



WORK FOR WATER NEW ENGLAND

A PROJECT SUMMARY

Like other drinking water and clean water service suppliers throughout the United States, service providers in New England have been aware for some time that agencies and consumers are at risk because experienced staff members in mission-critical job categories are nearing retirement at a time when the water industry finds it difficult to develop, recruit, and retain qualified replacements.

To address this challenge, the New England Water Environment Association (NEWEA) and the New England Water Works Association (NEWWA) have been working collaboratively with their members and professional drinking water and clean water associations from throughout New England on a Work for Water- New England project to maintain workforce reliability.

This project's Steering Committee, comprised of utility leaders representing water professionals in all six New England states, and Leadership Group developed a three-phase approach to address regional workforce challenges.

The first phase of this project has been research into New England's water workforce risks. Using a variety of data collection methods, New England water service providers determined that their primary workforce risks were associated with hiring skilled trades workers (drinking water treatment operators, distribution operators, clean water treatment operators, electronic maintenance technicians, electricians, and machinist/mechanics); engineers; and Information Technology staff.

Difficulty filling these positions with qualified staff was traced to several factors:

- The water industry's failure to make itself visible and appealing;
- Uncompetitive pay and benefits; and
- Working conditions and requirements.

Some structural issues also make it difficult to address serious workforce risks:

- Insufficient public appreciation of the value of water and the resources required to protect communities and the environment, resulting in rates inconsistent with workforce investment;
- An unusual degree of decentralization of the water industry in New England, resulting in numerous service providers with a few staff members performing multiple roles; and
- Limited communication among drinking water, clean water, and storm-water service providers.

Work for Water's Leadership Group and Steering Committee is not only investigating problems but reaching out to learn about approaches that have been developed in other parts of the US to address them. The product of the Work for Water-New England project will be a Strategic Roadmap that identifies strategies, programs, challenges, potential partners, and phased objectives to achieve workforce reliability.

To learn more, read our updates from [**Phase 1**](#) and [**Phase 2**](#) of this project.