



Recovering
Stronger



State Innovations for Water Sector Recovery: Regional Listening Sessions Project Description

State programs, policies, and activities have cascading impacts on all sectors—including water. States have a primary role in implementing and enforcing water regulations and are uniquely positioned to address water management issues through legislation and executive office initiatives.

In a crisis, the role that a state plays becomes even more important. Like so many other sectors, the water sector has been hit hard by the compounding crises of a pandemic and economic recession. Tourism and convention activities have been canceled, hotels and restaurants have closed, schools have emptied, and millions of Americans have lost jobs. These changes mean more people are unable to afford their water bills and more water utilities are left with dwindling means to continue essential operations and address critical infrastructure needs. It is uncertain when full economic activity will return. The American Water Works Association (AWWA) and the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) estimate that drinking water utilities will experience a negative aggregate financial impact of \$13.9 billion—or 16.9 percent—by 2021, due to revenue losses and increased operational costs during the pandemic. The National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) estimates that the resulting financial impact on wastewater utilities will be even higher, around \$16.8 billion, including a 20 percent drop in sewer revenues.

In the coming months and years, public officials at every level of government will consider policies and investments to jumpstart economic recovery. Investment in the nation's aging water infrastructure—composed of drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems—can spark a new era of job creation and economic growth while protecting public health and improving the quality of life for families across the United States. If our nation fails to invest in our

water systems, families across the nation could pay more than seven times more for water infrastructure failures in 20 years than they do now. States are already taking some steps to recover from the pandemic. We now have an opportunity to align federal, state, and local recovery efforts to transform the water sector and ensure a stronger, more resilient water future for all.

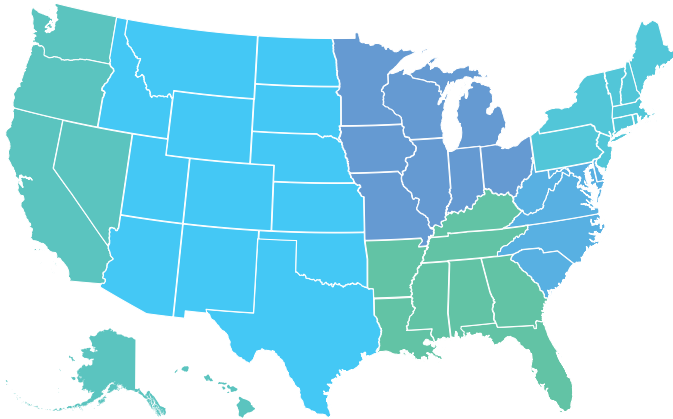
Policies and decisions at the state level can facilitate recovery, but piecemeal approaches by individual states and regions will not achieve the transformation needed to secure and forge a stronger more resilient national water landscape. The federal laws and regulations surrounding water management are designed to empower states with the responsibility to manage water, in partnership with local municipalities, institutions, and the federal government. But in a moment of chaos with multiple needs to be met, states lawmakers and agencies need support to clearly understand what policies and actions will enable a stronger overall recovery by laying the groundwork for a resilient, safe, and sustainable water sector.

That is why One Water changemakers from across the country can play a significant role in redefining the water landscape in the wake of COVID-19. The US Water Alliance will convene these champions for six regional listening sessions to surface and spread innovative state policy ideas. Alliance members, One Water delegations, and allied partners all have a stake in how the sector recovers and have expertise and influence to bring to bear at the state and regional level.

By coming together as a national network to spotlight state policies and approaches to lawmakers and agencies, One Water champions can advance a vision for the water sector to recover stronger, helping the nation recover stronger.

Project Components

- **Convene Six Regional Listening Sessions.** The US Water Alliance will bring together state policymakers and One Water stakeholders for listening sessions in six regions. These sessions will shape and frame the state recovery opportunities in the water sector as well as gather ideas and examples about how states are planning to recover.



● West ● Mountain & Southwest ● Midwest ● South ● Mid-Atlantic ● Northeast

- **Synthesize Insights in a State Blueprint.** To share the good ideas that surfaced during the listening sessions, identify the gaps in existing policy on economic recovery, and promote how new policies can bolster the water sector, this blueprint will outline how states can do their part for a renewed local-state-federal partnership for water.
- **Coordinate One Water Changemakers to Educate State Policymakers.** The diverse, influential stakeholders in the Alliance network leading One Water can make an incredible difference. Through this project, we will equip these champions with coordinated messaging, policy suggestions, and a network of peers to shape the conversation about recovery at the state level.

Times of upheaval can lead to moments of significant 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. To read more about the local, state, and federal components of the US Water Alliance's initiative, Recovering Stronger, visit www.uswateralliance.org.