



Strategic Framework: 2024–2027



One Water, One Future.



About This Strategic Framework

Developed in collaboration with the US Water Alliance’s staff, Board of Directors, One Water Council, key allies, funders, and incredible partners, this Strategic Framework is our North Star. It outlines the fundamentals that will guide us for the next three years, building on the successes and learning of the past three years and recognizing important changes occurring in the water sector.

Why a framework and not a strategic plan? The Alliance and our network operate in a fluid environment, and we are an alliance that represents the will and priorities of many beyond US Water Alliance staff. Because our agenda is collaborative, we create room to respond to the field. Rather than a rigid plan, this framework aims to give a sense of who we are and what we are working toward while still allowing room for emergence. It sets scaffolding for our programs and work plans.

We are grateful to all who contributed ideas, debated concepts, and counseled us in the creation of this framework and who continue to partner with us in advancing a sustainable, One Water future for all.

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Water Defines Our Future

Policymakers, water sector leaders, businesses, and civil society increasingly recognize the need to invest heavily in water infrastructure and solutions to growing water challenges. Concern is rising about the millions of Americans who lack access to safe water and sanitation facilities and families struggling to keep up with their water bills. Many people have a growing understanding that climate change is shifting the planetary water cycle, causing extended droughts, extreme storms, and catastrophic flooding, as well as the heating and acidification of the oceans. These and other water problems compromise the nation's water future—putting people, ecosystems, economic development, and even social and civil cohesion at risk. They underscore the fundamental and multi-faceted role that water plays in our communities.

National awareness and action are growing to meet these and other urgent water challenges, but we need more and better solutions that can be adopted more quickly throughout the water sector. The decisions we make about water today will have profound implications for generations to come. How water is regulated, managed, and integrated into communities can be enhanced or reimagined to overcome these challenges. Water is cyclical: water that comes out of a tap, flows down a stream, careens through a sewer or storm drain, and is treated at a plant is the same water. Yet, as water passes through a typical American community, it passes through the jurisdiction of many entities. These include drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater utilities, regional authorities, planning and conservation districts, and more.

In the United States, responsibilities concerning water management are spread across hundreds of thousands of organizations and agencies. This makes scaling innovation and efficiently stewarding public resources difficult. Even knowing what is happening to the nation's water supply is hampered by the lack of data. Meanwhile, the public's trust in water systems is wavering in the face of visible water crises that splash across news headlines.

The One Water approach, which envisions managing all water in an integrated, inclusive, and sustainable manner, has emerged as a framework for addressing this context and transforming water management in America. It is gaining significant traction with utilities, private companies, community organizations, environmental groups, research institutions, and others. Utilities are reimagining their approach to water management with an eye toward integrating across silos and generating multiple benefits including economic development, environmental sustainability, and social and economic equity. Meanwhile, organizations that historically have not prioritized water increasingly recognize how essential it is to community well-being and are building cross-sector partnerships to support water solutions. From our farmers and ranchers, to philanthropies, to industry, to the companies and workers who have dedicated their careers to the water sector—people are reimagining their roles in stewarding life's most essential resource, governing water systems in new ways, and recognizing that acting alone can only get them so far.

We are seeing a new wave of One Water innovation and progress emerging in diverse community contexts, aiming to solve increasingly complex water challenges. Through the US Water Alliance, passionate people from multiple disciplines and places are finding common ground and driving a transformation in how the nation views, values, and manages our water resources.



The US Water Alliance



Who We Are

The US Water Alliance is a member-supported national nonprofit organization that aligns diverse stakeholders—including utilities, public agencies, community organizations, engineering and technology firms, environmental groups, agricultural interests, labor unions, researchers, artists and culture bearers, and many others—to develop common-ground and transformational solutions to our nation’s most pressing water challenges. We aim to create and foster powerful relationships with our members rooted in shared vision, purpose, and values.

OUR VISION
 A sustainable, One Water future for all.

OUR MISSION
 We inspire and sustain a diverse movement to advance transformative solutions to pressing water challenges so communities can thrive.

- OUR VALUES**
- **Authentic Relationships:** We value connections anchored by honesty, transparency, respect, and vulnerability.
 - **Collaboration:** We consistently seek our partners’ and one another’s contributions, incorporating ideas and combining strengths to meet our collective goals.
 - **Equity:** We acknowledge histories of injustice, mitigate power imbalances, seek and honor the perspectives of all people with a stake in our work, and hold ourselves accountable for our processes and impacts.
 - **Innovative Ideas:** We uncover opportunities and develop, pilot, and spread transformative solutions.
 - **Service:** We are humble and rooted in care for people, our planet, and the water we share.

One Water

One Water Definition

One Water is a transformative way of viewing, valuing, and managing water. The One Water approach manages all water—whether from the tap, a stream, a storm, an aquifer, or a sewer—in a collaborative, integrated, inclusive, and holistic manner. One Water can change and regenerate the way we live, the opportunities we have, our environment, and our society.

