



# WORK FOR WATER NEW ENGLAND

## CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

### Please Join the Work for Water - New England Collaborative

In water utilities throughout the United States, skilled trades workers in key positions, like drinking water and clean water treatment operators, are retiring, and utilities are finding it difficult to replace them. The pipeline of qualified candidates entering these jobs has decreased significantly, as educational and social trends shift. Due to a national emphasis on the importance of college degrees and reduced awareness of the benefits and importance of skilled trades work, interest in this field of work and training opportunities have declined. Research on New England trends indicate that unless investments are made to address workforce issues, the reliability of the drinking water and clean water services provided to New England businesses and households is at risk.

These workforce challenges are too significant for individual utilities to solve on their own and are too complex to undertake on a regional basis without thoughtful planning and coordination. As a result, the New England Water Environment Association (NEWEA) and New England Water Works Association

(NEWWA) combined efforts in 2022, on behalf of all New England water utilities, to initiate a New England Water Workforce Collaborative (Work for Water - New England). This Collaborative aims to create a Strategic Plan to 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.

Since January 2023, the Collaborative, which is comprised of drinking water and clean water utility leaders from each of the six New England states, has conducted in-depth research as part of a three-phase approach with the following outcomes:

- Identification of mission-critical job categories that most urgently need action and investments to address potential widespread vacancies;
- A Roadmap that identifies five key strategies for addressing workforce challenges, as well as potential partners, suggested actions, and recommended timelines for success;

- A governance structure for the proposed regional workforce organization that assures leadership by utilities but supports collaboration with all components of the water industry, as well as collaboration with partners with compatible goals (e.g., education, non-profit organizations, contract operators, consultants, regulatory agencies, and government programs focused on employment); and
- Recommendations for governance, implementation, staffing, funding, and in-kind services of the proposed regional workforce organization.

The Needs Assessment portion of the project is complete, a Roadmap has been adopted, and a structure for moving forward together has been identified. Although this reflects a year's worth of work and is a notable achievement, the most significant challenge — implementation — lies ahead. Because the project's design requires governance and implementation, there are opportunities for involvement from individuals in any segment of the water industry, as well as individuals working for organizations with complementary goals.

Please consider volunteering to participate in achievement of one of the goals identified in the Work for Water-New England Roadmap:

- Coordinated Outreach
- Coordinated Recruitment;
- Collaborative Training;

- Effective Incentives;
- Effective Communication.

Staff members of drinking water, clean water, and stormwater utilities are encouraged and eligible to serve as a member of the Work for Water- New England Governing Board, or as the Chair of one of the committees focused on Roadmap goals. If you are a member of any other sector of the water industry or engaged in a sector with compatible goals (e.g., education, public health, or employment), you are invited to serve as a committee member.

The full Roadmap can be viewed online:

<https://www.newea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/New-England-Water-Workforce-Roadmap.pdf>

If you would like to learn more about this effort, ask questions, or express interest in any of these roles, please contact one of the following individuals:

- Mary Barry, Executive Director, New England Water Environment Association (NEWEA)  
[MBARRY@NEWEA.ORG](mailto:MBARRY@NEWEA.ORG)
- Kirsten King, Chief Executive Officer, New England Water Works Association (NEWWA)  
[KIRSTEN@NEWWA.org](mailto:KIRSTEN@NEWWA.org)

The Collaborative's final in-person workshop was held on April 22, 2024 and the final report will be published in May 2024. Please join us in our efforts to ensure water workforce sustainability through the creation of Work for Water - New England.