



Recovering  
**Stronger**



# Catalyzing Consolidation and Partnership in California

## Project Description

COVID-19 has upended life across America, disrupting business as usual in every sector and shifting the way we relate to, and work with, one another. In many ways, and across many sectors, the pandemic exposes and reinforces structural challenges and social inequities, with communities of color disproportionately impacted. In the water sector, this plays out through access to safe water, the cost of water services, governance structures, and even how we fund and deliver those water services. Local leaders and water agencies can use this opportunity to forge significant progress and help communities and the nation to recover stronger.

**Large and small, the more than 51,000 water systems in the United States experienced deep disruption with the COVID-19 pandemic and require assistance for response and recovery.** Even before the pandemic, many systems struggled to affordably meet the need for capital to operate safely or maintain, repair, or replace their infrastructure. Now is the time to accelerate outcomes and values-based approaches to utility consolidation and partnerships that deliver safe, efficient water service to communities. Through community-driven utility consolidation and partnerships, the US Water Alliance believes systems can build the capacity to tackle big problems efficiently by unlocking economies of scale, building operational resilience, and integrating planning across drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, and other municipal and regional departments. Doing so can chart a course towards a future where all the nation's water systems are meeting public health standards, safeguarding the environment, and serving as forces for equity and opportunity in the communities they serve.

### Overview

This opportunity is especially ripe in California where the State Water Resources Control Board seeks to secure 200 consolidation agreements over the next four years alone. The Alliance is committed to collaborating with change-makers in California to reduce barriers to utility consolidation, support the spread of information about options available to communities considering utility consolidation, and provide a model to accelerate the pace of these agreements as a fundamental component of a more sustainable, resilient One Water future. *Catalyzing Consolidation and Partnership in California* seeks to model a community-centered process aimed at identifying strategies, tactics, and needed resources to accelerate community-driven consolidations. With these strategies, tactics, and resources, local stakeholders can better explore a range of possible consolidation models with balanced, factual information consistent with the guiding principles outlined in the Alliance's briefing paper [Utility Strengthening through Consolidation](#).

## Project Components

**Convene and facilitate four policy dialogues on addressing barriers to consolidation.** In partnership with local grassroots organizations, technical assistance providers, and others, the Alliance seeks to generate momentum to pursue consolidation in the region and accelerate the pace of consolidation throughout the state. Each policy dialogue will focus on a key barrier to accelerating consolidation: information and tools, community and technical capacity, state policies and actions, and public discourse.

**Identify tools and deliverables the field needs to accelerate consolidation.** Each policy dialogue will identify what tools, deliverables, and other tactics are needed and who in the water landscape in California is best placed to do that work. Where possible, certain deliverables may be created or catalyzed through this project by thought leaders participating in the dialogues.

**Coordinate with the California State Water Resources Control Board.** The US Water Alliance will work closely with the California State Water Resources Control Board to examine areas with systems and contexts ripe for potential consolidation, current activities and plans, and what type of multi-stakeholder coordination could benefit the pace of community-driven consolidations in the state.

**Spread and share outcomes.** The Alliance will document and synthesize insights and lessons learned through publications, presentations, and briefings for others interested in utility consolidation and partnership as a pathway to better outcomes for communities and water systems. These lessons will inform others in regions across the nation where consolidation might be considered.

Times of upheaval can lead to moments of radical change. As COVID-19 upends life across America, we can take this moment of disruption and turn it into a source of lasting transformation in how we view, value, and manage our nation's water systems. At the US Water Alliance, we are dedicated to forging the pathway needed to recover stronger by seeking to reknit a local, state, and federal partnership for water. On the local side of this partnership, much progress can be forged by local water agencies and community leaders. This project is one of five pilots to drive innovation at this scale. To read more about the local, state, and federal components of the US Water Alliance's initiative, Recovering Stronger, visit [www.uswateralliance.org](http://www.uswateralliance.org).