

Wake County Project Accelerator: Phase 5 Memo

Subject: Outreach and Engagement Plan (Phase 5)

Project: Equitable Outreach Strategy for Well & Septic Financial Assistance Pilot Program, Wake County, North Carolina (Project Accelerator)

To: The Wake County Project Team

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Introduction

Wake County is one of the fastest growing communities in the United States, with a population of 1.15 million. This rapid growth has contributed to an increasing cost of living which risks pricing residents out of living in the County. Approximately 90,000 Wake County residents are served by more than 40,000 private drinking water wells, and 240,000 residents are served by approximately 90,000 on-site wastewater systems. Among residents served by these systems, well contamination and on-site wastewater system failures present health risks, and high repair costs can discourage residents from addressing them. Comparison of economic indicators to rates of reliance on private wells show that large proportions of people rely on private wells and septic systems in some of the most economically challenged areas of Wake County.

In 2022, the County’s Board of Commissioners approved \$200,000 to support a two-year pilot program dedicated to repairing wells and septic systems for eligible low-income and elderly homeowners. This Pilot Well and Septic Assistance Fund is administered through the Elderly

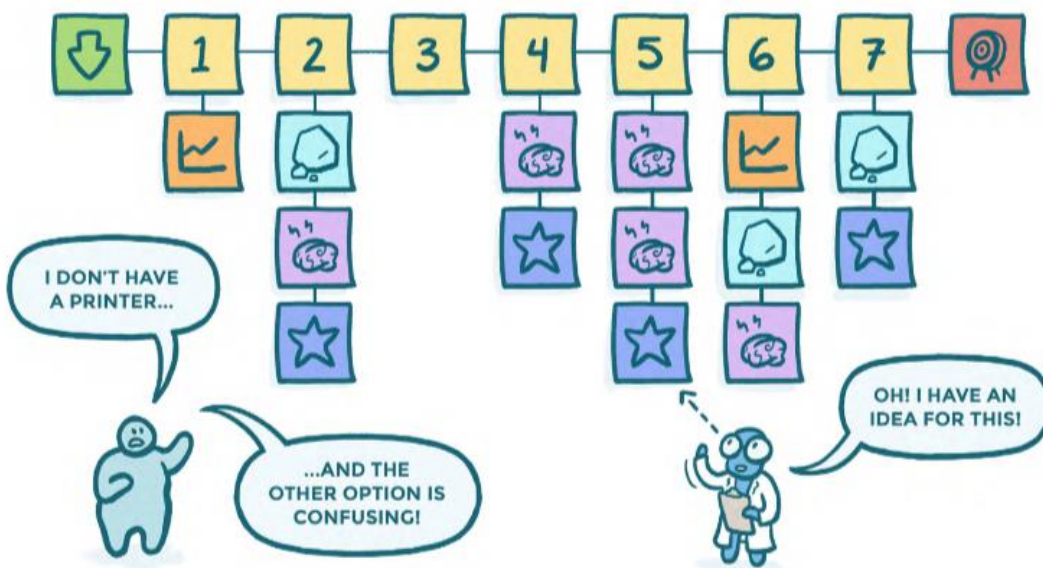
and Disabled Homeowner Grants and the Emergency Grant Program. Wake County Environmental Services and Housing Affordability and Community Revitalization are working together to ensure that this funding reaches vulnerable communities most in need of assistance with well and septic system repairs.

WaterNow Alliance (WaterNow) is partnering with Wake County to develop an equitable outreach and communications strategy for a two-year pilot program that provides financial assistance to repair wells or onsite wastewater systems for eligible low-income and elderly community members. This outreach framework will seek to ensure that vulnerable and under-resourced communities are represented and supported through this pilot program, and to lay the foundation for engagement around the County's One Water Plan.


In earlier phases of the project, WaterNow conducted baseline research to understand the Well and Septic Assistance Fund and Wake County's community outreach and engagement strategies and learnings (Phase 1); identified and researched strong examples of community engagement and assistance programs (Phase 2); and heard from local community organizations and past program participants in Wake County (Phase 3 and Phase 4). This memo includes the key deliverables for Phase 5, which focuses on iteratively designing an outreach and engagement plan, including strategy and examples of approaches to maximize public knowledge of and participation in Wake County's Well and Septic Financial Assistance Pilot Program.

Behavioral Blueprint Background and Approach

The approach taken in Phase 5 is to use a [behavioral blueprinting approach](#) to help organize and direct the outreach and engagement plan. A behavioral blueprinting exercise aims to map out the experience a customer has with a service from a holistic viewpoint. It captures an end-to-end view of the customer's experience, along with the "behind-the-scenes" work (e.g., underlying actors, systems, touchpoints, policies) that goes into creating and delivering that experience. It also maps out challenges or opportunities for customer engagement across each step of the process (see Figure 1 below).



- 

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS
Barriers that arise from how the decision-making environment is structured (e.g. discoverability, friction).
- 

PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS
Barriers that are rooted in cognitive biases (e.g. opportunity cost neglect, decision paralysis).
- 

OPPORTUNITY
Possible ways to increase motivation to perform this step, and ultimately reach the target behavior.
- 

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS
Questions about a step that you'd like to investigate moving forward.

Figure 1: Illustration of a behavioral blueprinting process. Source: [Center for Advanced Hindsight](#).

WaterNow has drawn on the insights from Phases 1 through 4 of this project to develop a behavioral blueprint for the process community members go through to receive support from the Well and Septic Financial Assistance Pilot Program, noting areas where customers face internal or external roadblocks to participation. This blueprint is available [here](#) (see also Attachment A).

