

November 2023 SMALL COMMUNITY WATER INFRASTRUCTURE EXCHANGE (SCWIE) E-MAIL NEWSLETTER

The SCWIE Microsoft Teams Meeting took place on September 20th.

USEPA DRINKING WATER SRF UPDATE

On behalf of Keelan Baldwin, Steve Grossman, presented the following:

On September 6, 2023, USEPA sent the 7th Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment to Congress. The survey assesses the nation's public water systems' infrastructure needs over the next 20 years and is used to allocate DWSRF grants. The survey determined that drinking water systems will need \$629 billion for pipe replacement, treatment plant upgrades, storage tanks, and other key assets to ensure the public health, security and economic well-being of our cities, towns, and communities. You can find the Report to Congress, Allocation memo, fact sheets, and FAQs at <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/epas-7th-drinking-water-infrastructure-needs-survey-and-assessment>. In addition, USEPA is providing states and water systems the opportunity to conduct a one-time update of their service line material information. This updated information will be used for the FY24 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Lead Service Line Replacement funding allotments.

USDA/RURAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Megan Gernentz, noted that since October 1 USDA/RD is looking forward to seeing what Congress gives us for the next fiscal year and how that all plays out.

Megan noted that if your state had a disaster in calendar year 2022 (there were approximately 35 states that had disasters), you are potentially eligible for funding for water, sewer storm, solid waste projects. There is about \$350 million of grant dollars. This is being managed through RD's state local offices, so you need to contact to your state person. To apply, go to:

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rd-apply>. Scroll down and click on Water and Environmental Programs and proceed to Calendar Year 2022 Disaster Water Grants Program.

The one benefit about this program over maybe other programs is that it can help fund resilience into projects. Resilience can be a lot of different things. If interested, one should work with the state engineer at the RD Office or with the consulting engineer to determine eligibility.

With this money RD also is working to obtain some circuit writer technical assistance type money to help facilitate this. Through RD's clearance process, they are working on writing the rules and everything else for this for that. Hopefully in the next couple months, this will be out for publication and that funding will be available. Megan should have more to talk about this at the next SCWIE Teams meeting.

Megan noted a significant change for those people that have worked with RD in the past is that RD has been using 2010 census and SMHI population data. RD has transitioned to 2010 census population and 2021 MHI ACS data effective October 1st.

In response to the following question as to whether that applies only to natural disasters or would it apply to other disasters, Megan's response was that it has to be presidentially declared. The easiest way to see if it is presidentially declared is to go to FEMA's website <https://www.fema.gov/>

RURAL COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Sarah Buck reported that RCAP is getting their national category three Environmental Finance Centers (EFC) up and running*. (A category three is a National Water Infrastructure EFC.) RCAP has a few active projects and are happily taking referrals across the country and are really concentrating their national work in seven different buckets.

* RCAP is one of USEPA's new 29 Environmental Finance Centers RCAP that will help to ensure disadvantaged communities who need it most get access to the influx of federal infrastructure dollars over the next five years, through the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Loan Funds.

USEPA is currently building out a skills matrix to give everyone a little more clarity as to what that looks like, in which TA providers might be best for which things.

RCAP's seven categories (buckets) are:

Regionalization;

Storm water;

Lead;

Emerging contaminants;

Nontraditional systems, such as schools, manufactured housing communities and other non community systems;

Tribal and

Looking at clusters or communities that are on private wells or septic systems that are threats to public or environmental health.

(This is similar to closing the wastewater gap pilots that RCAP has been doing with USEPA and USDA by helping those communities look at and assess all of their different options and come up with an affordable and sustainable solution.)

Sarah noted that one of the things that RCAP has been doing as RCAP turns fifty this year is working with each of their six regional partners to pick some communities that RCAP has been working with to support them over the long term with technical assistance to bring about major game changes. In the past month, all have been posted on RCAP's website. To view them, Go to <https://www.rcap.org/rural-voices/>)

CREATING SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Deb Martin of the Ohio Rural Community Assistance Program presented a pilot project that was proposed and funded by the Ohio Water Development Authority (OWDA). The pilot project is a community and economic development project, not just a water and sewer related or storm water project. It is important to create these kinds of programs because for most small communities when the community invests in infrastructure, whether it is for water, sewer, storm water, or all three, it is probably the most significant investment the community will ever make. Deb's presentation, based upon her years of working with leadership from small communities, advocated for a strong need for collaboration.

For the funders and lenders to these projects, all have a direct stake in ensuring that these community projects are going to be sustainable over the long term.

There are all sorts of problems confronting small communities. These communities are losing population, have aging populations, have lost or risk losing one or more industries and/or a significant business and/or have the consolidation of one or more of their schools. Any or all of these factors will completely disrupt the community's ability to repay loans. While one can keep raising rates, one gets to a point where people are unable to pay and that is not the solution.

While water, waste water and storm water infrastructure are things that lay the foundation, they are not enough to create sustainable resilient communities. Deb noted that one must look more holistically at the needs of communities and look in a comprehensive way.

Some of the activities are fairly simple in communities in terms of the actions that are done to build support for collaboration with neighboring communities and with regional efforts. When one talks about regionalization, much happens in communities where its members already have been working much more closely with their neighbors.

Getting people within the community to collaborate more because that is the first step in really helping communities understand that a lot of people are doing a lot of great things in small communities.

