



Project Accelerator Application Review Criteria: Spring 2026

Criteria	Description
<p><i>Threshold Eligibility Criteria: These criteria must be met to qualify for Accelerator support.</i></p>	
<p>Utility Type</p>	<p>The applicant is a utility, city, town, special district, or other public water services provider. Joint applications – from several public water services providers, or from a water services provider in collaboration with a non-profit organization, community-based organization, or state or regional organization – are also eligible.</p>
<p>Project Type</p>	<p>The project focuses on advancing One Water or localized or distributed infrastructure solutions, that address water management throughout an entire community. These project types can include (but are not limited to) water efficiency and conservation, reuse, green stormwater infrastructure, lead service line replacement, source water protection, customer outreach and engagement efforts, customer affordability initiatives, and other consumer-focused initiatives, among others.</p>
<p>WaterNow Membership</p>	<p>An elected or appointed official, or a member of executive management, for the applicant is a WaterNow member, or is willing to become a WaterNow member if selected (membership is free).</p>
<p>Consultation with Leadership</p>	<p>At least one decision-maker or utility executive leader is able to attend a project kickoff call with WaterNow, and to attend a final presentation to hear about the project outcomes and next steps.</p> <p>These meetings seek to ensure alignment of the project with the organization’s goals, and provide an opportunity for leadership to share input and suggestions on the projects’ development and next steps.</p>
<p>Project Brief & MOU Capacity</p>	<p>Applicant has capacity to co-develop a Project Brief that outlines the project roadmap, deliverables, and responsibilities, and enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with WaterNow.</p>

Criteria	Description	Scoring
<p><i>Review Criteria: If an applicant satisfies the threshold eligibility criteria, their application will be reviewed based on the following considerations.</i></p>		
<p>Project advances innovative distributed infrastructure practice or solutions</p>	<p>The project aims to advance innovative distributed infrastructure practices or solutions that could serve as examples or provide guidance for other communities that want to implement similar programs or policies.</p> <p>Scalable or replicable projects might include (but are not limited to) developing, implementing, or strengthening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water conservation programs or policies • Water efficiency programs or policies • Water reuse programs or policies • Green stormwater infrastructure programs or policies • Lead line replacement or other distributed water quality solutions • Watershed restoration programs or policies • Customer affordability or assistance programs 	<p>25 points</p> <p>Strong: 25 points Medium: 10 points Low: 5 points Missing: 0 points</p>
<p>Application includes clear description of project outputs and outcomes</p>	<p>The project application includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measurable outputs (such as drafted ordinance language or policy recommendations, facilitation of community focus groups, meetings, or other engagement activities, development of a program implementation plan, etc.). • Clear outcomes (such as an adopted ordinance, X number of applications for a specific program, ordinance code changes, X gallons of water saved, engagement with X number of customers, etc.). <p>Applications can be further strengthened by demonstrating a commitment to achieving project outputs and outcomes. This could take the form of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding commitment for the project – for instance, a line item in the budget or funding set aside from a budget line item. 	<p>15 points</p> <p>Strong: 15 points Medium: 7 points Low: 0 points</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment from a Council, Board, or management – for instance, a resolution from the Council or Board, or an agenda item at a board meeting that garnered support. • Established timelines – for instance, this project might be a precursor to another the utility is committed to implementing. 	
Project has a feasible goal and timeline	The project can be reasonably expected to be successful given 250 hours of pro bono capacity support from WaterNow and any additional partners. Highly suitable projects may be ready to move ahead with their scope as described, while moderately suitable projects may require some adjustments before proceeding.	15 points Strong: 15 points Medium: 7 points Low: 0 points
Project has high likelihood of implementation	The project has support – including buy-in from leadership and a dedicated/ identified funding source – that will help ensure that it is implemented and that this effort moves forward after the Accelerator project is completed.	15 points Strong: 15 points Medium: 7 points Low: 0 points
Project fosters trust between the utility and community	<p>The project aims to support trusting, authentic and constructive relationships between community organizations and water utilities. Projects can include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritizing transparency and accountability • Restoring community confidence • Deepening community understanding of utility roles and responsibilities • Highlighting shared goals to leverage mutual benefits • Including the community as part of utility decision-making • Adopting a community-facing orientation • Cultivating long-term community relationships with intention • Building from personal to more formalized relationships <p>Applications can be further strengthened by water systems applying in partnership with a local community organization on proposed trust-building projects.</p>	15 points Strong: 15 points Medium: 7 points Low: 0 points

<p>Project provides practical leadership and professional development opportunities for utility staff</p>	<p>The project supports emerging leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly, through the course of the project’s implementations, and/or; • Through the project’s goals (e.g., creation of internal mentorship program). <p>Projects can provide practical skills development that include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pitching project plans • Pitching to management • Communicating with political leadership • Communicating with community members • Building partnerships with community members and groups • Establishing performance metrics • Building teams • Growing collaborations with outside entities • Strengthening capacity for strategy and visioning • Additional goals identified by project applicants 	<p>15 points</p> <p>Strong: 15 points Medium: 7 points Low: 0 points</p>
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