



An Equitable Water Future for All

Project Description October 2016

Water is the defining issue of our time—it has been steadily rising as a top of mind issue for community, business, and political leaders across the globe. In fact, the World Economic Forum identifies water crises as one of the greatest risks we face in this decade. Water shapes economic growth, the environment, and the very social fabric of our communities. Through this project, the US Water Alliance will explore how water management impacts disadvantaged communities with a focus on advancing programs and policies that can secure a sustainable water future for all Americans.

The good news is that progress is happening on multiple fronts. For example, utilities are deploying a range of approaches to contribute to a more equitable society—from low-income assistance programs, to workforce development and inclusive contracting, to leveraging capital projects to foster neighborhood revitalization. Private companies are engaging in efforts to restore watersheds and enrich communities they operate in. Community-based organizations that have historically worked on issues such as affordable housing and transportation, are turning their attention to local water concerns. A growing number of philanthropic organizations are incorporating water into their portfolio of investments to build a society and economy that works for everyone.

The US Water Alliance is undertaking a two-year project to better understand, catalogue, and accelerate the adoption of promising programs and policies that improve outcomes for disadvantaged communities through inclusive and integrated water management.

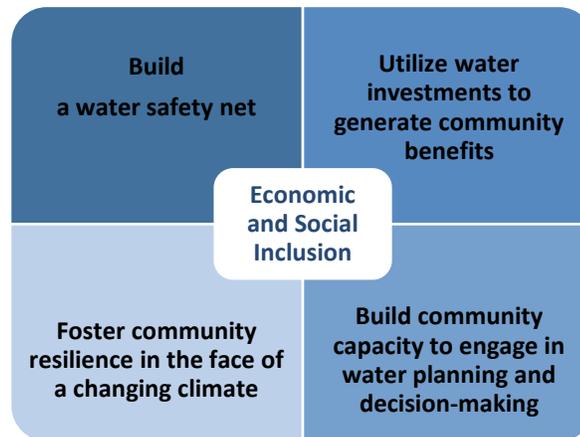
The Four Pillars of Water Inclusion

This project will explore four areas where water management can foster economic and social inclusion.

- **Build a water safety net.** One of the crowning achievements of the past century was investment in water and wastewater systems that provide the majority of Americans with safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water and wastewater service. While great progress has been made, there are still some Americans who do not have reliable access to life's most essential resource. As costs for system improvements and maintenance increase, affordability for lower-income people is a growing concern. A secure water future will require building a water safety net that provides a basic level of access to safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water and wastewater service—regardless of income.
- **Utilize water investments to generate community benefits.** As water utilities rebuild and upgrade water systems, there is an opportunity to maximize economic, environmental, and social improvements for disadvantaged communities. This includes workforce training, access to high-quality jobs in the water industry, contracting opportunities, and catalyzing neighborhood improvements.
- **Foster community resilience in the face of a changing climate.** From droughts to flooding, the impacts of a changing climate are often experienced in communities as water-related stresses. As we fortify

water and wastewater systems in the face of a changing climate, we have an opportunity to plan for and implement projects in a manner that make disadvantaged communities more resilient.

- **Build community capacity to engage in planning and governance.** Disadvantaged communities sometimes lack the technical knowledge to effectively engage in what are often complex planning and decision-making processes related to water management. Building the capacity of community leaders to effectively contribute to and shape these processes and investment decisions can help forge common-ground, sustainable solutions to how we manage water in America.



Project Activities

- **Conduct a National Scan and Develop National Clearinghouse.** The Alliance will conduct a national scan to identify and catalogue the stakeholders—water utilities, community-based organizations, national organizations, companies, foundations, researchers, and others—that are working on issues related to water management and disadvantaged communities. Coupled with a literature review, the findings from the national scan will inform the development of a clearinghouse that can serve as a resource for stakeholders who want to understand the field of practice and to connect with others.
- **Develop National Briefing Paper.** The national scan will inform the development of a national briefing paper that will explore the opportunities, challenges, and promising practices for securing a sustainable water future for all people and communities. The briefing paper will also lay the foundation for establishing a national taskforce.
- **Establish National Task Force.** The US Water Alliance will convene a taskforce of diverse representatives that include water industry leaders, those working on economic and social inclusion, advocates, philanthropic leaders, the private sector, and policymakers. Over the course of a year, the taskforce will work together to develop a national agenda and action plan focused on how water management can better integrate the needs of disadvantaged communities throughout the United States.
- **Host Community Conversations.** The taskforce will host four community conversations to closely examine the varied dimensions of how water management impacts disadvantaged communities. The US Water Alliance will work with members of the taskforce to identify stakeholders in each region—the American West, the Deep South, the Great Lakes, and the Northeast—that can speak to the challenges and solutions being advanced to support a safe and reliable water future for all.

- **Storytelling.** The US Water Alliance will document the community conversations and produce a storytelling project that brings a human dimension to this work.
- **Craft a National Agenda and Action Plan.** Based on the community conversations and the deliberations of the national taskforce, the US Water Alliance will develop and disseminate a national agenda and action plan to advance a more equitable water future for all.

About the US Water Alliance

The US Water Alliance is dedicated to advancing policies and programs to secure a sustainable water future for all. Established in 2008, the Alliance is a nationally-recognized nonprofit organization that educates the nation about the true value of water and the need for investment, accelerates the adoption of one water policies and programs, and celebrates innovation in water management. The Alliance brings together diverse interests to identify and advance common-ground, achievable solutions for our nation’s most pressing water challenges. Our membership includes water providers, public agencies, business leaders, environmental organizations, community leaders, policy organizations, and more. To learn more, visit <http://uswateralliance.org/>