



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Pacific Southwest / Region 9

# Clean Water Indian Set-Aside Program

Water Division  
Tribal Infrastructure Section • October 2025

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## What is the CWISA Program?

The Clean Water Act Indian Set-Aside (CWISA) Program grants funding for wastewater infrastructure to federally-recognized Tribal governments and Alaska Native Villages. Funds may be used for planning, design, and construction of wastewater collection and treatment systems. The CWISA Program was established in Section 518(c) of the 1987 Amendments to the Clean Water Act, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers the program in cooperation with the Indian Health Service (IHS).

## How to Apply

EPA provides funding for projects listed in the IHS Sanitation Deficiency System (SDS). To apply for funding from the CWISA Program, Tribes must first contact their IHS Area Office ([www.ihs.gov/dsfc/staff](http://www.ihs.gov/dsfc/staff)) to determine if their wastewater needs are eligible for entry into the SDS.



## How Does the CWISA Program Work?

The SDS identifies current sanitation deficiencies for existing Tribal homes; projects that support future growth will not be considered. EPA uses the SDS to identify and select priority wastewater projects for funding in coordination with IHS based on the ranking of projects in the SDS and available CWISA funding. Projects are prioritized in the SDS based on eight factors: health impact, existing deficiency level, previous service, capital cost, operation and maintenance capability, Tribal contributions, local tribal priority, and local conditions. For example, projects that resolve public health concerns rank higher than projects designed to rectify water quality problems. The funds are awarded annually, based on the wastewater project needs on the SDS list, per interagency agreements with the IHS or through direct grants to federally recognized Tribes.

## Annual Funding Levels

EPA Region 9 expects to receive approximately \$18 million in fiscal year 2026. That allocation is determined by relative sewer needs in SDS nationwide.

### Tentative Project Funding Timeline

Year 1	January – May	Tribes identify sanitation needs to IHS Area Offices
	June	Deadline for submission of Tribal needs to IHS Areas
	June – July	IHS Areas review and rank projects submitted to the SDS
	August – October	IHS HQ reviews IHS Area SDS project submissions
	November	Final SDS lists made available to EPA CWISA Program
Year 2	December – March	EPA Regional CWISA Programs select projects from SDS
	April – September	EPA Regional CWISA Programs notify Tribes of selected projects and award CWISA Program funds

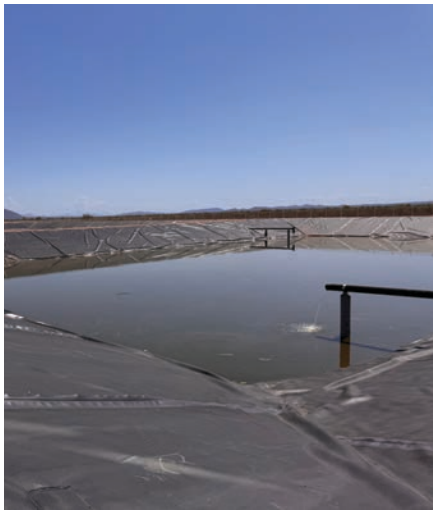
## Eligible Projects

All projects funded by the CWISA Program must support wastewater-related activities or projects. CWISA Program funds cannot be used to pay for the cost of operation and maintenance of the wastewater facility, nor can they be used to pay for repairs to the treatment system in emergency situations. Project components eligible for funding include:

- Project planning, design, and Preliminary Engineering Report (PER)
- Infrastructure construction and major sewer rehabilitation
- Wastewater treatment facilities (conventional or alternative)
- Correction of combined sewer overflows
- Collector sewer pipelines
- On-site wastewater treatment systems (e.g., septic systems)
- Follow-up and as-built drawings of funded wastewater projects
- Initial operator training to support infrastructure equipment.



*Final inspection of the new wastewater lagoon.*



*Completed wastewater lagoon, part of the new gravity collection system.*

## Project: Archie Hendrick's Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility – A Cooperative Approach to Wastewater Improvements

In 2007, the sewer system for the Archie Hendrick's Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility on the Tohono O'odham Nation featured a gravity sewer collection system, a sewer lift station, and a wetlands wastewater treatment system. By 2017, the treatment system was functioning like a lagoon but wasn't designed properly for it. In 2018, the EPA funded a project with the Indian Health Service (IHS) to plan alternatives to replace the wetlands system. In 2022, IHS released a report suggesting a new gravity sewer system and an off-site lagoon, similar to other systems run by the Tohono O'odham Utility Authority (TOUA).

The Tohono O'odham Nursing Care Authority (TONCA) proposed a unique funding plan: TONCA would pay for construction, TOUA would handle contracting, and IHS would manage the project. Construction began in September 2024 and finished in August 2025. The new sewer system removed the need for the problematic lift station and wetlands system, freed up land for future expansion, and solved odor and operational problems. This project succeeded thanks to the teamwork of the EPA, IHS, TOUA, and TONCA, showcasing how agencies can work together for the benefit of the Tohono O'odham Nation.

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