Deb went on to say that if everyone just stays in their lane and does not really know what anyone else is doing, there are so many missed opportunities. The ability and willingness, however, to collaborate creates amazing things.

There is huge need to better educate the public about the value of infrastructure. Deb believes that right now a lot of small communities run away from action because typically if you are dealing with the public, people want to complain. Staff tend to shy away from working with the public.

When one engages and educates the public about the real value of what they are getting by presenting the safety of the water and sometimes the not so safe bottled

water, people become surprised and really have no idea. One needs to do a much better job educating the public about water infrastructure.

There are lots of reasons to focus on community engagement and focus on looking at the holistic needs of small communities in order to create communities that are resilient.

If the community loses a business, they are resilient enough to bounce back from that just as they are resilient enough to bounce back from disasters that may happen in the community, whether it be from climate change, natural or man-made disasters. We have to start thinking about those things in a much broader way and plan better.

A great example is the city of Columbiana, Ohio where Ohio RCAP has been working with the community for a few years funded by USDA/RD's Rural Community Development (RCD) Initiative.

Based upon Deb's work with small communities over the years, her conclusion is successful and thriving communities have a long term and broadly shared vision. The whole community needs to be engaged in it and understand where it is they are trying to get to because it is harder to get somewhere if you have no idea where you want to go in the first place,

They need to have that collaboration internally and externally with pro-active leadership. There are so many small communities that will say we have been doing it this way for a long time and yes you have. You, however, will keep doing things the way that you always do and obtain the results that you always get. The leadership needs to be pushed to take a little bit of a calculated risk.

It is important that existing assets are built upon to create a better foundation for the community. And having strong community engagement and people that have a real sense of place also is critical in having a sustainable community.

Deb promoted USEPA smart growth tools which can be viewed at (<https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-tools#General%20tools>) and principles. Communities are selected every year. Funds, however, are limited and few communities are selected each year. USEPA puts an emphasis on demonstrating strong community engagement, bringing numerous resources and various tools to be able to help small communities and focusing on green infrastructure to preserve open spaces

A lot of what USEPA is doing is aligned with the way that RCAP sees small communities and the vision that RCAP has for them.

One of the things presented to OWDA is the investment that OWDA made in the pilot project could help to leverage other funding. In addition to the USDA RCD grant previously mentioned, there was a grant from the Office of Community Services at the Department of Health and Human Services. More communities can be served when leveraging occurs

It cannot be emphasized enough that infrastructure should be separate from the other things that are going on in a community because it takes all of those things collectively to be able to develop a sustainable, resilient and thriving community.

NEWS FROM THE STATES

Montana - Federal Emerging Contaminants (EC) Funding

On behalf of Anna Miller, the key state contact from Montana's Water, Wastewater & Solid Waste Action Coordinating Team (W2SWACT), Steve Grossman presented the following report

Montana is applying their Federal Emerging Contaminants Funds in several ways. Montana has 4 major regional water systems. Many of the small communities in the state have manganese in their wells. In one of the regional systems, the state will drill a new deep well with good water quality and then pipe water to the smaller systems that it supports.

This also will allow for more efficient use of the water resource. In addition there will be water operating and cost efficiencies for the systems having the well. **6**

Furthermore, the funds will be used to update lab equipment in Montana's state lab, where communities send their test samples to detect contaminants.

If one is interested in learning more about this, please contact Anna at 406.444.6689 or annam@mt.gov

Texas

Dorothy Young, the key state contact from the Texas Water Infrastructure Coordination Committee (TWICC) who had yet to respond to the SCWIE Survey noted that TWICC meets every other month at a minimum and more, if necessary, particularly after disasters. She noted that if there is a need to rally for emergency funding, the group's members take turns. There are three types of members in the group. They come from regulatory agencies, assistance providers and funding agencies. Recently, however, members have joined from charitable organizations and some legal aid groups.

Dorothy concluded by stating that the word collaboration is wonderful and that is how they have gotten some really small systems squared away..

Update on SCWIE Website

Steve let everybody know that he has been in the process of updating the SCWIE website and as you read this, he still is. Over the last seven months he has e-mailed almost every key state SCWIE contact. While he still has another group to e-mail, there are a number of contacts who have yet to respond to him. If you have not yet done so, he will either be calling you or you can contact him at scwiecoordinator@gmail.com or call him at 614.668.9597 to update him on the status of you statewide support group. If you are one of the few that does not have a statewide support group, you can expect to hear from him.

Steve recently had a conversation with a contact from Rhode Island whose statewide support group had been dormant for several years. He had a really good call and hopes that he was able to energize that person to restart the group.

Steve noted the importance of statewide support groups. In addition to sharing information, Steve believes that almost every statewide group now is coordinating their activities with respect to projects for small communities. The next step for those who are not doing it, is as Deb Martin and Dorothy Young emphasized is collaboration. If you have successful example of collaboration by your group, please let me know and you can present at a future SCWIE Microsoft Teams Meeting.

Note to All readers

This e-mail newsletter is sent to all water funding officials currently listed on the SCWIE website (www.scwie.org). It is sent to all those who have requested that they wish to participate on the regular SCWIE Microsoft Teams Meeting as well as those who have requested that they wish to receive the newsletter. In addition, it is posted on the SCWIE website under Newsletters.

If you wish to participate in SCWIE's Microsoft Teams Meetings, please let me know

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