# SMALL WATER SYSTEM SUPPORT PROGRAM FRAMEWORK – FINAL REPORT

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LA COUNTY WATER PLAN

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# Executive Summary

Los Angeles County Public Works (LACPW) published the inaugural edition of the Los Angeles County Water Plan (CWP) in 2023, setting strategies and targets to achieve regional water resilience in Los Angeles County. LACPW developed the CWP in collaboration with interested parties across Los Angeles County, focusing on water-related issues that were not being sufficiently addressed at the federal, state or local levels. The CWP defines targets in four key focal areas: Regional Water Supply Reliability, Groundwater Management and Quality, Small, At-Risk System Resilience and Drinking Water Equity, and Watershed Sediment Management. The Small Water Systems Task Force (Task Force) was established to guide the implementation of priority tasks from the CWP 2-Year Action Plan, focused on supporting small water systems, improving drinking water equity, and creating longer-term resilience and higher-quality supplies. The Task Force has met quarterly since September 2024, and includes participants from small and at-risk water systems, state and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and academia.

Los Angeles County is also charged by Senate Bill (SB) 552 with supporting domestic wells (1-4 service connections) and state small water systems (5-14 service connections) in preparing for and responding to a water shortage event. To comply with SB 552, Los Angeles County prepared a Drought Resilience Plan (DRP) that identifies short-term response actions and long-term mitigation strategies to address challenges that domestic wells and state small water systems face. The Small Water Systems Task Force established a working group to focus on the efforts around SB 552 compliance.

A Small Water System Support Program (Support Program) was identified in the CWP 2-year Action Plan, and the Framework for this Support Program is documented in this Report. The Framework shows how existing tools and resources can be united and augmented to support Los Angeles County small water systems in reliably delivering safe, clean, affordable drinking water to their communities. Although initially the Support Program was envisioned to provide support specifically to at-risk small water systems, that vision was later refined to include all small water systems in Los Angeles County.

Based on data retrieved from the California State Water Resources Control Board's Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Dashboard on December 1, 2025, there are 203 public water systems in Los Angeles County, and 122 (60%) serve 3,300 or fewer service connections and are therefore classified as small water systems. These small systems serve approximately 358,000 people, which is 4% of the total population served by the 203 water systems (approximately 10,058,000 people). That 60% of the drinking water systems serve only 4% of the population speaks to the complexity of the network of water systems across Los Angeles County. Water systems in Los Angeles County also have diverse governance structures; the majority of Los Angeles County small water systems are mutual water companies (35%), mobile home parks (17%), and investor-owned utilities (11%).

As part of the SAFER Program, the California State Water Resources Control Board assesses community water systems through the Drinking Water Needs Assessment using a suite of failing criteria (primarily related to water quality) and risk indicators (related to water quality; accessibility; affordability; and technical, managerial, and financial capacity). This Report includes a summary of the 2025 SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment specifically, as a snapshot in time of the needs of Los Angeles County small water systems. The 2025 SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment showed that 58 (48%) of the 122 small water systems in Los Angeles County were either failing, at-risk, or potentially at-risk, and all eleven failing water systems in Los Angeles County were small water systems. The driving risk factors for water systems in Los Angeles County were more commonly related to water quality than the rest of California, primarily due to presence of constituents of emerging concern (which include hexavalent chromium, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances [PFAS], and 1,4-Dioxane) and the percentage of water sources exceeding a maximum contaminant level.

## Executive Summary

During meetings of the CWP Small Water System Task Force and the Working Group, listening and feedback sessions with small water systems, and in survey responses, representatives from small water systems expressed a variety of concerns about aging infrastructure, lack of water source redundancy, staffing and workforce limitations, adapting to changing regulations, and challenges in acquiring funding. In the January 2025 meeting of the Small Water System Task Force, small water system representatives, as well as other agencies and organizations that supported response to the historic Los Angeles fires earlier that month, reflected on key needs related to: preparedness for unprecedented climate disasters, strengthening relationships between water systems and emergency responders, countering false or misconstrued information, coordinating access to supplies for emergency response, and support for long-term recovery.

The Framework documented in this Report outlines a Support Program that is a direct response to the areas of need voiced by small water systems and partner agencies and organizations, as well as to the findings identified in evaluation of data on Los Angeles County water system characteristics and risks. Through implementation of the Support Program, LACPW will both connect small water systems to existing resources and assess how LACPW and other collaborating agencies and organizations can provide support where needed resources are not yet available. Categories of support were identified, each subsequently divided into more specific elements of support. The categories of support are:

1. Facilitating capacity exchange;
2. Advancing workforce development;
3. Supporting community engagement;
4. Supporting financial stability;
5. Maintaining a resource repository;
6. Supporting emergency preparedness and response; and,
7. Providing advocacy support

In addition to the above support categories, initial and ongoing assessment tools can be used by systems themselves, LACPW, and partnering agencies and organizations to evaluate small water systems' technical, managerial, financial, social, and political (TMFSP) capacity needs in response to various changing conditions. These assessment tools will help identify which support tools are most needed by each water system.

Together, the diverse support identified in the Framework is focused on bolstering small water systems' resilience and capacity to reliably and affordably provide safe, clean drinking water to their communities.

Although domestic wells and state small water systems are held to different regulatory standards than public water systems, domestic wells and state small water systems would still benefit from many of the same types of support identified in this Framework. Recommendations from the Los Angeles County DRP have been integrated into the Support Program Framework to reflect LACPW's comprehensive approach to supporting small water systems, state small water systems, and domestic wells.

Though many organizations and agencies have a positive impact on small water systems in Los Angeles County, there is a need for a standardized framework to connect with small water systems, help systems understand what support is available to them and how to best make use of it, and help to develop or provide support where it does not yet exist. Thus, there are two key types of gaps in providing support to small water systems in Los Angeles County: 1) specific types of support that are not available; 2) lack of a "hub" for support that small water systems can rely on as their primary means to be connected to specific elements of support. For the first gap, this Framework outlines how diverse organizations and agencies (including, but not limited to, LACPW) might provide additional types of support. For the second gap, it is envisioned that LACPW will step into this "hub" role, helping to understand the needs of small water systems in the County, serving

as the primary point of contact for small water systems seeking support, and connecting them to relevant types of support.

Many of the needs identified in this Framework will require sustained effort, strategic partnerships, and resources commensurate with the scale of the challenge. Progress toward the CWP targets depends on that continued commitment.

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| Kris | Wright | AVEK Water |
| Lisa | Yamshita-Lopez | Rubio Cañon Land and Water Association |
| Rocky | Yang | Golden Sands Mobile Home Park |
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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Program Background and Vision

This Framework for a Small Water System Support Program (Support Program) was developed to describe how LACPW and other organizations can unite and augment existing tools and resources to support small water systems in Los Angeles (LA) County in reliably delivering safe, clean, affordable drinking water to their communities. Although initially the Support Program was envisioned specifically to provide support to at-risk small water systems, that vision was later refined to include all small water systems in Los Angeles County.

The repository of tools and resources is referred to as the Support Program or the Toolbox, and this document is referred to as the Framework. The Framework identifies and documents elements of support that can be used by diverse small water systems in Los Angeles County to support their success in reliably providing safe, clean, affordable drinking water. The specific pathway to success is unique to each water system, but three generalized pathways to success have been identified by Los Angeles County Public Works (LACPW):

1. Supported independence: strengthening system infrastructure and capacity while maintaining system independence
2. Regional partnerships: developing partnerships and/or physical interconnections with nearby water systems, while maintaining system independence
3. Consolidation: fully combining one water system with another water system to help overcome technical, managerial, and/or financial challenges

The elements of support identified in this Framework are intended to bolster the resilience of systems that are on any of the three generalized pathways to success.

This Framework was developed based on an assessment of strengths and needs of small water systems in Los Angeles County. A cursory evaluation of synthesized data from numerous sources was completed to identify common themes and challenges related to Los Angeles County small water systems' ability to reliably provide safe, clean, affordable drinking water. Additionally, LACPW convenes a Small Water Systems Task Force (Task Force) and Small Water Systems Working Group (Working Group) to gain insight from relevant interested parties. Similarly, LACPW hosted two listening sessions and two feedback sessions to solicit input directly from small water system representatives. Information gathered from the Task Force (**Section 2.1**), the Working Group (**Section 2.1**), and from listening and feedback sessions with small water systems (**Section 2.2**) was synthesized to contribute to understanding of the Los Angeles County small water systems' strengths and needs.

After establishing a shared understanding of the key strengths and needs of small water systems in Los Angeles County, the next step was to identify existing types of support (and who provides that support) as well as gaps in existing support that, if filled, would help to augment small water systems' reliability and resilience. The Framework identifies existing tools and resources can be united and gaps can be filled in order for small water systems in Los Angeles County to have access to the variety of support they need.

The complete approach to developing the Support Program Framework is described in **Section 2**. Findings from the cursory evaluation, listening/ feedback sessions, and Task Force and Working Group are summarized in **Section 3**. The Support Program Framework is described in detail in **Section 4.** Lastly, the proposed approach to implementing the Support Program is described in **Section 5**.

### 1.1.1 Support Program Framework Overview

The Support Program is a direct response to the areas of need voiced by small water systems and partner agencies and organizations, along with findings identified in the cursory evaluation. Through implementation of the Support Program, LACPW will both connect small water systems to existing resources and assess how LACPW and other organizations can provide support where needed resources are not yet available. Seven different categories of support were identified, each subsequently divided into various more specific elements of support. The categories of support are:

1. Facilitating capacity exchange;
2. Advancing workforce development;
3. Supporting community engagement;
4. Supporting financial stability;
5. Maintaining a resource repository;
6. Supporting emergency preparedness and response; and,
7. Providing advocacy support.

In addition to the above support categories, an eighth category of initial and ongoing assessment can be used by systems themselves, LACPW, and partnering agencies and organizations to assess and define small water systems' technical, managerial, financial, social, and political (TMFSP) capacity needs in response to various changing conditions. The components of TMFSP generally relate to the following:

- Technical Capacity (T): water system supply capacity, water supply and distribution infrastructure, operations and maintenance, water quality, system metering and water loss
- Managerial Capacity (M): staff capacity and organization structure, status of system board membership and meetings, comprehensiveness of record-keeping practices, and moratoriums on additional service connections.
- Financial Capacity (F): revenue sufficiency, affordability of water rates, billing and collections practices, cash reserves and fiscal stability, financial controls and reporting, and debt and grant management.
- Social Capacity (S): relationship between the water system (including the board and staff), the community it serves, and neighboring systems.
- Political Capacity (P): structured decision-making of elections, elected or appointed representatives, and the processes of open and transparent governance.

Together, the diverse types of support identified in the Framework are focused on bolstering small water systems' resilience and capacity to reliably and affordably provide safe, clean drinking water to their communities.

## 1.2 County Water Plan

LACPW published the inaugural edition of the Los Angeles County Water Plan (CWP) in 2023 to set strategies and targets to achieve regional water resilience in Los Angeles County. LACPW developed the CWP in collaboration with interested parties across Los Angeles County to address water-related issues that are not currently being addressed at the federal, state or local levels. The CWP defines targets in four key focal areas: Regional Water Supply Reliability, Groundwater Management and Quality, Small, At-Risk System Resilience and Drinking Water Equity, and Watershed Sediment Management. To achieve these targets, the CWP developed fourteen strategies, each with well-defined actions to implement each strategy. Every two years, LACPW will create an Action Plan identifying specific steps that will be taken to make

progress on each action. The initial 2-year Action Plan covered 2025 and 2026 and will be updated with a new 2-year Action Plan for 2027 and 2028. The CWP itself can also be updated as community needs evolve.

The CWP sets four targets (I, J, K, and L) related to "Small, At-Risk System Resilience and Drinking Water Equity" that inform the development of the Support Program Framework. The targets are as follows:

I. Reduce at-risk systems by 100%

J. 100% of water agencies, including those in severely disadvantaged communities, have affordable cost of water to meet health and safety needs (6,000 gallons per month per household)

K. Reduce color, taste, and odor drinking water quality issues by 50%

L. Increase ability to meet health and safety needs following an emergency by confirming 100% of small community water systems have access to alternative sources of supply

These targets are supported by CWP Strategy 11 to provide regional support for small, at-risk water systems. Actions 11.1 through 11.6 outline how Los Angeles County plans to implement Strategy 11.

11.1. Initiate a voluntary Small, At-Risk System Support Program or programs to promote small water system resiliency, not just address near-term emergency needs.

11.2. Identify "at-risk" systems and technical, managerial, and financial needs by collecting existing data (such as the County Department of Public Health's ongoing system inspection (i.e., annual sanitary surveys)) and assessment program reports, drawing upon the United States Environmental Protection Agency technical, managerial, and financial assessment guidance.

11.3. Facilitate Small, At-Risk System Support Program to provide administrative and technical advisory support to purveyors identified in Action 11.2 to take a range of resiliency actions (e.g., create Water Master Plan and asset management program, ensure workforce succession planning, establish and check interconnections, ensure emergency storage, enhance cybersecurity, acquire emergency generators, provide resources for grant applications, regulatory compliance, and existing operations and maintenance, etc.).

11.4. Develop a program to map, monitor, address, and alert the public to drinking water quality issues that originate from on-site plumbing issues, including monitoring for color and odor issues in premise plumbing, especially in under-resourced communities.

11.5. Encourage all Los Angeles County agencies to adopt and implement hazard mitigation plans and to join the California Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (CalWARN).

11.6. Expand local agency participation in Water Information Sharing and Analysis Center to access the latest cybersecurity strategies.

Following steps outlined in the initial 2-year Action Plan, LACPW has worked to identify small water system needs and envision a Support Program that meets these needs. This Framework documents progress on

CWP Actions 11.1 and 11.2 and identifies how the Support Program will be built out to contribute towards CWP Actions 11.3 through 11.6.

### 1.2.1 Small Water Systems Task Force and Working Group

The Small Water Systems Task Force (Task Force) was established to guide the implementation of priority tasks from the CWP 2-year Action Plan focused on supporting small water systems, improving drinking water equity, and creating longer-term resilience and higher-quality supplies. The Task Force has met quarterly since September 2024, and includes participants from small water systems, state and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and academia.

To complement the Task Force's focus on long-term strategic planning, a Working Group was established to actively contribute to shorter-term efforts. The Working Group began meeting in April 2025 to engage with several ongoing efforts, including the development of the Los Angeles County Drought Resilience Plan (DRP), review of UCLA's study on Drought and Climate Resiliency Solutions for Small Water Systems, and guidance for the small water system Support Program Framework.

## 1.3 Senate Bill 552 – Drought Resilience Planning for Domestic Wells and State Small Water Systems

Signed into law September 2021 by Governor Gavin Newsom, Senate Bill (SB) 552 obligated the State of California and local governments to share the responsibility in preparing for and responding to a water shortage event. These new requirements are expected to improve the ability of Californians to manage future droughts and help prevent catastrophic impacts on drinking water for communities vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The bill outlines the new requirements for small water suppliers, county governments, Department of Water Resources, and the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board, or SWB) to implement more proactive drought planning and be better prepared for future water shortage events or dry years.

Water users protected under SB 552 include the following:

- **Small Water Supplier:** A community water system serving 15 to 2,999 service connections, inclusive, and that provides less than 3,000 acre-feet of water annually (CWC Section 10609.51(k))[1].
- **Community Water System:** A public water system that serves at least 15 service connections used by yearlong residents or regularly serves at least 25 yearlong residents of the area served by the system, as defined in HSC Section 116275(i) and Section 10609.51(a).
- **State Small Water System:** A system for the provision of piped water to the public for human consumption that serves at least five, but not more than 14, service connections and does not

[1] Note that the definition of small water supplier per SB 552 differs from the definition of small water system used by the State Water Board and used in this Support Program Framework.

regularly serve drinking water to more than an average of 25 individuals daily for more than 60 days out of the year, as defined in HSC Section 116275(n) and Section 10609.51(m).

- **Domestic Well:** A groundwater well used to supply water for the domestic needs of an individual residence or a water system that is not a public water system and that has no more than four service connections, as defined in HSC Section 116275(n) and Section 10609.51(d).
- **Nontransient Noncommunity Water System:** A public water system that is not a community water system and that regularly serves at least 25 of the same persons over six months per year, as defined in HSC Section 116275(k) and Section 10609.51(f).

The Los Angeles County Drought Resilience Plan documents the County water shortage vulnerabilities for domestic wells and state small water systems, pursuant to SB 552. The other protected water users covered under SB 552 not included in the County Drought Resilience Plan have separate requirements to address water shortage vulnerabilities. Progress towards SB 552 as it relates to small public water systems is described in **Section 3.1.3**.

