

September 10, 2025

# Every Employee is Essential: Enhancing the Leadership and Management Skills of Water Utility Administrative Professionals

**Jim Horne**, Sustainable Utilities Program  
Manager, U.S. EPA Office of Wastewater  
Management

# CREATING THE WATER WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE WEBINAR SERIES

## Every Employee is Essential: Enhancing the Leadership and Management Skills of Water Utility Administrative Professionals

Water sector utilities are essential to providing clean and safe water for every American. Within each utility, administrative professionals are critical to achieving compliance and to ensuring the technical, financial, and managerial capacity to address both current and future challenges – all while providing the best possible service – especially in small communities.

This webinar will focus on an innovative initiative led by the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) in partnership with Water Finance Assistance and others to provide leadership and management training and a certificate to water and wastewater utility administrative professionals. This certification program will provide administrative professionals with a set of skills to better prepare them to make informed decisions, effectively manage resources, and add more value to their utility.

This webinar is part of an ongoing webinar series hosted by EPA, in partnership with leading water sector organizations around the country.

**ATTENDANCE IS FREE**

Register now at:

[\[https://www.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WN\\_0pSUxnFQQ\\_KCbSJhcFvdmg\]](https://www.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WN_0pSUxnFQQ_KCbSJhcFvdmg)

SEPTEMBER 10, 2025  
12:00 – 1:30 PM ET

### Moderators:

- Jim Horne, U.S. EPA

### Speakers:

- Lisa Fought, Director of Capacity Development and Outreach, RCAP
- Jodi Hilsabeck, Senior Environmental Program Coordinator – EFC, RCAP
- Sherry Schmidt, Senior Training & Technical Services Specialist, RCAP
- Glenn Barnes, Director, Water Finance Assistance

This webinar series is supported by:







September 10, 2025

## Speakers:



**Jodi Hilsabeck**, Senior Environment Program Coordinator - EFC, Rural Community Assistance Partnerships (RCAP)



**Lisa Fought**, Director of Capacity Development and Outreach, RCAP



**Sherry Schmidt**, Senior Training & Technical Services Specialist, RCAP



**Glenn Barnes**, Director, Water Finance Assistance

**Webinar slides will be sent to registrants within a week after the webinar.**



Rural  
Community  
Assistance  
Partnership

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**Every Employee is Essential:**

**Enhancing the Leadership and  
Management Skills of Water Utility  
Administrative Professionals**

**Presented by: RCAP and Water Finance Assistance**

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# Acknowledgment



This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Program with Rural Community Assistance Partnership. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the USEPA, nor does the USEPA endorse trade names or recommend the use of commercial products mentioned in this document.

This content does not necessarily reflect the views and policies of State Primacy, RCAP, or RCAP Regions.

