



ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR WATER

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

March 4, 2026

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Delivering RealWaterTA: Back to the Basics of Public Health Protection. Direction on Providing Technical Assistance to Support Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act Compliance, Water System Operations, and Financial Readiness

FROM: Jessica L. Kramer

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica L. Kramer", is placed to the right of the printed name.

TO: U.S. EPA Office of Water
Regional Administrators
Regional Water Division Directors
Environmental Finance Centers
EPA-Supported Water Technical Assistance Providers

Purpose

Ensuring that drinking water is safe and wastewater is properly managed is vital to protecting public health for all Americans. Technical assistance provides foundational support to water systems that deliver safe drinking water and clean wastewater services day-in and day-out. This memorandum reaffirms the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Water's commitment to working collaboratively with water systems across the country to implement proven technical assistance that addresses the water quality and infrastructure concerns of Americans and their communities. This memorandum provides structure on how technical assistance — funded through EPA grants, contracts or cooperative agreements — shall be provided to water systems to ensure efficient and appropriate use of taxpayer dollars that brings real compliance and infrastructure improvements to communities across the United States.

Unfortunately, a memorandum titled *Implementation of EPA Water Technical Assistance* (dated March 24, 2023) undermined historical core tenets of EPA programs established and funded to provide technical assistance to water systems across the country. "Measurable" outcomes stemming from the policy set forth in the 2023 Memo saw precious taxpayer-funded resources that are designed to protect public and environmental health, used for nebulous actions like updating a university's website and "fostering regional communication," ironically justified with unquantifiable impacts like "enhanced learning outcomes." Additionally, these precious dollars were approved for spending on items like "storytelling" and "reducing climate change impacts."

It is time to refocus the funding, resources, and programmatic implementation of technical assistance to align with the Office of Water’s core mission of protecting public health through implementation of the Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act, and to ensure accountability through tangible and measurable outcomes in which every American can be confident. Therefore, this memorandum serves to rescind the 2023 Memo and to course correct and rebrand the misaligned “WaterTA” model.

EPA’s new RealWaterTA initiative will better serve water systems and state partners, and keep funds moving smoothly through a back-to-basics approach focusing on proven, best-practice technical assistance methods. The goal of RealWaterTA is to directly assist more water systems to reliably provide safe drinking water and effectively treat wastewater over the long term. Within this overarching goal, the Office of Water expects this back-to-basics approach to benefit small, rural and tribal water systems. Many of the water systems serving these areas lack resources to pursue endeavors suggested by the 2023 Memo that inappropriately extend beyond the scope of compliance with SDWA and CWA requirements to protect public health.

The foundational statutory and regulatory requirements of the State Revolving Fund programs continue to apply, including those for: communities meeting affordability criteria (as referenced in the CWA) and “disadvantaged communities” (under the SDWA). Statutory and regulatory requirements for project eligibility also continue to apply. Technical assistance providers should be aware that several Executive Orders¹ require different policies from earlier EPA memoranda.

Moving forward, RealWaterTA will provide an authentic model for delivering technical assistance that makes a direct impact to meet local water infrastructure needs. RealWaterTA will move away from the amorphous and expansive nature of the “WaterTA” model. Instead, RealWaterTA will ensure delivery of technical assistance that is focused and targeted to help ensure that all Americans have access to clean and safe water services. This requires ensuring that technical assistance providers are working towards measurable targets and are accountable to defined outcomes. Specifically, the direction of this memorandum is to ensure that technical assistance is focused on enabling water systems to achieve and maintain compliance with CWA and SDWA requirements, and to develop their workforce and build financial, operational, and managerial capabilities to provide clean and safe water over the long term with a concerted focus on rural America, where small systems face unique challenges.

Additionally, the Office of Water will ensure that its direct technical assistance work addresses real-world challenges related to implementing the CWA and SDWA. The Office of Water will develop and provide on-the-ground technical assistance that employs applied research reflecting the alignment of science and policy work within the agency.

RealWaterTA moves away from the “WaterTA” language that runs counter to achieving real, tangible public health outcomes related to clean and safe water services. Further, this memorandum provides direction on the use of technical assistance as a core element of CWA and SDWA implementation

¹ e.g., Executive Order 14148, Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions; Executive Order 14151; Executive Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy

through improved access by water systems to available water infrastructure funding, including the longstanding State Revolving Fund programs, newer financing tools like EPA's Water Infrastructure Financing and Innovation Act (WIFIA) loan program, EPA water grants, and infrastructure funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other resources.