## 1.4 Examples from other Regional Agencies

Several other counties and water agencies throughout California have established programs to support small water systems and their communities. Interviews were conducted with staff at two such agencies: Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) and Placer County Water Agency (PCWA). These engagements were meant to learn about CVWD's and PCWA's approach to supporting small water systems within their regions and how they have overcome key barriers to providing support, with the goal of bringing lessons learned into the formation of this Support Program Framework.

Although only two agencies were interviewed for this Report, there are many other water agencies and counties in California that have taken steps to support small water systems. LACPW's continued engagement with other regional agencies and counties can support knowledge exchange and help to ground implementation of the Support Program in best practices.

### 1.4.1 Coachella Valley Water District

CVWD is a special district spanning 1,000 square miles within Riverside, Imperial and San Diego counties in California and is governed by a five-member Board of Directors. CVWD provides numerous types of water services, including domestic water service, agricultural irrigation and drainage, groundwater replenishment, non-potable recycled water, and wastewater treatment.

Around 2017, CVWD Board Vice President Castulo Estrada, in collaboration with local community-based organizations, led the formation of the Disadvantaged Communities Infrastructure Task Force with the mission to secure access to safe affordable drinking water, wastewater, and flood control services in underserved communities within the Coachella Valley. With the Task Force and funded by a grant from the California Department of Water Resources' Integrated Regional Water Management Program, CVWD developed a Domestic Water Supply Master Plan identifying and prioritizing opportunities to consolidate failing water systems with CVWD. Based on priorities identified in the Domestic Water Supply Master Plan,

CVWD has been able to execute approximately two consolidation projects per year, mainly through design and construction funding from the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF). CVWD often absorbs upfront costs to cover planning and design and is reimbursed from DWSRF funds once awarded, helping projects to advance where otherwise cash flow challenges might slow progress. For small water systems where consolidation is not feasible or not supported by the community, the Disadvantaged Communities Infrastructure Task Force is still a resource to learn of funding opportunities and discuss shared challenges with peers.

### 1.4.2 Placer County Water Agency

PCWA is a special district with jurisdiction over all of Placer County in California and is governed by a five-member Board of Directors. PCWA provides water service to many Placer County residents, but some areas of Placer County are served by other smaller water systems. There are approximately 130 other water systems within Placer County.

To equitably serve all Placer County residents, PCWA provides resources and support for other public water systems through consolidation and financial assistance. In recent years, PCWA has led consolidations with numerous small water systems using grant funding from the State Water Board. Additionally, non-PCWA public water systems in Placer County may apply for loan or grant funding for projects that improve access to safe and reliable drinking water through PCWA's County-Wide Master Plan. Every year, PCWA's Board decides which projects to allocate funding towards based on their strategic objectives. PCWA's financial assistance program is funded from PCWA revenue from power generation, out of county water sales, and property taxes, excluding ratepayer funds.

# 2 Approach to Identifying Water Systems' Strengths and Needs

A combination of data from direct engagement with water systems, the Task Force, and Working Group and analytical data from the cursory evaluation effort is used to identify water systems' needs and strengths in the region. The data sources and analyses methodologies are described in the following subsections. Subsequently, the data are analyzed in relation to the systems' SAFER status (failing, at-risk, potentially at-risk, not at-risk, and not assessed) as defined in the 2025 SAFER Needs Assessment. The results are presented in **Section 3**.

## 2.1 Task Force and Working Group

Virtual Task Force and Working Group meetings were facilitated regularly to consult with representatives of small water systems, along with organizational and agency partners that provide existing support. Participants have been asked to provide feedback on a number of efforts, including the Los Angeles County Drought Resilience Plan components in development, a report on Drought and Climate Resiliency Solutions for Small Water Systems in Los Angeles County developed by UCLA students, the Southern California Community Water Systems Atlas developed by UCLA, the cursory evaluation of small water systems, and the Support Program Framework in development.

Most meetings included a presentation about existing efforts and research compiled to date, followed by an interactive discussion, with participants contributing verbal and written comments. Key discussion topics include chronic and acute stressors faced by small systems, wildfire recovery and preparedness, short-term responses and long-term mitigation strategies to combat drought, and desired strategies that could support small water systems at the County-scale.

Themes of support that emerged through these conversations were summarized to develop the Support Program Framework. Working Group meetings included interactive discussions that helped refine the Support Program Framework components further, adjust or add elements of support, and inform what resources already exist for each. Additional needs and challenges actively voiced by Working Group members were incorporated in the Support Program Framework, along with suggestions about potential gaps where existing resources may not yet be available.

## 2.2 Listening Sessions, Feedback Sessions, and Survey

Proactive engagement was conducted with small water system representatives to hear first-hand what types of support would be most beneficial for small water systems. Two listening sessions were hosted in May 2025, one in Palmdale and one in Pico Rivera, that were attended by 23 representatives from 18 distinct water systems. The listening sessions included interactive discussions where representatives shared input on stressors faced by small water systems, existing sources for support, and key elements of a Support Program that would help small water systems in Los Angeles County.

In addition, a survey of small water systems in Los Angeles County was conducted to complement feedback shared during the listening sessions. The survey was built upon a prior survey conducted in 2022 for the County Water Plan and collected additional feedback about small water system priority needs. The survey received 13 responses, representing 11 unique water systems. Respondents shared information about their water system including total number of service connections, population served, and water sources. Respondents were asked to rank a variety of challenges by level of concern, shared information about type of assistance provided, received, and desired, and provided feedback on whether consolidation or regional partnerships would be of interest. A copy of survey questions is provided in Appendix A for reference. Survey responses also informed development of the Support Program Framework.

Upon completion of the draft version of this Framework, two additional feedback sessions were scheduled to meet with representatives of small water systems to highlight the elements of support previously identified and hear feedback about which elements are most vital to prioritize. The feedback sessions included roundtable discussions about the most prioritized elements to gather specific insight about implementation of new tools or resources. A feedback session for LA Basin SWS was held on July 14, 2026 at LACPW Headquarters in Alhambra and was attended by 8 representatives of 5 unique water systems. A second feedback session for Antelope Valley SWS was held on July 21, 2026 at Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency in Palmdale and was attended by 11 representatives of 9 unique water systems.

## 2.3 Cursory Evaluation Approach

To better understand Los Angeles County water systems, a cursory evaluation of all 203 community water systems and non-transient non-community water systems that are K-12 schools in Los Angeles County, based on data downloaded from the SAFER Dashboard on December 1, 2025, was conducted. The cursory evaluation included community water systems and K-12 schools because extensive data on these types of public water systems were readily available through the State Water Board. Other types of water systems, such as state small water systems and domestic wells, were excluded from the cursory evaluation due to limited existing data on these system types. The specific needs of state small water systems and domestic wells are explored in depth in the Los Angeles County DRP. The cursory evaluation synthesized data from numerous sources to characterize water systems' ability to reliably provide safe, clean, affordable drinking water to customers. Water systems were analyzed by size, governance structure, fire hazard risks, compliance with SB 552, progress towards CWP goals, existing support, and other metrics. Please refer to **Section 6** for a list of the data sets analyzed in the cursory evaluation.

Although the scope of the cursory evaluation included all community water systems and non-transient non-community water systems that are K-12 schools in Los Angeles County, the focus of this Framework is on small water systems. For the purposes of the Support Program, a small water system is defined as having 3,300 service connections or fewer. This definition is aligned with the State Water Board's Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Drinking Water Needs Assessment. However, it should be noted that the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) defines a "small water supplier" as a having between 15 and 2,999 service connections and providing less than 3,000 acre-feet of water annually, as described in **Section 1.3**. This Framework follows the State Water Board's definition of a small water system.

### 2.3.1 SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment

The SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment developed by the State Water Board was a key component of the cursory evaluation. Every year since 2021, the State Water Board conducts a Drinking Water Needs Assessment to identify water systems that are considered to be failing and to track progress towards achieving safe drinking water in communities across California. The Drinking Water Needs Assessment designates water systems as either failing, at-risk, potentially at-risk, not at-risk – based on their compliance with drinking water standards. This information is updated regularly and systems' statuses change over time. This Report includes a summary of the 2025 SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment specifically, as a snapshot in time of the needs of Los Angeles County small water systems.

Water systems are designated as failing if they meet failing criteria as defined by the State Water Board and provided in **Table 2-1**. Other statuses are assigned based on a system's calculated Risk Assessment score. The Risk Assessment score considers a system's performance with respect to nineteen risk indicators listed in **Table 2-2**. At-risk systems have the highest Risk Assessment scores, while not at-risk systems have the lowest Risk Assessment scores. Potentially at-risk systems have Risk Assessment scores below those of at-risk systems but could potentially experience circumstances that compromise ability to provide safe, accessible, affordable drinking water. Community water systems with more than 30,000 service connections or more than 100,000 population served are not included in the Risk

Assessment, and are therefore designated as “not assessed” unless they meet one of the failing criteria and are thus deemed failing.

*Table 2-1. 2025 SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment Failing Criteria*

| Failing Criteria |
|---|
| Primary Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) Violation with an open Enforcement Action |
| Secondary MCL Violation with an open Enforcement Action |
| E. coli Violation with an open Enforcement Action |
| One or more Treatment Technique violations (in lieu of an MCL), related to a primary contaminant, with an open enforcement action |
| Three or more Treatment Technique violations (in lieu of an MCL), related to a primary contaminant, within the last three years |
| Three Monitoring and Reporting violations (related to an MCL) within the last three years where at least one violation has been open for 15 months or greater |
| Source Capacity and Water Outage Violations with an open Enforcement Action |

*Table 2-2. 2025 SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment Risk Indicators*

| Category | Risk Indicators |
|---|---|
| **Water Quality** | History of *E. coli* Presence |
| | Increasing Presence of Water Quality Trends Toward MCL |
| | Treatment Technique Violations |
| | Past Presence on the Failing List |
| | Percentage of Sources Exceeding a MCL |
| | Constituents of Concern |
| **Accessibility** | Number of Sources |
| | Absence of Interties |
| | DWR – Drought & Water Shortage Risk Assessment Results |
| | Critically Overdrafted Groundwater Basin |
| | Bottled or Hauled Water Reliance |
| | Source Capacity Violations |
| **Affordability** | Percent of Median Household Income (%MHI) |
| | Extreme Water Bill |
| | Household Socioeconomic Burden |
| **Technical, Managerial, and Financial (TMF) Capacity** | Operator Certification Violations |
| | Monitoring and Reporting Violations |
| | Significant Deficiencies |
| | Days Cash on Hand |
| | Operating Ratio |
| | Net Annual Income |

# 3 Cursory Evaluation Results and Identified Needs and Strengths

The following subsections present key information about small water systems in Los Angeles County and document needs and strengths for water systems in the region. The data presented come from the Task Force and Working Group meetings, listening and feedback sessions, and cursory evaluation described in **Section 2** and include population and service areas, governance structures, existing support networks, fire hazard assessments, and compliance with SB 552.

## 3.1 Baseline Data

Based on data retrieved from the SAFER Dashboard on December 1, 2025, 122 (60%) of the 203 public water systems in Los Angeles County serve fewer than 3,300 service connections and were therefore classified as small water systems. These small systems served approximately 358,000 people, which was about 4% of the total population served by the 203 public water systems (approximately 10,058,000 people). That 60% of the public water systems served only 4% of the population speaks to the complexity of the network of water systems across Los Angeles County. **Figure 3-1** shows the population served by public water systems in Los Angeles County categorized by size and **Figure 3-2** shows the breakdown of small water systems in Los Angeles County by SAFER status. 58 (48%) of the 122 small water systems were either failing (11), at-risk (34), or potentially at-risk (13).

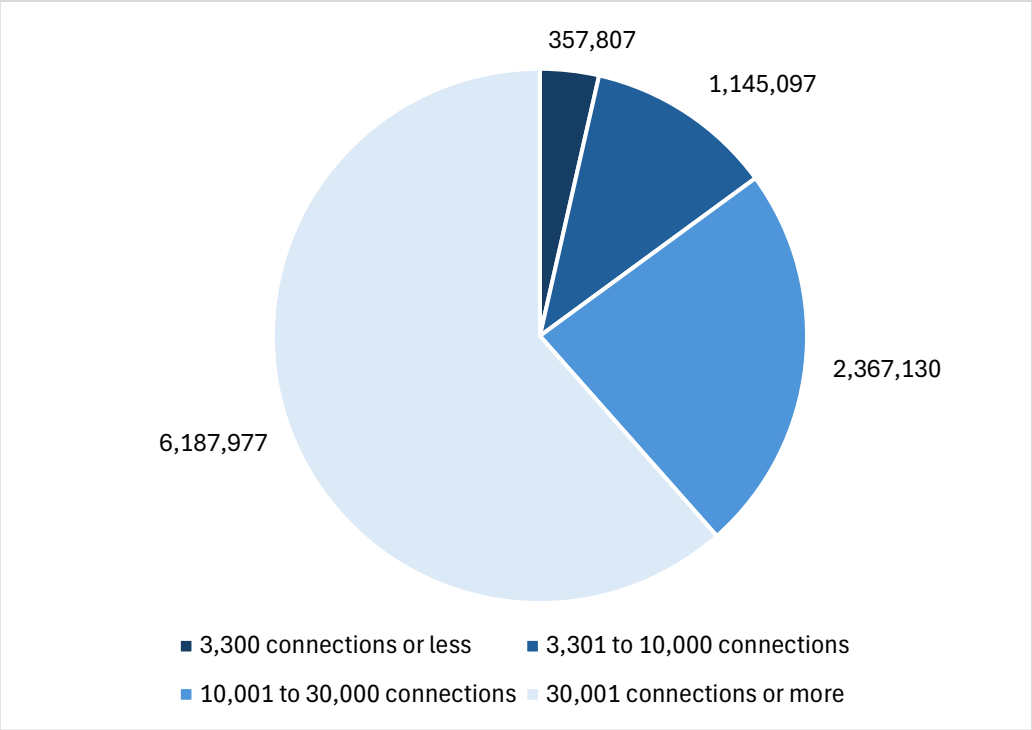


*Figure 3-1. 2025 Population Served by Water System Size in Los Angeles County*

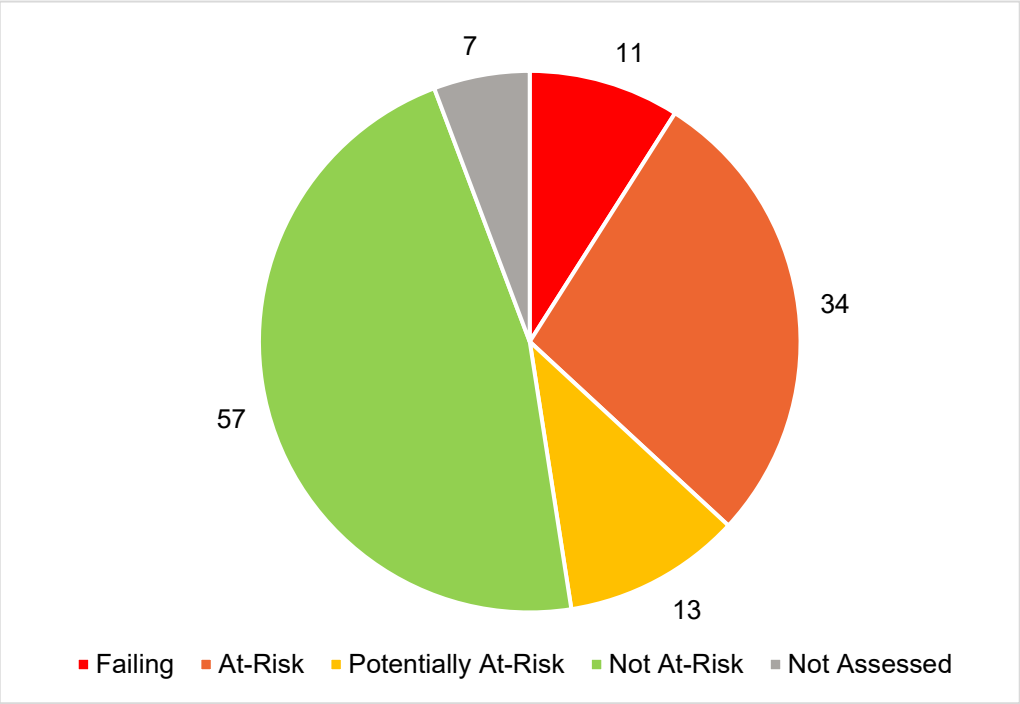


*Figure 3-2. 2025 SAFER Status of Small Water Systems (<3300 Service Connections) in Los Angeles County*

### 3.1.1 SAFER Status Over Time

Change in SAFER status of public water systems in Los Angeles County was analyzed from 2021 to 2025. For each public water system, the most critical SAFER status since 2021 was determined and compared to the system's 2025 SAFER status. **Figure 3-3** shows this comparison. All public water systems assessed in the 2025 SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment were included in this analysis and thus these results are not specific to small water systems. This analysis particularly relates to the CWP Target "I" to reduce at-risk systems by 100%. The data show that there were systems that had been on the failing or at-risk lists who have achieved non-failing status or decreased their risk between 2021 and 2025. More specifically, 33 public water systems in Los Angeles County that were classified in 2025 as not at-risk, had previously been failing, at-risk, or potentially at-risk. Additionally, 75 public water systems were not identified as at-risk at any point during the 2021 to 2025 analysis period. Conversely, 42 public water systems in Los Angeles County were classified as at-risk in 2025.

