




UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

OFFICE OF WATER

March 24, 2023

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Implementation of EPA Water Technical Assistance (TA)

FROM: Radhika Fox
Assistant Administrator 

THROUGH: Office of Water Office Directors
Regional Water Division Directors, Regions I-X
Regional Project Officers for Water Technical Assistance Grants

TO: EPA Water Technical Assistance Providers

This document provides direction on how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Water (OW) approaches providing water technical assistance (WaterTA) and supporting WaterTA provided by financial assistance recipients (recipients) to communities across the country. This document applies to Environmental Finance Centers and other recipients carrying out EPA funded WaterTA projects through grants or cooperative agreements. The document is rooted in EPA's commitment to collaborating with states, tribes, territories, local governments, and other stakeholders to expand the availability of water technical assistance to disadvantaged and underserved communities. The funding at issue supports the provision of water technical assistance to communities and effective administration of the Clean Water Act (CWA), Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58, Nov. 21, 2021) also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).

Goal of EPA Water Technical Assistance

All communities deserve access to safe, clean, and reliable water. Yet too many communities across America—rural, urban, and suburban, small and large—face challenges in providing safe drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater services to their residents. Administering successful State Revolving Fund (SRF) and grant programs, especially as part of BIL, includes ensuring that communities whom Congress intended the funds to benefit have access to the funds. EPA's WaterTA supports communities to identify water challenges, develop plans, build technical, financial, and managerial capacity, and develop application materials to access water infrastructure funding. EPA collaborates with states, tribes, territories, community partners, and other key stakeholders to implement WaterTA efforts. **The end result: more communities with applications for federal funding, quality water infrastructure, and reliable water services.**

EPA has a history of providing water technical assistance to support communities to build their capacity and address compliance challenges—and is now expanding its WaterTA efforts to help more

communities. The BIL presents an unprecedented opportunity to address water infrastructure needs by providing \$50 billion in new funding, the largest federal investment in water in the history of our nation. New and existing EPA WaterTA programs will be utilized to support effective implementation of CWA, SDWA, and BIL.

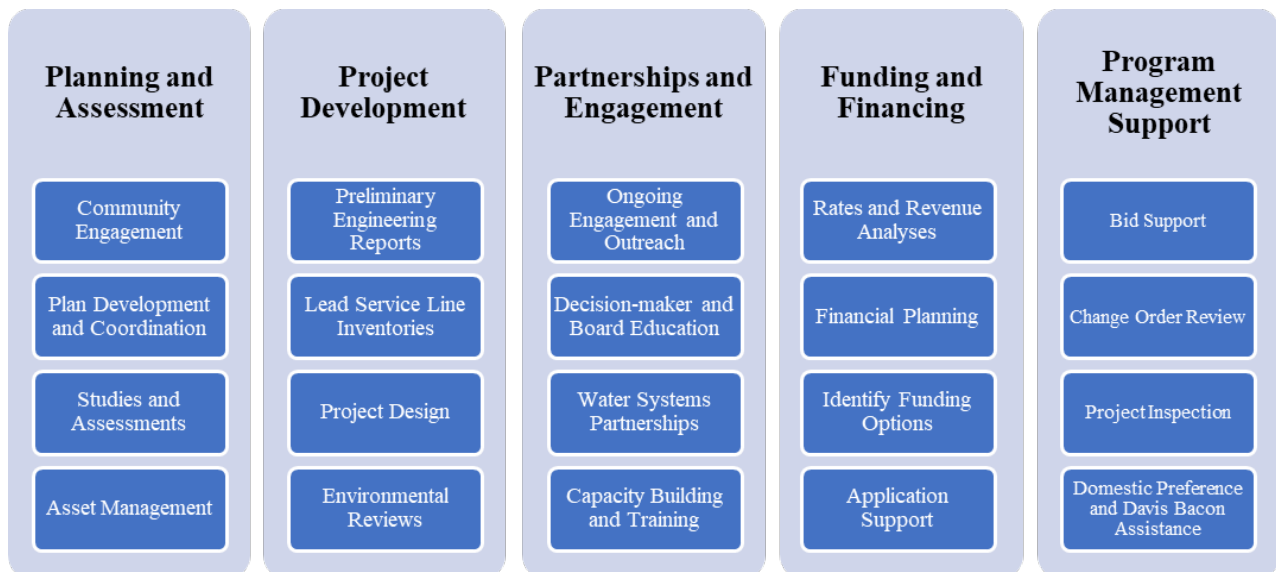
Principle #1 – Provide “Direct” Water Technical Assistance to Communities

EPA and TA providers will collaborate to provide direct WaterTA to communities to facilitate access to CWA, SDWA and BIL SRF resources (and other relevant BIL funding opportunities such as the Emerging Contaminants in Small or Disadvantaged Communities Grant program), with a focus on disadvantaged and underserved communities, communities that have never accessed SRF funding before, and communities that are not currently receiving an equivalent kind of TA. Direct WaterTA should put communities on the path to apply for, access, and/or implement SRF funding, and will place the agency in the best position to deliver on BIL.