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# Our Panel



**JODI HILSABECK**  
RCAP



**LISA FOUGHT**  
RCAP



**SHERRY SCHMIDT**  
RCAP



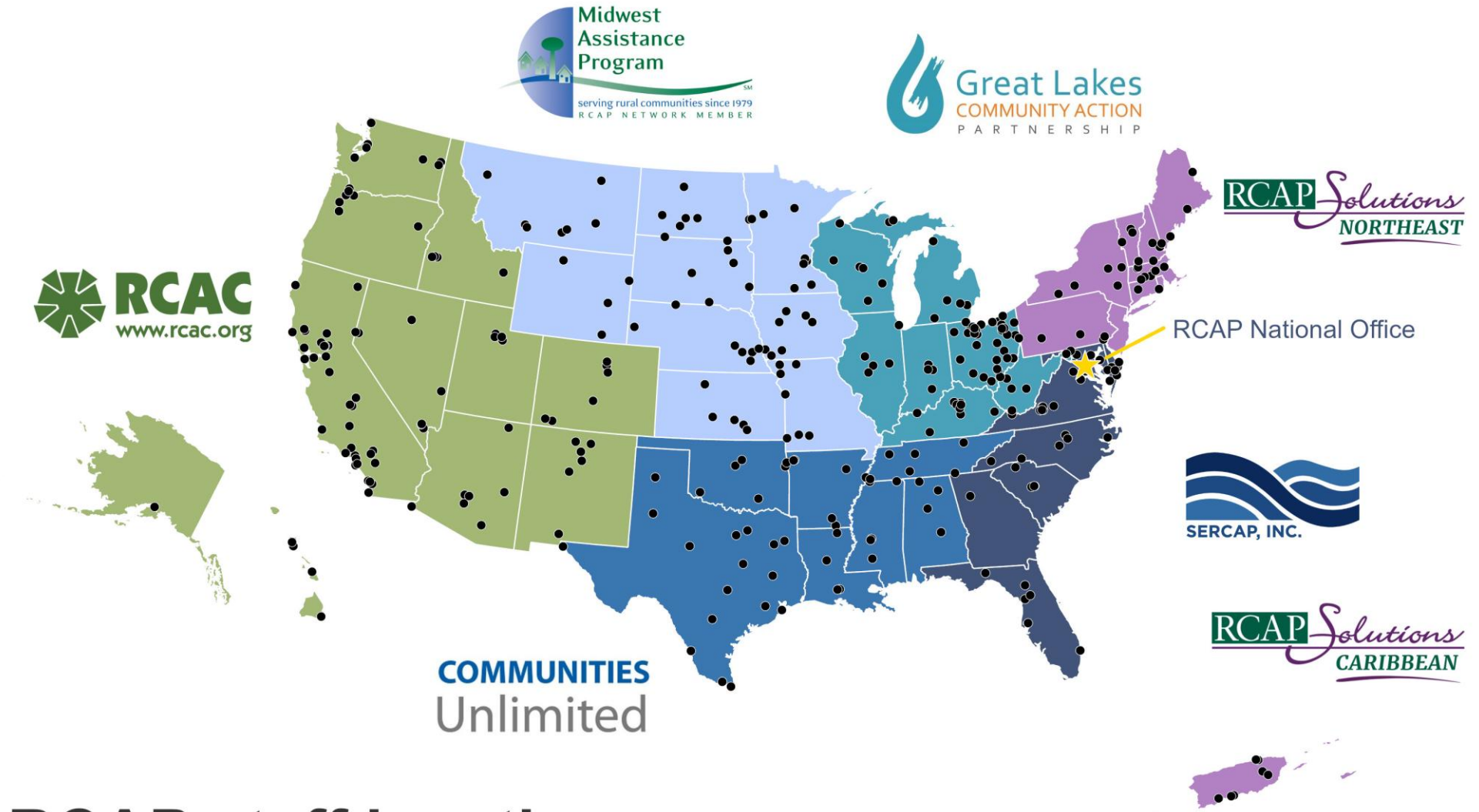
**GLENN BARNES**  
Water Finance  
Assistance