HALLMARKS OF A ONE WATER APPROACH:

1. Value water at every stage and in every form
2. Focus on achieving multiple benefits
3. Approach decisions with a systems mindset
4. Use watershed-scale thinking and action
5. Intervene with right-sized solutions
6. Center inclusion and partnerships
7. Account for climate action urgency and opportunities

ONE WATER IS A PATHWAY TO ESSENTIAL NEEDS FOR ALL:

1. Thriving Communities and Places
2. Reliable and Resilient Water Management
3. Sustainable and Competitive Industry and Business
4. Regenerative Agricultural Systems
5. Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice
6. Healthy Watersheds
7. Social and Civil Cohesion
8. A Livable Planet

Examples of Promising Practices in One Water:

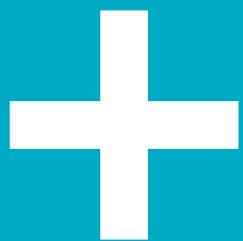
Many people are implementing a range of One Water practices. While the list below is far from comprehensive, it illustrates ways water utilities and others are incorporating One Water in their work.

- **Planning and project development are meaningfully and intentionally inclusive**, engaging with the most impacted communities and welcoming all people to the table.
- **Water, sewer, and stormwater management approaches are holistically considered at a neighborhood scale** and planning spans multiple community needs, creating economic inclusion and educational and employment pathways for community residents.
- **Capital projects and programs restore natural systems** and use nature-based solutions such as green stormwater infrastructure to achieve water management goals.
- **Investment approaches support multiple benefits and community goals**, often using several funding sources together in creative ways.
- **Companies measure and act** on their water usage, reduction and reuse strategies, and opportunities for replenishment, as well as broader ecosystem stewardship and sustainability.
- **Agricultural producers and municipalities coordinate funding and action at a watershed scale** to support strategies that protect water and mitigate or offset risks to producers.



Movement Building

Reimagining how to value and work with our most precious resource so all of us may thrive



Problem Solving



Our Approach: Movement Building and Problem Solving

The US Water Alliance believes the nation needs a robust, cohesive, and highly visible movement to build upon One Water innovation and progress in the water sector: a movement of champions who advocate for One Water to become the new normal in water management and thriving communities.

Right now, the One Water movement is expanding and becoming more diverse, which deepens the approach's practices and impacts. This widening spectrum of participation and thought leadership in the movement supports the development of innovative practices, which can lead over time to the creation and adoption of new standards of practice and policy in the water sector.

As we grow the movement and its impact, we also develop and apply One Water methods to solve water challenges. As an Alliance, we advance our work through four methods, and where our role ends, we actively partner and leverage the talents of our colleagues—inside and outside the water sector—to forge progress.

WE:

EDUCATE

the nation on the true value of water and engage an expanding base of One Water champions through mutual discovery, learning, and communications.

INITIATE

new approaches and solutions to our most pressing water challenges, leveraging powerful partnerships, authentic engagement, and cultural strategies to advance One Water solutions.

ACCELERATE

the adoption and scaling of the mindset, practices, and policies behind the One Water approach to advance a better quality of life for all.

CELEBRATE

what works to advance the One Water movement and solutions to inspire and spread innovation in water system transformation.

Core Foundations



One Water



Water Equity



Movement and Capacity Building

Priority Opportunities



Water Investments



Climate Action



Water Workforce and Leadership

One Water Future for All

Meeting this opportune moment for water across our sector to create systemic change

Where We Focus to Solve Key Problems

Core Foundations

The unified vision of One Water and water equity and a belief in the power of movement and capacity building drive our work and continue to be core areas of focus for the Alliance.

One Water

Building a One Water future requires establishing a healthy, effective One Water field of practice and eventually growing that field into the dominant approach to water management. A One Water philosophy permeates all Alliance work. Our efforts focus on advancing the practice and reach of the emerging field. We also look to create the political and policy conditions that enable One Water. Specific examples of initiatives at the Alliance that center One Water include the One Water Council, One Water Leadership Institutes, One Water Summit, government affairs and policy efforts, and the benchmark State of the One Water Field survey. The insights from our network reflected in these initiatives inform the priority opportunities the Alliance pursues and supports our members with, including those identified later in this framework.

Water Equity

Water equity occurs when all communities and households have access to safe, clean, affordable drinking water and wastewater services; are resilient in the face of floods, drought, and other climate risks; have a role in decision-making processes related to water management in their communities; and share in the economic, social, and environmental benefits of water systems. Building from our groundbreaking framework, *An Equitable Water Future*, the Alliance centers water equity in all we do. The Alliance supports the Water Equity Network, the only national community of practice consisting of utilities and community partners dedicated to advancing equitable water management. With 44 communities and growing, our Water Equity Network remains our foundational community of practice, centering racial equity in water management processes and outcomes. Collectively, we aim to foster authentic, cross-sector partnerships that advance water equity in communities across the country.