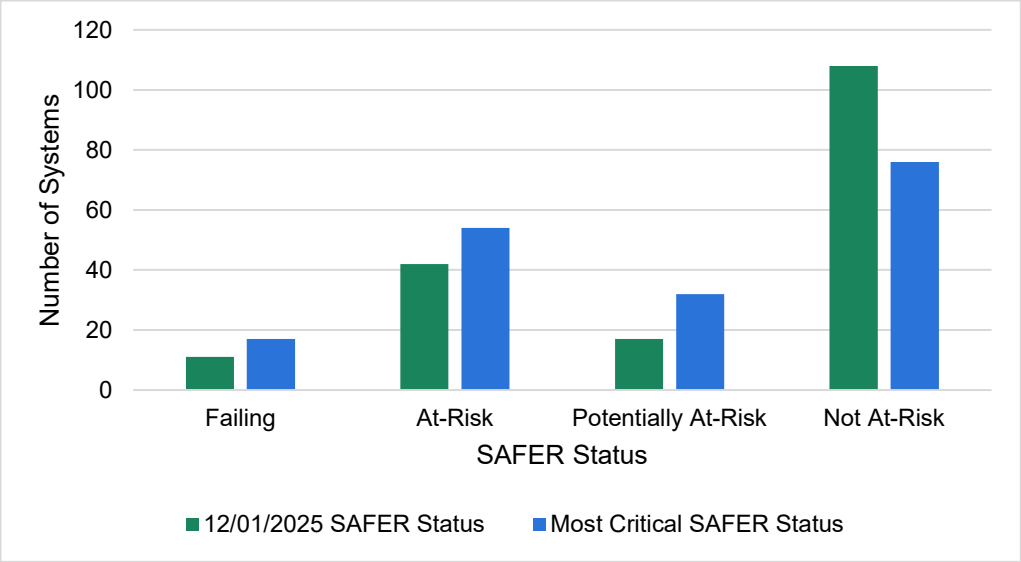


*Figure 3-3. December 2025 and Most Critical SAFER Status of Water Systems in Los Angeles County Between 2021 and 2025*

### 3.1.2 Governance Structure

Water systems in Southern California operate under at least ten different governance structures, including city, county water district, mobile home park, municipal water district, irrigation district, investor-owned utility, county waterworks district, mutual benefit, private ancillary, and private unknown. Governance structure data provided in this section is based on the "2023 California Community Water System Institutional Type Update" dataset compiled by Kristin Dobbin, University of California at Berkeley Assistant Professor of Cooperative Extension, as presented in the 2025 Southern California Community Water Systems Atlas produced by the UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation and the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources[2].

Though only about 22% of public water systems in Los Angeles County were city-run, these systems served about 66% of Los Angeles County's population. Small water systems in Los Angeles County have several different governance structures. **Figure 3-4** shows the different governance types across small water systems in Los Angeles County. Most small water systems in Los Angeles County were categorized as mutual benefits (35%), mobile home parks (17%), and investor-owned utilities (11%). SAFER Dashboard data as of December 1, 2025 indicated that about 9% of the small water systems categorized as mutual benefits were failing and about 30% were at-risk. About 24% of the small water systems that were mobile home parks were failing and about 52% were at-risk. Lastly, about 8% of the small water systems that were investor-owned utilities were failing, and another 8% were considered at-risk. To be effective, the Support

[2] https://innovation.luskin.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/The-2025-Southern-California-Community-Water-Systems-Atlas-report.pdf

Program must reach these governance types and include tailored strategies to address the unique challenges faced by these types of systems.

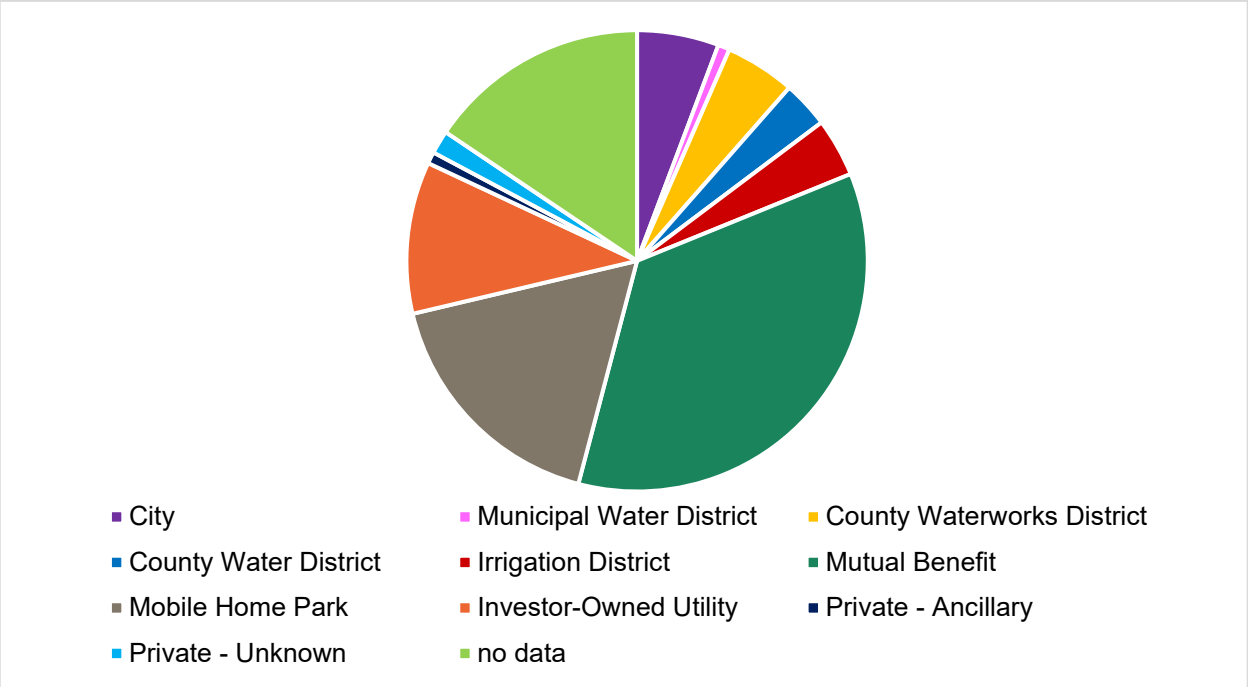


*Figure 3-4. Governance Type of Small Water Systems in Los Angeles County*

### 3.1.3 Progress Towards SB 552

As previously described in **Section 1.3**, SB 552 was enacted to strengthen California's capacity to manage future droughts and safeguard drinking water for communities vulnerable to climate change. The bill specifically outlines requirements for various entities, including county governments, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), the State Water Board, and small water systems. The requirements for small water systems include incorporating drought planning elements into their Emergency Notification Plan or Emergency Response Plan (applicable only to systems with 15 to 999 service connections), having an abridged water shortage contingency plan (applicable only to systems with 1,000 to 2,999 service connections), reporting on their monthly water supply conditions and usage annually, and upgrading their infrastructure to drought resilient standards. It should be noted that SB 552 defines small water systems (i.e. small water suppliers) as those with 15 to 2,999 service connections and serving fewer than 3,000 acre-feet per year.

More specifically, SB 552 requires actions by small water systems and sets specific compliance deadlines:

- By January 1, 2023:
    - Have monitoring systems to detect production well groundwater levels
    - Be a member of the California Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (CalWARN) or another mutual aid network
- By January 1, 2024:

    - Have an adequate backup electrical power supply
- By January 1, 2027:
    - Have a backup water source or system intertie that meets current water quality requirements and is sufficient to meet average daily demand
- By January 1, 2032:
    - Meter each service connection and monitor for water loss due to leakages
    - Have capacity to meet fire flow requirements

**Table 3-1** summarizes the progress towards SB 552 for systems in Los Angeles County, based on the 2023 electronic Annual Report (eAR), which were the most recent data available from the State Water Board as of the date of this report. Although SB 552 only applies to water systems with 15 to 2,999 service connections and serving fewer than 3,000 acre-feet, **Table 3-1** displays data for all small water systems, since systems with between 3,000 and 3,300 service connections must adhere to other requirements that overlap with SB 552.

In general, small water systems classified as failing as of December 1, 2025, were less likely to be in compliance with SB 552 requirements than systems classified as not at-risk water, with the exception of having a backup power supply. The requirement with the lowest compliance rate overall was to join a mutual aid network. Meeting this requirement involves no capital investment or financial commitment and presents a low hanging fruit opportunity for improving regulatory compliance and emergency preparedness.

*Table 3-1. Progress towards SB 552 based on 2023 electronic Annual Report*

| SB 552 Requirement | Percentage of Small Water Systems Meeting Requirement | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Failing | At-Risk | Potentially At-Risk | Not At-Risk | Overall Total |
| **Monitoring Systems for Production Well Groundwater Levels**[1] | 36% | 66% | 67% | 71% | 65% |
| **Member of CalWARN or other Mutual Aid Network** | 36% | 39% | 54% | 51% | 46% |
| **Backup Power Supply**[2] | 73% | 61% | 54% | 70% | 66% |
| **Backup Water Source or Intertie to meet ADD with Required Water Quality**[3] | 73% | 79% | 62% | 81% | 77% |
| **Meter Each Service Connections** | 45% | 45% | 69% | 88% | 69% |
| **Meet Fire Flow Requirements**[3] | 73% | 85% | 85% | 93% | 88% |

## 3.2 Identified Needs

The following subsections summarize needs identified through the cursory evaluation and engagement with small water systems. These needs are related to both acute and chronic stressors. Acute stressors are short-term events that can significantly impact the reliability and functionality of water systems, such as fires and earthquakes. Chronic stressors are issues that affect the reliability and effectiveness of water systems over long periods of time, like rising levels of contaminants in source water or lowering groundwater levels as well as lack of availability of qualified staff.

### 3.2.1 Acute Stressors

Effective response to acute stressors requires rapid, transparent public communication and proactive measures to counter misinformation. The cursory evaluation and feedback from small water system representatives highlighted the critical need to strengthen coordination with emergency responders and neighboring utilities. Additionally, more systems need support to ensure reliable access to emergency resources – such as essential supplies and bottled water – during crises. Water systems also need resilient infrastructure, including reliable backup power and preparedness for unprecedented climate-related disasters, to mitigate the impacts of acute events.

#### 3.2.1.1 Fire Hazard

Fire hazard is prevalent throughout Los Angeles County and poses significant risks to water systems across the entire region. In March 2025, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection released updated fire hazard severity-zone maps for Los Angeles County (OSFM, 2025). The updated maps categorize areas in two ways: by responsible entity and by fire hazard severity category. Areas in Los Angeles County were classified as either state responsibility areas or local responsibility areas. The fire hazard severity categories included low, moderate, high, and very high severity hazard. Since the SAFER Needs Assessment did not directly consider fire hazard, data from the fire hazard severity-zone maps were combined with data from the SAFER dashboard from December 1, 2025, to correlate SAFER status with fire hazard severity category. **Figure 3-5** shows the percentage of systems for each fire-hazard severity category relative to their 2025 SAFER status. Close to 70% of water systems considered not at-risk were in very high, high, and moderate fire hazard severity zones, which highlights that even systems generally considered not at-risk face notable fire hazard. When discussing takeaways from the January 2025 fires, small water system representatives specifically voiced the need for an alert system that is both accurate and timely; stronger relationships with first responders and emergency managers; enhanced communication with neighboring water systems; ensured access to their critical facilities during fires; support for emergency preparedness; and access to bottled water.

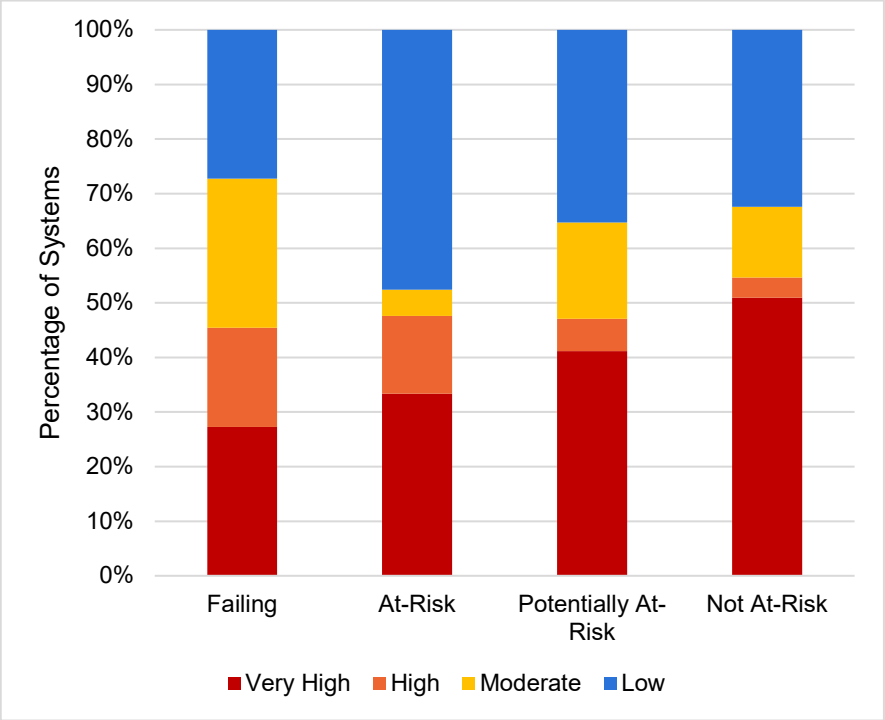


*Figure 3-5. Los Angeles County Water Systems in Fire Hazard Severity Zones by 2025 SAFER Status*

### 3.2.1.2 Seismic Risk

Small water systems in Los Angeles County face significant seismic risk due to the County's high earthquake hazard, which includes numerous active faults. Water systems in Los Angeles County face vulnerabilities both to local water infrastructure as well as to surface water import conveyance infrastructure.

Small water systems often rely on few critical assets without redundancy, such as individual wells, pump stations, storage tanks, and limited distribution piping (e.g., limited pipe loops) creating single points of failure. Earthquakes can directly damage this local infrastructure through shaking, liquefaction, and ground deformation, leading to pipe breaks, loss of pressure, damaged tanks or wells, and power-dependent facilities becoming inoperable.

In addition to local damage, many small systems are highly vulnerable to seismic disruption of imported surface water supplies. Notably, all three of the major aqueducts that provide water supply to Los Angeles County (the Colorado River Aqueduct, California Aqueduct, and Los Angeles Aqueduct) cross the San Andreas Fault. While the Los Angeles Aqueduct only provides water to the City of Los Angeles, approximately 37 small water systems receive part or all of their water supply from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) or a MWD member agency, whose water sources are the Colorado River Aqueduct and California Aqueduct. Large earthquakes could cause widespread damage to these conveyance systems, resulting in regional interruptions to imported water deliveries that may last weeks to months. Some small water systems that depend primarily or entirely on imported water lack sufficient alternative sources or emergency storage to withstand prolonged supply outages.

Overall, seismic risk to small water systems in Los Angeles County is driven by the combination of high regional earthquake hazard, physical vulnerability of local infrastructure, dependence on seismically exposed imported water conveyance, and limited operational and financial capacity for rapid recovery. These factors increase the likelihood and duration of post-earthquake water service disruptions, with implications for public health, fire protection, and community resilience. Similar support to what small water systems identified to address vulnerabilities to fire may help bolster small systems' ability to prepare for and respond to earthquake damage, including building stronger relationships with first responders and emergency managers; enhancing communication with neighboring water systems; ensuring access to their critical facilities during emergencies; providing support for emergency preparedness; and bolstering emergency access to bottled water.