# Rural Community Assistance Partnership



## RCAP staff locations



# Rural Community Assistance Partnership

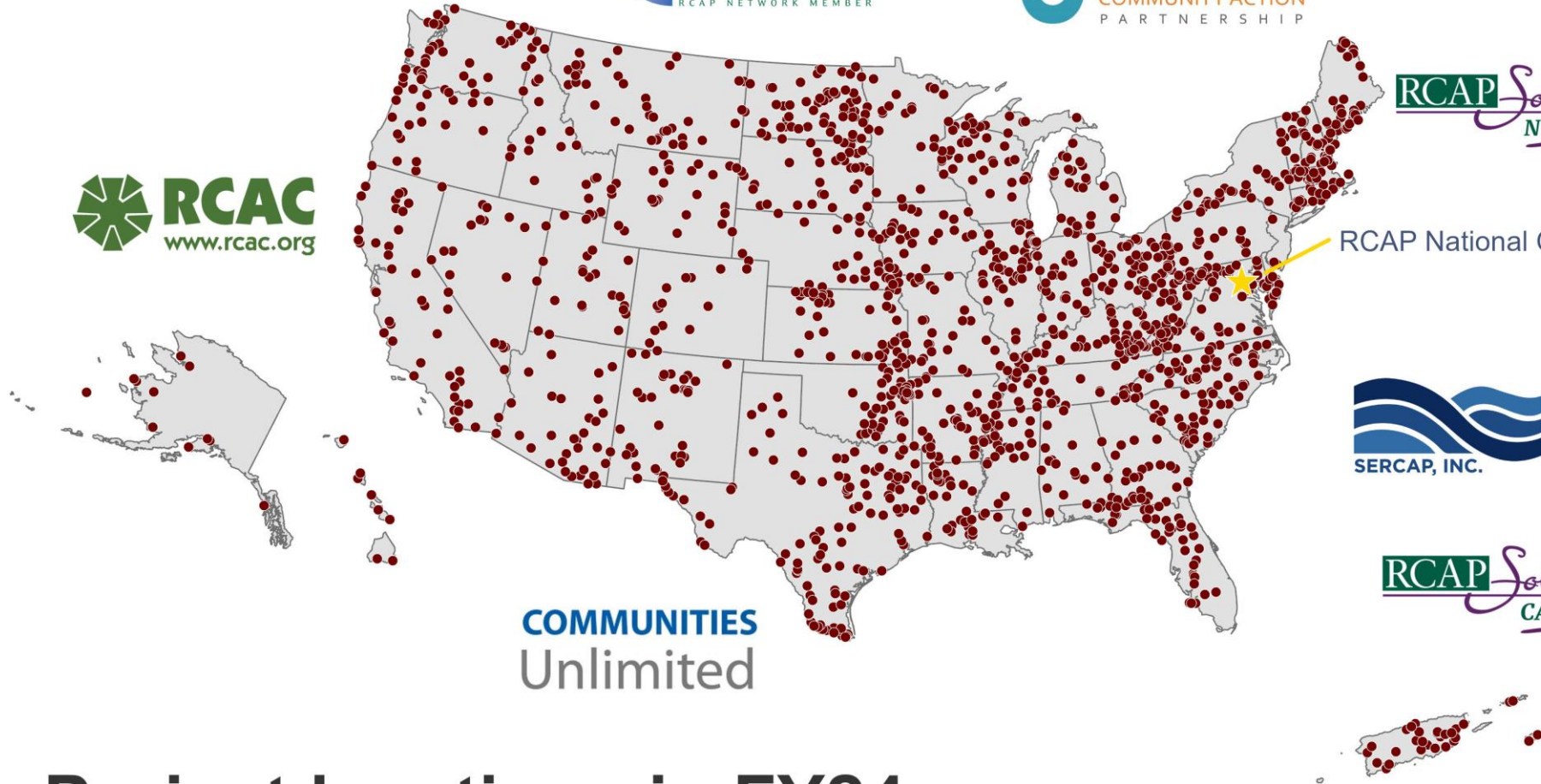


RCAP National Office



COMMUNITIES  
Unlimited

## Project locations in FY24





# Who RCAP Serves

- RCAP works almost exclusively in communities of 10,000 or fewer people
- Most of our work is in communities with fewer than 2,500 people and often fewer than 1,000 people



# Training and certificate program for water and wastewater **administrative professionals**

# Our Agenda

- Describe why we focused on administrative professionals
- Identify the project team
- Explain what we are doing with this effort
- Discuss what we hope to achieve long-term



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# Why administrative professionals?

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# Why Administrative Professionals?

