

Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grant Program

2025 Update



Program Summary

The Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grant Program was authorized by the America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 and codified under the Safe Drinking Water Act. A component of EPA's broader water workforce efforts, this program provides funds to accelerate career pipelines in the water utilities sector, provide access to water utility workforce opportunities, and expand the public's awareness about the different job opportunities in the water sector.

The Workforce Development Grant Program grantees help get apprentices hired, build career pathways to enter the water workforce, and raise awareness among the public. The program has encompassed a diverse array of initiatives over the years aimed at enhancing leadership, education, workforce development, and community engagement within the water sector. The program has also strengthened partnerships with utilities, educators, and workforce boards. Our grantees provide workforce development opportunities through a variety of activities.

- **Project Area 1:** Targeted internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship programs.
- **Project Area 2:** Education programs designed for elementary, secondary, and higher education students that inform people about the role of water and wastewater utilities in their communities.
- **Project Area 3:** Regional industry and workforce development collaborations.
- **Project Area 4:** Leadership development occupational training, mentoring, or cross-training programs.
- **Project Area 5:** Education and training programs, including internship or apprenticeship programs, designed for decentralized water workers.



21 grants funded by the Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Program

\$16 million awarded for workforce development programs



Over **600 participants** were trained and received certificates, offers of employment, or promotions

Program History



Inaugural Round Recipients Fiscal Year 2020-2021 \$3.8 Million

- 1) [East Central University](#) (Oklahoma)
- 2) [Rowan University](#) (New Jersey)
- 3) [Wichita State University](#) (Kansas)
- 4) [Grand Rapids Community College](#) (Michigan)
- 5) [Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Government](#) (Ohio)
- 6) [Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust](#) (Washington State)
- 7) [Syracuse University](#) (New York)
- 8) [Rural Community Assistance Partnership](#) (Washington, D.C.)
- 9) [American Water Works Association](#) (Colorado)



Second Round Recipients Fiscal Year 2023-2024 \$16 Million

- 1) [WaterNow Alliance](#) (California)
- 2) [American Water Works Association](#) (Colorado)
- 3) [Rural Community Assistance Partnership Inc.](#) (Washington, D.C.)
- 4) [The Water Tower Institute, Inc.](#) (Georgia)
- 5) [Pacific International Center for High Tehnology Research](#) (Hawaii)
- 6) [Wichita State University](#) (Kansas)
- 7) [Baltimore City Department of Public Works](#) (Maryland)
- 8) [Center for Watershed Protection, Inc.](#) (Maryland)
- 9) [Grand Rapids Community College](#) (Michigan)
- 10) [Board of Regents Nevada System of Higher Education](#) (Nevada)
- 11) [University of New Mexico](#) (New Mexico)
- 12) [National Rural Water Association](#) (Oklahoma)

Information about the grant program and other EPA activities related to the water workforce can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/water-infrastructure-sector-workforce>.



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Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Government: Toledo, Ohio

The Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG) is a regional organization that received grant funds through the USEPA Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Program in 2022. Through their grant, TMACOG partnered with Owens Community College, the City of Toledo, and utility partners in northwest Ohio to develop the Water Treatment Professions certification program. This college-accredited certification program prepares students for the State of Ohio EPA Operator Certification Exam to become licensed drinking water or wastewater treatment professionals. The USEPA grant covers the cost of tuition, test preparation support, and the cost of the certification exam. A key to the program's

success was the formation of the Water Workforce Coalition, a partnership of local water and wastewater utilities that provide students with on-the-job training and employment opportunities post-graduation.

Lisa Barber completed the Water Treatment Profession Certificate Program in May 2024. After completing the program she was hired by the City of Toledo as a Class 1 Water Supply Operator-in-training and has since been promoted to become a Water Control Room Operator.

Case Studies

The Water Tower Institute: Buford, Georgia

The Water Tower Institute in Buford, Georgia has developed a Water Workforce Training and Recruitment Hub with a utility, academic, and nonprofit network focused on expanding internships and post-secondary bridge programs. The Institute's efforts will result in an increase in number of certified water operators in the drinking water, wastewater, water recycling, and stormwater fields. This program is building upon The Water Tower Institute's nationally recognized skilled trade water industry training facility, programming, and partnerships to benefit a wider audience across the U.S.

Rachel Meltz completed the Wastewater Operator Course during the Summer 2025 cohort. After earning her state certification, she received interview invitations from both public and private sector employers, and accepted a wastewater operator position.





