

➤ **Understanding the Value of Water**

Every American should have an awareness of the value of water, as a driver of public health, economic prosperity and quality of life. EPA can assist local governments in developing “value of water” educational materials and toolkits for local governments so that citizens can make good investment choices in their communities and in their personal budgets. EPA can take the lead in developing a compendium of best practices, highlighting those communities whose citizens have a strong understanding of the cost of delivering safe, clean drinking water as well as the cost of effectively treating wastewater.

➤ **Protecting Water at the Source**

Protecting source water from contamination reduces the cost of treatment. It also reduces risks to public health from exposure to contaminated water. Communities who do not have access to regulated public water systems are especially vulnerable to health risks. Because source water does not fit within boundaries of political subdivisions, it is imperative that state, local and tribal governments collaborate on protecting source water at the watershed level.

➤ **Restoring, Updating and Expanding Water Infrastructure**

There are ongoing challenges related to aging infrastructure and the lack of system capacity to address emerging contaminants, water scarcity and other challenges expected to increase over time. Most communities nationwide are facing water infrastructure replacement costs as well as increasing regulatory requirements. Residents in many communities remain on well water, with little comprehension of the risks. EPA estimates a total of \$384.2 billion is needed for capital improvement needs over the next 20 years which far exceeds resources available at any level of government.¹ Federal government funding only addresses a fraction; therefore, financial assistance to local governments is lacking. Oftentimes, there is a lack of understanding of who is paying how much for what, and how much total investment needs to be done to take in consideration of the demands and requirements for the future.

➤ **Ability to Pay**

This is one of the strongest themes heard throughout the Workgroup's outreach to local communities and intergovernmental partners.² Although there is general agreement that clean, safe drinking water is essential for all Americans, that philosophy is inconsistent with the resources invested as well as with the typical business model for providing water to residents and businesses. Additional regulations aimed at ensuring clean water at the faucet of course add cost to the ratepayers. The Workgroup heard questions about what happens to those who simply cannot afford to pay, whether on a macro/community scale or a micro/individual scale. While not a federal issue per se – if the EPA is advocating for safe, clean drinking water for all Americans, then this issue requires more consideration and collaboration to find more

¹ EPA's (2011) Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey

² Note: The LGAC heard from representatives from the U.S. Conference of Mayors, National League of Cities, National Governors' Association, National Association of City and County Health Officials, Association of State Drinking Water Administrators and the National Association of Counties.

resources, evolve business models and/or modify approaches to regulatory compliance. As a starting point, the EPA could convene a collaborative “think tank” to focus on this issue in the coming years.

➤ **Expand Integrated Planning**

Integrated Planning (IP) offers municipalities the opportunity to meet multiple Clean Water Act requirements by sequencing separate wastewater and stormwater programs while maximizing investments so that the highest priority projects come first. EPA, states, and municipalities have achieved progress in implementing IP approaches while addressing the most serious water quality issues in order of priority to protect public health and the environment. By expanding IP to include the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) it would allow local governments to address drinking water challenges and the many variables faced such as population growth, aging infrastructure, increasingly complex water quality issues, limited resources, and other economic challenges. The LGAC recommends that this approach will lead to more comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

➤ **Small Systems**

The LGAC believes that every citizen should have access to safe and reliable drinking water regardless of their geographic location, income, racial, cultural or ethnic background. To promote health equity and environmental justice, the LGAC supports a consistent set of drinking water standards for the protection of all Americans. EPA must work to provide the same level of protection for all communities to have assurance of reliable and safe drinking water. Although there is no federal role regarding residents served by private wells, the EPA should assist states and local and tribal governments in providing water quality information to residents served by private wells. Migrant, border, tribal and rural communities may be particularly vulnerable especially those that do not have access to a regulated public water system.

➤ **Schools and Daycare facilities**

Ensuring all of our nation's children have access to clean, safe drinking water should be a priority for EPA and all levels of state, local and tribal governments. As the traditional models for education evolve to include charter schools, private schools, home schooling, public and private day care and after care, the regulatory framework should also evolve. As a starting point, the EPA should collaborate with education-provider associations as well as state, local and tribal governments to determine best practices and resources needed to more comprehensively and consistently ensure the nation's children have access to clean, safe drinking water. Testing and monitoring protocols may be a good starting point for the discussion.

