

CHANGE-MAKING AND COMMUNICATING

HOW TO TALK ABOUT LOCALIZED INFRASTRUCTURE WITH RATEPAYERS

Getting started in your community

Ratepayer knowledge gaps

Communicating water resource management challenges and decisions to ratepayers is an ongoing challenge for water utilities. For consumers, it's easy to forget about the vast network of green and gray infrastructure that collects, purifies, distributes, and disposes of their water. When asked, "Where does your water come from?" many are likely to respond, "From the faucet."

However, localized (*or on-site*) water infrastructure strategies that are located directly in businesses, homes, yards, schools, streets, parks, and other local venues offer ratepayers tangible ways to understand their local water ecosystem and the benefits that accrue from greater reliance on these decentralized strategies and technologies.

Water leaders diving into these sustainable programs can leverage this opportunity to engage their communities by anticipating tough questions and sharing clear, succinct educational information to explain new, unconventional infrastructure investments.

Start talking to and engaging with your community about these solutions early and often, providing clear information about how these strategies are essential for providing for a reliable, healthy, and safe community. Remember, there's no need to reinvent the wheel; check out our Communicating with Ratepayers webcast to learn more on how to lay the groundwork for better communication and messaging with your community to ensure greater engagement with and adoption of these programs.



Key messages for ratepayers

Localized water solutions are:



RESILIENT

By working with the natural ecosystem, localized water solutions help protect clean water resources in the long term.



SCALABLE

Distributed around neighborhoods of any size, localized water solutions work in aggregate to address community water needs.



QUICK TO IMPLEMENT

Each individual installation or technical fix is smaller, allowing localized solutions to be built more rapidly and begin contributing to their communities immediately.



COST-EFFECTIVE

Localized water solutions are less costly for communities and utilities to implement at scale compared to large new investments in aging gray infrastructure.



Responses to common questions

What are localized water solutions?

Localized water solutions are a new way to protect our water resources. While conventionally built water infrastructure is a critical part of moving and treating water, these large centralized systems can be costly to maintain. On-site, decentralized, localized strategies such as water use efficiency, green infrastructure, and reuse can offer faster, cheaper, and more environmentally-friendly ways to protect water supply and quality. They efficiently manage rainwater and urban runoff and increase resilience against droughts or sea-level rise – all while offering long-lasting economic and environmental benefits to the communities they serve.

Localized water solutions come in many shapes and sizes. They can be located throughout a neighborhood (such as constructed wetlands, bioswales, urban tree canopies), on a street (such as permeable pavements, smart landscaping, vegetated roofs), or in and around a home or business (such as water reuse systems, rebates, giveaways for high-efficiency devices).

Why should my water utility invest in localized water solutions?

Utilities regularly invest in infrastructure upgrades and maintenance to keep clean water flowing through your businesses and homes. However, with dwindling federal and state financial support for infrastructure, and rising costs for maintenance and operations, on-site water strategies and technologies are offering new ways to ensure high quality services at a lower cost than more traditional infrastructure approaches.

Localized water solutions work in tandem with existing infrastructure to maintain healthy water systems, stretch supplies, capture runoff, and treat waste. Individual installations – from toilets and reuse systems to bioswales, low water landscaping, and smart irrigation controllers – are distributed throughout communities, scaling together to support and extend the life of existing water infrastructure and sometimes even avoid the need for new conventional infrastructure altogether. This network of diverse systems provides resilience within communities to better withstand storms and flooding. Localized water solutions enhance community water resources and maintain long-term access to clean water for generations at a lower cost.



Common outreach strategies

Meet your ratepayers where they are

Reach your ratepayers early and often to get them on board with new infrastructure changes using a range of platforms:

WEBSITE UPDATES

Include an announcement on your utility's website or create a dedicated web page with information about new investments or programs.

NEWSLETTERS

Include construction updates or promote customer programs in your utility newsletter.

VIDEOS

Some utilities have experimented with filming short videos from the field and office to give customers a firsthand view into their daily activities.

MAPS

Use Google Maps to assemble a simple, customized map that shows where new localized water solutions will be constructed.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Posting news and announcements on social media, including NextDoor, Instagram, LinkedIn, and other platforms can be an effective and cost-efficient way to reach ratepayers. The ideal approach is to avoid making it a one-way street: interactive social campaigns like photo competitions can engage your community with projects more directly.

BILL INSERTS

At the end of the day, many consumers still get paper bills and rely on bill inserts for information. Try an infographic or other visual tool!



Sample social media posts

Spread the word to your community

Localized water infrastructure solutions work with the natural ecosystem to protect our clean water supply, increase resilience against storms and droughts, and manage rainwater runoff. Learn more about how we're investing in [\[insert specific solutions\]](#)

Localized water solutions, like [\[insert specific solutions\]](#), build resilience right into the foundations of our communities. Discover the water solutions that will protect supply and manage runoff in your neighborhood!

Clean water is our most precious natural resource. Learn more about how we're using community-based water solutions to ensure that we maintain a quality water supply, for now and for generations to come.

We're using new technologies and strategies to build a resilient water future, one drop at a time.

Localized water solutions, like [\[insert specific solutions\]](#), build resilience right into the foundations of our communities. Find out more about how we're using innovative new solutions to protect our water supply.

Contact an expert at tapin@waternow.org
or explore resources at tapin.waternow.org.