Grand Rapids Community College: Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) West Michigan Water Careers Program embodies all four key elements of developing a water workforce: recruitment, retention, competency, and community partnerships. Through their grant, GRCC expanded its industry and workforce development collaborations to help bring community members into well-paying jobs within the water sector and to increase the overall awareness of the career pathways available to those community members.

GRCC and their partners accomplished this through three programs: the Water Work Internship Program, the Water Careers Camp, and Water Pool-ooza (a free program aimed at educating community members about sustainability, conservation, and careers in water-related fields). In all three programs students gained hands-on experience – approximately 9,500 students participated across all outreach events.

Wichita State University: Wichita, Kansas

The Future Water Leaders (FWL) program is a unique and innovative K-12 water education and career exploration program. Wichita State University and project partners have used their grant to enhance the FWL program by developing Internship Program Leads and providing support to those leads with program tools, technical assistance, lessons learned, and long-term sustainability planning. Internships through the FWL provide high schoolers opportunities for water career exploration and practice, further building the pipeline from the classroom to water careers.

One Kansas-based intern remarked “I learned a lot of very valuable skills that will help me in my career such as learning to rebuild CI-17’s, run tests, rebuild chlorine rooms in booster stations, see how our system and everything works in the distribution, and finally see how to run SCADA.” Across the internship sites that have reported on their experiences, interns worked a combined total of 3,317 hours.



The American Water Works Association (AWWA): Denver, Colorado

The American Water Works Association's Transformative Water Leadership Academy (TWLA) is a unique and innovative mid-level leadership program for utility staff addressing four key elements necessary to develop the water workforce: recruitment, retention, competency and community partnerships. TWLA supports recruitment by strengthening the connection between current and future water leaders and their communities by bringing together individuals from all EPA regions, at different sized utilities, with different roles, to enhance their knowledge of the utility industry and grow together as leaders over a 10-month time frame. This is accomplished through twice monthly on-line sessions with experts in the water/leadership industry, quarterly small group discussions with TWLA graduate coaches, two in-person workshops, a capstone project and continuous mentorship opportunities. TWLA supports retention by instilling an organizational culture of growth and development in current utility employees, building the number and capacity of current water sector employees that are positioned to be the water utility leaders of the future.

TWLA Graduate '23, City of Lee's Summit Water Utility, Missouri

"Before joining TWLA, I was seriously considering leaving the water sector because I didn't feel like I truly belonged. But TWLA completely changed my perspective. The program opened my eyes to the immense potential for change within the industry. It birthed my passion and gave me a fresh outlook on the real power of my work and the impact I can make. Thanks to TWLA, I not only rediscovered my love for the water sector, but I also gained the confidence and motivation to push for positive change. TWLA helped me see my true value and empowered me to believe that I can play a key role in shaping the future of the water world."



Pacific International Center for Higher Technology Research: Hawaii

The Work-4-Water program is an 8-week pre-apprenticeship program, designed to prepare Hawai'i residents for essential careers in the decentralized water and wastewater sector. To ensure comprehensive learning, the course uses a hybrid model that blends self-paced webinars, virtual discussion classes, and training from industry experts. Upon completion, graduates receive a decentralized wastewater specialist certificate, a stipend, and career services to strengthen pathways into apprenticeship programs, on-the-job training, and the workforce.

In 2025, 32 students graduated from the first three cohorts across Hawai'i, Maui, and O'ahu Counties, with nine more cohorts scheduled for the coming year. The program's mission-driven model is yielding tangible results, as 74% of graduates are currently seeking roles in the water sector and six have already secured on-the-job training placements. The program is also shifting industry demographics, with female graduates representing 59% of cohorts, nearly triple the national average of 17.5% (Data USA, 2023).

These efforts are further supported by the online Decentralized Wastewater Resource and Training Center (DWRTC), which has reached 395 unique users and 1,582 views, doubling the grant's original engagement goals.

With 100% of participants reporting increased awareness of public health issues and 93% feeling ready for the field, the program has created a robust pipeline for the local workforce. Beyond technical skills, graduates emphasized the deep sense of community connection and personal growth fostered by the curriculum. As one participant noted, "I came in not knowing much about the water and wastewater industry, but I left feeling confident, informed, and inspired... it wasn't just about learning — it was about building a sense of purpose and connection to our community." Another graduate highlighted the cultural and personal significance of the training, stating, "This course is more than just learning about wastewater treatment; it is also about learning what you want to contribute to and where you see yourself in 5 years. I was able to take a step back and really consider who I want to be going forward and how I can best fulfill my kuleana while receiving immense support on this journey."



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