




# Water at Work Message Guidance

A harsh spotlight is shining on our aging water infrastructure: [decades of disinvestment](#) led to the widespread system failures during last month's winter storm. [Congress recently met to discuss](#) the billions in funding needed for wastewater, and Reps. Lawrence and Khanna [re-introduced the WATER Act](#), to fund safe drinking water.

In prep for the next wave of infrastructure spending, we've pulled together message guidance on the chance to create economic opportunity while upgrading our aging infrastructure, building climate resilience, and investing in communities most exposed to polluted water sources or lacking access to clean water and sanitation.


## Water infrastructure + jobs messaging

- Access to safe, affordable water is a human right, yet the [American Society of Civil Engineers](#) estimates the US needs to invest roughly \$109 billion per year in water infrastructure over the next 20 years to upgrade aging water systems, stop increased service disruptions, and protect public health and safety.
- The burden of funding critical water infrastructure improvements has [largely shifted to local governments and ratepayers](#). Most of the nation's water infrastructure was built 50+ years ago with federal dollars that have now largely dried up, leaving critical needs unfunded. In 1977, 63% of water and wastewater capital costs were covered by federal agencies. By 2019, [that percentage had dropped to just 9%](#). Last year, a [survey of 1,000 municipalities](#) found that 65% planned to delay or cancel infrastructure projects due to pandemic-related budget shortages.
- Deferred maintenance and disinvestment set the stage for the [widespread water failures](#) we saw during last month's winter storms, where treatment plants went down, pipes burst, and millions were told to boil water. It has also left [40% of water systems](#) in violation of at least one drinking water standard. Fixing our public plumbing will protect public health while boosting the economy.

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- Water work is more than replacing pipes and building treatment plants in urban centers. Protecting clean water at the source creates jobs too. In a recent report, [American Rivers](#) found that every dollar spent on watershed restoration generates \$2.50 in economic activity.
  - Today, pushes for water infrastructure investment include WaterNow Alliance's [Stimulus for Sustainability](#), U.S. Water Alliance's [Recovering Stronger Initiative](#) and the [WATER Act](#), an equity-focused, \$35 billion-a-year investment in public drinking water and wastewater improvements that advocates estimate would create nearly 1 million jobs.
  - As the [need for water workers](#) grows, so does the need to address barriers for individuals from underrepresented and low-income communities to join the water workforce.

## Examples of water at work across the country

- In Louisville, Kentucky, the Metropolitan Sewer District leverages capital investments to [build a more equitable community](#) and support job and contracting opportunities for local residents. In 2020, MSD's large investments created 1,200 jobs, 474 within Louisville and Jefferson County, including 56 different types of skilled trades jobs like boiler makers, pipefitters, bricklayers, carpenters, and truck drivers.
- In Colorado, [Denver Water's lead reduction program](#) will replace 64 - 84,000 lines over the next 15 years, contracting with local construction firms. Next door, Aurora Water established its Low-Income Water Efficiency Program (LIWEP) in 2011, [partnering with Mile High Youth Corps](#) to provide training and education to 200 corpsmembers each year.
- On Tribal lands, water investments can help address [long-standing infrastructure gaps](#) and [high unemployment](#). In December, after a years-long effort by the Navajo Nation, [Congress passed the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act](#), which authorized more than \$200 million for drinking water infrastructure for Navajo communities in Utah. The settlement will not only fund vital infrastructure, it will create more opportunities for economic growth for people who live and work locally, [said Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown](#) (Dennehotso, Kayenta, Chíítchinbii'tó) in a statement.
- The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District's [investment in community based green infrastructure](#) like rain gardens and bioswales will reduce the risk of sewage overflows while creating 500 green maintenance jobs. In 2020, the Milwaukee Water Equity Task



Force [released its roadmap](#) to increase representation of people from historically marginalized communities in the water workforce.

- [A 2019 analysis](#) of Philadelphia's green infrastructure program found the City's \$1.2 billion investment over 25 years resulted in a three-fold economic return and over 1,000 jobs annually.
- A 2011 [Economic Roundtable study](#) found that every \$1 million invested in Los Angeles stormwater projects led to 13.1 person-years of employment. In 2018, the [Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy \(LAANE\) projected](#) LA County's Safe, Clean Water Program (SCWP) would create nearly 10,000 jobs over 30 years, particularly in construction and Operations & Maintenance (O&M). The report highlights targeted hiring, apprenticeship and on-the-job training practices that train workers in new skills, creating additional career pathways.