- 1 There aren't programs *specifically* for this audience

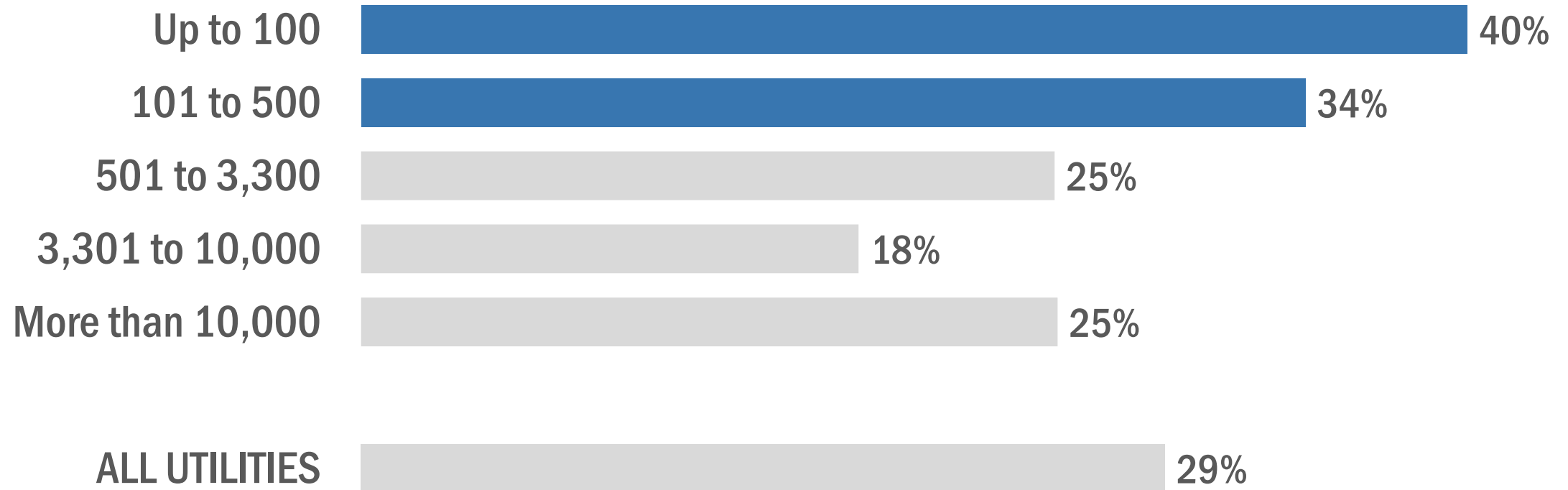
# Created under EPA's **Innovative** Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Program



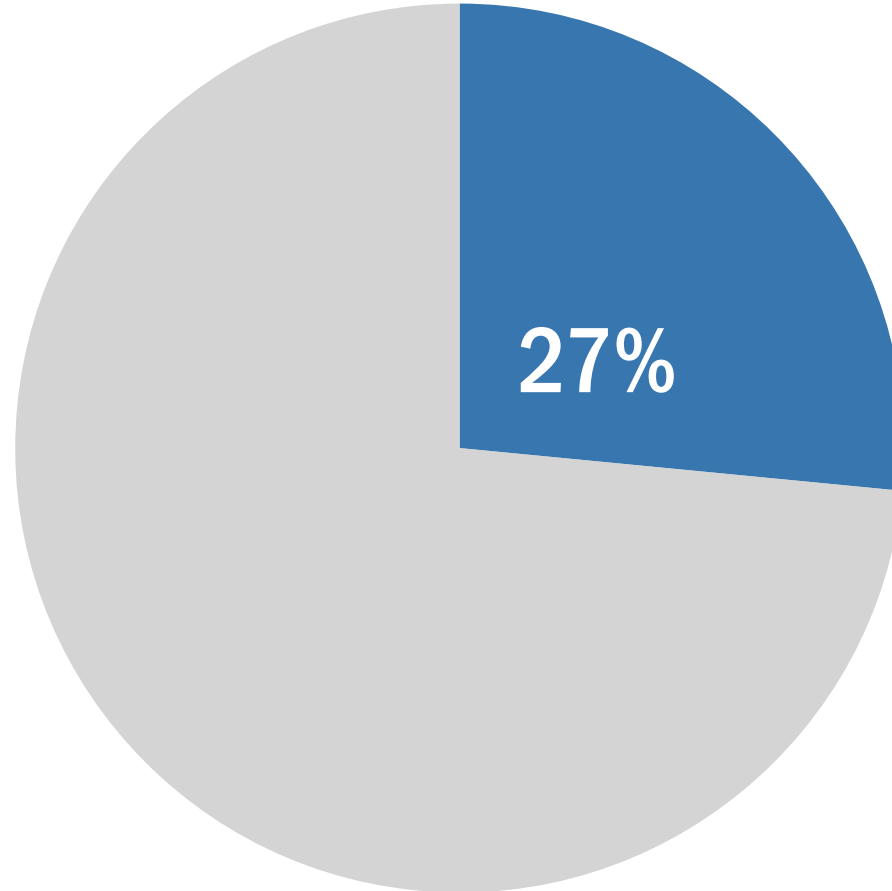
# Why Administrative Professionals?