## 3.2.2 Chronic Stressors

The following subsections present data and identify needs related to the following chronic stressors: affordability, funding support, water supply, water quality, aging infrastructure, and staffing and workforce.

### 3.2.2.1 Affordability and Funding Support

In the 2025 SAFER Needs Assessment, affordability was defined as the economic capacity of a community or household to pay for current drinking water charges and incur additional costs or fees in the future (State Water Resources Control Board, 2025). Affordability was measured using the indicators and thresholds shown in **Table 3-2**.

*Table 3-2. Affordability Assessment Indicators from the 2025 SAFER Needs Assessment*

| SAFER Affordability Indicator | Threshold |
|---|---|
| **Percent Median Household Income (MHI)** | 1.5% or more of the MHI is spent on water |
| **Extreme Water Bill** | Charges are 150% or more than the statewide average 6 hundred cubic feet charge |
| **Household Socioeconomic Burden** | Combined Poverty Prevalence and Housing Burden score of 0.25 to 1.0 (from the SAFER Needs Assessment) |
| **Notes: Indicators and thresholds come from the 2025 Affordability Assessment Methodology available at: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/drinkingwater/documents/needs/2025/2025affordabilityassessment-methodology.pdf** | |

As mentioned previously, CWP Target "J" establishes the goal that 100% of water agencies, including those in severely disadvantaged communities, have affordable cost of water to meet health and safety needs. The metric used to evaluate CWP Target "J" is the percent of water agencies specifically in severely disadvantaged communities where the cost of water for health and safety (6,000 gallons) does not exceed 2.5% of the median household income (MHI). Similarly, the 2025 SAFER Needs Assessment documents the water systems whose average annual water bill for residential customers was greater than 1.5% and 2.5% of the annual MHI within a water system's service area. These data are presented in **Figure 3-6** for water systems in severely disadvantaged communities in Los Angeles County. Beyond just those water

systems serving disadvantaged communities, based on data from the 2025 SAFER Needs Assessment, 14 water systems in Los Angeles County had an average annual water bill greater than 1.5% of the annual MHI within the system's service area. It should be noted that 42 systems in Los Angeles County had missing data and were not included in this analysis. A water system may be missing necessary data for this indicator if they did not provide this information to the State Water Board or if the water system does not charge for water.

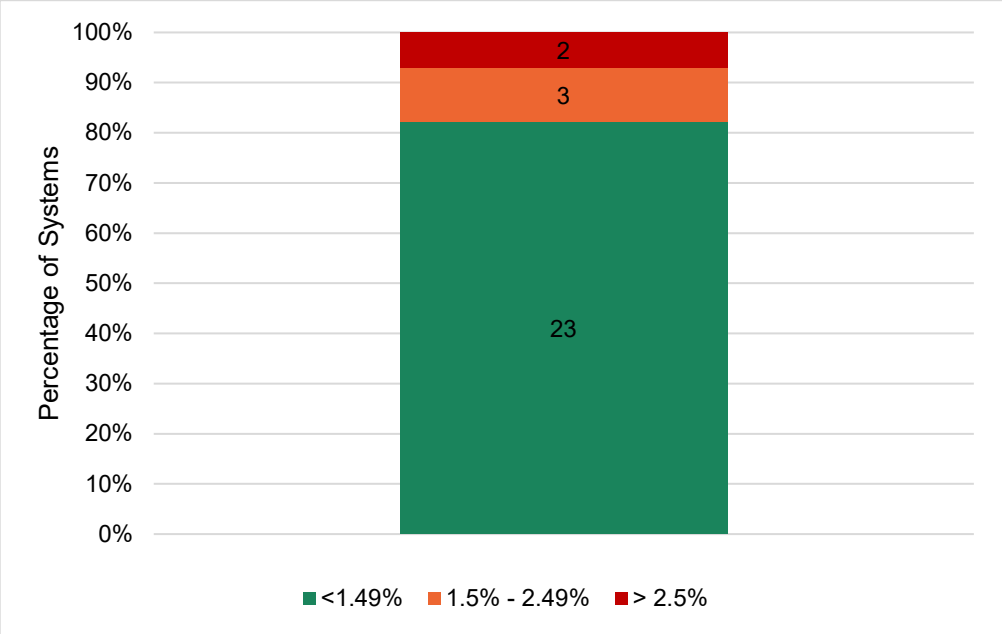


*Figure 3-6. Los Angeles County Water Systems in Severely Disadvantaged Communities in – Average Annual Water Bill as Percent of the Median Household Income (based on 2025 SAFER Needs Assessments)*

Small water systems face a growing financial burden when it comes to operation and maintenance and necessary system improvements. Although funding support is available, small water systems often struggle to access it. Representatives of small water system voiced several funding-related needs, including reduced requirements for funding assistance, quicker implementation of grant funding, increased availability of grants for more system types such as mutual water companies, and overall assistance accessing available funding.

#### 3.2.2.2 Water Supply

CWP Target "L" establishes the goal of increasing the ability to meet health and safety needs following an emergency by confirming 100% of small community water systems have access to alternative sources of supply. Small water system representatives have voiced the need for adequate source redundancy and/or backup supply, the establishment of interties, increasing fire flow capacity, minimizing water loss and theft, and comprehensive drought preparedness. The 2025 SAFER Needs Assessment documented the number of water sources and the presence of interties for public water systems assessed. Looking specifically at small water systems in Los Angeles County, about 26% had no secondary source and no intertie as of

December 1, 2025. Additionally, 41% of small water systems in Los Angeles County had interties. Four small water systems in Los Angeles County had an intertie as their only water source, and one small water system had no sources and no interties and used hauled water for supply. This information is presented in **Figure 3-7**.

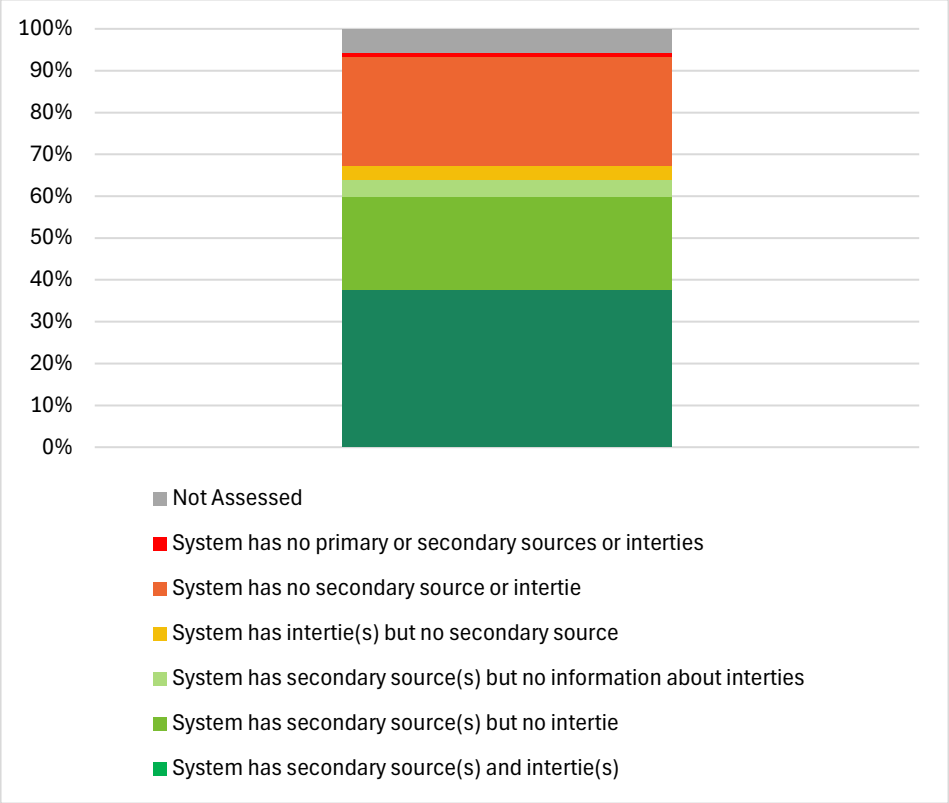


*Figure 3-7. Secondary Sources and Presence of Interties for Small Water Systems in Los Angeles County (based on 2025 SAFER Needs Assessment)*

### 3.2.2.3 Water Quality

Water quality issues are prevalent for water systems in the state of California and in Los Angeles County. As of December 1, 2025, in Los Angeles County, water quality issues were the primary driving risk factor for just over 50% of water systems that were failing, at-risk, or potentially at-risk. The distribution of the primary risk factors for failing, at-risk, and potentially at-risk systems in Los Angeles County and California is shown in **Figure 3-8**. Among the various indicators used to evaluate water quality risk, exceedances of maximum contaminant levels (MCL) for both primary and secondary contaminants and the presence of constituents of emerging concern contributed most substantially to the overall water quality risk score for water systems in Los Angeles County. Having either a primary or secondary MCL exceedance with an open enforcement action qualified a water system as failing per the 2025 SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment. During listening sessions, small water system representatives voiced the need for support in addressing constituents of emerging concern, adapting to new regulations, and communicating with residents about water quality challenges. Identifying resources to support small water systems facing water quality issues

would help address both primary and secondary contaminant challenges. For secondary contaminant concerns, this effort would directly align with CWP's Target "K" to reduce color, taste, and odor drinking water quality issues by 50%.

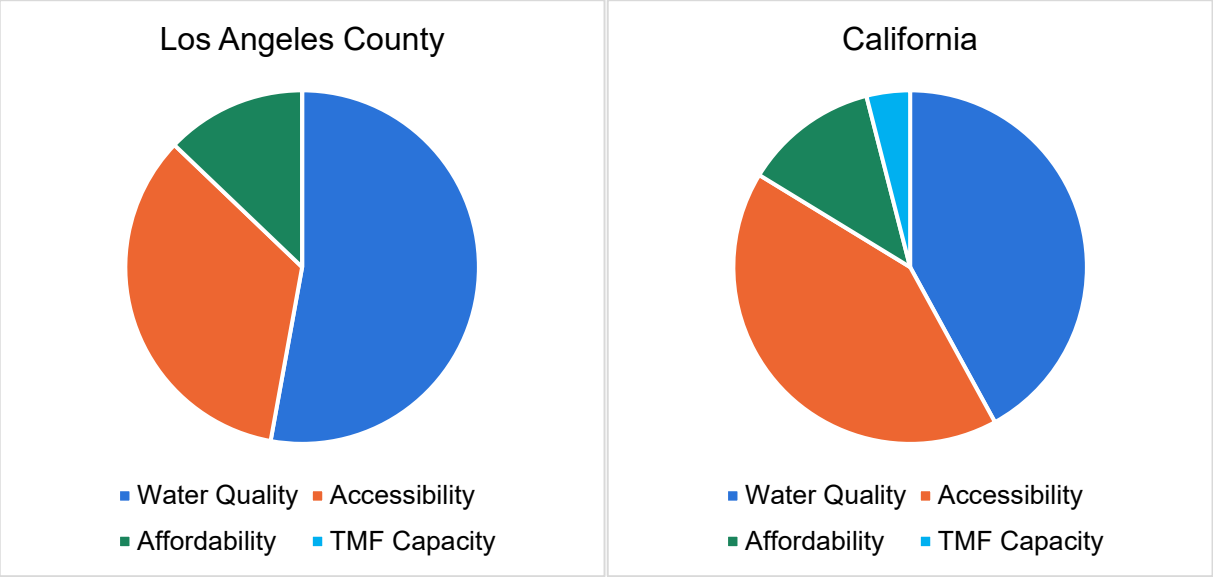


*Figure 3-8. Primary Driving Risk Factors for Failing, At-risk, and Potentially At-risk Water Systems in Los Angeles County and California (based on 2025 SAFER Needs Assessment)*

#### 3.2.2.4 Infrastructure

Many small water systems have existing assets that greatly exceed their average useful life expectancy, including pipelines, tanks, and pumps. Small water system representatives have emphasized the need for asset inventories and accurate record drawings to guide necessary infrastructure upgrades. Aging infrastructure often results in unreliable service, frequent leaks, and higher operations and maintenance costs, placing additional strain on limited resources. Key priorities identified include replacing aging assets (like tanks, pumps, and water mains), installing accurate customer water meters (with additional benefits for installation of smart meters), replacing lead service lines discovered during recent inventories mandated by the Lead and Copper Rule Revisions (LCRR) and Lead and Copper Rule Improvements (LCRI), and installing backflow prevention assemblies to protect the system from cross-connection contamination. While these upgrades are critical to ensuring the water system's ability to reliably meet drinking water needs and standards, infrastructure projects require significant planning, design, and construction support. Adequately addressing these needs will require coordinated investment and strategic planning to overcome financial and logistical challenges.

#### 3.2.2.5 Staffing and Workforce

Small water systems often face operational challenges related to staffing and workforce limitations. Representatives from these systems have emphasized the need for increased recruitment and training of water professionals to help reduce the burden on existing staff and support succession planning. While external TMF support may be available, accessing these resources may be challenging and small water

systems may need additional assistance. Moreover, even the most effective types of external support need to be directed and guided by local staff or board members that know the water system and community well. Addressing workforce and resource gaps is essential to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of small water systems.

## 3.3 Strengths

Small water systems frequently overcome their stressors to successfully and reliably provide drinking water service to their communities. Despite facing stressors, 47% of small water systems in Los Angeles County were currently not at risk as of December 1, 2025. Additionally, 29% of small water systems in Los Angeles County have not been considered failing, at-risk, or potentially at-risk in the 2021 (inception of the SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment) and 2025 analysis period.

In response to the many challenges that water systems face in Los Angeles County, communities have built strong support networks to assist water systems in providing safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water. Existing organizations are known to provide support to water systems in the County. While this list of supporting organizations was developed based on engagement with small water systems, it may not be exhaustive. The types of support provided by each of these organizations are summarized in **Table 3-3**. It should be noted that the existing organizations can be constrained in how and to whom they provide support. Existing organizations need to consider funding source constraints, jurisdiction, approvals required, and staff availability before committing to supporting water systems. As such, not all water systems are eligible to receive support from all existing support networks. **Table 3-4** describes the type of water systems that each organization may serve.

*Table 3-3. Types of Existing Support Provided for Small Water Systems by Organizations Operating in Los Angeles County*

| Type of Support | PWAG | CalWARN | WRD | CalMutuals | RCAC | CRWA | CSDA | CWA | Metropolitan Water District | AVEK | Municipal Water Districts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Administrative | X | | | X | X | | | | | | X |
| Regulatory (e.g. negotiating permit issues) | X | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Legislative (e.g. review, analysis, and lobbying) | X | | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Emergency response and preparedness | X | X | | | X | | | X | X | | |
| Funding acquisition | | | X | X | X | | X | | X | | X |
| Staff education and training | | | | X | X | X | X | X | | | |
| Technical assistance (leak detection, GIS, etc.) | | | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Groundwater management | | | X | | | | | | | | X |
| Water treatment facilities | | | X | | | | | | X | X | X |
| Delivery of imported water | | | | | | | | | X | X | X |
| Conservation programs | | | | | | | | | X | | X |
| Production/distribution of recycled water | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Water banking/ groundwater recharge | | | X | | | | | | X | X | |

Acronyms: Public Water Agencies Group (PWAG); California Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (CalWARN); Water Replenishment District of Southern California (WRD); California Association of Mutual Water Companies (CalMutuals); Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC); California Rural Water Association (CRWA); California Special Districts Association (CSDA); California Water Association (CWA); Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency (AVEK)

*Table 3-4. Support Organizations and Types of Water Systems Served*

| Organization | Types of Water Systems Served |
|---|---|
| PWAG | Invitation only |
| CalWARN | Any (no restrictions to membership) |
| WRD | Within WRD service area (overlying the Central Basin and West Coast Basin in the southwestern part of Los Angeles County) |
| CalMutuals | Mutual water companies |
| RCAC | Systems serving small, low-income, rural or Indigenous communities |
| CRWA | Systems serving rural communities |
| CSDA | Special districts |
| CWA | Investor-owned utilities |
| Metropolitan Water District | Systems that are connected to Metropolitan's distribution system and purchase water from Metropolitan |
| AVEK | Systems within AVEK service area in the Antelope Valley that are connected to AVEK's distribution system and purchase water from AVEK |
| Municipal Water Districts (Foothill MWD, Upper San Gabriel Valley MWD, West Basin MWD, Three Valleys MWD, Central Basin MWD) | Systems within a Municipal Water District's service area that are connected to the Municipal Water District's distribution system and purchase water from the Municipal Water District |

The cursory evaluation identified which water systems receive support from these organizations and the total number of support networks that each water system is a part of. All water systems in Los Angeles County that were assessed in the 2025 SAFER Needs Assessment are included in this analysis. **Figure 3-9** shows the relationship between a water system's most critical SAFER status between 2021 and 2025 and number of support networks joined. There is a clear trend that systems with more risk are less likely to have joined at least one support network. This highlights that failing and at-risk water systems are more isolated from support than water systems deemed not at-risk. It may be more challenging to reach those isolated, failing water systems that could most benefit from support.

