

# WATER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (WATERTA)

Internal deliberative pre-decisional - FOR USE BY 2024 PRESIDENT-ELECT TRANSITION TEAM MEMBERS ONLY

## ISSUE SUMMARY:

Disadvantaged, small, rural, and Tribal communities can lack the technical, managerial, and financial capacity to provide safe drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater services to their residents. Challenges include successfully accessing infrastructure funding, identifying the best-fit infrastructure technologies and processes, and maintaining and operating infrastructure over the long-term. The EPA's free Water Technical Assistance (WaterTA) services support communities to identify water challenges, develop plans, build capacity, and develop application materials to access water infrastructure funding.

## UPCOMING MILESTONES:

### 2024:

- Manage grant competition announced in September 2024 for \$49 million for Clean Water Rural, Small and Tribal technical assistance and training. The funding will be awarded to non-profit, technical assistance providers who will help communities with wastewater infrastructure needs and also guide them toward appropriate clean water funding options.
- Oversee the implementation of approximately \$30 million in FY2023 funding through the Training and Technical Assistance grant awarded to three TA providers in fall 2024 to support drinking water systems, publicly owned wastewater systems, and private well owners in small and rural communities.
- Launch a new WaterTA initiative to address Emerging Contaminants (ECs). This assistance will help eligible communities assess and address PFAS and EC and include best practice identification and sharing so they can better access available funding through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, commonly referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).
- Tribes/Territories BIL Implementation Support Contracts: OW is supporting the pre-award process for multiple contract actions that will provide direct technical assistance to Tribes and territories for clean water and drinking water infrastructure projects.

## BACKGROUND:

The EPA Office of Water has a history of providing water technical assistance to support communities to build capacity and address compliance challenges. The EPA expanded its WaterTA efforts to help more communities access BIL funding to address their water infrastructure needs; protect public health and the environment; and advance local environmental, social, and economic goals.

Communities that lack technical, managerial, and financial capacity seek assistance from the private sector, universities, other utilities, associations, community organizations and non-profits, and the state and federal government. Many smaller communities are "not networked," meaning they do not routinely receive and/or seek information or assistance from any assistance providers. WaterTA providers are generally non-profit organizations and public and private non-profit universities and colleges or EPA contractors. Through several new WaterTA initiatives, the Office of Water is also able to provide direct technical assistance to further the EPA's administration of BIL funding. This includes the State Revolving Fund (SRF) funding programs, the Emerging Contaminants in Small or Disadvantaged Communities Grant Program (for drinking water), and the Tribal set-aside funds from the SRF appropriations - the Drinking Water Infrastructure Grant Tribal Set-Aside (DWIG-TSA) and Clean Water Indian Set-Aside (CWISA) programs, and territory grant funding through SRF appropriations.

The EPA's free WaterTA can help communities:

- identify water challenges – including presence of lead pipes, addressing flooding and sewage backups, water system technical and capacity needs, and more;
- develop plans for solutions to these challenges – identifying the water infrastructure need and steps needed to address it;
- effectively engage the community in the process – ensuring all stakeholders have an opportunity to meaningfully engage in the process;
- work with systems to improve compliance with permit requirements and drinking water regulations, as well as improve reliable access in those areas that do not have water services;
- build technical, financial, and managerial capacity – including asset management, engineering needs and financial planning; and
- ultimately develop application materials to better access water infrastructure funding.

The following table provides an overview of the available EPA WaterTA programs and initiatives that provide technical assistance to utilities, municipalities, and Tribes to help them maintain regulatory compliance, improve resiliency, and build utility technical, managerial, and financial capacity.