- 1 There aren't programs *specifically* for this audience
- 2 Most small community utilities only have a single administrative professional

Communities **serving up to 500 people** are most likely to have a single person performing administrative functions.



More than a quarter of utility administrative professionals have been on the job **less than 2 years**.





# Why Administrative Professionals?

- 1 There aren't programs *specifically* for this audience
- 2 Most small community utilities only have a single administrative professional
- 3 They do **A LOT**

# Lisa's Story



# Sherry's Story



# Why Administrative Professionals?

- 1 There aren't programs *specifically* for this audience
- 2 Most small community utilities only have a single administrative professional
- 3 They do **A LOT**
- 4 They are often under-appreciated (and underpaid)



## An Opportunity

RCAP believes that one of the most effective ways to enhance small utility capacity development and regulatory compliance is to invest in leadership and management training for utility administrative professionals

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# The Project Team

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# The Project Team



# The Project Team





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# What exactly are we doing?

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## The Long-Term Vision

- Create a training program to develop the leadership and management knowledge, skills, and abilities of utility administrative professionals to improve utility TMF capacity
- In conjunction, offer them an opportunity to earn a certificate in utility management and leadership by sitting for a certificate exam

We could have done things the  
**easy way**...

# Psychometric Process

- Experts create reliable questions or tasks that measure specific traits, skills, or abilities
- People take the assessment under consistent conditions so results can be compared fairly
- Results are analyzed to provide insights about strengths, weaknesses, or suitability for certain roles

# Our Psychometrician

- Professional Testing, Inc.
- Has worked in the water sector before with Water Professionals International and with the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona



Professional Testing



**Step 1:**  
**Job-Task  
Analysis**



**Step 2:**  
**Study  
Guide**



**Step 3:**  
**Curriculum  
& Test**



**Step 4:**  
**Online  
Courses**



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# What Utility Administrative Professionals Do

- Managing water and wastewater service finances
- Managing water and wastewater service functions
- Complying with regulatory agencies
- Supporting and educating governing body members
- Communicating with stakeholders
- Facilitating capital improvement projects

