

NATIONAL WATER REUSE ACTION PLAN

COMPLETED ACTION

Action 8.5: Engagement with Disadvantaged and Rural Communities on Water Reuse



Background

Droughts, aging infrastructure and a lack of funding resources leave many communities across the United States struggling to maintain a reliable source of water in a changing climate. Water reuse is a powerful and innovative tool for communities to augment their water supplies, but has disproportionately been applied in wealthy and large communities. Small (i.e., <10,000 people) and underserved communities have had difficulty implementing water reuse because a smaller tax base and limited staff time can hinder successful funding and implementation of infrastructure improvements. Technical assistance (TA) programs could support small and underserved communities by helping them access the resources needed to implement water reuse. Successful TA programs depend on establishing strong relationships within local communities. Thus, early stakeholder engagement is an integral step in determining each community's specific needs and to understand where funding should be allocated.

This action focused on engaging three rural and underserved communities through TA pilots. As part of the TA pilots, action leaders worked with these communities to understand their interests in water reuse and associated support needs, provide training on water reuse approaches, and connect communities with TA providers with infrastructure funding expertise. Insights from the TA pilots could help inform future TA approaches that are catered to small and underserved communities.

Accomplishments/Impact

- A working group was convened with various partners to coordinate communication strategies with underserved communities regarding water reuse. Key outputs included [listening sessions](#) with underserved communities in June of 2021, [reuse-focused trainings](#) in November of 2021 and supplementary resources curated for underserved communities.
- The action team engaged in TA pilots with three self-identified small, underserved communities in California, Idaho and Kansas who were interested in water reuse. Details from these engagements and

Action Team

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the lessons learned around TA for underserved communities can be found in the [final action report](#).

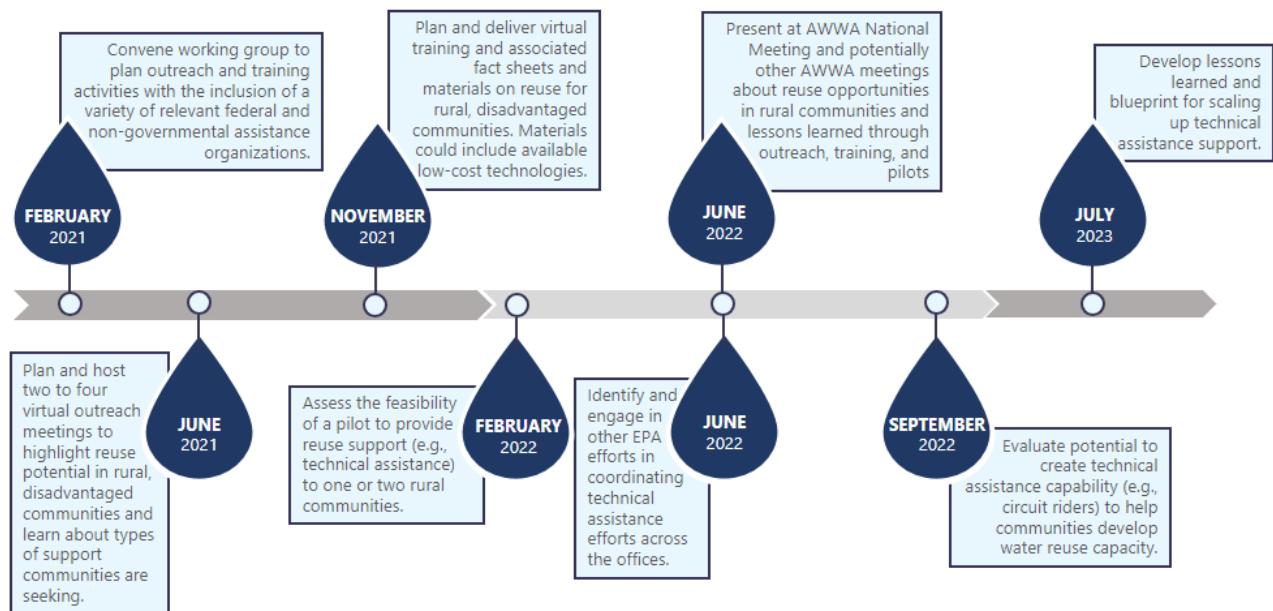
- The action team conducted community specific trainings [train-the-trainer presentations](#) with relevant TA providers for rural communities, such as NRW and AWWA events.
- The action team worked to integrate water reuse into the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) TA initiatives aimed at supporting underserved communities.

Lessons Learned

During implementation of this action, the action team gleaned important lessons about the challenges faced by small and underserved communities, as well as strategies to help overcome these hurdles. High-level lessons and guidance for future TA are listed below. An explanation of lessons can be found in section 3 of the [final action report](#).

1. Devote resources toward early-stage engagement and ensure solutions are catered to community-specific needs.
2. Convene diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes.
3. Leverage existing, trusted relationships and partnerships to advance common goals.
4. Understand the most effective role for each TA provider (e.g., financial, project design, engineering).
5. Limited staff time and competing priorities may slow communication between TA providers and small communities.
6. Be sensitive to potential mistrust of outsiders.

Action Implementation Process



Potential Future Activity

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) includes \$50 billion in funding to EPA to strengthen the nation's water infrastructure – the single largest investment in water in U.S. history. Technical assistance (TA) and investments in small and underserved communities are major BIL priorities. The BIL expands infrastructure investments in small and underserved communities through the Clean Water SRF and Drinking Water SRF programs. Members of the action team are collaborating with the BIL implementation teams to support future BIL TA programs. For example, the Water Reuse program has shared lessons learned from this action, which can be used by TA providers to improve the strength of funding applications submitted by small and underserved communities. Additionally, the action team [published training materials](#) to help TA providers understand how water reuse can be applied in small

and underserved communities. The collective products from this action allow TA providers to better serve small and underserved communities who may benefit from accessing a wider range of funding sources to invest in climate resilient infrastructure. Action team members plan to collaborate with BIL implementation teams to apply lessons learned in future TA programs.

Additional Resources

- [Listening sessions recording](#): *Advancing Water Reuse in Small and Disadvantaged Communities*
- [Virtual training webinar](#): *Advancing Water Reuse in Small and Disadvantaged Communities*
- [Virtual training webinar](#): *Keys to Success: Water Recycling in Small and Disadvantaged Communities*
- [Virtual webinar](#): *Keys to Success: Water Recycling in Tribal Communities*
- [Presentation Slides](#): NRWA WaterPro Conference: *Opportunities for Water Reuse in Small Communities*
- [Presentation Slides](#): NRWA In-Service Training for State Rural Water Association staff *Keys to Success: Water Recycling in Small and Disadvantaged Communities*
- [Final report](#): *Optimizing the Adoption of Water Reuse for Underserved Communities*