

State Water Resources Control Board
Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER)
Advisory Group
March 3, Meeting Materials Packet

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Draft White Paper Discussion On: Proposed Changes for the 2022 Drinking Water Needs Assessment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The annual Drinking Water Needs Assessment (Needs Assessment) is an analysis conducted by the State Water Board to help inform the implementation of the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Program. The State Water Board's Drinking Water Needs Assessment (Needs Assessment) consists of three core components: the Affordability Assessment, Risk Assessment, and Cost Assessment. The Needs Assessment is used by the State Water Board and the SAFER Advisory Group to inform prioritization of public water systems, tribal water systems, state small water systems, and domestic wells for funding in the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund Expenditure Plan; inform direction for State Water Board technical assistance; and to develop strategies for implementing interim and long-term solutions. The 2021 Needs Assessment is available here: bit.ly/2021NeedsAssessment

Overview of Proposed Changes

The State Water Board is seeking stakeholder feedback on the following proposed changes to the Needs Assessment for 2022:

Risk Assessment for Public Water Systems

- **Expand the inventory** of water systems assessed to include large community water systems with more than 3,300 service connections.
- **Remove five risk indicators:** Maximum Duration of High Potential Exposure; Water Source Types; Percent Shut-Offs for Non-Payment; Number of Service Connections, and Extensive Treatment Installed.
- **Add eight new risk indicators:** Contaminants of Emerging Concern; Source Capacity Violations; Bottled or Hauled Water Reliance; Percentage of Residential Arrearages; Residential Arrearage Burden; Days Cash on Hand; Operating Ratio; and Total Annual Income.
- **Updated Risk Indicator Calculation Methodology:** Critically Overdrafted Groundwater Basin, % Median Household Income (MHI), Extreme Water Bill, Past Presence on the Failing: HR2W List, Increasing Presence of Water Quality Trends Towards MCL, and Percentage of Sources Exceeding an MCL.

Risk Assessment for State Small Water Systems and Domestic Wells:

- Re-focus Aquifer Risk Map to section level data instead of census block group risk percentile scores.
- Change definition of "recent" water quality results from 2 to 5 years.
- Incorporate water quality data from cleanup monitoring sites (GeoTracker data).
- New combined Risk Assessment methodology utilizing normalized risk scores from the State Water Board's Aquifer Risk Map and the Department of Water Resources' Drought Vulnerability Risk Tool.
- Display race, ethnicity, median household income (disadvantaged community status), and other CalEnviroScreen 4.0 data.

Cost Assessment

- Rather than conduct a new Cost Assessment for interim and long-term solutions for Failing: HR2W list systems and At-Risk systems and domestic wells, the State Water Board has conducted a targeted Drought Cost Assessment. The Drought Cost Assessment estimates the costs associated with drought infrastructure requirements for small community water systems (15 – 2,999 service connections) in Senate Bill 552.
- The Drought Cost Assessment utilizes cost assumptions from the 2021 Cost Assessment Model as well as new cost data.

Affordability Assessment

- Remove one affordability indicator: Percent Shut-Offs for Non-Payment.
- Add two new affordability indicators: Percent of Residential Arrearages and Residential Arrearage Burden.

Preliminary 2022 Needs Assessment Results

Table 1 summarizes the preliminary results of the Risk Assessment for public water systems, state small water systems, and domestic wells.

- The results of the Risk Assessment for individual public water systems and the underlying data utilized in the assessment is accessible here: bit.ly/2022PrelimData
- The results of the Risk Assessment for state small water systems and domestic wells is available here: bit.ly/2022CombinedRisk

Table 1: Preliminary 2022 Risk Assessment Results

Systems	Total Systems Assessed	At-Risk	Potentially At-Risk	Not At-Risk
Public Water Systems	3,148	824 (26%)	479 (15%)	1,845 (59%) □
small systems ¹	2,757	779 (28%)	433 (16%)	1,545 (56%)
large systems ²	391	45 (12%)	46 (12%)	300 (77%)
State Small Water Systems	1,273	378 (30%)	438 (34%)	455 (36%)
Domestic Wells	312,187	64,176 (21%)	90,840 (29%)	157,146 (50%)

Table 2 summarizes the preliminary Drought Infrastructure Cost Assessment results for SB 552 requirements for small water systems with 15 – 2,999 service connections. The results of the Drought Infrastructure Cost Assessment for individual community water systems can be accessed here: bit.ly/2022PrelimCost

¹ Public water systems with 3,300 service connections or less.