The approach to direct WaterTA should be:

- **Targeted and focused on needs of TA recipient:** Direct WaterTA is provided via direct interactions with water utilities and communities. It will include concrete actions that put communities on the path to accessing SRF funding. The table below is a range of activities that could be considered TA services. Direct WaterTA goes beyond one-time workshops, webinars, trainings, or conferences.
- **Meeting TA recipients where they are:** Direct WaterTA starts with what the water utility/community needs to make progress and works from that starting point in the delivery of support. TA services will be informed by the technical, managerial, and financial constraints of the TA recipient.
- **Culturally competent and engages broader community:** Direct WaterTA should be provided in a culturally competent manner, cognizant of community sensitivities, to support the TA recipient to build community trust. In each community, efforts will be made to support TA recipients to engage the broader community, including harder-to-reach portions of the community.

Direct WaterTA services may include the following services to communities depending on the scope of work for the financial assistance agreement:



Principle #2 – Support Communities to Take Concrete Steps Towards Accessing Water Infrastructure Funding

EPA and WaterTA providers will collaborate to support communities to take concrete steps towards accessing water infrastructure funding, following the general approach identified below. EPA recognizes each community and project is unique and that the TA steps and timelines will vary and can be refined further as part of specific TA workplan development.

- **Community identification and coordination:** EPA and WaterTA providers will collaborate to proactively identify communities to receive assistance. (*Ongoing, first cohort of communities generally identified within 2 months of initiating work*)
- **Initial community outreach and assessment:** EPA and WaterTA providers will collaborate to conduct initial community outreach and assess each community’s water infrastructure needs. (*Generally, within 4-7 months of initiating work*)
- **TA workplan developed:** EPA and WaterTA providers will collaborate to develop a community TA workplan for each community. (*Generally, within 6-10 months of initiating work*)
- **Funding application submitted:** EPA and WaterTA providers will collaborate to implement community TA workplans, working towards the following timeline:
 - **By end of 2023 (or within 1 year of initiating work):** selected communities are on the path to plan and develop funding applications, informed by a community’s TA workplan.
 - **By end of 2024 (or within 2 years of initiating work):** funding application submitted or in progress, informed by a community’s TA workplan.

Principle #3 – Coordinate and Collaborate to Support Effective Delivery of WaterTA

EPA and WaterTA providers will coordinate and collaborate at each step of providing WaterTA to communities. Coordination and collaboration will be informed by the following:

- **Partner with States, Tribes, and Territories.** EPA and WaterTA providers will actively seek to partner with state SRF programs, along with tribes, territories, other federal agencies, local governments, and community groups, to meet the technical assistance needs of communities. Every aspect of EPA WaterTA – from the work itself to the tone and tenor of how EPA and its WaterTA providers facilitate meetings and participate in discussions – should be done through a lens of partnership, trust-building, empowerment, and listening first before speaking. When an element or approach of EPA’s WaterTA does not work well for a partner entity like a state or community, efforts should be made to understand the challenge and then collaboratively develop solutions in a manner that respects differing opinions and approaches while adhering to EPA requirements.
- **Coordinate to complement existing TA efforts and avoid duplication.** EPA and WaterTA providers will work closely together and with states and other federal partners to avoid multiple WaterTA providers contacting the same community or duplicating the provision of WaterTA services. This includes coordinating with other EPA funded TA providers such as recipients of funding under the Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (EJ TCTAC), and the Technical Assistance for Brownfields (TAB) program to minimize duplication of effort. EPA and WaterTA providers will also coordinate and collaborate to streamline interactions with states – for example, avoiding multiple WaterTA providers making similar requests for information to the same state agency.
- **Support community-centered solutions.** EPA and WaterTA providers will collaborate with states, tribes, and territories to facilitate dialogue with communities focused on local needs and proposed solutions. WaterTA providers will seek to support communities to plan locally driven solutions in partnership with states, tribes, territories, local governments, and community organizations. Efforts

should be made to build trust with communities, recognizing that WaterTA providers may be operating in an environment of mistrust in some communities. Particular efforts will be made to reach the hardest-to-reach voices in a community that is receiving WaterTA.

- **Be proactive.** EPA and WaterTA providers will collaborate with states, tribes, and territories to offer technical assistance proactively, recognizing that it can be a burden for communities to access TA services on their own and that many communities get stuck at some point in the process.
- **Incorporate continuous learning.** Expanding technical assistance for communities will take time and refinement of approaches. To ensure technical assistance meets local needs, EPA and the WaterTA providers will promote a culture of continuous learning, creativity, and iteration with its partners.