

The logo for Water Finance Exchange (WFX) features the letters 'WFX' in a large, white, serif font. Below it, the words 'WATER FINANCE EXCHANGE' and 'NO COMMUNITY LEFT BEHIND' are written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The background of the top section of the report is a blue-tinted photograph of a water treatment facility with large rectangular tanks and metal walkways.

WATER FINANCE EXCHANGE  
NO COMMUNITY LEFT BEHIND

# COMMUNITY WORKSHOP REPORT

## Mississippi Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Opportunities

### Vicksburg, Mississippi

On January 11th, representatives from Mississippi state, local, and federal government, along with local water sector leaders convened to discuss funding opportunities for water and wastewater infrastructure. The workshop, hosted by Water Finance Exchange (WFX) and Communities Unlimited (CU) highlighted the challenges to achieving urgently needed financial resources for small, rural, underserved communities.

Attendees shared successes and challenges from communities across Mississippi as they navigate the planning, funding, and implementation processes, as well as the ways to leverage the available technical assistance resources in the state. Innovative partnerships, new financial strategies, and an unprecedented volume of available technical assistance will pave the way for communities to meet their public health and community economic development goals.

The workshop included panel discussions, keynote presentations, and break-out sessions, allowing community leaders to learn from, and interact with, state and federal agency representatives and industry experts.

Water Finance Exchange (WFX) and Communities Unlimited thank the panelists and presenters, including leadership from:

- City of Vicksburg
- Mississippi Department of Health
- Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)

- U.S Army Corp. of Engineers
- Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)
- Mississippi Development Authority
- Black Bayou Water Association
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Delta Regional Authority (DRA)
- Mississippi Rural Water Association (MRWA)

More than 60 leaders across the state attended the workshop, including representatives from 17 rural and underserved communities.

Key next steps emerged from the workshop, including:

#### Convene Group on Regional Approaches

There is support from state agency representatives and interest from communities in further exploring regional approaches to water and wastewater management. The Black Bayou Water Association represents an instructive example in the state. David and Lee Koehn, managers of the system, said the systems they manage are stronger together as they can find opportunities to lower costs through economies of scale. Trudy Fisher, former MDEQ Director, urged attendees to continue conversations around regional approaches.

WFX will look to convene an ad hoc group of state and sector leaders on a recurring basis to identify opportunities for the state to incentive appropriate, voluntary, regional approaches for water and wastewater systems.

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# WORKSHOP REPORT - VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI

The group could serve as an advisory entity for state agencies and communities that are interested in the benefits of regional approaches. If you are interested in learning more about the group as it develops, contact Jackson Parr, WFX's Communications and Programs Manager, at [jparr@waterfx.org](mailto:jparr@waterfx.org).

## Promote and Expand Opportunities for Operator Training

Many communities at the workshop said finding a qualified and reliable operator was among their greatest challenges. The average age of water operators in Mississippi is 55 years old, and attendance at training and certification programs is below what is necessary to offset retirements. Operators at small systems often have to serve many different communities or leave for larger systems to earn an adequate wage.

The Mississippi Rural Water Association is a leader in operator training and certification in the state. There may also be opportunities to engage high schools, colleges, and other technical education centers to expose students to opportunities within the water sector and local government.

## Improve Technical Assistance Outreach

There is unprecedented resources and support for technical assistance in Mississippi. Water Finance Exchange and Communities Unlimited can help communities identify projects to improve their systems and collaboratively pursue funding opportunities, often at no cost to the community. Communities with the greatest need for these services are often those with the limited capacity to access them.



*Panelists discuss state and federal funding opportunities in Mississippi. From left to right: Katy Breaux, Jana Henderson, Brent Jones, Bill Moody, Dr. Trina George, Alexander Brandon.*

Technical assistance providers, including Water Finance Exchange and Communities Unlimited, will continue working collaboratively with state agencies and other partners to expand outreach to underserved communities and ensure they have equitable access to funding programs.

## Resources and Funding Opportunities

*United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development*

- [Summary of All Programs](#)
- [Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program in Mississippi](#)

*Mississippi Department of Health*

- [State Drinking Water Revolving Loan Fund \(DWSRF\)](#)

*Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality*

- [Water Pollution Control \(Clean Water\) Revolving Loan Fund Program \(CWSRF\)](#)

*Mississippi Emergency Management Agency*

- [Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities \(BRIC\)](#)

*U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*

- [Mississippi Environmental Infrastructure Program \(Section 592\) – pg. 58](#)

*Delta Regional Authority*

- [Community Infrastructure Fund](#)
- [Strategic Planning Program](#)