² Public water systems with more than 3,300 service connections.

Table 2: Preliminary 2022 Drought Infrastructure Cost Assessment Results for Small Water Systems

Drought Requirement	# Small CWS	Total Small CWS Cost Estimate
Monitor Static Well Levels	871 (33%)	\$1,680,000
Membership CalWARN / Mutual Aid	2,674 (100%)	\$0
Back-up electrical supply	1,872 (70%)	\$224,820,000
Back-up source: new well or intertie	895 (33%)	\$1,407,480,000
Meter all service connections	1,275 (48%)	\$173,990,000
TOTAL:	2,674	\$1,807,970,000

Table 3 summarizes the preliminary results of the Affordability Assessment for all community water systems by disadvantage community status. The results of the Affordability Assessment for individual community water systems can be accessed here: bit.ly/2022PrelimAffordability

Table 3: Preliminary 2022 Affordability Assessment Results

Community Status	Total Systems Assessed	High Affordability Burden	Medium Affordability Burden	Low Affordability Burden
DAC	580	16 (3%)	47 (8%)	67 (12%)
SDAC	1,316	38 (3%)	83 (6%)	203 (15%)
Non-DAC	874	15 (2%)	132 (15%)	150 (17%)
Missing DAC Status	98	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL:	2,868,	69 (24%)	262 (9%)²	420 (15%)

SAFER Drinking Water Outreach and Engagement Strategy

The Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience Drinking Water program, known as SAFER or SAFER Drinking Water, was created to ensure Californians who lack safe and affordable drinking water receive it as quickly as possible. The SAFER Outreach and Engagement Strategy is intended to increase early community engagement with SAFER; keep local drinking water projects on track; identify potential risks, issues, or delays; build local capacity and create a path towards equitable and resilient water governance.

BACKGROUND

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards, collectively known as the Water Boards, are dedicated to a single vision: abundant clean water for human use and environmental protection to sustain California's future. The Water Boards monitor and protect water quality, allocate the right to use California's water, regulate pollutants and enforce compliance to protect California's water resources. The Water Boards also regulate drinking water and advance the Human Right to Water,³ which establishes that every Californian has the right to clean, safe, affordable, and accessible water.

Currently, more than one million Californians do not have access to safe drinking water. The Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience Drinking Water program, known as SAFER or SAFER Drinking Water, was established in 2019 after the passage of Senate Bill 200.⁴ SAFER is a set of tools, funding sources, regulatory authorities, and engagement strategies designed to ensure Californians who lack safe and affordable drinking water receive it as quickly as possible. The purpose of SAFER is to bring environmental justice to California by addressing the disproportionate environmental burdens experienced by some communities and advancing justice for people of all incomes, races, and cultures.

Engagement Challenges

Community involvement is an important part of SAFER, but the following barriers have created challenges to meaningful engagement that advances safe and affordable drinking water:

- **Historical Barriers:** Many communities have endured negative experiences with government agencies (such as inequitable practices, racism, systemic exclusion from decision-making processes, and lack of action) that have led to distrust, fatigue and apathy for new solutions.
- **Cultural and Language Barriers:** Many communities with unsafe drinking water are linguistically isolated and/or communities of color. Often, traditional approaches to

³ Public water systems with 3,300 service connections or less.

⁴ Public water systems with more than 3,300 service connections.

water education do not present information in a culturally relevant manner, in the languages spoken by the community or using the community's preferred methods of communication.

- **Technical Barriers:** Many rural communities do not have access to internet, smartphones or computers. This can limit a community's ability to get information or attend virtual meetings.
- **Socioeconomic Barriers:** The effects of COVID-19 have disproportionately impacted low-income communities and communities of color and worsened preexisting socioeconomic barriers such inability to pay water bills.
- **Community Access:** Lack of existing community-based organizations in certain areas has made it difficult for the Water Boards to work with local groups to support SAFER outreach. Many communities also lack physical venues that are equipped for public meetings.
- **Poor Communication:** Drinking water solutions can take many years to complete, and project managers do not regularly communicate with communities throughout the process. This can lead to lack of confidence in solutions and frustration with the speed of progress.
- **Funding for Outreach:** Small, grassroots community groups may not apply for existing funding because processes can take several months, and the funding recipient must cover costs and rely on reimbursements.

