

# DIRECT INSTALLATIONS OF LOCALIZED WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR LOCAL WATER LEADERS



## THE CHALLENGE: WATER REBATE PROGRAMS LEAVE OUT LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS

Low-income households typically do not participate in water rebate programs because the challenges of paying the upfront costs, and the processing times associated with reimbursements, are prohibitively burdensome. This represents a critical missed opportunity to address undetected leaks, reduce water waste, and manage stormwater—steps that can lower water bills, protect residents' homes and health, and help utilities build water supply resilience. Direct installation programs can help overcome these challenges, lower the likelihood of water debt and water shutoffs, and foster more equitable utilities.

## THE FIX: DIRECT INSTALLATION PROGRAMS CAN ENGAGE LOW- INCOME POPULATIONS

Through direct install programs, utilities provide various types of onsite, distributed water infrastructure at no- or low-cost to customers, without the need for a rebate or reimbursement after the infrastructure is installed. Direct installation programs can support a range of strategies, across both indoor and outdoor water use, including:

### Water Use Efficiency

- Indoor High Efficiency Appliances and Fixtures (e.g., [Aurora](#), [Seattle](#), [Evans](#))
- Native and Water Efficient Landscaping (e.g., [Santa Clara Valley Water District](#), [Aurora](#))
- Smart Irrigation Controllers (e.g., [Spanish Fork](#))
- Leak Detection and Repair (e.g., [Sacramento](#), [Madison](#))

### Stormwater and Flood Management

- Rainwater Harvesting (rain gardens, rain barrels and cisterns) (e.g., [Tucson](#), [Pasadena](#))

### Water Reuse

- Greywater Laundry to Landscape (e.g., [Pasadena](#))

## WHERE TO START? INITIATING DIRECT INSTALL PROGRAMS

**Consider Partnerships:** Utilities nationwide are partnering with third party organizations on direct installation programs with great success. These include local nonprofits, such as workforce and conservation programs, churches, immigration centers, or other government agencies. These organizations can not only administer and implement direct installs, but also support outreach and communication efforts.

### Building Partnerships

Community organizations may wish to partner with utilities when doing so can provide a clear benefit to their clients (e.g., utility bill savings) or when it dovetails with their existing mission and programming. Local partnerships are especially vital to reaching communities that have large populations of non-English speakers, where local organizations can disseminate programmatic information to the populations they work with, educate utilities and other implementation partners about cultural practices (e.g., the importance of removing shoes in a home as a sign of respect), detail the primary languages spoken locally, and provide translation, among other forms of insight and implementation support.

Third party organizations can identify an established pool of potential participants that meet a direct installation program's eligibility requirements. Utilities often look to existing water utility bill assistance programs or partner with local [Low Income Home Energy Assistance programs](#) (LIHEAP) to develop a contact list of potential participants. Some programs automatically qualify applicants who can provide their LIHEAP enrollment letter for the current year, to streamline the process for both utilities and potential applicants. Other governmental agencies that provide assistance to low-income residents, such as County Housing and Community Development Departments, may represent opportunities to build similar partnerships.

**Develop a Program Plan:** Get stakeholders on board with a Water Use Efficiency and/or financial plan that clarifies the budget, and outlines the direct installation program goals and timeline.

**Budget for repairs:** Maintaining a 10-15% contingency budget can ensure a program's ability to address non-standard installations, emergency repairs, and any accidental damage.

**Look for synergies:** Direct installation programs often provide opportunities to advance related utility objectives. For instance, technicians often identify leaks while installing high-efficiency appliances, so it can be useful to combine direct installation programs with leak detection and repair initiatives.

## CONDUCTING DIRECT INSTALLATIONS: KEY STEPS

**Eligibility Determination:** Conducting preliminary site assessments prior to installations can save time and resources, by identifying locations where retrofits are not feasible for some reason (avoiding disappointment for residents and for installation technicians). This is also an important way to flag locations that need additional repairs before retrofits can be completed; and prepare the installation team for what to expect at each site. Some programs conduct more comprehensive audits of a site's water use, a process that identifies opportunities to accomplish "easy wins," such as installing water efficient showerheads and aerators.

**Equipment:** Programs should plan to have equipment available in various models and sizes, to fit different site specifications. For instance, mobile homes and manufactured housing often have unique plumbing infrastructure and fixtures; for toilet installations, some households may require ADA-compliant toilets with elongated seats.

**Ensure Plumbers are Available:** While it is often appropriate to work with installation technicians who are not certified plumbers, such as when working with a Conservation Corps, it is important to retain plumbers on standby in case unexpected issues arise beyond the capacity of the technicians.

## GETTING THE WORD OUT: OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

It can be challenging to recruit participants for direct installation programs. For this reason it is important to have a healthy marketing budget, strong internal marketing capacity, and a robust outreach network and communication channels.

- Local outreach partners, such as local non-profit organizations or community groups, will be better able to spread the word about the program if the utility provides a marketing toolkit, develops printed materials (e.g., informational fliers in multiple languages) and outreach content.
- Analyzing and understanding program participation (e.g., participation levels in different neighborhoods, among populations with different primary languages, and among households with varying income levels) allows programs to better tailor their outreach, and ensure it reaches key audiences.

If the target population includes communities where languages other than English are frequently spoken, utilities and their implementation partners should provide customer service in commonly spoken languages in the community.

→ Program materials (content on website, bill inserts, social media, informational handouts, application forms, etc.) should be provided in languages most commonly spoken in the community.

→ If possible, bilingual staff should also be present for audits and installations to communicate with participants.

Visit the Tap into Resilience Resource [Library](#) and [Toolkit](#) to find more resources on direct installations, creating equitable utilities, and learn more about strategies for financing these programs.