Movement and Capacity Building

The US Water Alliance unites diverse interests to find common ground solutions that no one sector can develop alone. The Alliance is anchored by an expanding member and partner base that includes utilities and public agencies of all sizes, community-based organizations, leading engineering and design firms, corporate water stewards, arts and cultural leaders, water technology providers, environmental justice advocates, labor unions, and philanthropy. Moving forward, we seek to broaden and deepen relationships with more agriculture partners, coastal protection agencies, academic institutions, Native American Tribes and Indigenous communities, and others. We activate our members, partners, and allies and build a more diverse national community for progress through policy initiatives, the Value of Water Campaign, arts and cultural practices, One Water Summit, the US Water Prize, water leadership dialogues, and more.

As the Alliance expands its unique activities, reach, and impact, our success will depend on growing our internal capacities so we can best serve members, implement programs, support communities, effectively communicate, and provide high-quality administrative support. We intend to grow and support our high-performing team to achieve this framework's goals and provide a healthy and enabling organizational culture.

Priority Opportunities

In addition to our ongoing core areas of work, the Alliance has identified three high-priority opportunities for solutions development, testing, and spreading over the next three years: **Water Investments, Climate Action, and Water Workforce and Leadership**. Our focus is not limited to these three opportunities. As additional opportunities arise, the Alliance will assess the potential for high-impact solutions and how they might best serve the sector's needs and catalyze necessary systemic changes.

Water Investments

The 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) is investing billions of dollars into the water sector. With intentionality, these and other funds can be used for infrastructure solutions that address entrenched inequities, reflect climate realities, and maximize long-term benefits for communities. However, many communities face barriers in accessing funding and financing, are unable to affordably take on loans, and lack the professional capacity to plan and deliver on infrastructure projects. Technical assistance providers, consultants, engineers, planners, and many others are needed to increase capacity in the field and ensure the communities who need this investment the most can take advantage of this opportunity in ways that work for them.

Given the strength of the Alliance's network, we aim to put our collective skills, expertise, and connections in service of communities seeking support. Through the US Water Alliance's Environmental Finance Center, we support communities to bring the promise of the BIL to life through technical, financial, managerial, and engagement support. In doing this work, we seek to realize forward-looking equitable infrastructure investments and establish new industry and government standards and norms for capital planning, financing, and implementation that long outlast this infusion of funding. We also seek to use cultural strategies and the Value of Water Campaign to raise awareness about the need to invest in water infrastructure in communities of all sizes across the country and highlight the urgent need for sustainable, long-term funding support for water investment.

Climate Action

Through droughts, fires, floods, rising sea levels, and extreme storms, climate stress is often experienced as water stress. Climate change is already impacting watersheds and water systems across the country, with Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color, low-income communities, and other historically underserved populations hit the hardest. Without urgent collective action to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, these impacts will intensify. Yet, for too long, water has been overlooked as a key pathway to solving our climate crisis. Recent studies estimate that freshwater sources and water management, including essential water and sanitation services, account for **10 percent of global GHG emissions**. Since the US Water Alliance's Imagination Team issued a bold call to action to achieve a net-zero water sector future by 2050, many water leaders seek resources, tools, and incentives to implement solutions and scale interventions. The water sector can play a key role in protecting communities, take action to address our own emissions, and deploy One Water approaches to reach the ambitious climate goals across our communities.

Together with our partners, the Alliance is centering One Water as a key pathway to solving our climate crisis. We will provide the water sector with the networks, tools, and competencies needed to accelerate climate action; partner, develop, refine, and use creative approaches to mainstream approaches for GHG reductions—centering equity outcomes in adaptation efforts and integrating climate-forward outcomes in capital investments; and center the urgency for climate action and climate collaborations across our movement-building efforts, network, communications, and programs.

Water Workforce and Leadership

The water sector has a transformational equity-building opportunity: the composition and capacities of its future workforce. From engineers and operators to electricians and communicators, the water sector faces an urgent need to identify, train, and retain the next generation of water talent. While our entire sector faces this need, the Alliance sees an opportunity to partner with our network to ensure our local utilities have the talent to maintain ongoing core operations and the leadership culture to drive equitable One Water approaches. Utilities' effective performance depends crucially on the skills, knowledge, and dedication of the more than 300,000 employees who operate and manage local water systems. Today, though, many utilities face a crisis in maintaining the quantity and quality of their workforces. They increasingly report that their traditional pipelines of new workers in labor markets cannot keep up with the growing demand for employees. Further, they acknowledge that existing efforts do not sufficiently address the utility workforce's lack of racial and gender diversity—a systemic condition that has and continues to block a flow of potential talent into water jobs.