For SAFER to be successful, the Water Boards need to partner with local experts who have a deep understanding of community needs. Collaborative partnerships are essential for building trust and achieving sustainable drinking water solutions.

How SAFER Works

To understand the SAFER Outreach and Engagement Strategy, it's helpful to first understand how SAFER works to achieve safe water for all. Within the State Water Board, the Division of Drinking Water, Division of Financial Assistance, and Office of Public Participation work together to implement SAFER as follows:

- **The Division of Drinking Water** is responsible for enforcing federal and state drinking water statutes and regulating over 7,400 public water systems. The Division of Drinking Water works directly with water systems to review their water quality monitoring data, directs struggling systems to technical and financial assistance and issues enforcement orders to systems that consistently fail to meet safe drinking water standards. The Division of Drinking Water develops an annual drinking water Needs Assessment that informs SAFER activities.
- **The Division of Financial Assistance** awards state and federal grants and loans for drinking water projects, including funding from the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund. SAFER can fund both short-term and long-term solutions. Short-term solutions include point-of-use or point-of-entry treatment systems, drilling wells, and providing bottled or hauled water directly to communities. Long-term solutions

include system upgrades, consolidations that link smaller systems to larger ones and training local technical and managerial staff.

- **The Office of Public Participation** oversees community engagement and supports public participation in Water Boards decisions. The Office of Public Participation facilitates local drinking water meetings, develops outreach materials, translates materials into languages spoken by communities and coordinates interpreters at public meetings. The Office of Public Participation also engages with tribal water systems who could benefit from SAFER funding.

SAFER uses many tools to prioritize technical, financial, and engagement assistance in the most equitable way possible. Unlike other funding programs where funding recipients must reach out to apply, SAFER uses its tools to proactively reach out to water systems in need.

How Data Informs SAFER

Each year, SAFER conducts a drinking water Needs Assessment that identifies California water systems and domestic wells that are failing or at risk of failing to provide safe drinking water. The Needs Assessment informs the implementation of the SAFER Program and how communities are prioritized for engagement and funding.

How SAFER Prioritizes Funding

Each year, SAFER develops a Fund Expenditure Plan that describes how safe and affordable drinking water funding will be spent. The Needs Assessment informs how the Fund Expenditure Plan prioritizes projects for funding. Small, disadvantaged communities are prioritized above all other communities. The following criteria is used to prioritize funding in fiscal year 2021-2022:

1. Address emergency or urgent funding needs, where other emergency funds are not available, and a critical water shortage or outage could occur without support from the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund.
2. Address community water systems and school water systems out of compliance with primary drinking water standards.
3. Accelerate consolidations for systems out of compliance, at-risk systems, as well as state small water systems and domestic wells, and promote opportunities for regional-scale consolidations.
4. Expedite planning through use of technical assistance for systems out of compliance, at-risk systems, as well as state smalls and domestic wells.
5. Provide interim solutions, initiate planning efforts for long-term solutions, and fund capital projects for state smalls and domestic wells with source water above a primary maximum contaminant level or at risk of running dry due to drought.
6. Ensure assistance is distributed in a manner consistent with the goals and direction provided in the State Water Board's Racial Equity Resolution and associated action plan.

How Drinking Water Solutions Work

- Short-term Support: When a sustainable solution is not possible in the near term, short-term solutions such as point-of-use or point-of-entry filtration can be installed, communities can be supplied with bottled or hauled water, or the state can fund emergency repairs until a long-term solution is feasible.
- Technical Assistance: Communities with drinking water challenges may need help finding solutions and accessing funding. Technical Assistance Providers support communities with project planning, assessment, financing and more.
- Consolidation: Consolidation is the process of joining two or more water systems together. This process can happen voluntarily, or the State Water Board can require a larger system to absorb a failing smaller system. When the State Water Board requires consolidation, SAFER sends a letter to the water system and its customers and hosts a public meeting to discuss the plans for mandatory consolidation.
- Regionalization: Regionalization is consolidation on a larger scale, where several water systems work together to form a combined system, or several systems are absorbed into a large system. Regionalization takes place through several public meetings and requires the collaboration of water systems, domestic well owners, community members, community-based organizations, local elected leaders and regional water management efforts.
- Administrator: When a water system has consistently failed to provide safe drinking water, the State Water Board can appoint an administrator to temporarily take control of the system. Before appointing an administrator, SAFER sends a notice to the water system and its customers and holds public meetings to discuss the process and listen to public comments. The appointed administrator develops and implements a Community Accountability and Engagement Plan and holds public meetings.

