progress

## In Progress:

- 14 innovative grant projects currently active
- Advancing **job-readiness** in the water utility sector
- Strengthened partnerships with **utilities, educators, and workforce boards**
- Early signs of success: apprentices hired, career pathways built, and awareness raised

## Next Steps:

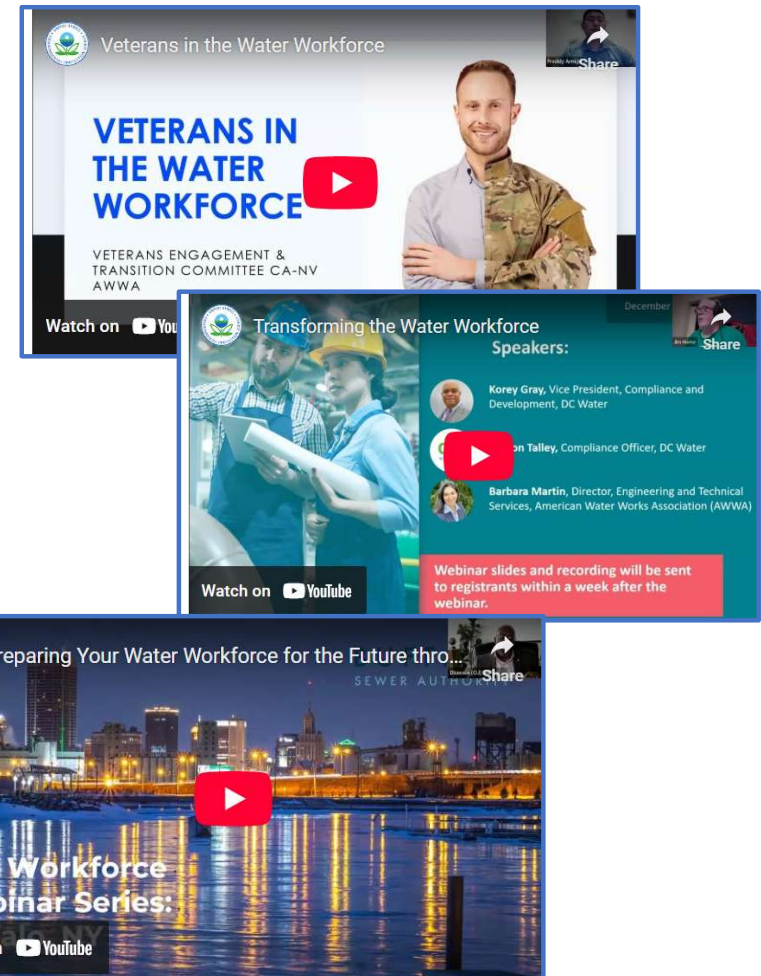
- Planning for **FY2025 NOFO** underway



## Other Water Workforce Resources

# Water Workforce Webinar Series

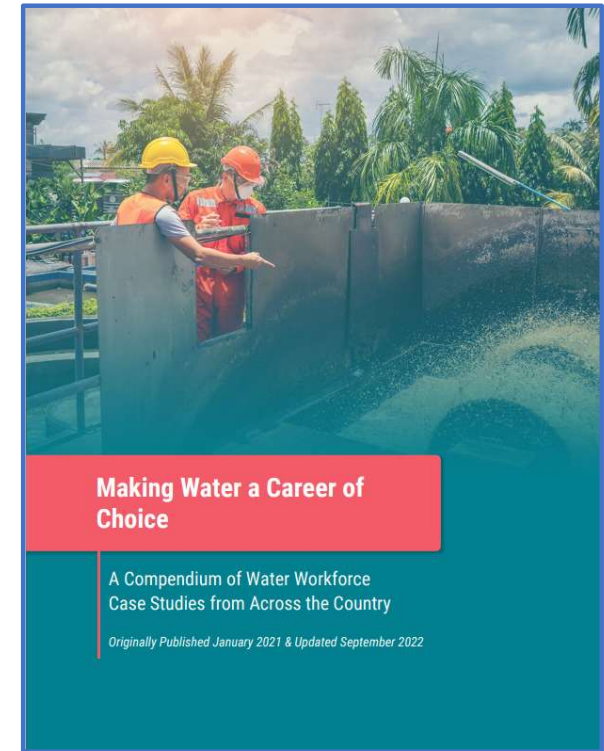
- 16 webinars featuring a variety of topics.
- Utility examples, partnerships with others (Schools, Apprentice Programs) Local Workforce Boards), technology adoption, etc.
- Great way to share best practices across the water sector.
- Webinar recordings are available online: [www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/water-sector-workforce-webinars](http://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/water-sector-workforce-webinars)



# Water Workforce Case Studies

- Features nine case studies that showcase different experiences and approaches for recruiting and retaining a dedicated, trained workforce.
- Also includes work with community organizations to attract individuals to a career in water.
- Excellent resource for best practices that are used across the water sector.
- The 2021/2022 compendium is available online:

[Workforce Case Studies: A Compendium of Workforce Initiatives and Programs from Across the Country Metadata](#)





# Questions??

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Thank you!