The Alliance has identified multiple strategies that can transform, not just help sustain, utilities and their communities. These strategies offer ways to intentionally employ workforce solutions as drivers of equitable economic opportunity for People of Color, women, and those who face high barriers to workforce entry. By initiating large-scale recruitment of a more diverse workforce and adopting other practices that support workforce equity, utilities can grow pipelines of committed talent, reshape their workforces to reflect the communities they serve, and, by advancing diverse local employment, help to close racial and gender income and wealth gaps. Simultaneously, cultivating essential capacities for One Water leadership in current and future generations of water workers is an opportunity to prepare workplaces for contemporary and emerging challenges and to develop and retain diverse talent through transformational leadership experiences.



Measuring our impact

Our Three-Year Goals and Target Outcomes

The US Water Alliance seeks significant results when it invests time and effort in building the One Water movement and tackling specific priority opportunities. The three-year outcomes for this strategic framework identify overarching goals for 2027 and measurable stretch targets based on key indicators. We will measure targets through the Alliance’s State of the One Water Field Assessment and annual impact tracking at the programmatic level.

ONE WATER GOAL:

The One Water approach—mentality, practices, and policies—is spreading, maturing, and reaching new communities and diverse people.

TARGET OUTCOMES:

- 150 places (utilities and their communities) are implementing One Water, and these places are reflective of regions across the country.
- 2,000 One Water champions are active in the Alliance-supported movement.
- 20 new resources for One Water practices and policies are supporting efforts to advance nationwide efforts on the ground.

WATER EQUITY GOAL:

The water sector embraces water equity as a critical performance outcome for utilities and communities.

TARGET OUTCOMES:

- At least 75 communities, anchored by their water utility, are active in the Alliance’s Water Equity Network.
- 20 Water Equity Network members are advancing equitable infrastructure investments, workforce goals, climate action, or other goals.
- The water sector has access to water equity standards and tools for voluntary adoption.

MOVEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING GOAL:

Thriving, cross-sector communities of practice are driving and spreading innovation and enlisting allies—supported by the capacity of a strong, talented Alliance team.

TARGET OUTCOMES:

- 50 organizations are active in the Value of Water Campaign, stewarding an inclusive, broad national movement to support water investment.
- 10 cross-sector working groups form through the One Water Council, Water Equity Network, and other initiatives to drive breakthroughs and advance solutions and conversations key to our vision.
- Increase staff capacity, improve internal systems, and bolster professional development at the Alliance, supported by the creation and implementation of a staff development plan.

CLIMATE ACTION GOAL:

Communities of all types are deploying meaningful One Water solutions to achieve net-zero GHG emissions and foster community resilience in the face of a changing climate.

TARGET OUTCOMES:

- 100 water utilities have made formal commitments to achieve net-zero emissions and are publicly disclosing their progress in reducing emissions.
- At least 15 water utilities are partnering with and enabling frontline, community-based organizations to inform, define, and achieve water and climate equity outcomes.
- The water sector and our partners are aligned around and have access to tools, resources, and professional competencies necessary to advance climate action.

EQUITABLE INFRASTRUCTURE GOAL:

Prevailing water infrastructure solutions address entrenched inequities, reflect climate realities, and maximize long-term benefits for communities.

TARGET OUTCOMES:

- 50 disadvantaged communities participate in Alliance-supported infrastructure investment to deliver affordable projects that result in multiple benefits.
- Five ideas emerge that could be system-changing and shape the water investment, infrastructure, and capacity landscape at various scales in the long term.

WATER WORKFORCE AND LEADERSHIP GOAL:

Awareness, resources, and solutions are taking effect to strategically and equitably address the water workforce crisis in ways that imbue a new culture of leadership to underpin One Water transformation.

TARGET OUTCOMES:

- Utilities with a total of 100,000 jobs (1/3 of the national utility workforce) are engaging in equitable workforce and leadership development.
- The Alliance network has helped establish at least three new regional workforce collaborations across the country.
- Alliance leadership development programs are supporting established and rising professionals to address contemporary and emerging challenges.





Continuing to leverage collaboration to forward a One Water future



Together, We Can Accomplish So Much

This document is much more than a strategic framework—it is a call to action. Action over the next three years will build the partnerships and networks necessary to drive critical, multi-benefit investments in communities that need them most; make advancing equity a foundational mission among water leaders; begin changing the face of the sector to better reflect the diverse face of our nation while driving economic justice; and harness the collective power of the water sector to rise to climate challenges.

This framework is also an open invitation. One Water will transform water management in America when it is a journey we take together. The Alliance is always looking for new members, donors, partners, and allies. Join us on the path to a sustainable, One Water future for all—now and for future generations.

One Water, One Future.



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