These solutions are complex and can take many years to complete. Their success hinges on partnerships between SAFER staff, water systems and their customers, local and state agencies, and local partners.

How SAFER Engages Water Systems

SAFER staff regularly review water quality monitoring reports for local water systems. When drinking water problems occur, SAFER staff coordinate with the water system to determine what happened, identify potential solutions, and works with the water system to get back on track to providing safe water. SAFER staff meet regularly to discuss what is being done for systems that are currently failing or at-risk of failing to provide safe drinking water to determine what types of community outreach and engagement are needed.

How SAFER Prioritizes Engagement

SAFER staff prioritize regions and communities in need of outreach, engagement and technical assistance when the following occurs:

- State Water Board mandates a consolidation

- State Water Board appoints an administrator
- A regionalization process begins, and the area meets several of the following criteria:
 - High number of domestic wells dependent on contaminated aquifers
 - Multiple small water systems
 - One or more systems are currently failing or at risk of failing to provide safe water
 - Serves disadvantaged communities
 - Serves predominantly Black, Indigenous, or communities of color
- A water system meets most the following criteria:
 - Exceeds maximum contaminant levels for primary contaminants
 - Has been out of compliance for over three years
 - High vulnerability score from CalEnviroScreen
 - Less than 1,000 service connections
 - Serves disadvantaged communities
 - Serves predominantly Black, Indigenous, or communities of color

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

To advance justice and address challenges to meaningful engagement, SAFER will partner with and fund community experts to conduct local outreach and engagement activities that achieve the following outcomes:

- Increase early community engagement with SAFER and ensure community buy-in
- Keep local drinking water projects on track
- Identify potential issues, risks or delays
- Build local community capacity
- Create a path toward equitable and resilient water governance

Who's Involved

The strategy involves three types of Outreach and Engagement Partners:

- **Funding Partners** enter into funding agreements with the State Water Board and fund Community Partners for outreach and engagement activities. Funding Partners are liaisons between the State Water Board and Community Partners that help address barriers to funding for outreach.
- **Community Partners** receive funding from Funding Partners for outreach and engagement activities in communities with drinking water challenges. Community Partners foster inclusive cultures and are experts in grassroots organizing, community education, outreach and engagement, and community capacity building.
- **Technical Assistance Providers** have funding agreements with the State Water Board to provide administrative, technical, operational, legal, managerial, and/or community engagement support to failing water systems. Technical Assistance Providers oversee the subcontracting and management of various types of

assistance for communities and assist water systems who may not have the technical capacity to address drinking water challenges on their own.

More information is in the Details on Outreach and Engagement Partners section below.

How it works

- 1. Prioritize Water Systems:** In 2022, SAFER staff will prioritize water systems in need of community engagement and technical assistance at one time. These priority systems will receive targeted engagement assistance from Community Partners. In future years, systems in need of assistance will be identified on an ongoing basis.
- 2. Select Funding Partners and Community Partners:** SAFER staff will select Funding Partners through a request for qualifications process. Funding Partners will work with the SAFER staff to identify, prepare and assign Community Partners to priority water systems.
- 3. Planning:** For each priority community, SAFER staff and assigned Community Partner and Technical Assistance Provider will hold a kick-off meeting to discuss the community's drinking water challenges and begin planning an engagement approach. After the kick-off meeting, the Community Partner will develop a community profile and engagement plan.
- 4. Implementation:** Community Partners will implement engagement plans in collaboration with SAFER staff. Technical Assistance Providers will help communities plan, fund, and implement drinking water solutions. Funding Partners will fund Community Partners for engagement work and coordinate with the SAFER staff. Community Partners, Technical Assistance Providers and Funding Partners will submit progress reports and participate in quarterly and annual meetings with SAFER staff.
- 5. Closeout:** Funding Partners, Community Partners, and Technical Assistance Providers will present successes and lessons learned at the end of each project. SAFER staff will share project highlights with the public.