Well and Septic Assistance Program Outreach and Engagement Toolkit

The outreach and engagement toolkit draws on the behavioral blueprint to identify the next steps toward harnessing these opportunities and overcoming any roadblocks in engaging customers throughout the process of learning about, applying for, and receiving assistance through the Well and Septic Assistance Program. The sections below organize areas of opportunity across four key themes, designed to focus on areas of work that may complement and build upon each other. Each section outlines potential opportunities related to the theme;

shares resources and examples, drawn from Phases 1-4 and from additional research; and identifies questions or decision points for additional consideration.

Expand and build on existing engagement with community organizations, through activities including:

- Engage community organizations to review and/or translate content and review the outreach distribution plan (*content creation*).
- Expand outreach through community organizations (e.g., community-based organizations, real estate community, faith-based organizations, etc.) (*content distribution*).
- Identify additional opportunities to cross-promote the Well and Septic Assistance Fund with other non-profit assistance programs (*content distribution*).
- Expand outreach through existing community organizations (e.g., El Pueblo CLAC, real estate community, faith-based organizations, etc.) (*customer engages with content and decides whether to take the next step*).
- Train providers who are already interacting with people in their homes to recognize well, septic and other structural issues in need of repair (*staff may direct eligible residents to apply for the Elderly and Disabled Homeowner Grants and the Emergency Grant Programs and/or to other programs offering financial and technical support*).
- Collaborate with other housing repair services and outreach programs to promote ongoing maintenance (*project completion and maintenance*).

Examples and Resources

Resources and examples for expanding and developing engagement through community organizations include:

Building a bridge to a local community:

- Durham, North Carolina's successful [Community Ambassador program](#) made use of a consultant hired from within the community that the program intended to reach. The community consultant's familiarity with the community and long-standing relationships with organizations and individuals within it allowed for the easy development of trust and communication around the Ambassador program.
- Partnering with organizations that reflect the demographics of their communities may be an effective way to build trust with populations that have expressed limited trust in government programs. For example, working with an organization like [El Pueblo's](#)

[Community Leadership Action Committee \(CLAC\)](#) may help allay concerns about interacting with the County among the Latine community in Wake County.

Spreading the word through community volunteers:

- The [Walnut Creek Watershed Learning Network](#), a community engagement program in Raleigh NC, invites participants to participate in a six-week educational course aimed at building community engagement around watershed issues. Course graduates receive a \$400 stipend for their time.
- Using volunteers to raise awareness has also been carried out in support of government assistance programs. The Cobb County Water System in Cobb County, GA uses its [Outreach Volunteer Program](#) to spread the word about its water efficiency and conservation programs. Participants attend six training sessions and gain competency educating their communities around a variety of water-related issues.
- A [Community Ambassador program](#) aiming to build engagement with the community and support enrollment in water and sewer discount programs was implemented in Cleveland, OH by the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, Cleveland Water, and CHN Housing Partners.

Vetting and developing content in partnership with community organizations:

- The Public Health Department of Seattle and King County, WA developed [outreach materials for its Poverty Bay Septic Rebate Program](#) through collaboration with several environmental groups, including ECOSS, an environmental justice organization which centers immigrant and refugee voices. The video that the collaboration produced to promote the program features clips from individuals speaking Vietnamese and Spanish, and focusing their remarks on the particular communities they represented. The video was also produced with subtitles in [Vietnamese](#), [Spanish](#), and [Korean](#), as well as English.
- Water and energy utilities have partnered with community organizations to produce water or energy conservation related *telenovelas*, as videos (Sonoma Clean Power's [Por El Mañana video series](#)), plays ("[Telenovelas in the Park](#)," a [collaboration](#) between the Mujeres de la Tierra and Tree People organizations, supported by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's [Community Partnership Outreach Grants Program](#)), or radio spots. These aim to share information in a familiar, conversational format, and highlight tangible examples of what participation in the program might look like.

Sharing information with community partners:

- Wake County's Long-Range Planning Department already engages community partners to share Census and demographic information. These efforts could also incorporate data about water systems across the County, to support organizations seeking to better understand if and how the populations it serves are likely to rely on well and septic systems, and to inform any outreach or programming underway in these locations.

Expand and build outreach and communication content and strategies, through activities including:

- Tailor content to address common barriers or obstacles (e.g., through an FAQ sheet addressing common concerns) (*content creation*).
 - Speak to key structural or psychological barriers, including:
 - Uncertainty or fear around County staff on site (e.g., exposure to immigration, etc.).
 - Concerns about potential risks involved in participating in the program (e.g., concern that participation in the program gives the County a stake in the home; worries about health or maintenance issues).
 - Fear of judgment for delayed action (e.g., being asked "why didn't you take action sooner?")
 - Concern/uncertainty about other issues that may be flagged during the site visit.
 - Questions about language barriers and translation support.
 - Lack of bandwidth to complete the testing and application process.
 - Highlight the support provided throughout the application process (from key points of contact at Health and Human Services, from Regional Centers, etc.) (*customer reports a well or septic concern by phone or through a well or septic complaint webform*)
- Highlight storytelling alongside information (e.g., showcase success stories to help visualize process and benefits) (*content creation*).
- Target outreach to locations with especially high need and/or eligibility (in partnership with other departments and community organizations; using spatial data) (*content distribution*).
 - Potentially gather and incorporate well and septic system information as part of the Planning Department's survey of duplex and quadruplex units (content distribution).
- Tailor content to common drivers for testing and repair (e.g., selling or purchasing a home; local/national news; clear changes in operation; presence of children in household) (*content creation*).
- Tailor distribution efforts to align with common drivers for system failure (e.g., pre- and/or post- major storm or flood events) (*content distribution*).
- Identify sources of referrals to key Wake County web pages; identify common drop-off points in customers navigating web pages (*customer engages with content and decides whether to take next step*).
- Streamline and further highlight content across Wake County web pages (*customer engages with content and decides whether to take the next step*).
- Explore ways to increase search engine optimization and increase likelihood and prominence of the program in Google's search results (*content distribution*).

