



FY 2020-2021: Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grant Program

Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center: *Building Back our Nation's Water Industry Workforce — Institute for Future Water Leaders*



INTRODUCTION

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) authorized the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to award grants to nonprofit professional or service organizations, nonprofit labor organizations, nonprofit community colleges, institutions of higher education, or other nonprofit training and educational institutions to (1) assist in the development and use of innovative activities relating to water workforce development and career opportunities in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector, and (2) expand public awareness about drinking water and wastewater utilities and to connect individuals to careers in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector.

A total of 9 organizations were recently selected by EPA to receive grant funding under this program. EPA has developed Fact Sheets on each of these projects that includes the language from the grant submission.

To learn more about the range of activities EPA is undertaking to support our Nation's water workforce, please go to [Sustainable Water Infrastructure-Water Sector Workforce](#).



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Institute for Future Water Leaders builds on 12 years collaboration and experience between the Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center (SU-EFC), Wichita State University Environmental Finance Center (WSU-EFC) and the Southwest Environmental Finance Center at the University of New Mexico (SWEFC) in delivering training and technical assistance to water utilities across all 50 states and 6 territories.

The proposed project aims to achieve the following objectives:

- ◊ Increase leadership skills and occupational knowledge of early and mid-career water professionals through the Institute for Future Water Leaders, a 9-month intensive program that uses successful virtual models from the COVID-19 era to blend face-to-face virtual training with work-embedded career assessment and reflection.

- ◊ Increase water system collaboration, information exchange, and career opportunity visibility by creating a professional peer learning community, and mentoring; and

- ◊ Increase capacity of water and wastewater systems to retain and develop staff through workforce planning training and assistance.



MAJOR ACTIVITIES

Implement an intensive 9-month curriculum including 11 training modules that will take a blended-learning approach to leadership development and occupational learning, incorporating aspects of both synchronous and asynchronous online coursework, work-embedded collaboration, and peer-to-peer exchange to drive self-reflection, development of leadership skills, and greater self-efficacy in incumbent water professionals. The curriculum will focus on three primary areas:

- ◊ Foundations of Utility Management, Managing Water and People – Human Resources Skills for the Water Sector, and Dimensions of Water Sector Leadership



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[Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center](#)



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MAJOR ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

- ◊ Working with an Advisory Board of state capacity development coordinators, water industry association staff, and regional EPA drinking water and wastewater experts, the EFCs will recruit 120 candidates from representative water and wastewater systems in the US, including small systems, large systems, and tribal systems.
- ◊ Engage geographically-diverse water systems through a partner-driven recruitment process and offer long-term opportunities for peer networking and engagement, including integrated case studies and lessons from the fields of project management, business operations, human resources, and communications.



OUTCOMES

Increased number of early and mid-career professionals that: 1) demonstrate improved leadership skills, 2) demonstrate improved occupational knowledge in financial and managerial topics like asset management, budgeting, climate preparedness, and workforce planning, and 3) interact and participate in a professional learning community.

Increased number of 1) water utilities retaining and developing incumbent employees, 2) utilities with succession plans and sustainable workforces, 3) utilities implementing asset management plans, 4) utilities with long-term financial planning benchmarks, 5) utilities preparing for climate change impacts, and 6) utility professionals engaging with peer-networks and ongoing professional learning.



PARTNERS

- ◊ The Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center will partner with the Southwest Environmental Finance Center and the Wichita State University Environmental Finance Center to reach a national audience of incumbent water and wastewater utility staff.
- ◊ Additionally, the EFCs plan to engage partners from state agencies, professional associations, and federal agencies in an Advisory Council to guide the project.
- ◊ The project partners will leverage existing relationships with the American Water Works Association (AWWA) and Water Environment Federation (WEF) and related state associations to recruit participation in the Institute for Future Water Leaders, the advisory board, and to promote and transfer project resources.
- ◊ The core partners will also leverage the reach of the greater Environmental Finance Center Network (EFCN), which includes at least one EFC in each EPA Region, by engaging those EFCs to identify potential program participants, advisory group members, utilities, and educational institutions.