2022-2023 Anticipated Timeline

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Early 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritize Water Systems• Solicit Funding Partners (request for qualifications- ongoing)• Public Workshop for prospective Funding Partners• Solicit Technical Assistance Providers (request for qualifications- ongoing)• Public Workshop for prospective Technical Assistance Providers |
| Mid 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Select Funding Partners |
| Late 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalize scopes of work and funding agreements with Funding Partners• Develop Community Partner agreement templates |
| Early 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify, prepare, and assign Community Partners to priority communities |
| 2023 and on | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outreach and Engagement Partners plan and implement activities. |

DETAILS ON OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT PARTNERS

All SAFER Outreach and Engagement Partners (1) commit to upholding values of equity, inclusion, cultural awareness, humility, and anti-racism; (2) have experience working with communities with unsafe water; multilingual communities; Black, Indigenous, and communities of color; or under-resourced communities; and (3) are expected to follow through on all contract responsibilities such as monitoring and reporting progress and coordinating with SAFER staff.

Funding Partners

Funding Partners coordinate with and fund Community Partners outreach and engagement activities. Funding partners receive their funding from three-year master funding agreements with the State Water Board. These master funding agreements are part of the State Water Board's Technical Assistance funding, so Funding Partners are required to meet the eligibility guidelines for Technical Assistance Providers described in Appendix C of the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund Policy. Funding Partners are considered a specific type of Technical Assistance Provider.

Essential Skills:

- Experience managing and tracking a large number of subcontracts.
- Able to liaise between local grassroots organizations and government agencies.
- Able to work with Community Partners to track and report on metrics and progress.

Sample Responsibilities:

- Enter into a Funding Agreement with the State Water Board.
- Monitor budget and submit quarterly reports to SAFER staff.
- Manage subcontracts for Community Partners.
- Liaise between SAFER staff and Community Partners.
- Monitor and coordinate Community Partner progress and deliverables.
- Maintain regular communication, relationships, and support for Community Partners.
- Alert Water Boards staff of concerns or drinking water issues.

Community Partners

SAFER staff select Community Partners to implement outreach and engagement activities where there are drinking water challenges. Community Partners can be any type of group or organization and do not have to be a 501c3 nonprofit. This means informal neighborhood groups and grassroots organizations can become Community Partners. Community Partners may work with one specific community or several communities within a region. Community Partners with experience in a specific community will be prioritized for that community. Community Partners enter into contracts with Funding Partners to receive payment for outreach and engagement work.

Essential Skills:

- Willing to learn and receive training about engaging communities on water issues.
- Able to develop and implement effective and equitable engagement strategies.

- Able to develop multilingual and culturally relevant outreach and engagement materials.
- Able to plan and facilitate multi-stakeholder meetings focused on sensitive topics.

Sample Responsibilities:

- Participate in kick-off meetings and meet with SAFER staff quarterly to discuss progress.
- Develop and implement multilingual and culturally relevant community engagement plans.
- Coordinate professional language interpretation and translation services.
- Provide written updates to SAFER staff on a quarterly basis or more frequently if needed.
- Compile and share deliverables (meeting materials, stakeholder lists, etc.) quarterly.

Technical Assistance Providers

The Division of Financial Assistance selects Technical Assistance Providers to help failing water systems with administrative, technical, operational, legal, or managerial services. Individuals or organizations can apply to join a pool of qualified Technical Assistance Providers that are eligible to enter into a funding agreement with the State Water Board. Technical Assistance providers may also be assigned Community Partner responsibilities, if appropriate.

Essential Skills:

- Knowledge and experience in successfully providing any combination of administrative, technical, operational, legal, or managerial services to drinking water systems in California.
- Experience in successfully bringing a water system into compliance; completing a consolidation; reducing or eliminating factors that put systems at risk of not providing safe water; or enhancing the technical, managerial, or administrative capacity of a water system.
- Able to provide technical assistance to multiple water systems at the same time.
- Able to develop and implement effective and equitable engagement strategies.
- Demonstrated success in outreach and engagement with community members.

Sample Responsibilities:

- Manage administrative, technical, operational, or legal services for water systems.
- Secure or administer bridge loans and solicit and award subcontracts.
- Subcontract or manage multilingual and culturally relevant outreach and engagement tasks.
- Plan and facilitate multi-stakeholder meetings focused on sensitive topics such as extension of service, consolidation, or regional projects.

HOW TO CONTACT US

If you would like more information about the SAFER Outreach and Engagement Strategy or are interested in becoming a SAFER Engagement and Outreach Partner email SAFER@waterboards.ca.gov or call 916-445-5615.

