

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP REPORT

Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Opportunities in New Mexico

Albuquerque, New Mexico

On September 30th, 2025, Water Finance Exchange (WFX) and the Southwest Environmental Finance Center (SWEFC) convened a water and wastewater infrastructure funding workshop in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This workshop brought together local, state, and federal government officials from five agencies, five technical assistance providers, an array of water sector experts, and over 60 community leaders from 16 distinct communities to discuss the funding programs available for municipal water systems, with a focus on small and rural communities.

James Markham, a Research Engineer with the SWEFC, and Hank Habicht, Managing Co-Founder for WFX, provided opening remarks before a keynote from Rebecca Roose, Infrastructure Advisor to the Governor, and presentations from state and federal funding agencies and technical assistance providers. Presentations focused on the financial and technical resources available to communities in New Mexico to support the planning, funding, and implementation of water and wastewater infrastructure projects, to meet public health, sanitary sewer, and economic development goals. Rebecca Roose, Infrastructure Advisor to the Office of the Governor, shared the numerous initiatives the Governor is spearheading to promote sustainable infrastructure, including an Infrastructure Summit in November. Participants and presenters also discussed shared challenges and strategies to address water and wastewater infrastructure improvements.

WFX and SWEFC would like to thank the panelists, presenters, and exhibitors from:

- Environmental Defense Fund
- Moonshot Missions
- New Mexico Climate Investment Center
- New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration

- New Mexico Environment Department
- New Mexico Finance Authority
- New Mexico Rural Water Association
- Rural Community Assistance Corporation

Several key themes emerged from the workshop presentations and discussions, including:

Workforce Development Needs

Many participants reported challenges related to identifying a qualified workforce in several critical sectors of water



Scott Wright educates attendees on the Community Development Block Grant, one of many funding opportunities in New Mexico.

system management. Presenters and attendees discussed the ways in which workforce challenges are exacerbated by financial challenges, as small and rural communities report struggling to provide a competitive salary and benefits necessary to attract and retain certified operators, for example. Experienced operators and office clerks often leave smaller utilities, seeking competitive pay benefits and professional development opportunities in the industry.

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The issue of operator shortage is compounded by an aging workforce in the water and wastewater sector. While sharing operators helps address the demand for operators, speakers and community leaders also discussed ways to expand job opportunities for operators and increase opportunities and interest among the younger generation of water sector experts.

Attendees also raised the issue of experience and expertise in finance and accounting. Similar to certified operators, systems report shortages in clerical and administrative expertise, including preparation of audits and applying to various state and federal infrastructure funding programs. During the exhibitor session, community leaders were able to connect one-on-one with technical assistance providers and funders at designated booths to discuss their community's unique needs and address challenges in workforce development and financial capacity.

Economic Development Opportunities

During the workshop, many speakers and attendees emphasized the need for adequate water and wastewater infrastructure to facilitate growth and development. An adequate supply of clean, safe drinking water is essential for residential development and local economic development. Proper sanitary sewage disposal and waste management is also necessary to attract industries that bring jobs, growth, and prosperity. Community representatives and state agency representatives spoke to the growth already occurring in municipal communities in New Mexico, and projected future growth. Communities in the region will need to begin developing greater infrastructure capacity to capitalize on that growth, which was a common theme across presentations and panels. During her luncheon presentation, Gretel Follingstad of the Environmental Defense Fund discussed the organization's upcoming groundwater report, which will provide insight into groundwater management challenges and strategies for New Mexico.

Technical assistance providers elaborated upon economic development opportunities through improved water and wastewater infrastructure by discussing regionalization opportunities for small, rural communities, which can range from multiple water systems simply sharing an operator, to technical interconnections across water lines. Furthermore, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) is evaluating the effectiveness of regional initiatives through focused experts like Andrew Hautzinger.

Connecting Communities with Technical Assistance

For many communities, processes like figuring out where and how to start the funding application process, or finding the appropriate solutions for their unique technical needs, can seem daunting. The structure of our workshops, in

which representatives from government funding entities present summaries of each funding opportunity, its terms, and the eligible projects, technical assistance providers present the scope of services they can offer communities, and all water sector experts offer one-on-one conversations with community leaders during the exhibitor session, allows for community leaders to receive a large scope of both general and personalized information and assistance.

WFX has financing programs that can rapidly deploy funds to communities for immediate needs. These funds can cover the cost to complete an audit or preliminary engineering report in order to apply to a state or federal program for a capital infrastructure project, and can also provide the matching funds necessary to leverage a grant.

These technical assistance providers, including WFX, SWEFC, Moonshot Missions, the New Mexico Rural Water Association, and Rural Community Assistance Corporation are available to provide support to municipal communities and systems in New Mexico. Many of their technical assistance services come at no direct cost. Presenters and panelists shared a strong interest in coordinated approaches to financing and technical assistance, ensuring that as many communities as possible have access to these essential resources. Follow-up discussions for funders, technical assistance providers, and communities will include ideas for further collaboration and integration of data in New Mexico about resources, economic conditions, and community infrastructure needs to accelerate project design and funding.

Looking Ahead

Workshop presenters and organizations in attendance are working on hosting additional events across the state. If you would like to learn more about the funding programs or technical assistance services available to your community, please contact Nicole Ramirez, WFX's Communications and Programs Manager, at nramirez@waterfx.org.

On behalf of WFX and the SWEFC, we would like to thank all the panelists, presenters, and attendees for making our September 30th workshop a huge success, and we would especially like to thank our generous funders, the Thornburg Foundation. We will be back in Albuquerque next month for a workshop focused on funding and technical assistance opportunities for Tribal communities.

WFX and the SWEFC invite comments and questions from participants and we will continue to follow up as we work with municipal communities across New Mexico.