Examples and Resources

Resources and examples related to expanding communications content and approaches include:

Highlighting storytelling and program participants:

- This [video](#) summarizes housing repair services to low-income homeowners and special needs renters in King County, introducing both County staff and a number of different program participants and their experiences, and outlining responses to common anticipated questions about the services.
- The [Albemarle Housing Improvement Program](#), located in Albemarle County, Virginia, includes [written and video testimonials](#) from past participants.
- The [Local Energy Efficiency Alliance Program](#), working in the same region, provides [four clickable case studies](#) that provide a short snapshot along with a [more in-depth description](#) outlining: a short summary of each participant's story; their description of their experience in their own words; basic issues uncovered in the home energy assessment; energy improvement measures implemented; and the participating contractor(s).
- The Habitat for Humanity Seattle – King County focuses on the impact of stories of its program participants in a [more narrative format](#).

Tailoring content to address common psychological and logistical barriers:

- Barnstable County's [AquiFund web page](#), which describes the septic repair and replacement low-interest loan program, includes a "Frequently Asked Questions" section, covering common questions about eligibility, the application process, and the implications of the loan on future efforts to sell a home or refinance a mortgage. The Suffolk County Septic Improvement Program also outlines [a list of FAQs](#). The [Albemarle Housing Improvement Program](#), [Nassau County S.E.P.T.I.C. program](#), and [Philadelphia Water Bill Customer Assistance Program](#) provide examples of application roadmaps and/or checklists, outlining what to expect in each step of the process.



Using AHIP's Services

STEP 1: INTAKE

- **Preliminary phone or in-person screening**
 - We'll ask you questions about your household: who lives with you, your household income
 - We'll ask you questions about your house: Is there a repair emergency? What are the other issues? What source of heat do you use? What are your energy and water bills like?
- **Entry into our database/waitlist**
 - With more than 400 households on our list, we cannot get to everyone right away. We prioritize health and safety emergencies, households with children and elderly occupants, and neighborhoods with special funding available
 - We encourage prospective clients to call back to check on their status and to update their information

STEP 2: ENROLLMENT

- **Eligibility verification and program application**
 - You will be assigned a Rehab Specialist, who will contact you. He will verify your income and other eligibility measures and provide program application paperwork to fill out. Homeowners must be current on their real estate taxes (or have a payment plan in place) and have clear title to their homes. Residents who hold a life estate are eligible
- **Initial home review**
 - Your Rehab Specialist will talk with you about your house and conduct an initial walk-through

STEP 3: PROJECT PLANNING

- **Inspections**
 - Depending on where you live (city or county) and the types of repairs you need, your Rehab Specialist will schedule one or more general and/or specialty inspections. These may be done by AHIP staff, third-party specialists, LEAP, and/or the city's building inspector
- **Scope of work and estimate**
 - Your Rehab Specialist will finalize a scope of work and estimate for your project and review it with you. We do our best to work with you to make sure critical needs are met and the most important things are included—but we ask all clients to keep in mind that we focus on health and safety issues and are limited by funding availability and program restrictions

Figure 2. Screenshot of the Albemarle Housing Improvement Program's (AHIP) application roadmap.

- This [Facebook reel](#), for Seattle & King County Department of Public Health's COVID vaccine clinic, provides a short description of what attendees can experience and addresses possible questions or hesitations around insurance and citizenship and immigration status requirements. Another short [reel](#), also promoting the clinic, takes on the voice of a younger family member reminding their grandparents to get vaccinated in time for the holidays, a format that mimics the ways participants often learn about and navigate assistance programs, and provides an intuitive format for asking and answering common questions about participation.

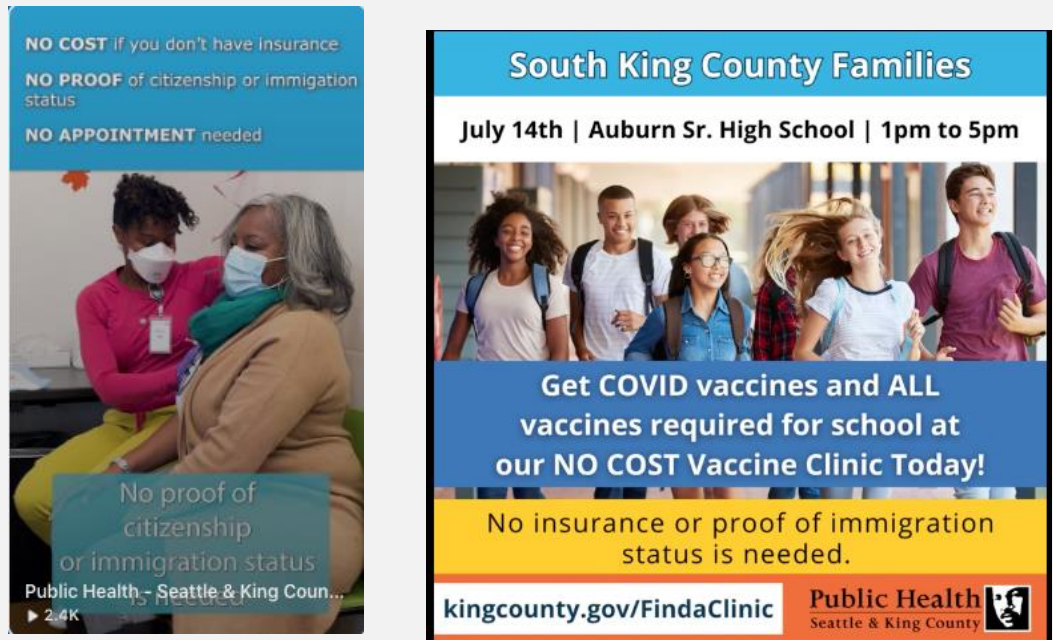


Figure 3. Screenshots from Seattle & King County Department of Public Health’s informational Facebook reels regarding their COVID vaccine clinic, noting requirements around insurance and proof of immigration status.