Delivering RealWaterTA

Following this memorandum, U.S. EPA Headquarters programs, EPA Regions and technical assistance providers funded through EPA grants, contracts or cooperative agreements shall align technical assistance activities with the following eight priorities. This work will also adhere to all applicable Executive Orders² that are in effect:

- ***Support Returning to and Maintaining Compliance:*** Technical assistance should be used to support water system operations and maintenance to achieve and maintain CWA and SDWA compliance. This includes identifying drivers of noncompliance, finding right-sized infrastructure solutions to address noncompliance while supporting financial solvency, understanding and implementing CWA and SDWA requirements, and assisting with funding applications. Technical assistance should help communities with known and quantifiable risks of noncompliance that represent a clear and present threat to public health and the environment. Technical Assistance providers shall also particularly reach out to and support systems located in rural communities, many of which lack significant funding resources to address severe infrastructure aging risks.
- ***Focus on Traditional and Innovative Water Infrastructure:*** Technical assistance should prioritize water infrastructure that is essential to statutory and regulatory compliance and continuity of service, with a focus on traditional water infrastructure (e.g., pipes, pumps, collection lines, and treatment plant components). Technical assistance should also advance preparedness, security measures, and innovative technologies such as fit-for-purpose water reuse. Providers should not use technical assistance as a means to advance local or state climate goals and technical assistance should be strictly tethered to CWA and SDWA authorities and compliance or as otherwise authorized. Infrastructure recommendations should be based upon the most efficient and cost-effective means to achieving long-term compliance with the CWA and SDWA and ensuring long-term continuity of water services.
- ***Define the Scope of Technical Assistance:*** Technical assistance providers should focus on directly engaging with water systems to provide scientific, engineering, and financial expertise. Any use of federal funds on activities with unclear outcomes, such as email campaigns and websites, whose influence and impact are difficult to measure, should be *de minimis* in amount and, if expended, should demonstrably support the priorities of RealWaterTA.
- ***Strengthen Technical, Managerial, and Financial (TMF) Management:*** Strong TMF capabilities are necessary for systems to achieve and maintain compliance, so it is essential that technical

² e.g., Executive Order 14148, Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions; Executive Order 14151; Executive Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy

assistance supports TMF capability development. Technical assistance should provide scientific and engineering expertise, operational help, and assistance in understanding sustainable financial management practices such as asset management, fiscal planning, rate-setting and water system restructuring.

- **Empower the Water Workforce:** Technical Assistance will recognize the vital role of the water workforce in operating and maintaining water infrastructure that is key to statutory and regulatory compliance. Where applicable, TA providers should invest in water workforce initiatives that support workforce recruiting, training and skill development. Additionally, providers should recognize the accelerated adoption of technological advancements in water systems and help ensure that training opportunities keep pace.
- **Improve Financial Readiness and Access to Financial Assistance:** Technical assistance should be coordinated with the specifications and requirements of financial assistance programs. For example, assistance should be coordinated with the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds to assess financial health, prepare systems for SRF assistance, and support viable infrastructure projects. Additional sources of funding support may include state funding, EPA's WIFIA program, EPA water grants and USDA water infrastructure funding. TA providers should guide systems to one or more funding programs based upon the specific needs and qualifications of the system.
- **Reduce Inefficient Costs:** To the greatest extent possible, technical assistance providers should minimize costs that do not directly benefit communities. Costs such as unnecessary travel, food for conferences, and printing can eat into the funds available to support important technical assistance. These types of costs ultimately limit the ability to maximize the benefits of essential technical assistance to communities that need it most.
- **Drive Real-world Results:** Technical assistance should be results-driven and outcome-focused. Providers are expected to define clear objectives at the outset of assistance and track progress towards measurable outcomes. All technical assistance providers should develop and maintain documented examples that identify where and what TA activities were conducted and the tangible outcomes achieved for the utilities served and should provide sufficient supporting documentation (qualitative and quantitative, as appropriate) that describes and substantiates those results in detail. Programs will be held accountable for ensuring that technical assistance resources are used effectively and are producing tangible compliance gains and enhancing project design and delivery.

Technical Assistance is essential for effective and efficient implementation of the Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act. Through RealWaterTA, EPA and its partners will better support communities in achieving real water system improvements that protect public health.