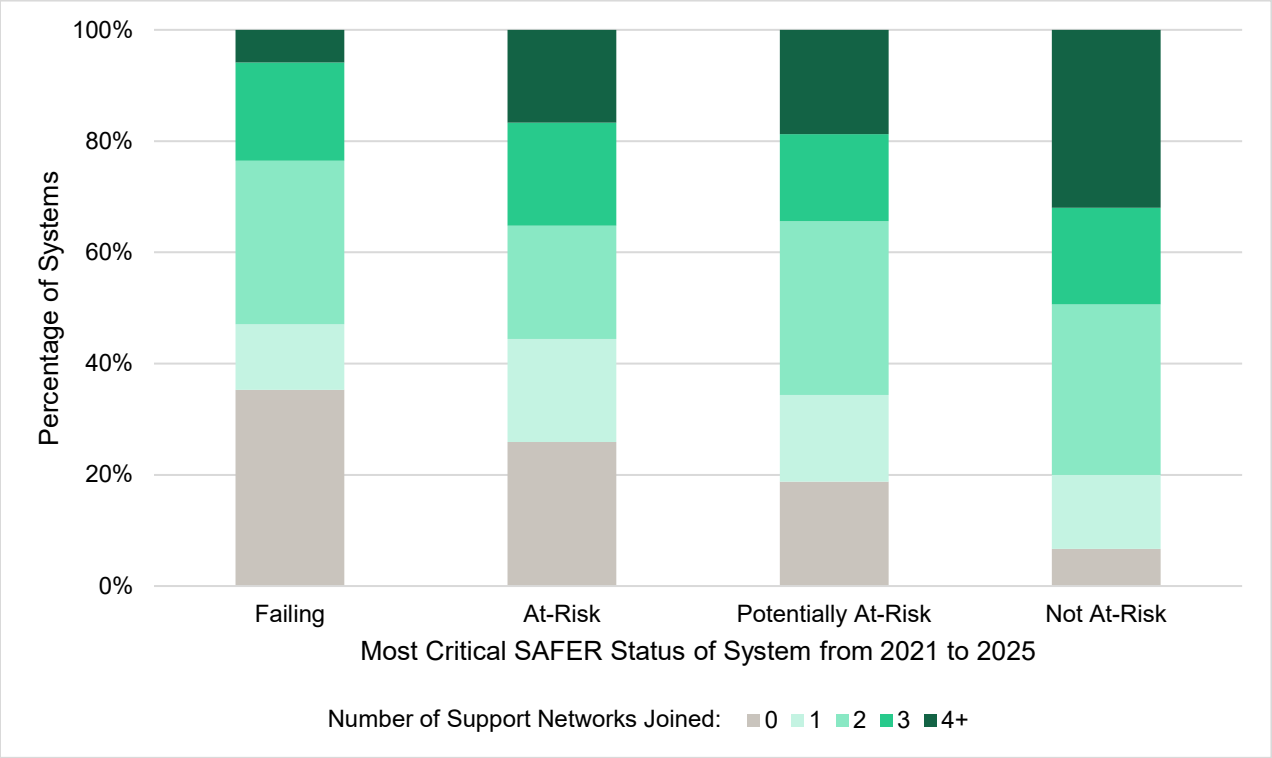


*Figure 3-9. Support Network Membership by Most Critical SAFER Status From 2021 and 2025*

# 4 Filling the Gaps: Small Water System Support Program Framework

As described in **Section 1.1.1**, the Support Program Framework consists of eight categories of support (including initial and ongoing assessment) and specific elements of support within each category. Existing resources that contribute to each element of support were identified to begin to understand what is already available and where there may be opportunities for additional support. Besides LACPW, the organizations that offer and/or could offer services of support were identified and categorized into eleven different types as follows:

- County government
    - LACPW
    - Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
    - Department of Public Health (Public Health)
    - Chief Sustainability Office (CSO)
- State government
    - California Department of Water Resources (DWR)
    - State Water Resources Control Board (SWB, or State Water Board)
- Federal government
    - United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA)
    - United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

- Local government
    - Town councils
- Service providers
    - Technical Assistance (TA) Providers
    - California Rural Water Association (CRWA) (also a water system association)
    - Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)
- Mutual aid networks
    - CalWARN
- Water system associations
    - Community Water Systems Alliance (CWSA)
    - California Association of Mutual Water Companies (CalMutuals)
    - Public Agencies Group (PWAG)
    - California Water Association (CWA)
    - California Special Districts Association (CSDA)
- Educational institutions
    - College of the Canyons
    - Los Angeles Trade – Technical College (LATTC)
    - UCLA
- Water wholesalers and large water systems
    - Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency (AVEK)
    - Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (Metropolitan)
    - Municipal Water Districts
    - Large water systems
- Groundwater agencies
    - Water Replenishment District of Southern California (WRD)
- Professional associations
    - American Water Works Association (AWWA), including its California-Nevada Section

Although not all types of support can or will be provided by LACPW, LACPW could play an active role in connecting small water systems to specific organizations that have resources available to support their needs. The following subsections describe the key elements of support, considerations for their implementation, and LACPW's and other contributing organizations' current and potential role in their implementation.

## 4.1 Initial and Ongoing System Assessment

Initial and ongoing assessment will be used by LACPW and other supporting organizations as a recurring tool for small water systems to assess and define their technical, managerial, financial, social, and political (TMFSP) capacity needs in response to various changing conditions. Assessment tools will be used to identify specific needs of each small water system in relation to the system's and CWP goals. In recognition that small water systems face new challenges over time and in response to growing climate change impacts, assessment is not envisioned as a one-time effort but rather a suite of tools that water systems and supporting organizations can make use of in response to and in preparation for new conditions. Key assessments identified focus on TMF capacity, disaster/emergency vulnerability, overall capacity, income

studies, and non-English language needs. A key element of support involves assessing pathways to success in collaboration with each small water system. As was previously defined in **Section 1.1**, the three pathways to success identified are supported independence, regional partnership, and consolidation. The key support elements for initial and ongoing system assessment are summarized in **Table 4-1**.

*Table 4-1. Initial and Ongoing System Assessment and Elements of Support*

| Support Element | Status (Across Contributing Organizations) | Implementation Considerations | LACPW | | Other Contributing Organizations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Current Role | Opportunities | Current Role | Opportunities |
| Assess pathways to success (supported independence, regional partnerships, consolidation) in collaboration with each small water system | Only existing in ad hoc manner | Each system's pathway to success should be determined in direct collaboration with the small water system. Develop a community and system engagement strategy to support the effort. Consider the water system's supply and demands, distribution capacity, infrastructure strengths and needs, and other technical factors for the assessment. | Los Angeles County Waterworks Districts act as a receiving water system in some consolidations near their service areas. | • Request SAFER Technical Assistance to work with failing and at-risk small water systems to identify interest in consolidation and partnerships and propose appropriate interventions to address their points of failure and risks.<br>• Provide small water systems with tools and resources to progress towards the goals established by a specific pathway. | Relationships arise ad hoc between small water systems and neighbors. Regional entities (e.g., WRD, MWD) provide various types of support to small systems that maintain their independence. Consolidations occur largely in reaction to increased stressors faced by a particular small water system, with various receiving water systems. | Following systematic assessment of the best pathway to success for small water systems, all contributing organizations would have an opportunity to provide more targeted support to address the key challenges faced by small water systems. |
| Conduct TMF capacity assessments | Existing – limited applications; available to some SWS | A combination of the SWB TMF assessment tool and other tools (like the US EPA's Water Infrastructure and Capacity Assessment Tool) can provide a more comprehensive evaluation of small water systems. Organizations that conduct capacity assessments often face funding constraints or eligibility limitations. It will be important to track California SB 1188, which requires the SWB to develop and adopt minimum TMF capacity standards for public water systems with fewer than 10,000 service connections, to help small water systems navigate the upcoming new TMF standards. | N/A | • Publicize the resources available to small water systems to conduct TMF assessments.<br>• Host a new TMF self-assessment tool for water systems to focus their efforts.<br>• Generate a database from TMF self-assessments to help match assistance to priority system needs. | Offer TMF and/or capacity assessment support<br>• State government: SWB<br>• Service providers: TA Providers, CRWA, RCAC<br>• Federal government: USDA, US EPA<br>• Groundwater agencies: WRD<br>• Water system associations: CalMutuals | • Expand questionnaires from TMF assessment tools.<br>• Foster resource-sharing by helping small water systems create partnerships with larger water systems. |
| Conduct disaster/emergency vulnerability assessments | Existing – limited applications; available to some SWS | Connect identified risks to potential disaster/emergency preparedness efforts, and consider building upon existing resources. Given how interconnected water systems are across Los Angeles County (physically and in terms of relationships) and how critical relationships between water systems and emergency responders, consider a regional disaster/emergency vulnerability assessment. | N/A | • LACPW can support and publicize resources available to support more proactive disaster/emergency preparedness by helping water systems conduct vulnerability assessments, and by conducting vulnerability assessments of regional capacity to respond to disasters.<br>• Coordination with the Wildfire Working Group on the plan to develop a Wildfire Vulnerability Assessment tool, can support that tool being developed to reflect the conditions and needs of small water systems. | Offer tools to conduct vulnerability assessments<br>• Federal government: US EPA (Strengthening Water Infrastructure for Tomorrow Initiative)<br>• Water system associations: PWAG<br>• State Government: SWB (via TA Providers), DWR (Water Shortage Vulnerability Explorer) | • Reach more systems with current services<br>• Expand risk assessment or drought and non-drought identified in Los Angeles County DRP to more systems<br>○ County Government: OEM, Public Health, CSO |

| Support Element | Status (Across Contributing Organizations) | Implementation Considerations | LACPW | | Other Contributing Organizations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Current Role | Opportunities | Current Role | Opportunities |
| Conduct income study | Existing – available to some SWS | The SWB offers technical assistance through the SAFER Program to provide income studies to small water systems prioritized by the SWB, to identify the median household income of a water system's service area. Small water systems may benefit from assistance compiling the data needed to conduct an income study. | N/A | • Publicize the resources available to small water systems to conduct income studies. | Offer income studies<br>• Water system associations: CalMutuals<br>• State government: SWB<br>• Service Providers: TA Providers | Reach more systems with current services. |
| Assess non-English language needs | Existing – assessed only in specific cases | Small water systems typically do not assess non-English language needs unless prompted by a specific law or regulation. There may be opportunities to leverage census data and Public Health data to facilitate this assessment. | N/A | Create a method and set of tools (like a compilation of different publicly available databases) to support small water systems in this assessment. | N/A | N/A |

## 4.2 Key Elements

The following subsections provide an overview of each category of support and how the various key elements could benefit small water systems. The proposed elements for all categories are summarized in **Table 4-2**. The Task Force and Working Group members provided additional feedback on the Framework and highlighted the most critical elements of support that need to be created, sustained, or augmented. Based on the compiled responses, the most critical elements of support include facilitating relationships with emergency managers and first responders, connecting small water systems to mutual aid, providing equipment for emergency needs, and coordinating engagement before, during, and after an emergency. Additional elements highlighted include facilitating tabletop emergency response exercises, creating and maintaining a matrix of funding opportunities, facilitating relationships between neighboring water systems to tackle shared challenges, advocating for funding opportunities to match small water system needs, and communicating with decision-makers about regulatory challenges faced by small water systems.

**Table 4-2** is organized by category of support and notes key current roles for LACPW and other contributing organizations, and opportunities for LACPW and other contributing organizations to provide further key support for each element. The opportunities identified are more specific for LACPW at this stage of development of the Framework. Contributing organizations may be constrained in various ways and the support contributing organizations offer is limited by their capacity, and the type of support available may change over time.

### 4.2.1 Facilitating Capacity Exchange

This category of support describes opportunities for water systems to learn from one another through facilitating connections. Alongside each element, small water systems may need assistance to learn to use tools and encouragement to engage in collaborative activities that foster knowledge sharing.

### 4.2.2 Advancing Workforce Development

This category documents opportunities to support the pipeline and succession planning for small water system staff and board members. Key elements identified to advance workforce development include offering internship programs; providing continuing education for operators, managers, and board members; and raising awareness of water sector job opportunities. These efforts will help develop and maintain a knowledgeable and skilled water workforce.

### 4.2.3 Supporting Community Engagement

This category of support documents opportunities to strengthen relationships between small water systems and the communities they serve. The key elements identified to support this category include developing templates for water systems to communicate with their community members and to improving public engagement efforts related to drinking water and in the specific context of emergencies.

### 4.2.4 Supporting Financial Stability

This category of support documents opportunities to reduce chronic financial stressors that small water systems face, as described in **Section 3.2.2.1**. While grant and loan opportunities exist for small water systems, many small water system's staff lack the time and capacity to research appropriate funding sources and complete funding applications. In addition, many systems could benefit from support to set water rates that balance customer affordability and operating costs. The key elements focus on helping small water systems understand existing funding opportunities, work together to apply for funding to address shared challenges, and secure technical assistance and funding for capital improvement projects, rate studies, and consolidation projects. Creating new grant or loan opportunities is not included in the Support Program Framework.

### 4.2.5 Maintaining a Resource Repository

This category of support documents opportunities to ease challenges with day-to-day water system administration. As described in **Section 3.2.2.5**, small water system staff and board members are often juggling many responsibilities and may spend most of their workdays meeting immediate needs to keep the water system running. The key support elements would assist staff with preparing regulatory-required documents, staying on top of regulatory deadlines, understanding changes to regulations and operations requirements, and hiring qualified operators and contractors. Having access to a resource repository may allow water system staff to save time on day-to-day responsibilities so that staff could redirect attention to tackling other long-term challenges.

### 4.2.6 Supporting Emergency Preparedness and Response

Small water systems face risks from natural and human-made disasters, such as wildfires, earthquakes, and cyber security hazards, but may not have as many resources as larger water systems to prepare for and respond to these disasters. The key support elements would help small water systems take a proactive approach to emergency preparedness.

### 4.2.7 Providing Advocacy Support

This category of support documents opportunities to amplify the voices of small water systems so that state and federal decision-makers hear about the unique challenges small water systems must overcome to achieve regulatory compliance and deliver safe and affordable drinking water to customers. Many small water systems struggle to meet new regulatory requirements if they are not paired with additional funding or technical assistance for implementation. The key elements proposed would expand existing advocacy efforts to give all types of small water systems in Los Angeles County a chance to provide input on policies that impact them.