➤ **Training Water and Wastewater System Operators**

The Workgroup heard from several local agencies that it is becoming more and more difficult to find and retain qualified water and wastewater system operators. Training and licensing of water and wastewater system operators is an essential component of any public water/wastewater system. Training operators at the local level can provide employment

opportunities as well as create a needed pool of skilled operators. The EPA can accelerate widening the pool of operators through grant programs for local operator training. The EPA can also compile best practices where local governments have already developed creative and collaborative programs.

➤ **Interagency Coordination**

EPA must work in partnership with other agencies as part of a national action plan to engage and leverage other agencies in identifying resources, utilizing authorities and providing technical assistance. The EPA, USDOT, HUD partnership has been very effective. Expanding partnerships to include the US Army Corps of Engineers is a high priority for local governments to ensure concurrent and collaborative relationships with local governments rather than sequential and conflicting relationships.

➤ **Sharing Data and Risk Communication**

The LGAC believes that sharing water monitoring data at all levels of government and the public will help strengthen the public's confidence and promote a better understanding of drinking water and health. The LGAC recommends that EPA include actions to work closely with health and environmental agency partners to improve data sharing capabilities and technology. This should also include working with states, tribes and local governments to provide best practices for communicating risks. Especially important is providing clear and actionable public service communication rather than scary, bureaucratic, legalese. A good example provided to the workgroup is a community posted a sign that indicated unsafe to fish in a temporarily contaminated waterway.

➤ **Incentivize Investments**

Private-public sector partnerships and investments in water infrastructure can be a useful tool towards modernizing and expanding water infrastructure. Tax rebates or credits for private companies to invest in water infrastructure especially in rapidly growing areas and in smaller towns can further incentivize investments. The Workgroup heard from several agencies about the concept of regionalizing/consolidating smaller systems. This concept is worthy of further consideration in collaboration with local governments.

➤ **Toxic Algal Blooms**

The EPA must continue to aggressively implement a plan to address toxic algal blooms and partner with rural communities to address agricultural run-off.

➤ **Emerging and Unregulated Contaminants**

Monitoring, testing and treating for emerging and unregulated contaminants is an evolving field of science. The EPA should continue to work closely with the Science Advisory Board to not only address individual contaminants but also evaluate cumulative risk impacts. Collaboration with local governments and public water systems is critical to develop a balanced, comprehensive, science-based approach to this evolving issue.

➤ **Lead and Copper**

The LGAC has previously issued a letter to the Administrator regarding the Lead and Copper Rule. Effectively addressing the problem will require non-traditional partners such as local realtors to ensure that residents are aware of not only the problem but how they can reduce their risks even if they cannot afford to replace lead service lines in their homes.

➤ **Educating Local Government Officials**

EPA should continue its outreach to local officials on straightforward communication concerning drinking water responsibilities, resources and infrastructure needs. Local officials as they take office are faced with learning multiple and complex federal and state water regulations. EPA should continue their work with local governments and agencies representing local governments so that local officials better understand responsibilities and compliance with drinking water programs. This will also help local officials better plan and integrate local tools such as codes, ordinances, and incentives for better water quality protection.

➤ **Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF)**

The DWSRF is a significant financial tool for drinking water infrastructure investments. Through state programs, the DWSRF delivers access to low interest credit and subsidies for infrastructure investments. EPA should continue to promote innovative uses of the DWSRF by providing guidance and incentives, as well as the flexibility to protect sources of water and to help public water systems deliver reliable and safe drinking water. The LGAC recommends that the EPA identify and share best practices where these funds have addressed challenges successfully. However, the EPA should acknowledge that the DWSRF is a tool, not a panacea for local public water systems facing financial challenges.

➤ **Water Infrastructure and Resiliency Finance Center**

The EPA's Water Infrastructure and Resiliency Finance Center is another important tool to assist local governments. The EPA should continue to promote awareness of the Center as a resource for local officials and community members.

➤ **Emergency Preparedness and Response**

EPA must continue to help prepare resilient communities for the impacts of extreme weather events and other emergencies (such as flooding, wildfire, excess heat and drought) relative to their impacts on drinking water supply and delivery.