Remember we said administrative professionals **do a lot?**

## In Total



**20**

Tasks



**200**

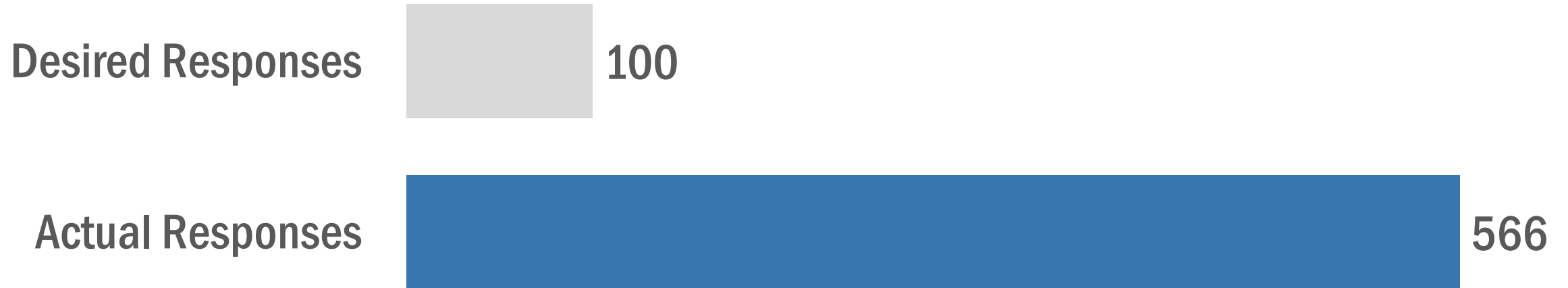
Steps

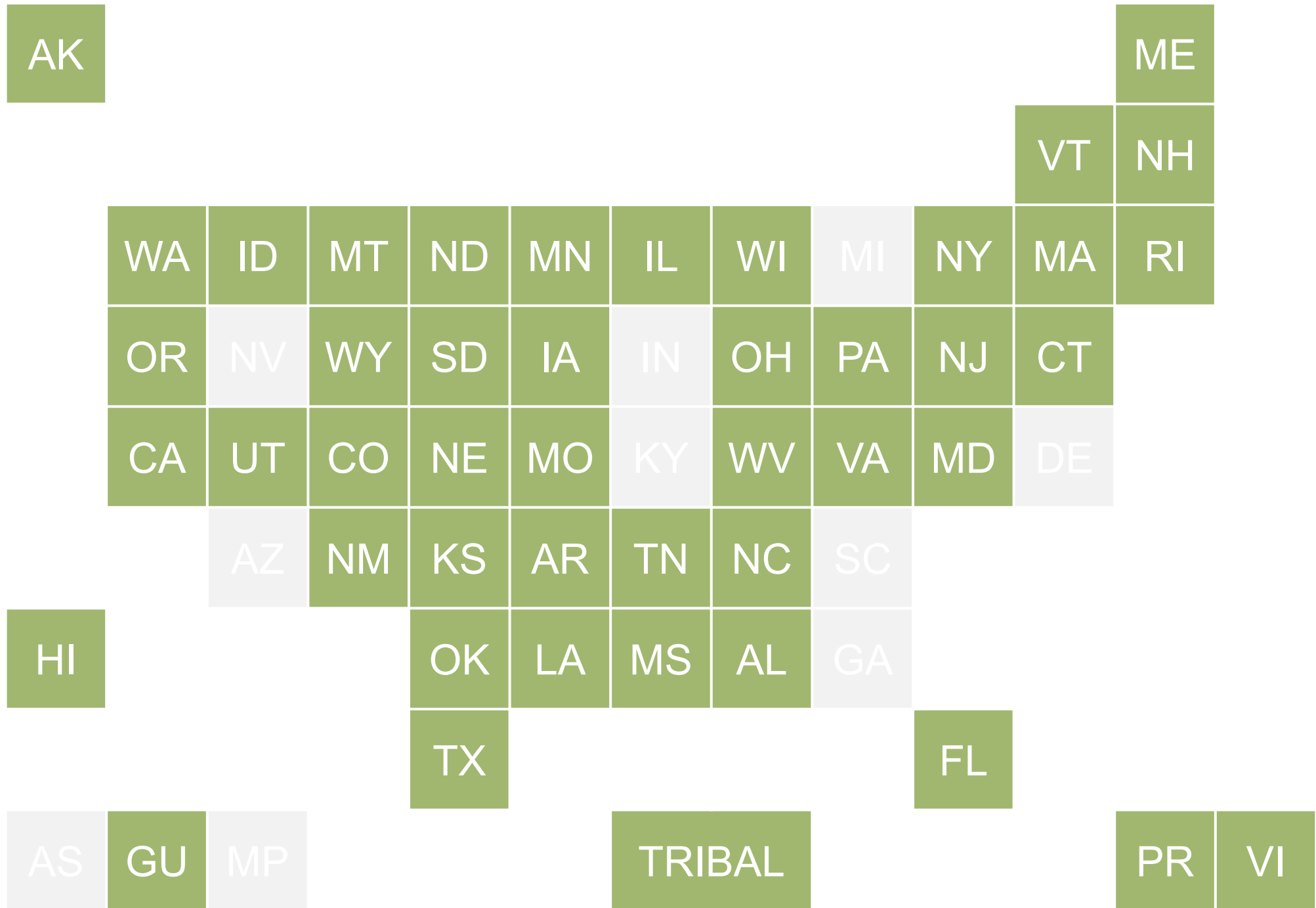


# National Survey



# Survey Results





# Survey Results

Before the Survey

35

Tasks

200

Steps

# Survey Results

Before the Survey

35

Tasks

200

Steps

After the Survey

35

Tasks

200

Steps



# What Utility Administrative Professionals Do

- Epitome of “other duties as assigned”
- Chief Problem Solver
- Essential

**Step 1:**  
**Job-Task  
Analysis**



**Step 2:**  
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## Back to the Job Task Analysis



35

Tasks



200

Steps

# Comprehensive Study Guide written as standard operating procedures

### Workforce Study Guide

#### Chapter A: Managing Water and Wastewater Service Finances

##### ***Conduct water and/or wastewater rate review to ensure financial stability***

Rates are important to water and wastewater utilities because they are the main source of money to run the system—paying for staff, electricity, chemicals, repairs, and saving for future projects. If rates are too low, the utility can't keep up with maintenance or meet regulations; if they're too high, they can create an unfair burden on customers. Administrative professionals play a key role in ensuring that rates are appropriate by preparing reports for rate reviews. Rates should be assessed each year as part of the budget process.

#### Review Current Rates

The revenue from rates charged to customers depends on several factors:

- Base Rate—a charge per billing period regardless of usage, expressed in dollars per billing period.
- Flow Rate—a charge based on the volume of water consumed, expressed in dollars per unit of measurement such as 1,000 gallons or hundred cubic feet.
- Billing Periods—the number of times per year customers receive bills.
- Bill Payment Rate—the percentage of dollars charged to customers that are paid to the utility.
- Price—what is charged for the base rate or flow rate.

To determine the annual expected revenue from rates, administrative professionals should calculate the revenues from the base rate and flow rate separately and then add them together. The formula for annual revenues from the base rate is:

$$\text{Base Rate} \times \text{Billing Periods} \times \text{Bill Payment Rate}$$

The formula for annual revenues from the flow rate is:

$$\text{Flow Rate} \times \frac{\text{Total Gallons Metered}}{\text{Unit of Measurement}} \times \text{Bill Payment Rate}$$