- The City of Durham found that simple changes to the language and formatting of their water shutoff notification letter helped increase response rates. The changes, shown in the figure below, sought to: highlight the immediate action and next steps needed, visually block the content into easily scannable sections, and frame the notice of potential disconnection as an opportunity for collaboration and problem solving with the utility. A/B testing helped compare the performance of both messages and to refine the language over time.

Dear Customer:

As of this date, the City has not received payment for your utility bill and your account is seriously overdue.

Your payment must be received in our office by 5 p.m. on the last business day prior to the disconnect date. See below for your account information.

Failure to make payment by this time will result in a \$50 delinquency charge added to your account, whether or not your water service is actually terminated. You may also be charged an additional deposit of \$50.

The back of this letter has more information, and answers to frequently asked questions. If you have additional questions, contact us at 919-560-1200 or <http://durhamnc.gov/2996>.

If your payment has been made, thank you and please pardon the confusion. You may disregard this letter. You may also want to contact us to verify your payment has been posted to your account.

Sincerely,

Customer Billing Services Division,
Department of Water Management

DISCONNECT DATE: 08/06/2019

PAYMENT DUE:

Account Number:

Original Letter

Dear Customer,

We know many in our community have lost their jobs, businesses, and healthcare coverage in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. If you are facing hardship, we urge you to call us at 919-560-1200 to set up a payment plan or receive a list of community resources that may offer financial support.

This is necessary because the City has not received payment for your water bill, and your account is overdue. **You need to act now.**

***If you do not pay or contact us by 5 PM on 06/23/2020,
your water will be shut off on 06/24/2020.***

We do not want you to go without water. But if we do not hear from you or receive your payment *BEFORE* your Disconnect Date, we will assume you are actively choosing to have your water cutoff.

You must contact us *BEFORE* the Disconnect Date written below. If you cannot afford your bill, we will work with you (see back). If you regularly forget, you can set up automatic payments.

To pay, you can:

- Call 919-560-1200, and press "option 1"
- Pay online at www.durhamnc.gov. Select "Pay Your Water Bill."
- Put your payment in the drop box at City Hall, on Mangum Street

DO NOT pay at a local store. They will turn your payment in too late and your service will be disconnected.

If you have already paid, thank you and you may disregard this letter. To check that your payment went through to your account, please contact us at 919-560-1200 or <http://durhamnc.gov/2996>.

Sincerely,

Customer Billing Services Division,
Department of Water Management

**Last Day to Pay to Stop
Water Shutoff: 06/23/2020**

Payment Due: \$94.20
Disconnect Date: 06/24/2020
Account #: [REDACTED]

Revised Letter

Figures 4a and 4b. Example of the “before” and “after” language in the City of Durham’s disconnection letter, which revised in partnership with Duke University’s Center for Advanced Hindsight. Image shared during a presentation by Deputy City Manager Bertha T. Johnson at the 2022 WaterNow Alliance Tap into Resilience Summit.

Ensuring wide accessibility of available content and resources:

- A number of guides and tools can help review and enhance the accessibility of outreach and communications content, including:
 - The River Network’s [Inclusive Communications for the Water Movement](#)
 - The Water Hub’s [Digital Accessibility Guide](#)

- The [Free Website Accessibility Checker](#) and [WCAG Color Contrast Tracker](#), which can automatically check whether color contrasts meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
- The [Hemingway App](#), which reviews content for readability and clarity and offers editing suggestions.
- Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District's [recent holiday message](#) was shared by inviting residents to call a number and listen to a voicemail recording; this could offer an easy and accessible way to share information, particularly translated information, or updates related to weather events or other potential drivers for well and septic testing and repair.
- Seattle & King County Department of Public Health's On-site Sewage/Septic System Program contracts with local non-profit and community organizations to help craft and distribute messages to specific demographics. For instance, the following video sharing information about the Poverty Bay Septic Rebate is available in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Korean](#), and [Vietnamese](#). The Department maintains a goal of dedicating 30% of its budget to direct payments to the community, to support these types of contracts with partner organizations or community members. The City of Durham now also budgets specifically for a community liaison to support outreach efforts to communities within the City.

Tailor content and distribution to common drivers for testing and repair (e.g., selling or purchasing a home; local/national news; clear changes in operation; presence of children in household) (*content creation*) and with common drivers for system failure (e.g., pre- and/or post- major storm or flood events) (*content distribution*):

- Seattle & King County require time-of-sale inspections of on-site septic systems, a process overseen by the Department of Public Health. This allows the Department to send out homeowner manuals to new owners, including information about septic systems, six months after the home is purchased.
- The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission automatically notifies customers of leaks based on water use data, via email or a text message, through its [Leak Alert Program](#); they have found that text messages are best saved for the highest priority messages rather than routine communications. Participants could sign up or opt in to receive similar prompts or messages related to high-priority maintenance activities or risks.
- Water conservation campaigns in California have found that [featuring local celebrities or influencers](#) in campaigns can also help share practical tips or best practices, a practice that might also be applicable to efforts to demystify and remind well and septic system owners about testing, maintenance, and repair activities.

