
Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board

Wastewater Consolidation (Senate Bill 1215) Program: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the Wastewater Consolidation Program?

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (Lahontan Water Board) recognize that improperly sited, designed, operated, and/or maintained onsite sewage treatment systems are a key source of bacteria, total dissolved solids (TDS), and nitrate pollution to surface waters and groundwater.

In 2018, Governor Brown signed Senate Bill 1215 (SB 1215) into law, establishing funding and regulatory framework for a statewide program to facilitate the consolidation of inadequate onsite sewage treatment systems with existing sewer systems. SB 1215 modifies the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act (California Water Code, Chapter 4.3, commencing with Section 13288) to authorize Regional Water Boards to encourage, and if necessary, mandate the provision of sewer service to eligible communities. This authority will be executed either through collaboration with local sewer providers, or through enforcement orders to establish a timeline for connection to local sewer systems. At this time, funding will be continuously available through the Division of Financial Assistance and no ending date has been set.

Who is eligible for the program?

The Wastewater Consolidation Program applies to all disadvantaged communities served by one or more inadequate onsite sewage treatment systems. Receiving sewer systems in partnership with disadvantaged communities are also eligible for funding through the Wastewater Consolidation Program.

A disadvantaged community is defined as “a community with an annual median household income that is less than 80 percent of the statewide annual median household income” (California Water Code Section 79505.5). The median household income in California for 2020 is \$78,672.

The Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) Intended Use Plan (IUP) defines a small, **disadvantaged community** (DAC) as a community with less than 20,000 people and a median household income (MHI) less than 80 percent of the statewide MHI. A small, **severely disadvantaged community** (SDAC) is defined as a community with less than 20,000 people and a median household income (MHI) less than 60 percent of the statewide MHI.

Eligible applicants include, but are not limited to:

- Housing developments relying on aging individual septic systems

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- Privately-owned communities, such as mobile home parks
- Disadvantaged communities and cities
- Migrant housing centers
- California Native American Tribal Communities

How are funds used?

Funds awarded can be used by sewer service providers for various consolidation project costs including sewer line extension, sewer connection fees, and upgrades to their facilities to accommodate the additional flow and address compliance issues. Funds can also be used for a feasibility study to consolidate several small wastewater systems.

What is an onsite sewage treatment system?

Onsite sewage treatment systems are decentralized systems used to collect, treat, and discharge/disperse wastewater to the subsurface. Examples of onsite sewage treatment systems include, but are not limited to:

- septic tanks,
- cesspools,
- leach fields,
- wastewater lagoons,
- and seepage pits.

Why should I be concerned about a failing septic system?

Inadequate and aging or failed septic systems have been identified as sources of increased nitrate contamination in public and private drinking water supply wells throughout the state. An onsite sewage treatment system is considered inadequate if it has the reasonable potential to cause a violation of water quality objectives, impair present or future beneficial uses of water, or cause pollution, nuisance, or contamination of waters of the state (California Water Code, Section 13288).

Can the Water Boards require connection to sewer?

California Water Code, Section 13289 provides the Regional Water Boards with discretionary enforcement authority to coordinate with local sewer providers for the expansion of sewer service to disadvantaged communities. State Water Board funding is available to the community and sewer providers to offset the costs associated with consolidation. Wherever possible, Regional Water Board staff will encourage voluntary consolidation as the most cost-effective approach to providing sewer service to disadvantaged communities. However, in situations where sewer providers are unwilling to extend sewer services, California Water Code, Section 13289 authorizes the Regional Water Board to require the extension of sewer service to a disadvantaged community. The enforcement authority is limited to projects involving disadvantaged communities that are **at or within a three-mile radius** of a public or municipal wastewater receiving system.

What kind of funding is available to consolidate waste discharge systems?

State Water Board's Division of Financial Assistance (DFA) is responsible for administering the funding for sewer extension and wastewater consolidation projects. Funding includes grants and small interest loans allocated from the Small Community Grant Fund within the CWSRF.

Per the 2021-22 CWSRF Intended Use Plan (IUP), the maximum allowable grant for an individual consolidation project is \$10 million per community, up to \$75,000 per household connection. The CWSRF IUP is subject to change from year to year. It is recommended that any interested applicants check the most recent CWSRF IUP for the most up to date allowable grant for an individual consolidation project.