If the utility charges customers different rates based on customer class or meter size, the revenue from each group of customers will need to be calculated separately. If the utility

**Step 1:**  
**Job-Task  
Analysis**



**Step 2:**  
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**Step 4:**  
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# Test Bank

- Gathering in Washington, DC the week of November 10 to write the multiple-choice questions for the certificate exam

## 24 Hours of Training Content

- Half the content will be delivered live to participants
- Half will be self-paced eLearning modules
- All will be online

**Step 1:**  
**Job-Task  
Analysis**



**Step 2:**  
**Study  
Guide**



**Step 3:**  
**Curriculum  
& Test**



**Step 4:**  
**Online  
Courses**



Online courses will begin  
**Late Summer – Early Fall 2026**

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# What do we hope to achieve?

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# Better **compliance** for small systems

A recognized **credential**

More **recognition** for these  
amazing employees

# One More Amazing Administrative Professional

- Supervise operations personnel and oversee the execution of daily tasks and ongoing projects within the community
- Prepare and submit EPA-mandated reports, including Discharge Monitoring Reports (DMRs) and Consumer Confidence Reports (CCR), and assist the Utility Director in managing correspondence with the EPA
- Monitor the largest account for current and delinquent payments, and serve as a liaison between these agencies and the utility department

An expanded idea of who is a **leader** within organizations



*I wanted to reach out and say that I think this is a **great opportunity**, and I am excited to learn more. I have been a municipal clerk for over 15 years and have **always had responsibilities that specifically included water system compliance**. I am currently serving as Town Clerk, and I am directly responsible for supervising and monitoring the Town's water system.*



## For More Information

Sherry Schmidt

701-220-5119

[sschmidt@rcap.org](mailto:sschmidt@rcap.org)



# Q&A Session

**Webinar slides and recording will be sent to registrants in the next week.**



Audio



Video



Q&A



Show captions



More



End

# Thank you!



United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency



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WATER AGENCIES



American Water Works  
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Water Environment  
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