Targeting outreach to locations with especially high need and/or eligibility:

- The Town of Nags Head, North Carolina, identifies high-priority systems for support through GIS mapping, focusing on properties with minimal separation between groundwater and existing wastewater systems.¹
- Wake County's existing [Social Equity Atlas mapping initiatives](#) could offer a starting point for similar outreach efforts.

Making online content easy to notice and navigate:

Embedding links within other Departmental web pages can help direct eligible participants to program information.

- Information about common drop-off points in customers' navigation of web pages could further inform opportunities to flag and encourage viewers to engage with information about the Fund.
- Longer term strategies might include looking for opportunities to have a single portal for a variety of customer assistance programs, as part of any larger program or website expansions or updates. The City of Philadelphia recently introduced a [single application](#) for all of the water bill assistance programs it offers, collecting customer information once and matching it internally to the programs that best fit their needs and eligibility.

Engage and mobilize County Resources, through opportunities including:

- Use One Water planning to integrate resources into broader educational content (*content creation*).
- Identify additional opportunities to integrate well and septic content into messaging with broader considerations (e.g., home ownership and maintenance or water stewardship) (*content creation*).
- Further engage and coordinate with other County departments and programs to review content and inform the distribution plan (*content creation*).
- Identify additional opportunities to cross-promote the Well and Septic Assistance Fund with other County assistance programs (*content distribution*).
- Support field staff in sharing information about the Elderly and Disabled Homeowner Grants and the Emergency Grant Program's eligibility criteria (*content distribution*).
- Increase the long-term funding for the program (ideally, with funding sources that allow flexibility in thresholds for eligibility) (*project completion and maintenance*).
- Opportunity: Flexibility in funding to support maintenance (*project completion and maintenance*).

Examples and Resources

Resources and examples related to expanding communications content and approaches include:

Cross-department and cross-agency coordination:

- The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, City of Cleveland Division of Water, Cleveland Public Power, Cleveland Water Pollution Control, First Energy and CHN Housing Partners and other partners have hosted [Utility Assistance Resource Fairs](#), which provide customers assistance in signing up for discount programs and cost-saving opportunities in a single location. The participants [hosted 6-7 events](#) per year during 2022 and 2023, reaching a total of 2,200 customers. Similar collaborations might help customers: (1) understand the source of their water and wastewater services and (2) apply for and navigate any relevant bill, water testing, and well, septic system, home repair, or other applicable assistance programs.
- The City of Steamboat Springs [has instituted](#) regular Water Team meetings, which occur every other week and include participants from the City Water Utility, Public Works Department, City Attorney, City Manager, and City Council representatives. The Water Team reviews priority projects identified across several long-range plans and studies to determine the highest priorities to seek funding to advance the community's water resiliency goals. This also helps ensure the City has an up-to-date list of key projects that can be [quickly compared](#) to upcoming funding and financing opportunities, and an understanding of each Department's bandwidth to apply for and administer projects.
- Golden, Colorado's [Community Engagement Planning Guide](#), which serves as a guide to all city employees for planning, strategizing, implementing, and documenting community engagement activities, aims to facilitate outreach across internal departments.

IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS

City Council

Advisory Boards to be Notified and/or Consulted *(check all that apply)*

<input type="checkbox"/> Community Sustainability Advisory Board	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobility & Transportation Advisory Board
<input type="checkbox"/> Downtown Development Authority	<input type="checkbox"/> Economic Development Commission
<input type="checkbox"/> Fire Pension Board	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning Commission
<input type="checkbox"/> Golden Urban Renewal Authority	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Art Commission
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic Preservation Board	<input type="checkbox"/> Citizens Budget Advisory Committee
<input type="checkbox"/> Local Liquor Licensing Authority	<input type="checkbox"/> Investment Advisory Committee
<input type="checkbox"/> Parks, Recreation & Museums Advisory Board	


Outside Organizations & Groups Invested in the Process/Project Stakeholders

There are numerous organizations in Golden that work with the community in a variety of ways. Are you planning to involve any of these groups? If so, what will their role be?

Record notes here:

Here is a sample list of organizations that may be interested in being involved in your project depending on the topic.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golden Chamber of Commerce • Jefferson County Public Schools • Visit Golden • Golden Merchants • Cultural Facilities (Foothills Art Center, Miners Alley Playhouse, Quilt Museum, CO Railroad Museum, etc.) • Jefferson County Economic Development Corp. • WestConnect Corridor Coalition • Leadership Golden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profit organizations (Lions Club, Golden Rotary, Golden Civic Foundation, Golden Optimists, Golden Schools Foundation, etc.) • Sports leagues and recreation programs • Senior Resource Center • Politicians who represent Golden area • Groups who work with traditionally under-served populations • Jefferson County - Govt/Sheriff • CDOT • JeffCo Open Space
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CITY OF GOLDEN | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLANNING GUIDE

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Figure 5. A screenshot of a Community Engagement Project Worksheet included in the City of Golden’s Community Engagement Planning Guide.

Other communities have adopted similar guidelines, including:

- The City of Madison, which created two tools to implement its [Public Participation Resource Guide](#), as part of its [Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative](#) (RESJI): a [comprehensive version](#) for significant decisions and a [fast track version](#) to be used only for low-stakes decisions.
- The [City of Seattle's Racial Equity Toolkit](#) is part of the City of Seattle’s overall effort to eliminate racial inequity and is a set of questions designed to guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programs, projects, and budget issues with an equity lens.
- The [Racial Equity Tools](#) website has also compiled a larger list of examples, along with other [Community Assessment Tools and Resources](#).

- PolicyLink’s [Community Engagement & Participation Checklist](#) offers one way of measuring the extent to which community input and involvement are integrated into government projects.

Funding opportunities:

- Some recently created resources for searching and applying for newly available federal funding opportunities created through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act include:
 - A [database of funding sources for water projects](#)
 - The [Environmental Finance Center \(EFC\)](#) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provides training, advising and direct assistance, and conducts applied research to support water management in EPA’s Region 4.