*Table 4-2. Key Elements of the Support Program*

| Support Element | Status (Across Contributing Organizations) | Implementation Considerations | LACPW | | Other Contributing Organizations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Current Role | Opportunities | Current Role | Opportunities |
| **Facilitating Capacity Exchange** | | | | | | |
| **Set up and host a message board** | Existing – available to some SWS | Consider having a moderator. Targeted guidance and proactive outreach may be needed to foster familiarity and confidence in using the message board effectively. | N/A | Develop and host website, and moderate message board | Host message board<br>• Water system association: CalMutuals (for members)<br>• Groundwater agencies: WRD (pumper forum for members) | Encourage member water systems to join and contribute to Los Angeles County small water system message board. |
| **Host annual meetings with trainings** | Existing – available to some SWS | Annual meetings could allow small water system representatives to regularly gather in the same space, learn from one another, and build relationships. Trainings on relevant, timely topics chosen by small water systems could be included. | N/A | Host and moderate meetings | Operator and Leadership Trainings<br>• Professional association: AWWA Annual Meetings and Trainings<br>• Service providers: CRWA, RCAC<br>• Water system associations: CalMutuals, PWAG | • Promote existing training programs and create spaces where the trainings can foster relationship-building opportunities.<br>• Support Los Angeles County-specific annual meetings. |
| **Set up and staff 1-800 help line** | Not existing | The 1-800 help line could be a dedicated hotline to help small systems navigate questions and connect them to resources. Consider alternatively or also implementing website chat support and a pre-screening feature to identify urgency of requests. The specific level of effort required needs to be determined. Stakeholder engagement and outreach needed to increase awareness and reach target users. | N/A | Identify staff member or contract with a consultant who can run 1-800 help line (in the absence of another contributing organization able to run the 1-800 help line) | N/A | • Potentially run the 1-800 help line<br>• Direct small water systems to use the 1-800 help line to access immediate resources and help. |
| **Facilitate relationships between neighboring water systems to tackle shared challenges** | Existing – available to some SWS | Neighboring water systems tackling similar challenges could be given more opportunities to identify their shared challenges and receive support to tackle them together. Information sessions on opportunities for partnership (e.g., shared contracting) using resources from RCAC and the USEPA could help water systems think creatively about ways to work together. Implementation support is likely needed too – for example, establishing shared contracting for a bookkeeper may require support to reach agreement on conditions. | N/A | Create opportunities for small water systems to form relationships with each other and with their larger neighbors, and support their ideation of ways to work together to tackle shared challenges. | Facilitate relationships among members<br>• Water system associations: CalMutuals, PWAG<br>• Mutual aid networks: CalWARN | Support implementation of identified partnership opportunities. |
| **Advancing Workforce Development** | | | | | | |
| **Offer internship programs** | Existing – can be developed further | Secure appropriate supervision for internships, considering partnerships with larger water systems, since individual small water systems may not have the capacity to supervise and mentor interns. Partnerships with larger water systems can also provide an opportunity for interns to learn in different system size environments. The nature of the internship, whether paid or unpaid, should also be considered as it may affect the success of the program. In some cases, unpaid or voluntary internships have proven successful. | N/A | • Promote and further publicize internship programs.<br>• Support partnerships between water systems to host interns. | Internship programs:<br>• Water system associations: PWAG<br>• Large water systems | Expand internship programs or collaborate to supervise interns. |

| Support Element | Status (Across Contributing Organizations) | Implementation Considerations | LACPW | | Other Contributing Organizations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Current Role | Opportunities | Current Role | Opportunities |
| **Provide initial and continuing education for SWS operators, managers, and board members** | Existing – can be developed further | Continuing education opportunities and training could cover essential skills and tools (including basic computer software like Microsoft Excel) and focus on the fundamentals of operating and managing a water system. Educational programs should be audience-specific, with training opportunities for operators, general managers, and board members who may not have an extensive background in how to run a small water system. Additional support may need to be provided to support participation (childcare, transportation, etc.). Developing a "cohort" across multiple small water systems could lay the groundwork for long-term capacity exchange and collaboration. | When holding trainings for staff, Los Angeles County Waterworks Districts invite nearby small water systems to participate as well | • Promote and further publicize educational opportunities.<br>• Offer offices/facilities to host trainings facilitated by other contributing organizations | Educational programs:<br>• Professional associations: AWWA<br>• Educational institutions: College of the Canyons, LATTC<br>• Service providers: CRWA, RCAC<br>• Water system associations: CalMutuals | • Promote and further publicize educational opportunities.<br>• Develop specific educational programs and materials for targeted needs.<br>• Invite staff from nearby SWS to in-house trainings<br>  ○ Large water systems |
| **Raise awareness of water sector job opportunities** | Existing – can be developed further | This effort would benefit from partnerships with educational institutions. Being able to highlight career growth opportunities may make the profession more appealing and increase the pipeline of new workers in the water sector. | N/A | • Publicize water sector job opportunities and share job-searching tools.<br>• Leverage the CWP Water Communications Task Force to publicize water workforce needs. | Water sector job opportunities campaign<br>• Professional associations: AWWA<br>• Educational institutions: College of the Canyons, LATTC, UCLA<br>• Groundwater agencies: WRD | • Publicize and further develop existing tools to find water sector job opportunities.<br>• Assist SWS in advertising job openings |
| **Supporting Community Engagement** | | | | | | |
| **Develop plain language communication templates** | Existing | Develop communication templates based on the target audience or end-users (such as renters). Templates for public-facing documents could be made available in multiple languages that are commonly spoken in Los Angeles County. Consider language level to ensure information is accessible to the intended audience. | N/A | • Provide additional templates (and in additional languages) relevant to Los Angeles County water systems.<br>• Publicize existing resources and templates available and developed by other organizations. | Informational resources and templates:<br>• Federal government: US EPA<br>• State government: SWB<br>• Groundwater agencies: WRD<br>• Water retailers: Metropolitan, Municipal Water Districts<br>Offer translated templates:<br>• Water system associations: CalMutuals | Make resources and templates more accessible and audience-specific. |

| Support Element | Status (Across Contributing Organizations) | Implementation Considerations | LACPW | | Other Contributing Organizations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Current Role | Opportunities | Current Role | Opportunities |
| **Develop a County-wide drinking water public engagement campaign** | Not existing – can be built using existing resources | The goals and objectives of a drinking water public engagement campaign should be properly defined, with consideration for systems addressing current water quality violations. Helping Los Angeles County residents understand that most water systems reliably provide drinking water that is safe and clean (i.e., meets primary and secondary drinking water standards) while some systems struggle with water quality issues requires a thoughtful communication strategy. | Water for LA Campaign and CWP Water Communications Task Force | Build on and leverage the LACPW's Water for LA resources, the CWP Communications Task Force, and existing relationships with interested parties and organizations. | DWR supported a Los Angeles County-focused "Path to Tap" educational effort and resource through the Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement Program (also known as WaterTalks). | • Publicize developed drinking water public engagement campaign to reach target audiences.<br>○ Local government: Town Councils<br>• Expand outreach on point-of-use or point-of-entry water treatment devices identified in Los Angeles County DRP to end users of SWS with water quality challenges:<br>○ County Government: Public Health |
| **Coordinate community engagement before, during, and after an emergency** | Existing at small scales – can be further developed | Coordinated communication with the public across water system boundaries is key during emergency events, especially because some small water systems do not have their own website or lack the ability to quickly update their website with up-to-date emergency information, and because many residents do not know what water system serves them. The Water for LA website became a hub for communications about unsafe water notifications during the January 2025 fires but this was not widely known (by the public and by water systems). Consider appropriate safeguards and information-sharing protocols when developing tools for coordinated communication.<br><br>Public education about what to do before evacuating would be useful. | Water for LA Campaign and CWP Water Communications Task Force | • Further develop a website for live updates on water systems' statuses (unsafe water notifications and updates about infrastructure damage and repair).<br>• Assess whether partnership with a website like Watch Duty is possible, to provide water system status updates.<br>• Coordinate with the County-wide drinking water public engagement campaign to help residents understand potential emergency impacts to drinking water. | County government: Office of Emergency Management | • Publicize Los Angeles County's emergency community engagement coordination.<br>• Coordinate with LACPW on streamlined information sharing before, during, and after emergencies<br>○ County government: Office of Emergency Management |
| **Supporting Financial Stability** | | | | | | |
| **Create and maintain a matrix of funding opportunities** | Not existing | The matrix could include prerequisites for funding, steps required to obtain funding, and challenges and success stories that small water systems have experienced in the past, making funding opportunities more accessible to small water system staff. | N/A | • Develop, maintain, and publicize online matrix.<br>• Highlight funding opportunities where group applications are likely to be more competitive than smaller, isolated applications (see below). | Summarize available grants, loans, and technical assistance:<br>• State government: SWB, DWR<br>• Federal government: US EPA, USDA<br>• Groundwater agencies: WRD | Publicize centralized funding information. |
| **Offer bridge loans** | Existing – available to certain SWS | Existing bridge loan programs must align with funding agencies' criteria. Loans are also provided by private banks, but often at higher interest rates. | N/A | Document bridge loan opportunities. | Provide bridge loans:<br>• Service providers: RCAC<br>• Federal government: USDA | Circulate bridge loan and financing opportunities. |

| Support Element | Status (Across Contributing Organizations) | Implementation Considerations | LACPW | | Other Contributing Organizations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Current Role | Opportunities | Current Role | Opportunities |
| **Provide technical assistance (TA)** | Existing – available to certain SWS | Technical assistance helps water systems access planning, design, and TMF capacity support when costs would otherwise be prohibitive. TA projects are varied in scope and can help water systems address stressors related to water quality, water supply and aging infrastructure. Most TA programs are focused on serving disadvantaged communities. Water systems applying for TA funding should have accurate data on customer median household income (MHI) to accurately qualify, or request an income study where they think publicly available MHI data do not accurately represent their service area. | N/A | Help water systems understand what types of efforts qualify for TA, and help water systems submit TA requests. | Funding TA:<br>• State government: SWB<br>• Federal government: US EPA<br>Providing TA:<br>• Service providers: CRWA, RCAC, other TA Providers<br>• Groundwater agencies: WRD | Fund TA focused on key needs in Los Angeles County. |
| **Coordinate group funding applications** | Existing – available to certain SWS | Applications for certain grants may be more competitive when a group of small water systems submits a combined application. Group applications can also decrease administrative cost. Hazard mitigation grants may be well suited for group funding applications. | N/A | • Coordinate with water systems to identify key opportunities for group funding applications.<br>• Provide grant-writing support for group funding applications. | Group funding coordination<br>• Water system associations: CalMutuals<br>• Groundwater agencies: WRD | Work with LACPW to support group funding applications. |
| **Assist and/or partner on consolidation construction funding applications** | Existing – arises on an ad hoc basis | Supporting planning, design, and construction of consolidation projects is a funding priority for the SWB.<br><br>This support includes medium and large water systems serving as receiving systems in a consolidation. Many medium and large water systems may face constraints (e.g., water supply limitations, staffing limitations, need for funding to cover their staff time) in their ability to serve as a receiving water system. | Los Angeles County Waterworks Districts act as consolidation partners on an ad hoc basis | Identify and coordinate with potential consolidation partners, which in some cases may include Los Angeles County Waterworks Districts. | Medium and large water systems act as consolidation partners on an ad hoc basis. Some provide physical interties through a master meter without full consolidation. | Additional water systems could act as consolidation partners. |
| **Assist with grant applications, reporting, and financial management** | Existing – available to certain SWS | Assistance with grant applications, reimbursement requests, financial management, and reporting requirements is often limited to water systems that receive TA for Drinking Water State Revolving Fund construction financing. | Support grant applications on an ad hoc basis (e.g. IRWM grant applications through WaterTalks) | Provide grant application and management services to systems and for funding sources for which TA does not apply. | Technical assistance on funding applications<br>• Service providers: RCAC, CRWA, and other TA providers<br>• Groundwater agencies: WRD | Support water systems in connecting with grant support. |

| Support Element | Status (Across Contributing Organizations) | Implementation Considerations | LACPW | | Other Contributing Organizations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Current Role | Opportunities | Current Role | Opportunities |
| **Conduct rate studies** | Existing – available to certain SWS | Existing programs offer rate study support to rural water systems or mutual water companies, but they are typically conducted as a part of planning and design of construction projects. Some systems would benefit from rate study services at an affordable price outside of the context of a construction project.<br><br>While it is sometimes vital for a system to increase rates to close a system's gap between its costs and its revenue and to help fund adequate reserves, rate increases must take into account affordability of water bills for its community. | N/A | Connect to existing resources. | Low-cost or no-cost rate studies<br>• Water system associations: CalMutuals (for mutual water companies)<br>• Service providers: TA Providers, RCAC[3] and CRWA | Continue to offer and further publicize low-cost and no-cost rate study support. |
| **Maintaining a Resource Repository** | | | | | | |
| **Provide templates for regulatory, operations, and CIP documents** | Existing | The SWB and USEPA make many templates available for regulatory, operations, and capital improvement plan (CIP) documents. Compiling these and working with small water systems to identify and then fill gaps could help support small water systems. | N/A | • Compile and maintain online repository.<br>• Work with small water systems to identify gaps.<br>• Develop templates that fill gaps. | Regulatory bodies<br>• Federal government: US EPA<br>• State government: SWB and DWR | N/A |
| **Provide regulatory compliance schedule templates** | Existing – can be developed further | Monitoring schedules are provided for public water systems in the SWB's Drinking Water Watch tool, but other compliance deadlines are not noted. The SWB is in the process of developing an integrated reporting platform, called WaterTAP, for all Division of Drinking Water (DDW) reports and notices. | N/A | Develop and maintain templates in online repository, and note where customization is needed. | Regulatory bodies<br>• Federal government: US EPA<br>• State government: SWB<br>Educational resources<br>• Water system associations: CalMutuals | The SWB's new WaterTAP tool could be developed with the need of small water systems in mind, and clearly document regulatory deadlines and link to templates and support resources. |
| **Provide practical guidelines for new regulations** | Existing – available to certain SWS | The SWB and USEPA develop guidelines for some new regulations impacting small water systems. Compiling these and working with small water systems to identify and then fill gaps could help support small water systems. Guidelines should be tailored for staff who may not have an engineering or operations background. | N/A | • Compile and maintain online repository.<br>• Work with small water systems to identify gaps.<br>• Develop guidelines that fill gaps and workshopping drafts with small water systems to make sure they meet needs. | Regulatory bodies<br>• Federal government: US EPA<br>• State government: SWB and DWR<br>Educational resources<br>• Water system associations: CalMutuals | Continue to develop guidelines as new regulations are established, with a focus on distilled information for small water systems. |

[3] For rate studies that aren't covered by funding elsewhere, RCAC charges $3-10k depending on the complexity.

| Support Element | Status (Across Contributing Organizations) | Implementation Considerations | LACPW | | Other Contributing Organizations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Current Role | Opportunities | Current Role | Opportunities |
| **Maintain repository of available local operators and contractors** | Not existing | Repository could include contact information and business location of operators, well drillers, pump installers, cross-connection control specialists, etc. | N/A | Compile and maintain online repository based on input from small water systems. | List of certified operators<br>• State government: SWB<br>• Professional organizations: AWWA | Contribute to repository. |
| **Supporting Emergency Preparedness and Response** | | | | | | |
| **Connect to mutual aid** | Existing | Some types of mutual aid are available to all SWS but systems need support in signing up for mutual aid networks and accessing mutual aid. Beyond signing up to join a mutual aid network, small water systems could benefit from training on best practices for requesting and receiving mutual aid and lessons learned from leveraging mutual aid in past emergencies. More specific, regional mutual aid networks may pose more benefit than statewide mutual aid networks (e.g., CalWARN) but require more resources (time and/or money) to sustain. | N/A | • Connect small water systems to existing mutual aid networks<br>• Hold webinar or training session on best practices for requesting and receiving mutual aid. | Mutual aid coordination<br>• Mutual aid networks: CalWARN<br>• Water system associations: PWAG and CalMutuals | • Large and medium-sized water systems could expand mutual aid provided to small water systems.<br>• Consider whether an Los Angeles County-wide water system mutual aid network would pose significant benefit and be worth associated costs. |
| **Facilitate relationships with emergency managers and first responders** | Not existing | After the January 2025 fires, one frequent reflection from small water system staff was the lack of relationship between emergency responders and their system staff. This element could include conducting annual walkthroughs of SWS with the local fire departments, Emergency Operations Center managers, and other first responders, and coordinating to ensure SWS staff maintain access to facilities during an emergency. | N/A | Coordinate with Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management | Coordination between water systems and emergency responders<br>• Water system associations: PWAG | Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management could:<br>• Develop emergency contact database that includes service area boundary information (and consider whether spatial data for critical water infrastructure could be included in a private version).<br>• Hold meet-and-greets and coordinate site visits for water system staff, first responders, and emergency managers.<br>• Coordinate small water system participation in County emergency planning. |
| **Support with Emergency Response Plan (ERP) development** | Existing – limited resources available | The SWB and USEPA have ERP templates available. Not all water systems are regulatorily required to develop an ERP; some small water systems are only required to develop a very brief Emergency Notification Plan. | N/A | Connect to existing resources. Host training on ERP development. | ERP Templates<br>• Federal government: US EPA<br>• State government: SWB<br>• County government: Public Health<br>ERP development support:<br>• TA Providers, RCAC | N/A |