SAFER Drinking Water 2022 Tribal Outreach Plan

California Native American Tribes (tribes) are sovereign governments that require a tribe-by-tribe approach for outreach and communication. To determine a tribe's drinking water needs, and to achieve both short and long-term drinking water solutions, Water Boards Tribal Affairs staff will implement a SAFER Tribal Outreach Plan as follows:

SAFER TRIBAL OUTREACH PLAN APPROACH

Outreach & Engagement

- **Inter-Agency Coordination.** Tribal Affairs staff will meet regularly with agencies like Department of Water Resources (DWR), Indian Health Services (IHS), and US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) to identify, and prioritize solutions for, tribal water systems that have either, or both, urgent and long-term drinking water concerns and problems.
- **Tribal Government Engagement.** Tribal Affairs staff will meet with tribal governments to learn about their drinking water concerns and issues, and to identify their priority solutions. Tribal Affairs staff will meet with tribes who 1) directly contact our office or 2) are referred to the SAFER program for drinking water needs.
- **Outreach Methods.** Tribal Affairs staff will share information about tribal-specific opportunities for the SAFER program with all tribes through emails, letters, public workshops, and various types of media.

Tracking & Monitoring

- **Data.** Tribal Affairs staff will maintain an internal database of tribes and their drinking water needs, issues, priority solutions, and project statuses. The database will include information compiled, with permission, from coordinating government agencies and tribal governments.
- **Lists.** Tribal Affairs staff will maintain a list of tribes who are coordinating with the Water Board for their drinking water needs.

Evaluation and Reporting

- **Best Practices.** Tribal Affairs staff will track and monitor communications with tribes, ensuring that all communications with tribes follow the Tribal Liaison's best practices and are solution oriented.
- **Quarterly Reports.** Progress reports will be available online every 3 – 4 months and will include project updates, and trending drinking water concerns, issues, and solutions.

SAFER Tribal Outreach Plan Steps

Step 1 Solutions & Priorities

- Meet with USEPA and IHS monthly to coordinate data, prioritize which tribal water systems to outreach to, and collaborate tribal drinking water solutions.
- Tribal Affairs staff will contact tribes who are referred to the SAFER program, contact us directly, or who have been noted as *at-risk for a failing water systems* by agencies like Indian Health Services or EPA.

- Tribal Affairs staff will meet with the tribe to understand their drinking water needs and identify priorities and possible. Water Board staff will then support the ongoing coordination of drinking water solutions for the tribe.

Step 2 Project Coordination (Ongoing)

- Tribal Affairs staff will work directly with the tribe and specific Water Board departments and offices to understand the type of funding that is needed and will provide ongoing coordination and project planning support until the project is complete.

Step 3 Technical Assistance and Funding Agreements

- Tribal Affairs staff will support the coordination of technical assistance and funding agreements for each tribe's drinking water solution.

Step 4 Project Implementation

- Once the project implementation is underway and the technical assistance provider is confirmed, Tribal Affairs staff will continue to communication with, and provide project coordination support to the tribe and technical assistance provider, as needed.

Step 5 Completion

- Once the project is completed Tribal Affairs staff will coordinate celebrations via events, social media, and other media.
- Tribal Affairs staff will coordinate program evaluations, exit-interviews, and reports.

More Information

- Visit SAFER website at waterboards.ca.gov/safer
- Tribal Liaison Email: Tribal-Liaison@waterboards.ca.gov
- Leave a voicemail message at (916) 445-5615

SAFER Advisory Group Updates: March 2022

OVERVIEW

This document provides a written update for Advisory Group members on topics related to the SAFER program. There will **not** be a facilitated discussion on the topics below. *You are encouraged to read these updates, but it is not required for Advisory Group Meeting #1.*

SAFER Program Progress

The table below shows the goals and current progress of the number of communities and people that the SAFER program aims to assist. This table can help paint a picture of how much progress the SAFER program has made in achieving these goals.

Table 5: SAFER Goals and Current Progress

Goals	Current (July 1, 2021-Jan 31,2022)	
	# of Communities	# of People
Interim safe drinking water E.g., bottled water, point of use, repairs	936 (29 communities, 907 households)	25,562
Project planning assistance E.g., new planning agreements	83	419,561
Long-term solutions E.g., completed construction or consolidation	37	55,712
Return to compliance E.g., water system is serving safe water	25*	92,054

Point-of-Use/Point-of-Entry Pilot Project

Point-of-Use (POU) and Point-of-Entry (POE) systems are water treatment methods used to treat water for a single home or building. SAFER is implementing a POU/POE pilot project with the following three main goals:

1. Understand the benefits and limitations of POU/POE devices
2. Identify needs and knowledge gaps related to implementing community-scale POU/POE projects.
3. Propose innovative POU/POE pilot studies that address common or new challenges.