Engage and mobilize program participants, through activities including:

- Highlight storytelling alongside information (e.g., showcase success stories to help visualize process and benefits) (*content creation*).
 - Inviting enthusiastic program participants to join the County at community meetings or other events where the program is being promoted may provide prospective recipients of assistance with a story they can relate to.
- Share outreach content with program participants interested in encouraging others in their families, networks, etc., to participate (*content distribution*).
 - Providing past participants opportunities to speak to their experiences with the program may allow them to convince others seeking assistance to participate.
- Share information about maintenance and operations considerations (e.g., precipitation, changes in maintenance if household size increases) (*project completion and maintenance*).

Examples and Resources

Some examples and resources regarding opportunities to engage and mobilize program participants to promote the program and support good well and septic maintenance include:

Highlighting storytelling:

- Collecting stories from residents who have had positive experiences with the program is a valuable tool for promoting the program to others. While word-of-mouth is a primary

driver of participation, [using testimonials to market the program](#) could be nearly as effective.

- Implementing a survey for program participants to fill out or respond to over the phone could be a relatively light-lift way to gather positive experiences and identify customers whose stories could be crafted into effective testimonial messages. Stories from participants could be collected and published on Wake County's website and social media, in local news advertisements, and shared in materials promoted by partner organizations including the Regional Centers and community organizations.
- Collecting success stories from participants across a range of demographics would create a variety of materials which members of hard-to-reach communities within Wake County might relate and respond to.

Supporting participants in driving word-of-mouth promotion:

- Program participants may be interested in sharing information about the program with friends, neighbors, and other community members who could benefit from the Well and Septic Assistance Program. At the conclusion of their participation in the program, these participants could be offered contact cards, social media templates, and/or brochures for the program to share with others.
- Participants who align with the values of the Well and Septic Assistance Program or who otherwise feel an emotional connection to their experience with the program [may be especially motivated](#) to help spread the word.
- If any post-participation check-in is implemented to offer residents additional support with maintenance, or to provide a touchpoint for offering connections to additional assistance programs, this would present another opportunity to offer materials for spreading the word about the program.

Encouraging good maintenance and operations practices:

- Community feedback in the Town of Nags Head, North Carolina, indicated that homeowners felt a heavy burden regarding the proper maintenance of their septic system and were unsure of the components of their systems and how to proactively maintain them. The Town has considered but not yet implemented a Voluntary Septic System Subscription Service, that would automate the inspection and maintenance of septic systems on a recurring basis and would transfer the burden of septic system maintenance from the homeowner to the town. This might include: inspections at routinely scheduled intervals; pump outs at routinely scheduled intervals or as needed based on inspection results; and additional loan or grant opportunities for system replacement. The Town has paused its exploration of this method for the moment, but

it may be worth reaching back out to understand any lessons and experiences from this effort in the future.²

- The Department of Public Health of Seattle and King County implemented a Septic System Rebate which covered the cost of septic inspections and pumping up to \$450 for residents living in geographic focus areas. The rebate was [administered by the King Conservation District](#) and required recipients to attend an educational webinar as part of the rebate.
- While both the [USDA Rural Development Program](#) and [Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project, Inc.](#) (SRCAP) are included on Wake County's [Help with Septic & Well Repairs, Water Treatment & Well Testing web page](#), there may be opportunities to strengthen these relationships, and better understand the services, application processes, and eligibility criteria of these partners.

Potential next steps and starting points:

Potential next steps for selecting, prioritizing and implementing options to address the barriers and to harness some of the opportunities identified in the behavioral blueprint include:

- Determining the stakeholders involved in selecting, prioritizing, implementing and reviewing the next steps based on the barriers and opportunities identified and summarized in the behavioral roadmap. This might include internal stakeholders, and could also be an opportunity to identify additional existing and potential community partners.
- This effort would also involve determining if and how to align this process with the County's existing frameworks for community engagement around public health and water issues.
- Collectively prioritizing the next steps and determining which internal and/or external stakeholders will implement them, how metrics will be tracked, and how information will be shared with community members and partners.

² Additional details about the program are available in the Phase 2 memo, [Research Strong Outreach Campaigns & Conduct Informational Interviews](#), and in the Town's [Decentralized Wastewater Management Plan \(pg.s 86-87\)](#).

Resource Index

The examples and resources mentioned in the sections above are also summarized in the table below for quick reference.

Name	Description	Keywords
Albemarle Housing Improvement Program	Housing assistance program offering written and video testimonials from past participants, and an example application roadmap.	Testimonials, Application Roadmap, FAQs
American Water Works Association (AWWA): Public Communications Toolkit	This kit contains all of AWWA’s information on public communication, from talking points to Journal AWWA Articles to presentations.	Resources, Case Studies, Communications Strategies
American Water Works Association (AWWA): A Water Utility Manager’s Guide to Community Stewardship	This guide outlines strategies, tools and case studies for water utilities to leverage their assets and operations to ensure services are distributed equitably, across topics spanning project design, construction and preventative maintenance; customer service and communications; and contracting and procurement, among others.	Resources, Case Studies, Outreach Strategies
Barnstable County, Massachusetts: AquiFund web page	Barnstable County’s AquiFund web page , describing this septic repair and replacement low-interest loan program, includes a “Frequently Asked Questions” section, covering commons questions about eligibility, the application process, and the implications of the loan on future efforts to sell a home or refinance a mortgage.	FAQs
Cobb County Water System, Georgia: Outreach Volunteer Program	The County uses its Outreach Volunteer Program spreads the word about its water efficiency and conservation programs.	Outreach Strategies
Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities: Community Engagement in the Water Sector: An Outcome-focused Review of Different Engagement Approaches	This report examines several community engagement campaigns and how they changed public behavior opinions. The report identifies three main types of community engagement initiatives: providing input, seeking input, and building active and connected communities. It concludes that the initiatives studied were generally successful at increasing knowledge and improving attitudes to more sustainable water practices and policies.	Case Studies, Outreach Strategies

