



WALNUT VALLEY WATER DISTRICT AND THE CHINESE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF WALNUT

BUILDING A LASTING COLLABORATION THROUGH DEEPENED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

BUILDING BLOCKS OF TRUST CASE STUDY | JULY 2025



BUILDING BLOCKS OF TRUST IN ACTION

Deepen Community Understanding of Utility Roles and Responsibilities



Cultivate Long-Term Relationships with Intention



Prioritize Transparency and Accountability



INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The story of trust-building between the Walnut Valley Water District (WVWD) and the Chinese American Association of Walnut (CAAW) is one of collaboration and shared purpose. It begins in Southern California, where WVWD provides drinking water to nearly 100,000 residents across the City of Diamond Bar and parts of Walnut, Industry, Pomona, Rowland Heights and West Covina. Throughout these communities, a significant portion of the population identifies as Asian, including many of Chinese descendants. Recognizing the importance of connecting with these community members, WVWD sought to partner with CAAW, a community organization representing Chinese-American residents.

Initially, CAAW and its members' familiarity with WVWD was mostly limited to receiving their regular water bills in the mail. But following participation in WaterNow's **Project Accelerator** initiative, WVWD saw an opportunity to work together to bridge the gap between themselves as the water provider and the CAAW community. Over six months, supported by the Building Blocks of Trust initiative, WVWD and CAAW opened communication channels, learned about each other's goals, and co-hosted a **Community Water Festival** to deepen the community's understanding of the utility's roles and responsibilities with an emphasis on the value of water. Through their work together, CAAW and WVWD went from relative strangers to ongoing collaborators.

This collaboration grew over time. Collaborations ranged from additional youth programs that taught water conservation, to facility tours demonstrating how the water system operates, and WVWD's sponsorship of CAAW events.



HOW DID THE PARTNERSHIP BUILD TRUST?

To build this trust, WVWD and CAAW focused on deepening understanding, cultivating relationships, and prioritizing transparency.

CAAW and WVWD partnered to organize events like facility tours and workshops to explain WVWD's work. They attended and supported each other's activities, engaging in regular communication to build mutual respect. By following through on commitments and sharing information openly, they created a strong foundation for their partnership. Specific actions, such as conducting in-person meetings at community events and hosting joint activities, further solidified their relationship. CAAW and WVWD focused on listening, which helped them understand each other's priorities and needs.

Open-minded and proactive planning ensured that all parties felt included and valued.

By adopting a relational, rather than transactional, approach, WVWD showed the community that its members were valued customers, supporting CAAW's mission as a service-oriented organization.

WHY WAS TRUST ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS?

Trust was essential to WVWD and CAAW building a successful, lasting relationship and achieving shared goals. WVWD recognized that gaining community support for its programs and future initiatives—such as upcoming rate increases—first required the support of trusted community voices like CAAW. The trust-based partnership helped community members better understand how investments in the water system ensures their access to safe, clean water and how their water bill payments make those investments possible. Further, by taking a proactive approach to community engagement and relationship building with CAAW, WVWD followed through on the utility's commitment to prioritize transparency and accountability.



LESSONS LEARNED

The experience of WVWD and CAAW offers valuable lessons for other communities seeking to build trust-based partnerships. One key insight is the importance of being honest about the time and resources available for collaboration, as this helps set realistic expectations and prevents misunderstandings. Consistency is also crucial. Maintaining communication and committing to the process, even when it feels uncomfortable, can preserve and grow trust. Modeling trustworthy behavior by being reliable, transparent, and responsive is essential, as actions speak louder than words. Finally, a neutral facilitator, a role WaterNow and River Network provided as part of the Building Blocks of Trust initiative, can help foster discussions and support trust-building efforts when necessary.

The partnership between WVWD and CAAW demonstrates how focusing on transparency, respect, and collaboration can spur new, yet durable relationships. By working together, WVWD and CAAW set an example for others to follow, showing that trust is not just a foundation for partnerships but a tool for creating lasting impact.