| Support Element | Status (Across Contributing Organizations) | Implementation Considerations | LACPW | | Other Contributing Organizations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Current Role | Opportunities | Current Role | Opportunities |
| **Facilitate tabletop emergency response exercises** | Not existing | Tabletop emergency exercises could be specific to the needs and capacities of SWS. Tabletop emergency response exercises could be hosted for small water systems by region, and emergency responders and managers could be invited. | N/A | Publicize tabletop emergency exercises hosted by other agencies or organizations. | Tabletop emergency exercises<br>• Water system associations: PWAG | • Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management could host tabletop emergency exercises.<br>• Larger water systems could invite neighboring SWS to participate in tabletop emergency exercises. |
| **Support interagency emergency response and recovery communications** | Not existing | During and after an emergency, there is often a need for multiple impacted water systems and agencies to coordinate on response and recovery efforts. | N/A | Convene virtual and in-person meetings and opportunities for agencies to coordinate during an emergency and recovery period. | Coordination of emergency assistance requests<br>• Mutual aid networks: CalWARN<br>• Water system associations: PWAG<br>Interagency coordination of emergency management<br>• Water retailers: Municipal Water Districts<br>• County government: Office of Emergency Management<br>• Water system associations: PWAG | • Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management could support the integration of SWS representatives into emergency response communications.<br>• Support legislation that allows water system personnel to access critical infrastructure that may be in an access-restricted area during and after a disaster, such as SB 1001 |
| **Provide equipment for emergency needs** | Existing – limited resources available | Access to a generator is crucial during many emergencies. Mutual aid networks may be able to provide emergency equipment but there is no guarantee that the equipment needed will be available in a timely manner. Contributing organizations, in particular LACPW, have an opportunity to bolster SWS's resilience by maintaining a stock of key equipment for emergencies. LACPW could conduct a survey of SWS to make sure what is acquired best aligns with SWS's emergency equipment needs. | N/A | • Connect to existing resources.<br>• Develop equipment lending program.<br>• Develop a plan for storing and deploying emergency equipment.<br>• Take advantage of external funding opportunities to support regional stockpiling of emergency equipment. | Emergency equipment lending<br>• Mutual aid networks: CalWARN<br>• Water system associations: PWAG (three shared portable generators) | Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management could coordinate with LACPW on acquiring, storing, and deploying emergency equipment. |
| **Offer bottled water services** | Existing – available to certain SWS | Residents served by SWS need bottled water in some situations, such as when their system is temporarily unable to deliver safe water following an emergency or has long-term water quality violations. | Coordinate with various county departments to provide ad hoc emergency bottled water support | Publicize existing process to acquire and distribute packaged or bottled water to residents served by SWS in the event of an emergency. | Bottled water service<br>• State government: SWB (through TA Providers)<br>• County government: Office of Emergency Management | Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management could further build out its bottled water services to meet the needs of communities served by domestic wells, state small water systems, and small public water systems. |

| Support Element | Status (Across Contributing Organizations) | Implementation Considerations | LACPW | | Other Contributing Organizations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Current Role | Opportunities | Current Role | Opportunities |
| **Provide physical interties** | Existing – available to certain SWS | SWS that do not have a backup source of water should have a physical intertie capable of meeting average daily demand (consistent with SB 552 requirements). | Los Angeles County Waterworks Districts provide physical interties on an ad hoc basis | Assess potential intertie partners, including Los Angeles County Waterworks Districts, for SWS that do not have current interties or backup sources. | Current intertie partners<br>• Metropolitan Water District<br>• Municipal Water Districts<br>• AVEK<br>• Large and medium water systems | Current intertie partners could provide interties to additional systems, with a focus on the most vulnerable (i.e., those dependent on a single source). |
| **Providing Advocacy Support** | | | | | | |
| **Advocate for funding opportunities to match SWS needs** | Existing – advocacy covers needs of certain SWS | There is a gap in grant opportunities, such as for fire hardening and resilience. | Advocate for regional resilience, especially when SWS needs overlap with larger regional goals | Connect water systems with relevant associations.<br><br>Share about small water systems' infrastructure needs and projects with InfrastructureLA. | Advocate for SWS funding needs<br>• Water system associations: CSDA, CWA, CWSA, CalMutuals, PWAG<br>• Professional associations: AWWA | N/A |
| **Communicate with decision-makers about regulatory challenges faced by SWS** | Existing – advocacy covers needs of certain SWS | Decision-makers include agencies, primarily at the county and state levels.<br><br>Advocacy should consider the array of challenges that small water systems face depending on their governance structure and size relative to larger water systems. | Advocate for regional resilience, especially when SWS needs overlap with larger regional goals | Connect water systems with relevant associations. | Advocate about SWS challenges<br>• Water system associations: CSDA, CWA, CWSA, CalMutuals, PWAG<br>• Professional associations: AWWA | N/A |

## 4.3 Connection to Drought Resilience Plan

While this Framework largely focuses on small public water systems, it complements the Los Angeles County Drought Resilience Plan (DRP), which is focused on domestic wells (1-4 service connections) and state small water systems (5-14 service connections). Implementation of support is intended to be seamless across those categories; **Figure 4-1** shows the how Small Water System Support Program nests within it support for domestic wells and state small water systems as outlined in the DRP.

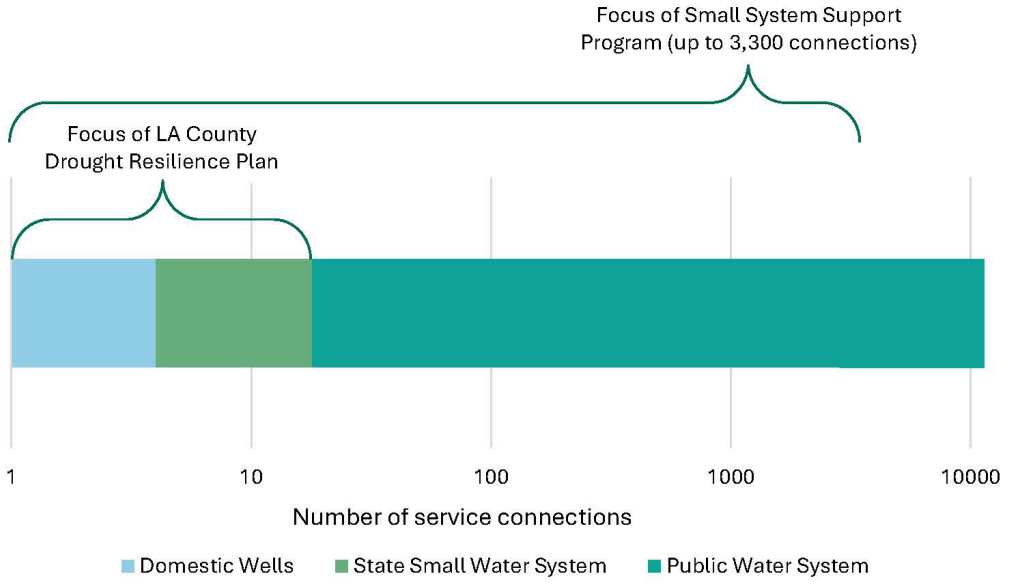


*Figure 4-1. Small Water System Support Program and Drought Resilience Plan by Service Connections*

As described in **Section 1.3**, the Los Angeles County DRP identifies short-term response actions and long-term mitigation strategies to address challenges that domestic wells and state small water systems face. Although domestic wells and state small water systems are held to different regulatory standards than public water systems, domestic wells and state small water systems could still benefit from many of the same types of support being developed here. **Table 4-3** presents the short-term response actions (STRA) and long-term mitigation strategies and actions (LTMSA) for domestic wells and state small water systems that are incorporated in the Los Angeles County DRP and identifies how these actions and strategies relate to the Framework.

*Table 4-3. Los Angeles County DRP Overlap with Framework*

| Type | DRP Action/Strategy | Related Support Element in Framework |
|---|---|---|
| Long Term Mitigation Strategies and Actions | LTMSA 01: Update the risk assessment completed for the County DRP to incorporate information and revisions to the DWR Water Shortage Vulnerability Explorer Tool. | Initial and Ongoing System Assessment – Conduct disaster/emergency vulnerability assessments |
| | LTMSA 02: Assess the potential risk for non-drought hazards (e.g., wildfires, earthquakes, landslides) that could interrupt domestic well or state small water system supplies and provide findings to appropriate planning efforts. | |
| | LTMSA 04: Coordinate and collaborate with Groundwater Sustainability Agencies in areas subject to Sustainable Groundwater Management Act regulations for the installation of water meters at state small water systems. | Supporting Financial Stability – Provide technical assistance |
| | LTMSA 05: Coordinate and collaborate with DWR and other entities to assist domestic well and state small water system operators with sizing and installing bulk water storage tanks at existing wells. This could include coordination and technical assistance, as well as financial assistance with purchasing a tank. | Supporting Financial Stability – Provide technical assistance<br>Supporting Financial Stability – Create and maintain a matrix of funding opportunities |
| | LTMSA 06: Assist domestic well operators with well monitoring by providing laboratory contacts for well sampling, testing, and result interpretation, Groundwater Sustainability Agency resources, and well monitoring guidance. | Maintaining a Resource Repository – Maintain repository of available local operators and contractors |
| | LTMSA 08: Implement outreach to end-users of domestic wells and state small water systems on point-of-use or point-of-entry water treatment options (e.g., undersink reverse osmosis, whole-house filter packs) to address bacterial and arsenic water quality issues. | Supporting Community Engagement – Deploy County-wide drinking water public engagement campaign |
| | LTMSA 09: Continue providing links to State-licensed water haulers and labs. Provide domestic well and state small water system users with a resource list of other entities that could help evaluate well condition, rehabilitation efforts, and replacement efforts, as needed. | Maintaining a Resource Repository – Maintain repository of available local operators and contractors |
| | LTMSA 10: Develop a program that provides technical and/or financial assistance to domestic well and state small water system users to replace shallow wells or rehabilitate/replace aging infrastructure that have in the past, or may in the future, run dry. Could also help domestic well and state small water system users identify potential grant sources. | Supporting Financial Stability – Provide technical assistance<br>Supporting Financial Stability – Create and maintain a matrix of funding opportunities |
| | LTMSA 11: Create and maintain a web portal with County information, permits and forms in one place. Develop an online data and mapping tool. Ensure portals and tools are simple, accessible, and easy to navigate to remove avoidable associated barriers. | Maintaining a Resource Repository – Provide templates for regulatory, operations, and CIP documents |
| | LTMSA 12: Support domestic well and state small water system communities and community water systems by assisting in the pursuit of funding and additional resources for exploration, development, and implementation of a plan for physical consolidation. | Initial and Ongoing System Assessment – Assess pathways to success (independence, regionalization, consolidation) in collaboration with each water system<br>Supporting Financial Stability – Assist and/or partner on consolidation construction funding applications |
| | LTMSA 13: County to update its All-Hazards Mitigation Plan, Emergency Operations Plan, and/or related documents to confirm interagency roles, responsibilities, and actions associated with implementation of the DRP. | Supporting Emergency Preparedness and Response – Support interagency emergency response and recovery communications |
| Short-Term Response Actions | STRA 01: Establish a communication and engagement program through the County Water Plan Water Communications Task Force in coordination with non-government organizations, groundwater sustainability agencies, and other entities to support voluntary water conservation measures among domestic well and state small water system users in the event of a water shortage. | Supporting Community Engagement – Deploy County-wide drinking water public engagement campaign |
| | STRA 02: Identify and establish a network of emergency potable water supply stations/suppliers in the event of a water shortage emergency. Ensure the network of water filling stations have sufficient water supplies while a water shortage is occurring. | Supporting Emergency Preparedness and Response – Offer bottled water services<br>Supporting Emergency Preparedness and Response – Connect to mutual aid |
| | STRA 05: Coordinate and establish a program to acquire and distribute packaged or bottled water to state small water system and domestic well users in the event of an emergency. | |
| | STRA 03: The County will continue existing coordination with public water systems that allow for water hauling and bulk water delivery to domestic well and SSWS communities with existing bulk water storage tanks. | Supporting Emergency Preparedness and Response – Provide equipment for emergency needs |
| | STRA 04: The County will continue existing coordination with public water systems to provide temporary, mobile bulk water shortage tanks for SSWSs. This includes ensuring agreements are in place in advance of the emergency for coordination with public water systems to provide temporary water supplies | |

# 5 Implementation Approach

Many types of support for small water systems in Los Angeles County already exist, but there are still small water systems in Los Angeles County that fail to, or are at risk of failing to, provide safe water for their communities. Supporting these systems is both a regional equity priority and a long-term investment in countywide resilience. This Framework outlines the existing types of support, identifies key gaps in support available, and documents how existing and augmented support can better be accessed by small water systems to have a positive impact in their communities. There are two key types of gaps:

1) Types of support that are generally not available or not available to all systems that need it; and

2) A "hub" for support that can be any Los Angeles County small water system's first stop to be connected to specific elements of support.

LACPW and the Task Force will continue to identify resources, partnerships, and approaches to address the full range of gaps identified in this Framework.

## 5.1 Role of LACPW

### 5.1.1 Basis for LACPW Role

As detailed in **Table 4-2**, LACPW has historically provided some specific types of support to small water systems, but not within a holistic program of support. This Framework positions LACPW to play a key role in providing more systematic and extensive support to small water systems, complemented by and integrated with the efforts of other organizations and agencies that provide support to small systems. This expanded support has its grounds primarily in the Los Angeles County Water Plan, but also in the LACPW Strategic Plan.

The LACPW 2022-2027 Strategic Plan identifies a population outcome that all Los Angeles County residents have access to safe, clean, and reliable water resources. This population-level outcome is not limited to County-operated systems and is framed Countywide, aligning directly with the Support Program's premise that small systems (many of which are not County-owned or operated) require County coordination and assistance to meet drinking water goals.

The Los Angeles County Water Plan Strategy 11 identifies that a "regional program to identify and support small, at-risk, potentially at-risk, and failing systems within Los Angeles County, including independent systems and private wells, would provide a better understanding of each system's unique needs, improve drinking water equity, increase workforce training, leverage funding opportunities, and tailor strategies to create longer-term resilience and higher-quality supplies"[4]. This Framework identifies the key components of that regional program. Like the overall Los Angeles County Water Plan, the Small Water System Support

[4] Los Angeles County Water Plan, 2023

Program is an effort for the County as a whole, with LACPW playing a key role in concert with many other contributing organizations and agencies.

### 5.1.2 LACPW as Both "Hub" and Contributing Organization

For the first gap – specific types of support available – this Framework outlines how diverse organizations and agencies (including, but not limited to, LACPW) might provide additional types of support to small water systems in Los Angeles County. More information on where LACPW might provide specific types of support as a contributing organization can be found in **Section 4.2**. For support elements prioritized by small water systems and the Task Force, further discussion of implementation considerations and funding opportunities is included in **Section 5.4**.

It is envisioned that LACPW will step into the second gap – providing a "hub" for support for small water systems – helping to understand the needs of small water systems in the County and connect them to relevant types of support. Though many organizations and agencies have a positive impact on small water systems in Los Angeles County, there is a need for an entity to maintain relationships with and between small water systems, and to help those systems understand what support is available to them and how to best make use of it. Plans for ongoing engagement with small water systems are documented in the Los Angeles County Small Water Systems Engagement Plan and focus on helping systems access available support, facilitating collaboration between systems, and gaining system staff and board members' insight on how to refine the Support Program.

In order to serve in this role, LACPW must have access to adequate funding and staff resources as well as alignment with necessary authority. While structural thinking about this "hub" role is still in its nascent stages at the time of this Report, the idea of a Small Water Systems Support Unit within LACPW has been discussed with LACPW staff and leadership. Assessing the right home within LACPW for the Small Water Systems Support Unit primarily consists of aligning authorities, funding, and staff capacities (skills and time). LACPW leadership has identified that the Small Water Systems Support Unit may best belong within either County Engineers or Planning, working in partnership with other divisions and offices of LACPW and the County overall. It is estimated that one to two full-time equivalent staff members would be needed to adequately staff a Small Water Systems Support Unit, as well as access to on-call consulting support for technical, managerial, financial, grant-seeking, engagement, and other capacities.

## 5.2 Role of Small Water Systems Task Force

The strengths and needs of small water systems in Los Angeles County will continue to change over time. The Small Water Systems Task Force established in 2024 is a body of individuals with insight into, and a vested interest in, the success of small water systems in the County. As such, it is envisioned that the Task Force meetings will continue to be a venue to evaluate progress on needed support for small water systems and identify potential adaptative change for the Support Program. Continued work by the Task Force and its partners will be essential in advancing support needs that may require external funding or dedicated staff capacity. This is particularly important to being able to reach desired outcomes for implementation of the Support Program, especially achieving the County Water Plan Target "I", to reduce at-risk systems by 100%.

Continued facilitation of quarterly Task Force meetings can help the Support Program respond to new conditions and integrate new strategies, actions, and targets as the County Water Plan and its Action Plan are regularly updated. The Small Water Systems Task Force has the ability to produce new working groups, like the Small Water Systems Working Group (described in **Section 5.3**) to actively contribute to shorter-term efforts.