<p><u>Database of Outreach Campaign Examples</u></p>	<p>A database summarizing the review of 11 examples of outreach campaigns, created as part of Phase 2 of this project.</p> <p>See the Summary Memo: <u>Research Strong Outreach Campaigns & Conduct Informational Interviews (Phase 2)</u>.</p>	<p>Case Studies, Outreach Strategies, Communication Strategies</p>
<p>Durham, North Carolina: <u>ENGAGE Durham initiative</u></p>	<p>Durham, North Carolina’s successful <u>Community Ambassador program</u> was created to support the City’s <u>ENGAGE Durham initiative</u>, a pilot effort to coordinate equitable engagement efforts on multiple City and County projects. (See the Summary Memo: <u>Research Strong Outreach Campaigns & Conduct Informational Interviews (Phase 2)</u>).</p>	<p>Outreach Strategies, Community Ambassador Program</p>
<p><u>Effective Communication for Water Resilient Communities: A Conceptual Framework</u></p>	<p>This research reviews various approaches to effective communication and through a synthesis of the concepts aims to present a new, sociopsychological water conservation conceptual framework. The present conceptual framework integrates emotional appeal, for use on social media platforms and in order to foster more water resilient communities. This framework provides guidelines for water sectors to deliver effective video communications on social media platforms.</p>	<p>Case Studies, Communications Strategies, Social Media</p>
<p><u>Environmental Finance Center (EFC) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill</u></p>	<p>The EFC provides training, advising and direct assistance, and conducts applied research to support water management in EPA’s Region 4.</p>	<p>Resources, Funding/Financing</p>
<p><u>Free Website Accessibility Checker</u></p>	<p>This free online tool reviews online content for accessibility issues.</p>	<p>Resources, Accessibility, Communications Content</p>
<p>Golden, Colorado: <u>Community Engagement Planning Guide</u></p>	<p>This guide for city employees outlines a suggested approaches to planning, strategizing, implementing, and documenting community engagement activities, and aims to facilitate outreach coordination across internal departments.</p>	<p>Outreach Strategies, Internal Coordination</p>

<p>Habitat for Humanity Seattle – King County, Washington: Home Repair Program</p>	<p>The Habitat for Humanity Seattle – King County website includes examples of success stories from its Home Repair Program.</p>	<p>Communications Content, Testimonials</p>
<p>Hemingway App</p>	<p>This online tool reviews content for readability and clarity and offers editing suggestions.</p>	<p>Resources, Accessibility, Communications Content</p>
<p>Local Energy Efficiency Alliance Program (LEAP), in Albemarle County, Virginia</p>	<p>The LEAP website includes four clickable case studies that provide a short snapshot along with a more in-depth description outlining: a short summary of each participant’s story; their description of their experience in their own words; basic issues uncovered in the home energy assessment; energy improvement measures implemented; and the participating contractor(s).</p>	<p>Communications Content, Testimonials</p>
<p>Madison, Wisconsin: Public Participation Resource Guide</p>	<p>The City of Madison created two tools to implement its Public Participation Resource Guide, as part of its Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative (RESJI): a comprehensive version for significant decisions and a fast track version to be used only for low-stakes decisions.</p>	<p>Internal Coordination, Outreach Strategies</p>
<p>Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORS), Ohio: Utility Assistance Resource Fairs</p>	<p>The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, City of Cleveland Division of Water, Cleveland Public Power, Cleveland Water Pollution Control, First Energy and CHN Housing Partners and other partners have hosted Utility Assistance Resource Fairs, which provide customers assistance in signing up for discount programs and cost-saving opportunities in a single location. The participants hosted 6-7 events per year during 2022 and 2023, reaching a total of 2,200 customers.</p> <p>NEORS has also partnered with a local non-profit organization to support applications to its customer assistance program, using a Community Ambassador model.</p>	<p>Internal Coordination, Community Ambassadors, Application Process</p>
<p>Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORS), Ohio: Voicemail Outreach Message</p>	<p>The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District’s recent holiday message was shared by inviting residents (over a number of platforms, including social media) to call a number and listen to a voicemail recording; this could offer an easy and accessible way to share information, particularly translated information, or updates related to weather events</p>	<p>Communications Content, Social Media</p>

	or other potential drivers for well and septic testing and repair.	
Town of Nags Head, North Carolina: Septic Health Initiative Program	<p>In addition to traditional outreach methods, the Town identifies high-priority systems for support through GIS mapping, focusing on properties with minimal separation between groundwater and existing wastewater systems.</p> <p>The town offers free septic system inspections, maintaining a list of residents which have participated in the past and reaching out periodically to schedule additional inspections. The Town has considered but not yet implemented a Voluntary Septic System Subscription Service, that would automate the inspection and maintenance of septic systems on a recurring basis and would transfer the burden of septic system maintenance from the homeowner to the town. (See the Summary Memo: Research Strong Outreach Campaigns & Conduct Informational Interviews (Phase 2)).</p>	Spatial Analysis, Communications Strategies, Outreach Strategies, Maintenance
Nassau County, New York: S.E.P.T.I.C. Program	Nassau County’s S.E.P.T.I.C. program website includes an application roadmap.	Application Roadmap
City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Water Customer Assistance Programs Application	Longer term strategies might include looking for opportunities to have a single portal for a variety of customer assistance programs, as part of any larger program or website expansions or updates. The City of Philadelphia recently introduced a single application for all of the water bill assistance programs it offers, collecting customer information once and matching it internally to the programs that best fit their needs and eligibility.	Application Process, Application Roadmap
Racial Equity Tools	Racial Equity Tools is a collection of tools, research, and tips to support individuals and groups working to achieve racial equity. Its compilation of Community Assessment Tools and Resources offers a helpful collection of examples of internal processes around community engagement from communities across the Country.	Case Studies, Resources, Internal Collaboration, Outreach Strategies
River Network: Inclusive	This guide provides both communications and accessibility guidance to organizations covering a	Resources, Accessibility,

