

SAFER Drinking Water Advisory Group Meeting #1

Meeting Notes | March 2, 2023

Overview

The Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group participated in a half-day meeting that included discussions on the draft SAFER Work Plan for 2023-2025. Staff shared written updates on SAFER Advisory Group (AG) member appointments, program goal progress and timelines, consolidation projects, upcoming workshops and 2022-2023 legislation.

SAFER Work Plan 2023-2025

State Water Board staff presented the draft SAFER Work Plan for 2023-2025, followed by two small group discussion sessions with Advisory Group Members. The following are their recommendations:

Engagement

- Provide information on selection process of community outreach to ensure all communities are represented.
- Support working with community-based organizations, familiar with local issues.
- Consider hosting meetings in areas of greatest need.
- Prioritize ongoing local engagement, especially during lengthy processes.
- Enhance engagement with county agencies and local groundwater agencies.
- Identify approaches to promote countywide and regional participation.
- Align engagement priorities with the program goals.
- Clarify the goals/metrics of engagement at the community level.
- Clarify how AG recommendations are considered and incorporated.

Data Acquisition and Systems

- Provide information and maps of installed wells and their management.
- Provide information from groundwater experts regarding SAFER issues.
- Simplify and map the 2021 Needs Assessment data with local and county layers.
- Enable map filtering to identify failing and at-risk systems based on specific risk factors.
- Require groundwater agencies to share domestic well data to inform SAFER.
- Improve collection, reporting, and sharing of data related to local water systems.
- Develop tools to help communities identify and address water contamination issues.
- Display the status of projects on the Dashboard.
- Provide illustrations of progress trends for funding, support, and long-term solutions.
- Develop user-friendly mapping tools, informative webinars, and tutorials with assigned staff.

Needs Assessment

- Increase attention to wells used for agriculture to understand impacts on groundwater quality.
- Use water expenditure to income ratio as an affordability indicator, refer to regional data from the Affordable Housing Institute.

Drinking Water Solutions

- Projects scope and processes:
 - Make more progress addressing state small water systems and domestic wells.
 - More focus on domestic wells affected by groundwater extraction.
 - Ensure information and resources are accessible and beneficial to rural communities.
 - Address multiple challenges simultaneously by considering regional needs.

- Request more details on the timing and process of enforcement actions.
- Support to local counties for required administrative and logistical processes.
- Decrease the time between identifying a problem and implementing a solution.
- Link local actions to the implementation of solutions.
- Engage with groundwater sustainability and local agencies that manage at-risk and failing systems.
- Develop additional pilot studies beyond Point-of-Use and Point-of-Entry treatment (POU/POE).
- Apply a racial equity lens to POU/POE pilot studies.
- Identify affordability considerations when applying a solution.
- Develop a tutorial to help the public provide required information to the state.
- Operations and Maintenance (O&M)
 - Prioritize development of O&M guidelines and provide expedited pre-payment options.
- Consolidation
 - Develop a checklist for consolidation, like the one created for domestic wells.
 - Establish upfront agreements.
 - Clarify State Water Board staff's definition of consolidation.
 - Work more closely with community water systems for consolidation initiatives.
 - Speed up process.
- Technical Assistance (TA)
 - Incorporate performance metrics and related accomplishments in the Work Plan.
 - Increase accountability and transparency.
 - Inquire about the number and types of TA providers.
 - Explore option of using State Water Board staff as TA providers.
 - Emphasize capacity building.
 - Explore possibility of developing additional courses.
 - Develop TA or other resources for very small non-transient non-community and transient non-community water systems.

Tribal Affairs

- Expand video communications regarding the State Water Board's work with tribal groups.
- Respect tribal sovereignty and avoid overstepping state authority.
- Provide updates on legislative collaborative efforts related to working with tribal groups and the SAFER program.
- Advance more projects represented by AG members and accelerate their implementation.
- Expand outreach efforts and information available to tribal communities.
- Develop an engagement strategy for tribal land projects that may impact non-tribal residents.

Funding Process

- Prioritize funding and solutions for systems with the greatest need.
- Implement pre-approval grant process and allocate money up front to support applicants and expedite the process.
- Prioritize funding of technical assistance providers to keep processes moving.

Communications

- Improve and increase communication through social media and other platforms.
- Enhance transparency and accountability in data and trends through use of more graphics and charts.

- Assist local systems to improve their communication about projects.
- Improve community awareness about project challenges and timelines, water crisis resolutions, and program successes.
- Provide information on issues faced in congressional districts.
- Improve outreach and engagement with water systems that may oppose consolidation.
- Enhance outreach to residents and domestic well communities.

AG Member Announcements

- Self Help Enterprises is currently accepting applications for its annual spring cohort of the Leadership Institute. The program is focused on water leadership and aims to empower participants to have a voice at the table. The application period is open through March 25, 2023.
- The Community Water Center will discuss drinking water issues at the Visalia office on March 9, 2023, as part of the Sustainable Libraries Initiative. Additionally, they will host an event on March 22, 2023, to further discuss these issues.
- Sultana Community Services District (Sultana CSD) will host a public event to discuss the consolidation of the local school's system with Monson-Sultana CSD (date to be determined).

AG Attendance (P= present, A= absent)

Cástulo Estrada: P	Eva Dominguez: P	Michael Prado Sr.: P
Jennifer Hazard: P	Ileana Miranda: P	Rami Kahlon: P
Chelsea Hsin Feng-Tu: P	Isabel Solorio: P	Rob Burroughs: P
Don James: P	James Sullivan: P	Sarah Rutherford: P
Erick Orellana: P	Kassy Chauhan: A	Sergio Carranza: P
Esther Espinoza: P	Kristin Dobbin: P	Tonya Moreno: P
Ethel See Winchell: A	Martha Curiel: P	

State Water Board Attendance

State Water Board Member: Laurel Firestone

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

Division of Financial Assistance: Meghan Tosney, Jasmine Oaxaca

Office of Communications: Nefretiri Cooley

Office of Public Affairs: Jackie Carpenter, Dimitri Stanich

Office of Public Participation: Adriana Renteria, Alisha O'Loughlin, Amy Kronson, Marina Pérez, Caroline Pradeau Fonseca

Office of Chief Counsel: Douglas Bojack, Lauren Marshall