## 5.3 Role of Small Water Systems Working Group

The Small Water Systems Working Group was created partially to help Los Angeles County meet SB 552 requirements of having a body that advises on the development of the DRP, and partially to support development of the Small Water Systems Support Program. Under SB 552 requirements, the County established the Small Water Systems Working Group as the standing body to support drought and water shortage preparedness. After the finalization of the County's DRP, the Working Group will convene as County staff deems appropriate (e.g., to advise on implementation or in the case of a water shortage emergency). Public Works will conduct an annual review of County DRP implementation and assess annual water supplies. The Water Shortage Emergency Response Process outlined in the County DRP outlines specific indicators and activities Public Works will initiate depending on the appropriate water shortage stage (i.e., Information, Alert, and Response stages).

## 5.4 Prioritization and Resource Identification

Immediate implementation or augmentation of all the elements of support identified in the Small Water System Support Program Framework is infeasible. As such, the Small Water Systems Task Force was asked to identify priority elements of support for early implementation. In addition, two in-person feedback sessions were held in July 2026 to convene representatives of small water systems in the Los Angeles Basin and Antelope Valley to further prioritize support and discuss considerations for implementation.

Many of the prioritized support elements focus on relationship building, and on emergency preparedness and response. Small water system representatives additionally prioritized access to funding or financing for capital improvements in the form of grant writing and management, application resources, and technical assistance. **Table 5-1** reflects support elements prioritized by small water systems and the Task Force, the potential lead agency or organization(s), resources required for implementation, and potential resources to support implementation. Notably, the Los Angeles Basin and Antelope Valley systems differed significantly when prioritizing elements of support. Continuing education, training opportunities, and TMF assessments emerged as top priorities in the Antelope Valley while advocacy and communication with decision-makers were uniquely prioritized in the Los Angeles Basin.

Finally, when prioritizing key support needs, small water system representatives were encouraged to identify types of assistance that are not already offered by organizations. However, several elements were identified as a priority to sustain using the existing network of organizations, rather than newly implement or augment. For example, advocacy for funding opportunities to match small water system needs and communication with decision-makers about regulatory challenges faced by small water systems are areas of importance for small water systems, but which have been long supported by organizations such as CalMutuals, PWAG, and

AWWA. Thus, these elements were not included in the priority table below, which focuses on support elements to be newly implemented or augmented.

*Table 5-1. Priority Support Elements and Resources*

| Support Element | Lead Agency or Organization | Status | Resource Requirement | | | Implementation Notes and Potential Resources to Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Additional Staff Time | County Budget[5] | External Funds | |
| **Provide initial and continuing education for SWS operators, managers, and board members** | County PW, Water system associations, Service Providers | Existing – can be developed further | Yes | Potentially | Potentially | Training opportunities, which are currently limited to members of a particular association (e.g., PWAG) or for staff and board of specific water system, could be expanded to include additional participants from neighboring systems.<br><br>County PW could promote training opportunities offered by others and host participants of these events at its offices. Additionally, County PW could leverage its role as convener of the SWS quarterly Task Force meetings to provide an annual training and regularly promote upcoming events.<br><br>With external funding, County PW could develop or partner on a cyclical training program catered to specific cohorts (e.g. general managers) to increase long-term capacity exchange and collaboration. Additionally, external funding could be used by County PW to administer stipends for training programs to increase participation (childcare, transportation, etc.).<br><br>**Potential funding source**: The US EPA Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Program could potentially fund workforce development training programs in future funding rounds. |
| **Facilitate relationships with emergency managers and first responders** | County OEM, County PW | Proposed | Yes | No | Potentially | SWS have indicated a desire for LACPW or Los Angeles County OEM to act as a liaison between emergency managers, first responders, and water system personnel, by maintaining contact through staffing changes, providing introductions, and seeking opportunities to organize tabletop emergency response exercises, meet-and-greets, or other forums.<br><br>**Potential funding source**: Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG), administered by California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) focuses on all-hazards emergency preparedness. The primary objective is to assist state, local, tribal, and territorial emergency management agencies to implement the National Preparedness System and to support the National Preparedness Goal of a secure and resilient nation. |
| **Provide equipment for emergency needs** | County PW, County OEM | Proposed | Yes | Potentially | Potentially | In-kind materials support from either County or external sources could help SWS mitigate impacts from power outages, water main breaks, well outages, etc. It would also be necessary to store and deploy equipment to support small systems in the case of an emergency.<br><br>Recently, DWR's Tank Program made 2500-gallon household storage tanks available over a short window of time to counties and non-profits to own and store for a future emergency. Because there was not pre-planned capacity to be able to store and later deploy the tanks, the short-term opportunity passed. If LACPW or Los Angeles County OEM were able to identify storage space and an implementation plan, the County would be able to take advantage of such a program in the future.<br><br>Additionally, connecting SWS with the SWB's Urgent Drinking Water Needs (UDWN) Program may help SWS harness funding to pay for specific equipment and labor to address emergency needs.<br><br>**Potential funding sources:** SWB's UDWN Program; USDA's Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants. |

[5] Budget other than for staff time. Where staffing is needed but not available, and implementation may require County budget for consultant support.

| Support Element | Lead Agency or Organization | Status | Resource Requirement | | | Implementation Notes and Potential Resources to Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Additional Staff Time | County Budget[5] | External Funds | |
| **Coordinate community engagement before, during, and after an emergency** | County OEM, County PW | Existing – limited form | Yes | No | Potentially | SWS have recommended that the County maintain a central hub to find drinking water quality and emergency notices, coordinating between SWB's Division of Drinking Water and Los Angeles County Department Public Health, where required notices (e.g., Do Not Drink Notices, Boil Water Notices) are submitted. While this idea originated related to emergency notices, the discussion expanded to note the value of a central hub for notices related to chronic water quality issues (e.g., notices for exceedance of a maximum contaminant level).<br><br>**Potential funding sources:** California Fire Foundation's Proposition 4 Grant will be announced in Fall 2026 and can fund public education & outreach, including local disaster preparedness and safety campaigns and community fire readiness workshops. |
| **Provide physical interties** | County PW, Large and Medium Water Systems | Existing – available to certain SWS | Yes | No | Yes | County staff could assist in assessing potential intertie partners for SWS that do not have current interties or backup sources.<br><br>**Potential funding sources:** SWB Technical Assistance; Drinking Water State Revolving Fund construction financing; coordinated regional funding applications through InfrastructureLA. |
| **Assist with grant reporting and financial management** | County PW | Proposed | Yes | Yes | Yes | SWS are in need of a large organization to support SWS with funding access. This may include initial identification of funding, pooling funds that could support multiple systems, administering a grant, and supporting the reporting requirements<br><br>County staff time would be required to secure grant funding and administer funds to systems. This could build upon LACPW's experience managing grants through the Integrated Regional Water Management Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement Program. |
| **Create and maintain a matrix of funding opportunities** | County PW | In-Progress | Yes | No | No | County staff time to update the funding matrix would sustain this support element.<br><br>Available resources to support updates to the funding matrix are the California and federal Grants Portals as well as Public Works' InfrastructureLA monthly newsletters that features funding opportunities. |

## 5.5 Evaluating and Adapting this Program

The Small Water System Support Program was developed from the goals and targets of the County Water Plan and the LACPW Strategic Plan, and shaped by existing conditions and engagement with people working for or with small water systems in Los Angeles County. Because of this, the Support Program is shaped to be most impactful now, prioritizing the systems facing challenges now, and delivering the resources and support most needed now. Over time, for the Program to be most impactful, it will need to be evaluated against its own goals, and adapted to improve its processes, or to address new or emergent challenges faced by small water systems.

The CWP Small, At-Risk System Resilience and Drinking Water Equity Targets (reducing the number of water systems deemed at-risk; addressing water affordability; reducing color, taste, and odor issues; and increasing alternative sources of water supply) are key metrics for assessing drinking water resilience and equity across Los Angeles County. These targets are useful for understanding the drinking water-related experiences of Los Angeles County residents. As the CWP collects new data about these metrics, and assesses conditions, it will be possible to reflect how the Small Water System Support Program has contributed to changes in these underlying metrics. Through engagement at the Task Force, quantitative or qualitative assessments of the changes seen in the CWP metrics can be gathered about the Support Program. For example, if fewer systems are found to be at-risk, and the systems that were able to improve were those helped by Support Program elements, this will be an important finding of Program evaluation.

Another recommendation is that the cursory evaluation that was completed during this Support Program's development be redone at 3- or 5-year intervals. This assessment was based primarily on data gathered by the State Water Board and can be central to evaluating which elements of support may be most needed in the region.

Lastly, it is recommended that, beyond data-driven evaluation described above, the staff supporting the Support Program Hub (as described in **Section 5.1.2**) conduct annual surveys or interviews with participants in the Support Program, both those who give and those who receive support. These "performance evaluations" can be crafted to allow LACPW to adjust its delivery of the Hub role and share stories of success or acclaim that are shared.

Adapting the Support Program over time will be necessary, and quantitative and qualitative evaluation, conducted routinely, will support a shared understanding of what is working, what is needed, and where improvements may be achieved. The nature of the challenges faced by small systems in Los Angeles County will change over time, and adopting a process for adapting the program to the most pressing or most widespread need is recommended to be built in at the outset.

## 5.6 Next Steps

This Final Report on the Small Water System Support Program Framework is the result of substantial engagement and feedback, as well as effort to integrate the diverse input provided by small water system representatives and members of the Task Force.

With direction on priorities having been provided by small water system representatives and the Task Force, prioritized support elements in **Table 5-1** will be a key focus in the near term. Additionally, LACPW standing up its capacity to serve in the Hub role is a key near-term priority.

To support implementation of the Program, a Los Angeles County Small Water Systems Engagement Plan and analysis of funding opportunities was developed. The outreach effort will support continued engagement with small water systems, with emphasis on those that are failing or at-risk, so that the Small Water System Support Program efforts can be responsive to the insights of water system staff and board members. The analysis of funding opportunities is in the form of a funding matrix of resources that can be acquired by (or in some cases deployed to) small water systems. Funding opportunities that can be used by LACPW and other agencies and organizations for their work to provide support to small water systems are noted in **Table 5-1** above.

Lastly, while the cursory evaluation has been fundamental in understanding the landscape of Los Angeles County small water system strengths and needs, it was not designed to closely examine the specific challenges of each small water system in the County. In order to gain a more detailed understanding of what is needed to support specific failing and at-risk small water systems in overcoming their key challenges, LACPW may choose to request SAFER Technical Assistance to engage with water systems to identify appropriate interventions to address their individual points of failure and risks. This would be a key element of the initial and ongoing assessment of systems' TMFSP capacity as identified in the Framework.

Additional detail on next steps for the Small Water System Support Program, as well as overall next steps for Strategy 11 of the Los Angeles County Water Plan to provide regional support for small, at-risk water systems, will be documented in the next 2-year Action Plan, for 2027 and 2028.

# 6 Resources

**Table 6-1** lists the data sets that were leveraged in the cursory evaluation. Additional reports referenced in the Framework are listed below.


- California State Water Resources Control Board. 2025. *2025 Drinking Water Needs Assessment.* June.
- Los Angeles County Public Works. 2023. *Los Angeles County Water Plan: Water Supply Resilience.*
- University of California Los Angeles and University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources. 2025. *The 2025 Southern California Community Water Systems Atlas: Informing the Implementation of California's Human Right to Water.*

*Table 6-1. Summary of Datasets Used in the Cursory Evaluation*

| Dataset | Dataset Source | Date Published/ Accessed | Use in Cursory Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12-1-2025 SAFER Dashboard | State Water Board[6] | December 1, 2025 | Identify inventory of systems, system attributes, and SAFER status |
| 2025 SAFER Risk Assessment Results | State Water Board | June 2025 | Capture point-in-time SAFER status of water systems to determine trends and most critical historical SAFER designation |
| 2024 SAFER Risk Assessment Results | State Water Board | May 2024 | |
| 2023 SAFER Risk Assessment Results | State Water Board | April 23, 2023 | |
| 2022 SAFER Risk Assessment Results | State Water Board | June 16, 2022 | |
| 2021 SAFER Risk Assessment Results | State Water Board | October 21, 2021 | |
| 2023 Electronic Annual Report Responses | State Water Board | April 1, 2024 | Evaluate SB552 compliance |
| 2025 Southern California Community Water Systems Atlas | University of California Los Angeles Luskin Center for Innovation | September 2025 | Identify governance structure of water systems |
| Drinking Water System Outreach Tool – CA Drinking Water Systems Nov 2024 | State Water Board | November 2024 | Determine highest severity fire hazard zone within each water system |
| Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map | Cal Fire | May 2025 | |
| Organizations' Membership Lists | Public Water Agencies Group (PWAG) | March 2025 | Identify which water systems access support from existing support networks |
| | California Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (CalWARN) | March 2025 | |
| | Water Replenishment District (WRD) | March 2025 | |
| | California Association of Mutual Water Companies (CalMutuals)[5] | April 2025 | |
| | California Rural Water Association (CRWA)[7] | September 2025 | |

[6] The SAFER Dashboard is updated daily, so data available at the linked website may have changed since the data were downloaded for the cursory evaluation.

[7] CalMutuals Membership List, CRWA Membership List, and CRWA Technical Assistance Projects List, cannot be shared outside of LACPW.

| Dataset | Dataset Source | Date Published/ Accessed | Use in Cursory Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|
| | California Special Districts Association (CSDA) | November 2025 | |
| | California Water Association (CWA) | November 2025 | |
| | Foothill Municipal Water District | September 2025 | |
| | Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District | September 2025 | |
| | West Basin Municipal Water District | September 2025 | |
| | Three Valleys Municipal Water District | September 2025 | |
| | Central Basin Municipal Water District | September 2025 | |
| | Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency (AVEK) | November 2025 | |
| | Metropolitan Water District (MWD) | September 2025 | |
| List of RCAC Projects Between 2019 and 2024 | Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) | September 2025 | |
| List of CRWA Technical Assistance Project Between 2023 and 2025 | CRWA[7] | September 2025 | |

# Appendix A Small Systems Survey Questions

# Los Angeles Basin Small Systems Survey

Los Angeles County Public Works is grateful for you taking a moment to share with us the unique strengths, as well as concerns and challenges faced by your system. Our goal is to use this assessment to develop a local Los Angeles County support program to address infrastructure renewal, water quality challenges, wildfire preparedness, compliance with new legal and regulatory requirements, and leverage for various funding opportunities.
Thank you for sharing your time and perspective!

* Required

## Contact Information

1. Name *

2. Position with water system *

3. Email address *

4. Telephone number *

## Water System Information

5. System Name *

6. Number of service connections *

7. Population served *

8. Address (Administrative office) *

9. Water Source(s). Please check all that apply. *

- [ ] Wells (Groundwater)
- [ ] Surface Water
- [ ] Supplier(s), if any
- [ ] Other

## Water System Concerns and Challenges

10. Please rate each of the following concerns/challenges by level of concern, from 'No Challenges' to 'Very Difficult Challenges.'

| | No challenges | Minimal challenges | Moderate challenges | Notable challenges | Difficult challenges | Very difficult challenges |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Finances/Funding Access | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Regulatory Compliance | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Aging/Failing Infrastructure | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Fire/Emergency Preparedness | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Water Quality/Contaminants | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Drought/Supply Interruption | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Intertie with another system/System redundancy | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Long-term Water Supply | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Operations/Personnel | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

11. Are you receiving assistance currently or recently with water system challenges?

◯ Yes

◯ No

## Assistance Received

12. What kind of assistance are you getting (or did you receive recently)?

13. How helpful has this assistance been in resolving the issue(s)?

14. Who has been providing this assistance?

## Assistance

15. Who would you most want and trust to provide you with assistance, if possible? Please check all that apply.

- [ ] Engineering firm or other outside consultant
- [ ] Division of Drinking Water engineer (regulator)
- [ ] Technical assistance provider
- [ ] Not-for-profit organization
- [ ] A large water system, or Los Angeles County, or another government agency
- [ ] Other

16. Are you in any mutual aid agreements or a member of CalWARN?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

17. Are you able to offer assistance to other small water systems?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

18. What kind of assistance (information sharing, equipment, managerial, back up water supplies, etc.)?

19. Are you interested in participating in the Los Angeles County Small Systems Task Force?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

## Regionalization/Consolidation

20. If some form of consolidation or regionalization would help you be successful, would you want to do it?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

21. Has consolidation or regionalization been suggested to you?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

22. What type of consolidation or regionalization would be of interest? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ Physical System Consolidation
- ☐ Managerial
- ☐ Financial

23. What is the main reason(s) for wanting or not wanting consolidation?

## Anything else?

24. Please share any additional information you believe is important and would like us to know in our effort to understand small system needs and identify strategies to address them.

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