

AGM 3 Meeting Notes

Overview

The Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group (AG) participated in a day-long meeting that included robust discussions on the SAFER outreach and engagement strategy, direct operations & maintenance (O&M) support and drinking water infrastructure funding and updates on the (FY) 21-22 Funding Expenditure Plan.

Community Engagement Strategy Discussion

- General optimism about the strategy and shared sentiment that there is urgency to get communities access to safe water quickly.
- Concern that proposed regions are too large given how difficult this work is and discussion regarding how to best divide the state for adequate coverage.
- Consensus on the importance of localized approaches and the need for regional coordinators to be consistent with ongoing work, rather than starting from scratch. Coordinators need real expertise on working with frontline communities and organizations in the region.
- Need for performance evaluations to ensure regional coordinators are held accountable for any gaps in outreach or their performance. For example, community members should evaluate community partners and community partners should evaluate regional coordinators.
- Additional concerns about rushed implementation of the strategy, increased communication barriers for the public, and confusion on roles within regions and communities if the strategy is not communicated clearly with community members.

Questions:

- Is there a parallel outreach and engagement strategy for tribes?
- What is the proposed cost for coordinators and community partners?
- What is the anticipated workload for coordinators vs. community partners?
- Will different regions have different budgets and how will that be determined?

Direct O&M Funding Discussion

- Members agreed on the long-term need for O&M funding beyond the SADW fund timeline because communities may not have safe, affordable drinking water by the end of the decade.
- There is a need to evaluate how O&M funding can be widely available with maximum benefits. If a low-income rate assistance (LIRA) program is launched it should partner with O&M funding for maximum availability of funds.
- Members acknowledged there are water systems that will need O&M support that cannot necessarily be consolidated.
- If there is a pilot project for a community that cannot consolidate, communities that are structurally underwater or have debilitated infrastructure should be observed as case studies.

Questions:

- What are consolidation considerations used by the Water Boards?
- How are instances when consolidation may not be helpful evaluated? For example, larger systems may not provide safe water and consolidations may not provide intended outcomes.
- What are the current reporting requirements for secondary contaminants or secondary MCLs?
- Is there a long-term sustainable budget outlook for water systems that need O&M funding?

- Are systems receiving O&M funding going to provide financial records and disclose where funds are being spent?

Drinking Water Infrastructure Funding

- General support for 100% grants, especially if they will simplify the funding process for DACs currently dealing with community income surveys.
- About half of the members present agreed with the creation of “Medium DAC” as an eligible category for A-C projects but want to ensure there is not a backlog of pending projects for small DACs that will be passed up if larger communities become categorized as DACs.
- About a third of members present agreed with having small non-DACs be eligible for 100% grants, but more information is needed for members to feel confident in their decisions on this.
- Mixed reactions on allowing small non-DACs to be eligible for 100% grant funding and an income cap. Need more conversation on this.
- Confusion because some consolidation projects apply for USDA funding that uses MHI data from the census that does not match the MHI data the SAFER Program uses. DFA can conduct income surveys and provide technical assistance for those surveys.
- Concerns for medium DACs on the higher end of the population scale (90,000 people), the community has higher economies of scale to absorb project costs that should be taken into consideration before agreeing to 100% grant eligibility.
- Concern about how mixed-income levels within communities are considered and impacted by projects and rate changes as a result of projects.

SAFER Updates and Meeting Materials

Members had positive reactions to the materials packet but wanted more pre-meeting information on the infrastructure funding.

Next Steps

Staff will use Advisory Group feedback in development of the SAFER community engagement strategy, O&M funding, and Drinking Water Infrastructure criteria. Staff will provide updates on these projects at future meetings.

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

Horacio Amezquita: P	Jianmin Huang: P	Michael Prado Sr: P
Sergio Carranza: P	Don James: P	Jonathan Rash: P
Sandra Chavez: A	Everett McGhee: P	Michael Rincon: P
David Cory: P	Maria Luisa Munoz: P	Emily Rooney: P
Cástulo Estrada: P	Jonathan Nelson: P	Isabel Solorio: P
Lucy Hernandez: A	Camille Pannu: P	Dawn White: P

State Water Board Attendance

Division of Drinking Water: Michelle Frederick, Andrew Altevogt

Division of Financial Assistance: Jasmine Oaxaca, Meghan Tosney, Joe Karkoski, Bridget Chase

Office of Public Participation: Adriana Renteria, Jessica Bean, Itzel Vasquez-Rodriguez, Ernest Echeveste

Office of Chief Counsel: Lauren Marshall, Anthony Austin