Update

- Water Boards staff met with POU/POE technical experts and users from Nov 2021 through Feb 2022 to hear first-hand experiences that will help inform the project.
- We plan to release a summary document with input from these meetings in summer 2022. The document will present the benefits and limitations of POU/POE devices,

identify knowledge gaps, and recommend ways to use POU/POE for short- and long-term drinking water solutions.

- We will discuss this document at a future SAFER Advisory Group meeting and at a broader public workshop before we finalize the document.

Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Funding

On March 15, 2022, the State Water Board will vote on proposed changes to the 2021-2022 Intended Use Plans for the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds. If approved, the changes will create more project funding opportunities and streamline the funding process. The changes would apply to several funding sources, including the drinking water and wastewater infrastructure funding included in the 2021/22 State Budget.

The State Budget included \$650 million for drinking water infrastructure projects and \$650 million for wastewater infrastructure projects. The funding must be marked for specific projects by June 2024, and completely used by June 2026.

Board staff met with drinking water and wastewater representatives, environmental justice groups and other stakeholders to get input on the proposed changes in 2021. Earlier this year, the Board held a workshop and received public comment on the proposed changes.

Water Debt Relief (Arrearages)

The State Water Board is administering the California Water and Wastewater Arrearage Payment Program. The program offers community water systems and wastewater providers financial relief to cover unpaid residential and commercial bill debt accrued March 4, 2020 through June 15, 2021. In July 2021, the State Water Board received \$985 million for the program.

Drinking Water Program

- The drinking water program is now closed. The State Water Board provided over \$301 million to drinking water systems, which will aid over a half a million Californians.
- Over 600 community water systems, which collectively serve over 80% of the state's population, applied to the program. For a list of systems that participated, visit: bit.ly/h20debt
- Within 60 days of receiving funds, these systems must credit customer accounts and let them know in writing that their debt has been cleared or reduced.

Wastewater Program

- Wastewater program applications are open February 1 to April 1, 2022.
- With over \$600 million remaining for wastewater debt, the program will likely be able to cover 100% of eligible debt that wastewater agencies request in their applications.
- Wastewater treatment providers or wastewater billing entities must apply for the funding. Wastewater billing entities may be cities, counties, or special districts.

- Funding is available for residential and commercial customer debt accrued from March 4, 2020, through June 15, 2021, including debt transferred to a third-party collection entity, debt collected through property tax rolls, or debt offset by customer assistance programs.
- Once they receive funding, wastewater agencies have 60 days to credit customer accounts and let customers know in writing that the debt has been cleared or reduced. Wastewater agencies that participate must also waive late fees and interest for these customers.
- For more information, visit bit.ly/WastewaterDebtRelief.

Table 6: Tentative Schedule of Events Related to SAFER

Date	Topic	Attendance
Mar 1	<p>Solicitation Opens for Funding Partners Request for Qualifications (closes March 31) As part of the SAFER Outreach and Engagement Strategy, Funding Partners enter into funding agreements with the State Water Board and fund Community Partners for outreach and engagement activities. The State Water Board will accept qualifications for potential funding Partners beginning March 1, 2022.</p>	N/A
Mar 2 & 4	<p>Webinars for County-wide and Regional Funding Program Solicitation The County-wide and regional Funding Program offers funding for counties to develop programs to address drought related issues and/or water quality issues that impact communities served by state small water systems and/or domestic wells. The webinars will provide details on the program and how counties can apply for funding.</p>	Optional
Mar 9 2:30-4:30PM	<p>Workshop for Prospective Funding Partners This workshop will inform prospective Funding Partners on the steps and requirements to respond to the Request for Qualifications.</p>	Optional
Mar 23	<p>Webinar for Drinking Water Technical Assistance Provider Request for Qualifications The webinar will inform interested parties on the steps and requirements to respond to the Request for Qualifications to be considered for placement on the list of qualified drinking water TA providers.</p>	Optional
Mar 31	<p>Solicitation Closes for Funding Partners Request for Qualifications The State Water Board will accept qualifications for potential funding Partners until March 31, 2022.</p>	N/A

May TBD	Advisory Group Meeting #2	Required
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