

Infrastructure Messaging

Celebrating water progress and making the case for future funding



Background


Clean drinking water and healthy rivers for fish and wildlife are [bipartisan priorities](#), but nonetheless receive [far less government funding](#) than is needed to maintain both natural and built water systems. Effective advocacy coupled with recent crises helped elevate water in recent infrastructure discussions, securing billions of dollars for needs like lead pipe replacement, PFAS testing and treatment, and drought and flood preparedness in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act. But we know this funding is just a downpayment: the [EPA's latest needs assessment](#) found that we need to spend \$625B on water infrastructure. That is why it's so important to continue communicating about the health, environmental and equity benefits of investing in water, and making a case for future funding.

We know that water may be just one issue among many that you work on, and that communities living without safe water also contend with dirty air, heavy industry, lack of parkspace, and more. Our goal is to show how smart water spending can multi-solve interlocking challenges and create more livable neighborhoods and a healthier environment.

[Polling](#) shows that public awareness of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is declining at a time when many agencies and advocates are still working to get those dollars to the ground, so we created this message guide to help our partners connect the dots between federal infrastructure funding and community concerns, tapping into the strong public support for investing in safe water access and affordability, as well as resilient ecosystems and nature-based solutions. At a time when so much water news is focused on crises, stories of progress can help nurture hope and fuel action.

Big picture guidance

The most effective messages tap into closely held concerns, speak to a problem people are currently experiencing, and then offer a solution and/or a call to action. We have organized our talking points, below, accordingly. Here are the values, problem, and solutions we recommend uplifting in your infrastructure communications:

- 
- **Values:** Public health and safety, home and family, fairness, responsibility to future generations, care for the natural world¹
 - **Problem:** Aging infrastructure and extreme weather have left many communities with toxic taps, dry wells, boil water notices, flooded basements, and more
 - **Solutions/Interventions:** Justice-focused infrastructure investments that pair engineering and technology with nature-based projects, and prioritize areas with the most need
 - **Call to action:** Equitable spending of current funds, and ongoing investment in water infrastructure

To tap into voter values, make sure your infrastructure communications:


- **Paint a picture of the future we want:** safe drinking water and sanitation for all, thriving communities that can weather future droughts and storms, and a healthy environment for people and wildlife
- **Speak to lived experiences in your community** like water backing up into homes, or families that have to rely on bottled water for drinking, cooking and cleaning because of lead or PFAS contamination, as a way to make the current infrastructure investment gap real and relevant for your audience
- **Explain how historic federal funding puts solutions within reach,** focusing on the benefits rather than the dollars, and describing specific projects and partnerships that are proposed or planned in your area that will address local needs/concerns
- **Connect the dots to other issues,** including housing, air quality, food and farming, park equity, green jobs, and a just transition to clean energy.
- **Emphasize that equitable infrastructure is:**
 - Community driven: Planned and built based on input from local residents
 - Justice-centered: Prioritizes the needs of the most vulnerable residents
 - Multi-benefit: Addressing a range of problems simultaneously
 - Well-resourced: Adequately funded from the planning stage all the way through maintenance and monitoring

Sample Talking Points

Values:

- Every person in the U.S. deserves access to clean, plentiful drinking water, and a home that's safe from climate disasters.

¹ Note: while healthy rivers, lakes and streams, and clean water for fish and wildlife both poll well, safe drinking water consistently ranks at the top of voter priorities, and is a goal we recommend elevating in infrastructure discussions.

- 
- Finally, billions in federal infrastructure spending is helping to put these basic needs within reach for families that have been denied them due to disinvestment.
 - This historic funding has the potential to advance the human right to water while helping our communities weather heat, drought, fire and floods.

Problem:

- After an infrastructure building boom last century, federal water funding dried up, and many water systems have fallen into disrepair.
- Without government help, more maintenance costs have fallen on ratepayers, making water bills unaffordable, and leaving some critical updates unfunded.
- As a result, millions of people across the U.S. are living with toxic taps, dry wells, boil water notices, sewage spills, and flooded streets.
- Millions more don't have running water or flush toilets in their homes due to government neglect.
- Like other environmental justice issues, Black, Indigenous and other People of Color communities tend to bear the brunt of water safety, affordability and access issues, as well as climate disasters.
- [More than 3 million people](#) were displaced by climate disasters in 2022, and 2023 has seen a [record number of billion dollar disasters](#).
- Disaster recovery [funding is running out](#), underscoring the need to invest in prevention rather than recovery.

Solutions:

- Our nation's water problems are solvable in our lifetimes, in part thanks to billions in new federal water funding.
- These dollars aren't just for pipelines and treatment plants: infrastructure starts upstream with forests and meadows, and includes sewers and storm drains as well as green streets, parks and rain gardens in our neighborhoods.
- This "forest to faucet" approach is good for people, fish and wildlife.
- It protects clean water at the source, and helps the ground soak up more rain to reduce flood risk and refill underground aquifers.
- Federal infrastructure funds are making it possible for communities to:
 - Protect forests that feed our rivers and reservoirs.
 - Replace pavement with plants in cities.
 - Keep people safe from rising seas and stronger storms.
 - Get lead pipes out of millions of homes across the country.
 - Help communities test for and treat PFAS "forever chemicals."
 - Get more families connected to safe water and sanitation.



Call to action:

- To make the most of this moment, we need to prioritize spending in the areas impacted most by pollution and extreme weather, and involve local residents in project planning and construction.
- While the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act represent a huge step forward, we must continue investing in clean water and climate preparedness.

Appendix:

What we know from polling:

- Voters overwhelmingly agree that access to safe, affordable water is a human right.
- Drinking water and sanitation top the list of voters' infrastructure spending priorities.
- When asked about current water challenges, voters are most concerned about pollution of lakes and rivers, flooding, and drinking water contamination.
 - Voters consider PFAS, outdated infrastructure, lead pipes, and agricultural pollution the top threats to drinking water safety.
- Voters overwhelmingly support natural water and climate solutions, and generally agree that the best solutions will work for both people and nature.
- A strong majority of voters support prioritizing “overburdened,” “disadvantaged,” “marginalized” or “environmental justice” communities for infrastructure spending.
- About half of voters think climate change harms some groups more than others, and about a third agree that past racist policies have created the conditions for this inequality.

Read more:

- Polling: Water Hub ([August 2023](#) and [June 2022](#)), [US Nature 4Climate poll](#) (August 2023), [Climate Change in the American Mind, Climate Justice](#) (April 2023), [Walton Family Foundation](#) (March 2022)
- [We Make the Future Climate Justice message guide](#)
- [Water words that work](#)
- [Wonky water words and alternatives](#)