

SAFER Drinking Water Advisory Group Meeting #4

Meeting Notes | November 17, 2022

Overview

The Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group (AG) meeting included discussions on process improvements and performance indicators, and 2023 drinking water needs assessment. Staff shared written updates on the Administrator Handbook Board Meeting, the Advisory Group Member applications, and job openings within the SAFER Drinking Water Program.

Process Improvements & Performance Indicators Discussion

Funding Process

- Positive feedback on clearer application guidelines, consolidation procedures, and involvement with the engagement unit.
- Improved regular follow up by the project manager as projects move forward.
- Need for greater SAFER Program promotion to help advance funding opportunities for counties and local communities.
- Concern with the slow process of initiating conversations with small rural counties to educate and provide resources to start projects for domestic wells and state smalls.
- Helpful to be able to submit a general application and have more involvement with Division of Financial Assistance staff.
- Confusion at the local level regarding how to understand the application process and at what point in the process their application is in.
- Positive feedback on technical assistance (TA) providers engaging in community outreach efforts.
- Positive feedback on engaging with multiple stakeholders to fund projects expeditiously.
- Positive feedback on administrators and TA providers helping speed up the process to move projects forward.

Process Improvement Priorities

- Need for community engagement to educate and inform communities about water quality and well testing.
- Agreement to have available funds for starting and completing projects.
- Create and organize partnerships between local leaders, county, and State Water Board to address contaminated water issues in disadvantaged communities.
- Accelerate TA process from six months to 30-60 days.
- Streamline the CEQA process to implement projects quicker.
- Overall agreement to consider previous projects as an opportunity to streamline projects.

Recommendations

- Funding availability for local communities and counties with water affordability, water contamination, and overdraft challenges.
- Provide storytelling and messaging on the impacts of the 553 SAFER projects completed and use lessons learned to streamline processes.
- Provide trainings for TA providers and State Water Board staff to ensure consistency and prevent confusion and frustration.

- TA providers to manage the project from start to finish and provide a case study for sharing 2023 Drinking Water Needs Assessment

Changes for the 2023 Needs Assessment

- Overall agreement on the changes for the 2023 Needs Assessment.
- Recommendation to incorporate information about challenges and needs, such as political and social dynamics as well as well infrastructure and geologic conditions.
- Provide funding opportunities for domestic well owners who do not qualify as low-income households nor have access to RCAC funds.

Other Water System Performance Metrics

- Recommendation to consider funds for microplastic testing for small water systems.
- Concern with turnaround time to find well drillers and drilling costs for domestic wells.
- Concern about the confidence level with one data point in counties for domestic wells with water quality risk.
- Recommendation to include a metric for fire flow capacity.
- Concern with year-to-year metric inconsistencies makes it difficult to see the overall impact.

Advisory Group Member Announcements

- California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley is a group of partners, including the State Water Board and Self-Help Enterprises (SHE), who meet regularly to address water-related initiatives like drought and emergency water issues. This group has been a very instrumental resource to drive emergency drinking water solutions. SHE has expanded their SAFER-funded domestic well and emergency drinking water program to train other counties and offer similar domestic well and emergency programs.

Advisory Group Attendance (P= present, A= absent)

Horacio Amezcua: P	Jennifer Hazard: P	Jonathan Rash: P
Sergio Carranza: P	Jianmin Huang: P	Michael Rincon: P
Kassy Chauhan: P	Don James: P	Emily Rooney: P
Sandra Chavez: A	Rami Kahlon: P	Isabel Solorio: P
Esther Espinoza: P	Maria Luisa Muñoz: P	James Sullivan: P
Cástulo Estrada: P	Michael S. Prado Sr.: P	Ethel See Winchell: A

State Water Board Attendance

Division of Drinking Water: Andrew Altevogt, Karen Nishimoto, Kristyn Abhold

Division of Financial Assistance: Meghan Tosney, Jasmine Oaxaca

Office of Public Participation: Adriana Renteria, Marina Perez, Haydee Yonamine, Caroline Pradeau Fonseca

Office of Chief Counsel: Douglas Bojack, Lauren Marshall