



# WORK FOR WATER NEW ENGLAND

## Work for Water - New England Update, December 2023

The New England Water Workforce Collaborative held their most recent in-person workshop with the Steering Committee and Leadership Group on October 17, 2023 at the NEWWA Training Center. The goal of this meeting was to review and discuss the strategic Roadmap; the forthcoming organization's structure, governance, funding, and staffing; and the implementation plan.

### Background

The New England Water Workforce Collaborative (Work for Water - New England) was established following a meeting between the Workforce Committees of New England Water Environment Association (NEWEA) and New England Water Works Association (NEWWA) in January 2022. Because workforce challenges are widespread and affect our entire region, NEWEA and NEWWA engaged New England drinking water and clean water associations to join this regional workforce collaborative. The Collaborative is led by the Leadership Group and Steering Committee, comprised of utility leaders from each of the six New England states.

The Collaborative contracted Cheryl Davis, Principal at CKD Consulting and former Senior Manager at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, to support the Collaborative's activities. Cheryl was integral to the founding of BAYWORK, a successful water workforce collaboration in Northern California.

As of January 2023, the Collaborative began the development of the Strategic Plan, following a three-phase approach:

- Phase I - Information Gathering (January to April 2023)
- Phase II - Investigation of Opportunities and Issues (May to August 2023)
- Phase III - Development of Strategic Plan (September to December 2023)

A variety of research methods, including an online survey that collected responses from over 200 drinking water and clean water service providers; meetings with the Leadership Group and Steering Committee; and analysis of data previously collected by NEWWA, were used during Phase I to identify high-priority workforce challenges.

During Phase II, the Steering Committee used the data collected and analyzed during Phase I to identify job categories that are most at risk of widespread vacancies, issues contributing to recruitment and retention challenges in these at-risk job categories, and structural issues inhibiting the ability of New England water service providers to address workforce problems.

The Strategic Plan that will be developed at the conclusion of this three-phase process will outline the proposed establishment of a regional workforce organization with the mission of addressing the most pressing water workforce challenges for long-term workforce sustainability and reliability.

### October 2023 Meeting

The main objective of the Collaborative's October 17 meeting was reviewing and discussing **the Roadmap** that was developed following their last in-person meeting in August 2023.

The Roadmap highlights five key strategies for addressing workforce challenges:

1. Coordinated Outreach
2. Coordinated Recruitment
3. Collaborative Training
4. Effective Incentives
5. Effective Communication

Each of the five strategies has associated programs that will be implemented to make the strategy actionable; potential partners to assist with furthering the strategy's key goal; expected challenges; and outlooks for phase I (1-3 years) and phase II (4-6 years).

Workgroups will be created to guide and implement each of the five strategies outlined in the Roadmap. The Steering Committee members were tasked with identifying potential partner organizations (non-utilities) that would serve on the workgroups managing these five strategies.

Participants were also tasked with identifying three of the five strategies that were most relevant and critical to their organization to allow for the assignment of members to workgroups. Additionally, participants named 1-3 utility employees with the capacity and willingness to provide leadership to a workgroup.

An additional, special implementation workgroup will be created to focus on drafting organizational structure, funding, and staffing for the eventual workforce organization developed by the Collaborative and its Strategic Plan. Attendees were asked to identify potential partner organizations, including utilities, association staff, equipment manufacturers, and contract operators, who should serve on this workgroup.

### **Future Meetings and Outlook**

Following the in-person meeting in October, the Leadership Group, with input from the Steering Committee, decided to extend Cheryl Davis' contract, which required additional funding and approval from NEWEA and NEWWA's Boards. This approval was secured

in late November 2023, which delayed the schedule for the Collaborative's future meetings.

The Collaborative's next three meetings will take place virtually in January and February 2024 and will address the following implementation initiatives: organizational structure, funding, and staffing. Throughout the remainder of Phase III, the Collaborative plans to draft and finalize their Strategic Plan. The Collaborative aims to present the implementation plan in early 2024.

The next and final in-person meeting will take place in March 2024.

New updates from the Collaborative and details about its Strategic Plan will be released periodically when action items and next steps have been established. If you would like to learn more about this project, please contact Kirsten King, Executive Director of NEWWA, at [kirsten@newwa.org](mailto:kirsten@newwa.org) or Mary Barry, Executive Director of NEWEA, at [mbarry@newea.org](mailto:mbarry@newea.org).