How can my community get funding?

DFA distributes and manages funding through an online Financial Assistance Application Submittal Tool (FAAST) process. Applicants can apply for different types of funding based on wastewater consolidation or sewer extension and connection need. There are different applications for planning, design, or construction phases. In addition, technical assistance is available through DFA to aid in completing the required application for a planning, design, or construction agreement. Note that planning and design costs can be reimbursed as part of a construction agreement, and it is not necessary to apply for a separate planning/design grant if the project is ready to go straight to construction. The Policy for Implementing the CWSRF can be found here:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/srf/cwsrf_policy.html

The CWSRF IUP establishes grant eligibility and funding limits and is updated annually. The CWSRF IUP can be found here:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/srf/pubs.html

For planning, design, and construction projects, DFA will disperse the project cost after the funding recipient has submitted associated invoices. DFA will typically release funds within 60 days of invoice receipt.

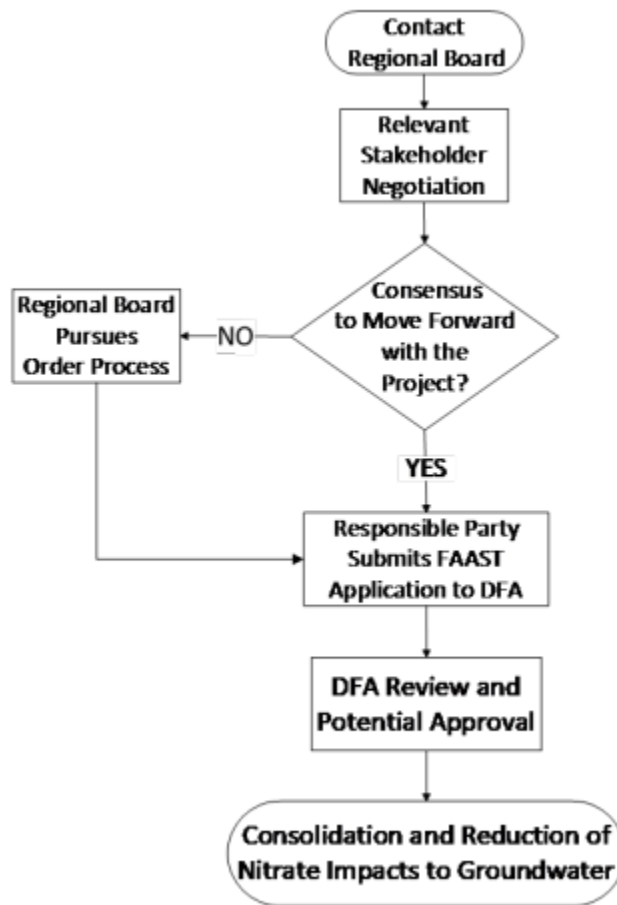
What is the process to apply for/participate in the program?

Applicants can initiate the process by contacting the Wastewater Consolidation Program staff in the Lahontan Region. Lahontan Water Board staff will then mediate negotiations amongst the relevant stakeholders and contact DFA to notify them of the incoming application. Simultaneously, the designated applicant / responsible party will apply for funding using the FAAST application. Upon receipt of the application, DFA will assign a project grant manager to review the scope of work and budget. The project manager will work with the applicant and the Regional Water Boards to facilitate approval and ensure completion of the project requirements. Regional Water Board staff will be available to advocate for the project throughout the process.

If the wastewater treatment provider is unwilling to extend sewer to the community, the Regional Water Board can issue an order to the receiving wastewater treatment system. This would require them to provide sewer service to the identified disadvantaged community because all associated improvement and sewer extension costs would be

covered by this program. The receiving sewer system will still be eligible to apply for grant funding through DFA to defray costs associated with the provision of sewer service ordered by the Regional Water Board. After the Responsible Party has submitted the FAAST application, the normal process will apply.

The completion of approved sewer provision projects will result in the reduction of bacteria, nitrate, and TDS impacts to groundwater and the protection of sustainable drinking water. A flowchart of the wastewater consolidation project from initial contact with the Regional Water Board to completion is found below.



Who may I contact for more information/to start the process?

The Wastewater Consolidation Program for the Lahontan Water Board office has one designated staff. The contact information is included below:

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