Communications for the Water Movement	<p>range of topics from digital accessibility to ethical storytelling, to inclusive language.</p>	<p>Communications Content</p>
<p>Seattle, Washington: Racial Equity Toolkit</p>	<p>The City of Seattle's Racial Equity Toolkit is part of the City of Seattle's overall effort to eliminate racial inequity and is a set of questions designed to guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programs, projects, and budget issues with an equity lens.</p>	<p>Internal Collaboration, Outreach Strategies</p>
<p>Seattle and King County Public Health Department, Washington: On-site Sewage/Septic System Program</p>	<p>The Public Health Department of Seattle and King County, WA developed outreach materials for its Poverty Bay Septic Rebate Program through collaboration with several environmental groups. Videos produced through this collaboration feature clips from individuals speaking Vietnamese and Spanish, and focusing their remarks on the particular communities they represented. The video was also produced with subtitles in Vietnamese, Spanish, and Korean, as well as English. (See Summary Memo: Research Strong Outreach Campaigns & Conduct Informational Interviews (Phase 2)).</p>	<p>Outreach Strategies, Communications Strategies, Communications Content, Social Media, Translation</p>
<p>Seattle and King County Public Health Department, Washington: On-site Sewage/Septic System Program</p>	<p>The Department of Public Health of Seattle and King County implemented a Septic System Rebate which covered the cost of septic inspections and pumping up to \$450 for residents living in geographic focus areas. The rebate was administered by the King Conservation District and required recipients to attend an educational webinar as part of the rebate. (See Summary Memo: Research Strong Outreach Campaigns & Conduct Informational Interviews (Phase 2)).</p>	<p>Maintenance, Spatial Analysis</p>
<p>San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, California: Leak Alert Program</p>	<p>The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission automatically notifies customers of leaks based on water use data, via email or a text message, through its Leak Alert Program.</p>	<p>Communications Strategies</p>
<p>Sonoma Clean Power: Por El Mañana Video Series</p>	<p>Sonoma Clean Power's Por El Mañana video series features short videos on water or energy conservation presented in Spanish in a <i>telenovela</i> format.</p>	<p>Communications Content, Translation</p>

<p>City of Steamboat Springs, CO: Water Team Meetings</p>	<p>The City of Steamboat Springs has instituted regular Water Team meetings, which occur every other week and include participants from the City Water Utility, Public Works Department, City Attorney, City Manager, and City Council representatives. The Water Team reviews priority projects identified across several long-range plans and studies to determine the highest priorities to seek funding to advance the community’s water resiliency goals.</p>	<p>Internal Collaboration, Funding/Financing</p>
<p>Suffolk County, New York: Septic Improvement Program</p>	<p>The Suffolk County Septic Improvement Program also outlines a list of FAQs related to its Septic Improvement Program.</p>	<p>FAQs</p>
<p>Telenovelas in the Park</p>	<p>A collaboration between the Mujeres de la Tierra and Tree People organizations, supported by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power’s Community Partnership Outreach Grants Program, to produce educational telenovelas focused on water education.</p>	<p>Outreach Strategies, Communications Content, Translation</p>
<p>Walnut Creek Watershed Action Team and Community Partnership, Raleigh, North Carolina</p>	<p>The Walnut Creek Watershed Action Team and Community Partnership are a coalition of several organizations collaborating to engage the community and protect the Walnut Creek Watershed in central North Carolina, including parts of southern Raleigh and the surrounding suburbs. The Action Group and the Community Partnership serve similar roles, coordinating the efforts of the many organizations working on environmental, economic and community issues related to the watershed.</p> <p>In addition to a wide range of communications and outreach activities, the Partnership has engaged the community through the Community Stewardship Crew, a stipend community ambassador program; and the Walnut Creek Watershed Learning Network, a community engagement program in Raleigh NC, which invites participants to participate in a six-week educational course aimed at building community engagement around watershed issues. (See Summary Memo: Research Strong Outreach Campaigns & Conduct Informational Interviews (Phase 2)).</p>	<p>Outreach Strategies, Communication Strategies, Community Ambassadors</p>

<p>State of California Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications and the Department of Water Resources: #SaveOurWater Campaign</p>	<p>Water conservation campaigns in California have found that featuring local celebrities or influencers in campaigns can also help share practical tips or best practices, a practice that might also be applicable to efforts to demystify and remind well and septic system owners about testing, maintenance, and repair activities.</p>	<p>Communications Strategies, Communications Content, Social Media</p>
<p>The Water Hub: Digital Accessibility Guide</p>	<p>A short guide outlining tips and digital accessibility best practices to help reach more people regardless of life experience or abilities.</p>	<p>Resources, Accessibility, Communications Content, Social Media</p>
<p>WCAG Color Contrast Tracker</p>	<p>This online tool can automatically check whether website color contrasts meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).</p>	<p>Resources, Accessibility, Communications Content</p>
<p>Databases of Funding Sources for Water Projects</p>	<p>A compilation of databases tracking funding opportunities related to water projects.</p>	<p>Resources, Funding/Financing</p>