WaterTA Program	Focus
<a href="#">Environmental Finance Centers (EFCs)</a>	EFCs provide technical assistance services to support communities to develop water infrastructure needs, develop funding applications, and address other capacity needs. Sixteen new regional BIL-funded EFCs and four new national BIL-funded EFCs will support access to Bipartisan Infrastructure Law resources and facilitate effective administration of the SRF program.
<a href="#">Training and Technical Assistance for Small Systems Grant Program</a>	Provides grant funding to eligible technical assistance providers to assist small drinking water utilities with Safe Drinking Water Act compliance, support improved water quality efforts for small and decentralized wastewater systems, and support private drinking water well owners to improve water quality.
<a href="#">Clean Water Rural, Small, and Tribal (RST) Technical Assistance Grant Program</a>	Provides grant funding to eligible nonprofit organizations to support rural, small municipalities, and Tribal governments to access finance/funding and to support rural, small, and Tribal centralized and decentralized wastewater systems to build capacity to protect water quality and comply with the Clean Water Act.
<a href="#">Creating Resilient Water Utilities (CRWU)</a>	Provide technical assistance, training, and climate data resources to support water utilities as they pursue climate adaptation and resiliency strategies.
<a href="#">Area-Wide Optimization Program (AWOP)</a>	Provide tools and approaches for drinking water systems to meet water quality optimization goals and provide an increased – and sustainable – level of public health protection to their consumers.
<a href="#">Water Infrastructure and Resiliency Finance Center</a>	Provide financing information (e.g., a Clearinghouse of funding opportunities, State Revolving Fund 101 and other learning modules, and webinars) to help utilities make decisions for drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure.
<a href="#">Cybersecurity</a>	Offer online and in-person courses on water sector cybersecurity threats, vulnerabilities, consequences, best practices, resources, and program development. Additionally, the EPA offers free, confidential assessments and cybersecurity technical assistance to interested drinking water and wastewater utilities.
<a href="#">Drinking Water Rule Implementation and Compliance Assistance</a>	Provide on-site and webinar-based training that includes rule overviews and/or specific technical requirements to states and water system operators. The EPA also conducts virtual sanitary survey training for states.

<a href="#">Water Resilience</a>	Conduct trainings and exercises (both direct and classroom/webinar based) related to the disaster resilience of water and wastewater utilities against natural disasters.
<a href="#">Drinking Water Capacity Development</a>	Provide tools and resources to help water systems build their technical, managerial, and financial capacity, maintain certified operators, and establish partnerships.
<a href="#">Utility Workforce Development</a>	Webinars, case studies, and grant programs to support innovative workforce development practices at water and wastewater utilities.

In addition to the above WaterTA efforts, the Office of Water launched the following initiatives:

- [H<sub>2</sub>O Community Solutions Teams \(Pilot Initiative\)](#): Supported 29 communities to assess water infrastructure needs and make progress in accessing federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding.
- [Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap \(Pilot Initiative\)](#): Along with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development program, assisted 11 underserved areas with significant decentralized wastewater needs (or no wastewater infrastructure at all) to make progress in accessing Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding.
- [Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap Initiative](#): Expands the technical assistance services provided in the Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap pilot to provide direct technical assistance to approximately 150 underserved and disadvantaged communities with decentralized wastewater needs (or no wastewater infrastructure at all) to assist them with better accessing BIL funding.
- [Lead Service Line Replacement Accelerators \(Pilot Initiative\)](#): Along with Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, provides technical assistance to accelerate lead service line replacements and support access to Bipartisan Infrastructure Law SRF funding across 40 communities through 2024.
- [Get the Lead Out \(GLO\) Initiative](#): Expands the services provided in the Lead Service Line Replacement Accelerators pilot program to provide lead service line replacement planning technical assistance to approximately 200 underserved and disadvantaged communities, supporting them with better accessing BIL SRF funding.
- [WaterTA Engineering Support Initiative](#): Provides engineering expertise needed to apply for funding for water and wastewater infrastructure projects for 250 communities.

In 2023, the EPA launched a simple [webform](#) for communities to request WaterTA. As of October 11, 2024, 726 requests have been received, of which, 425 have been matched with either an Office of Water or a State-run TA initiative.

#### KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

- ☒ Congress      ☒ Industry      ☒ States      ☒ Tribes      ☒ Media      ☒ Other Federal Agency  
☒ NGO      ☒ Local Governments      ☒ Other: Water and wastewater utility organizations

#### MOVING FORWARD:

The EPA's Office of Water will continue to provide direct technical assistance to disadvantaged, small, rural, and Tribal communities that lack technical, managerial, and financial capacity to provide safe drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater services to their residents.

The EPA's Office of Water will continue to conduct communications and develop external-facing tools to help communities understand and access SRF funding as well as to support WaterTA providers in providing effective WaterTA that results in community trust-building and better access to SRF funding.

Furthermore, the EPA's Office of Water will continue to identify underserved and disadvantaged communities that could benefit from Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding in collaboration with states, Tribes, territories, community partners, and other key stakeholders.

LEAD OFFICE/REGION: OFFICE OF WATER LEAD OFFICE/REGION: OFFICE OF WATER  
OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: