



**Advancing
A New Era of
Lasting Water
Solutions**

Water Foundation Strategic Framework | 2024

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Who We Are



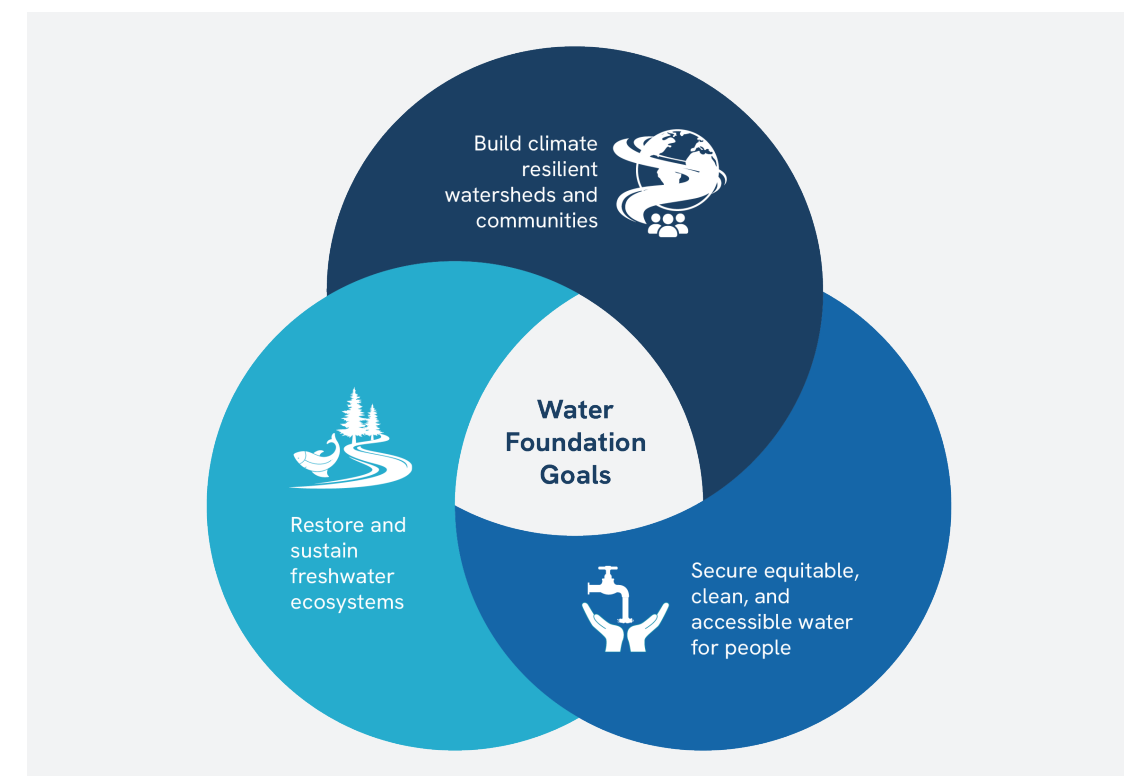
The Water Foundation was established to secure clean, reliable water for people and nature. Since 2011, we have evolved to design and implement programs spanning a range of water issues. Working with partners, we catalyze and advance lasting water solutions to secure equitable, clean, and accessible water for people, restore and sustain freshwater ecosystems, and build climate resilient communities and watersheds. We are a catalyst for policy change at the local, state, and federal levels.

We also work to mobilize new resources for water by convening the philanthropic community. In 2022, we expanded such efforts when the Water Table funder collaborative joined forces with the Foundation. This integration offers the opportunity to channel additional resources toward sustainable and equitable water solutions.

The Water Foundation's work is driven by our vision of a future in which:

- Every living thing has enough clean, fresh water to thrive.
- A powerful movement for water justice and ecosystem health has transformed relationships with water.
- Water decisions are rooted in communities and the rights of nature.

Over the years, we have granted more than \$90 million to 230 partners in 30 states. We have a successful track record of deep engagement in multiple states and have contributed to crucial wins, like the passage of laws to ensure safe drinking water and sustainable groundwater in California, the protection of significant rivers and wetlands in New Mexico, and commitments to honor treaties with Tribes in the Pacific Northwest.



What We Do

The Water Foundation is a public foundation with roles ranging from identifying and advancing transformative solutions to mobilizing resources for water. Our primary role is as a grantmaker, deploying funds raised from a collection of philanthropic and government partners to support the work of a wide range of nonprofit partners. The core of our support goes to frontline communities, environmental organizations, environmental justice groups, and cross-sector coalitions. With these partners, we design and support campaigns to advance legislation, shape administrative decisions, and influence public funding programs from initial idea to implementation and impact. In select instances, we also work with government agencies to directly deploy public funding to ensure policies we and our partners helped to pass have their intended impacts.

As home to the Water Table, the Water Foundation facilitates collaboration between funders, mobilizes aligned funding, supports shared grantmaking and learning, and helps strengthen ties to field partners. Thus far, the funder collaborative has helped to channel over \$500 million to water solutions across the US.



Highlight | Ensuring Safe Drinking Water in California



Following the lead of partners in the Central Valley, we made safe drinking water a priority campaign in 2017. We funded groups on the ground to organize in their communities and strategize, design legislation, and lobby as a coalition. We provided analysis and campaign resources and our staff directly participated in the coalition. After two years of building power and political will, the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund defied the odds and was signed into law in 2019. It made California the first state to operationalize the human right to water by dedicating more than \$1 billion for planning, programs, and projects. Since passage, close to two million Californians have benefited from improved access to safe, clean drinking water.

Why We Do This Work

Clean, reliable freshwater is essential to community and ecosystem health. Yet, our water infrastructure is aging, our environment is increasingly degraded, and climate change is exacerbating water challenges.

Across the country, over 7.2 million US residents become sick each year from drinking contaminated water, often due to outdated or poorly managed water systems unable to keep pace with pollution from sources like agriculture and industry. Governments and water managers have rarely prioritized the health of the environment and native species. As a result, half of the nation's streams are too polluted for swimming and fishing, and almost 40% of the country's freshwater fish are imperiled. Calamities like drought, polluted rivers and wells, and devastating floods are all intensifying as the climate changes. The US experienced 28 billion-dollar weather and climate disasters in 2023, more than any year on record. And, 93% of climate impacts globally are felt through the water sector.

Nevertheless, there is unprecedented opportunity. Committed advocates and local leaders are demonstrating that community-based water solutions can protect public health and build climate resilience. Meanwhile, federal and state governments are dedicating billions of dollars to improving water infrastructure and ecosystem health.

In the years we have spent supporting partners on the ground, we have learned that the communities most impacted by water challenges are best positioned to design creative, durable solutions. The Water Foundation has a proven ability to foster collaboration, incubate new ideas, and scale solutions that leverage public investments, while expanding the capacity and power of those partners. In the coming years, we will build on these successes by investing in state coalitions and political champions, cross-state learning, and elevating positive policy impacts, which will also help advance federal priorities, like infrastructure investment and clean water protections. Our updated strategy focuses on leveraging our grantmaking capacity, water expertise, and trusted relationships to help community leaders and organizations shape and implement water policy.

A New Strategy for a New Era

1. What We Have Learned

Much has changed in water policy and the world around us since we published our 2019 strategy. Water has remained in the headlines as climate change has manifested across the country in the driest, wettest, and hottest seasons on record. The Covid-19 pandemic made it abundantly clear that water is also a public health issue. Social and political unrest brought the impacts of historical inequities and disinvestment in communities of color to the fore. The highest court in the land rolled back protections vital to US wetlands and waterways, and federal funding for infrastructure and resilience opened a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform how we imagine and realize a more sustainable and equitable water future.

At the institutional level, the Water Foundation took on facilitation of the Water Table funder collaborative and launched new efforts to deploy targeted public funding for the implementation of water policies we and our partners helped to secure. The Foundation also engaged in deep and ongoing work to embed the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in our programming and operations and to define the values that guide how we work with our partners.



Highlight | Securing \$1 Billion for Water Projects in Texas



In 2023, we worked with Texas partners to establish the pooled Wellspring Fund. Shortly after its launch, Wellspring supported communications, education, and advocacy around a constitutional amendment to dedicate \$1 billion to water projects across the state. Our partners ensured sustainable water management strategies, such as mitigating Texas' water systems' annual 572,000 acre-feet of water loss, were included in the legislation. Subsequently, voters overwhelmingly passed the measure with 78% of the vote, due in part to Wellspring grantees' efforts to raise public awareness. The resultant Texas Water Fund will provide state loans and grants to communities for water supply projects, with an emphasis on rural communities, fixing aging systems, addressing water loss, and investing in water conservation solutions.

In 2023, the Water Foundation completed a formal third-party evaluation to collect lessons learned, assess our strengths, and help define our forward-looking priorities. A summary of those findings and recommendations can be found in Appendix A.

All of this has informed refinements to our strategy, which include an updated vision and mission, a new approach that centers our work around policy, an increased focus on how we can grow connections across geographies and issues, and a more explicit commitment to equity, justice, and solutions driven by communities most impacted by water challenges.



2. Outcomes that Guide our Work

If the Water Foundation and our partners are successful over the next five years, we will achieve the following:

- Historically underserved residents in at least three states are benefiting from increased access to safe, clean, and affordable water services;
- Policies to protect clean water have been advanced in at least five states;
- New policies advanced by at least three states and two federal agencies prioritize nature-based and multi-benefit solutions; and
- We see demonstrable progress toward growing an increasingly strong, powerful, and coordinated base of advocates for water justice, freshwater ecosystem health, and climate resilience in our focal states and basins, and nationally.

3. Our Theory of Change

We believe the barrier to reaching equitable, resilient water systems is not a lack of technological innovation or creative management ideas, but the lack of political will. As such, the Water Foundation’s work is focused on political will, power, and policy—including legislation, administrative action, regulatory enforcement, basin planning



Highlight | Advancing a Collaborative Vision for the Columbia-Snake River

Since 2019, we have supported integrated coalitions of Tribal nations, Indigenous-led organizations, and conservation allies advocating for comprehensive river restoration in the Columbia-Snake River basin. As a result, both state and federal leaders have taken meaningful action toward restoring the river basin and its salmon populations. Washington Governor Jay Inslee approved \$732 million for salmon recovery in the 2023-2025 state budget, including funding to begin to transition the energy, transportation, and irrigation services provided by the dams. In 2024, the Biden-Harris Administration signed a historic agreement with state and Tribal leaders to advance salmon recovery, Tribal sovereignty, and economic prosperity with \$1 billion in federal investments over the next 10 years.



Photo credit: Nez Perce Tribe

and management, and public funding. Our theory of change, refined over time, centers on finding the right opportunities to turn the “policy wheel” toward equity and resilience.

The policy environment is messy and complex, but when it is working well, it follows a self-reinforcing circular path that can generate sustained positive change over time. New policy leads to and necessitates implementation. Effective implementation leads to positive, tangible impacts for people and nature. Organizing and advocacy around the stories of those positive impacts can help build political will for further policy advances.



We aim to turn the policy wheel (and keep it turning) to ultimately transform the ways people use, manage, and share water. To do so, we need to build power and strengthen the capacity of movement infrastructure, tell compelling stories that make water a winning political issue, and mobilize resources that can be invested at every point along the wheel.

Over the next five years, we intend to use all of the tools at our disposal to turn the policy wheel toward our vision of water justice and ecosystem health. This includes proven tactics, like mobilizing resources, designing and executing campaigns, and cultivating local leaders, and new approaches to fill gaps in the field, like potentially establishing a 501(c)4 to expand our direct political engagement.

4. Influencing Policy in Three Key Venues

Our work prioritizes the primary policy venues in which water decisions are made at scale: state, federal, and basin. In each venue, we survey and analyze the water sector—assessing strengths and weaknesses, identifying opportunities for breakthrough change, and noting fundamental barriers to progress. We collaborate to draft roadmaps for advancing common goals that are bold enough for partners to rally around, specific enough to make a measurable difference, and malleable enough to adapt to alternative perspectives and changes in context. We also facilitate partners sharing learning across issues and jurisdictions. These actions help build an increasingly powerful water field over time.

Like the water issues we work on, our program work touches cities, rural communities, working lands, and open spaces, and will often require partnerships with Tribal nations. We have a detailed set of criteria questions (see Appendix B) for determining new geographic priorities. In any new venue, we are looking for a forcing mechanism, like an ecological crisis or regulatory deadline, local leadership capacity and clear funding partnership opportunities, and political/regulatory will or the opportunity to build it. We tailor our approach based on that political context, priorities of potential partners, and available resources, so the specifics of our engagement look different from one place to the next.

State Policy

States are the primary locus of US water policy and the core of the Water Foundation’s work. State governments regulate water quantity and quality, make infrastructure investment decisions, and maintain primary jurisdiction over freshwater ecosystems and groundwater. States also serve as important laboratories for water policy innovation. At the state level, we work with partners, decision-makers, and thought leaders to identify and promote effective water policies and strategies for advancing them. Over the next five years, we will build on our deep in-state partnerships by growing connections and sharing learning across state boundaries to accelerate water policy adoption and implementation.

We have executed this model successfully in California, where our partners advanced state passage and implementation of legislation including the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, Conservation as a Way of Life legislation, and the Open and Transparent Water Data Act, administrative action such as the Central Valley Flood Protection Plan, and appropriation of hundreds of millions of dollars to help make communities more climate resilient. Similarly, in New Mexico, our partners worked with the state to

designate more than 300 miles of rivers and streams and wetlands as Outstanding National Resource Waters, to allocate new state resources for clean water, and to pass the Regional Water System Resiliency and Water Security Planning Act.

In both states, coalitions have grown their political influence with each win, helping to attract more funding, expand the group of aligned partners, and make inroads with legislators to design subsequent legislation. To build on those successes, we have supported several initial cross-state learning opportunities, including the regional caucus meetings through PolicyLink’s Water Equity and Climate Resilience Caucus and the State Policy Hub at River Network, and we have facilitated partners sharing best practices to maximize the state impacts of federal funding in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

Our state work also includes targeted engagement in local policy where it has the potential to affect state politics and build important state constituencies, or to demonstrate proof of concept for state policy. Los Angeles, for instance, is the political heart of California, sending approximately one-quarter of all of the state’s legislators to the capitol. To build familiarity with and support for water issues amongst those legislators—while also improving local water quality, increasing local water supply, and providing investments in public health and climate resilience—we helped the Our WaterLA Coalition design and help pass LA County’s Safe Clean Water Program, which funds equitable green stormwater initiatives. Since it started in 2020, the program has invested almost \$1 billion in green stormwater infrastructure studies and projects that increase urban resilience, building an important political constituency for local, state, and federal green infrastructure investment, and growing the statewide influence of local organizations.

Looking ahead, we will continue to advance state policy in our focal states of California, New Mexico, and Texas, and we will engage in other states as aligned with our federal and basin policy goals described below. Our three focal states exemplify climate change-driven water stress with deep droughts, dramatic floods, and unprecedented wildfire. Each has unique models of resilient and equitable water management, such as New Mexico’s acequia systems, Austin’s 100-year water plan, and California’s commitment to the human right to water. Given their vastly different politics, water advances in these states can send a powerful message to policymakers and advocates in other states and at the federal level about what is feasible and how to make it happen.



Highlight | Protecting Vital Waters in New Mexico

Our 2019 strategy identified New Mexico as a state with clear need and opportunity on water. We began work in the state with a combination of convening, grantmaking, and campaign leadership. In 2022, our efforts to organize a diverse coalition of local leaders paid off in a big way. With the Rio Grande on the cusp of drying completely through Albuquerque for the first time in 40 years, the state Water Quality Control Commission voted unanimously to protect more than 300 miles of northern Rio Grande, Upper Pecos Watershed, and other major regional rivers. Designating these rivers, streams, and wetlands as Outstanding National Resource Waters has protected water quality by prohibiting new pollution and preserving regional irrigation and water sharing practices. Since then, we have continued to focus on supporting the state’s implementation efforts while exploring a next round of designations.

Federal Policy

The federal government plays a crucial role in US water policy, with significant ability to advance or degrade water equity and resilience. Its role ranges from articulating major goals, like [Justice40](#) and the recent [America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge](#), to protecting water rights for public lands and Tribal nations, to managing dams, reservoirs, hydropower production, and inter-state supply negotiations on multiple rivers. The federal government also sets water quality thresholds by implementing laws like the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act, and it is the biggest source of public funding for water.

Combined estimates of dedicated water funding in both the BIL and IRA total just under \$100 billion. While these short-term resources, coupled with regular appropriations, represent a significant level of funding, water investment needs are rapidly increasing as the nation grapples with stressors like aging infrastructure and climate change. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently assessed an [outstanding need of \\$630 billion](#) through 2041 just for wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. Nevertheless, federal water advocacy has received relatively little attention compared to federal work on other environmental or social justice issues.

We see a clear opportunity to mobilize additional resources for federal water policy in a strategic, coordinated manner across different parts of the water field, including environmental justice advocates, conservation organizations, and water utilities. In the near term, we will work to ensure federal funding prioritizes the most urgent water issues, the most underserved communities, and the most promising water solutions, along with helping regulatory agencies maximize the impact of existing laws and public resources. Over the long term, we aim to grow and support a broad movement for ecosystem health and water justice that has the capacity and power to help pass and implement new water legislation. Election outcomes over this period will necessarily dictate the pacing and sequencing of this work.

While we do not anticipate driving major new federal legislation soon, we do see a critical need to start down that path. Initially, this long view will entail looking for state policy opportunities that help build political champions and pressure for federal reforms, while demonstrating how state policies to address these national aims can be both effective and popular.

To jumpstart this effort and respond to current threats and opportunities, over the next five years, we will prioritize:

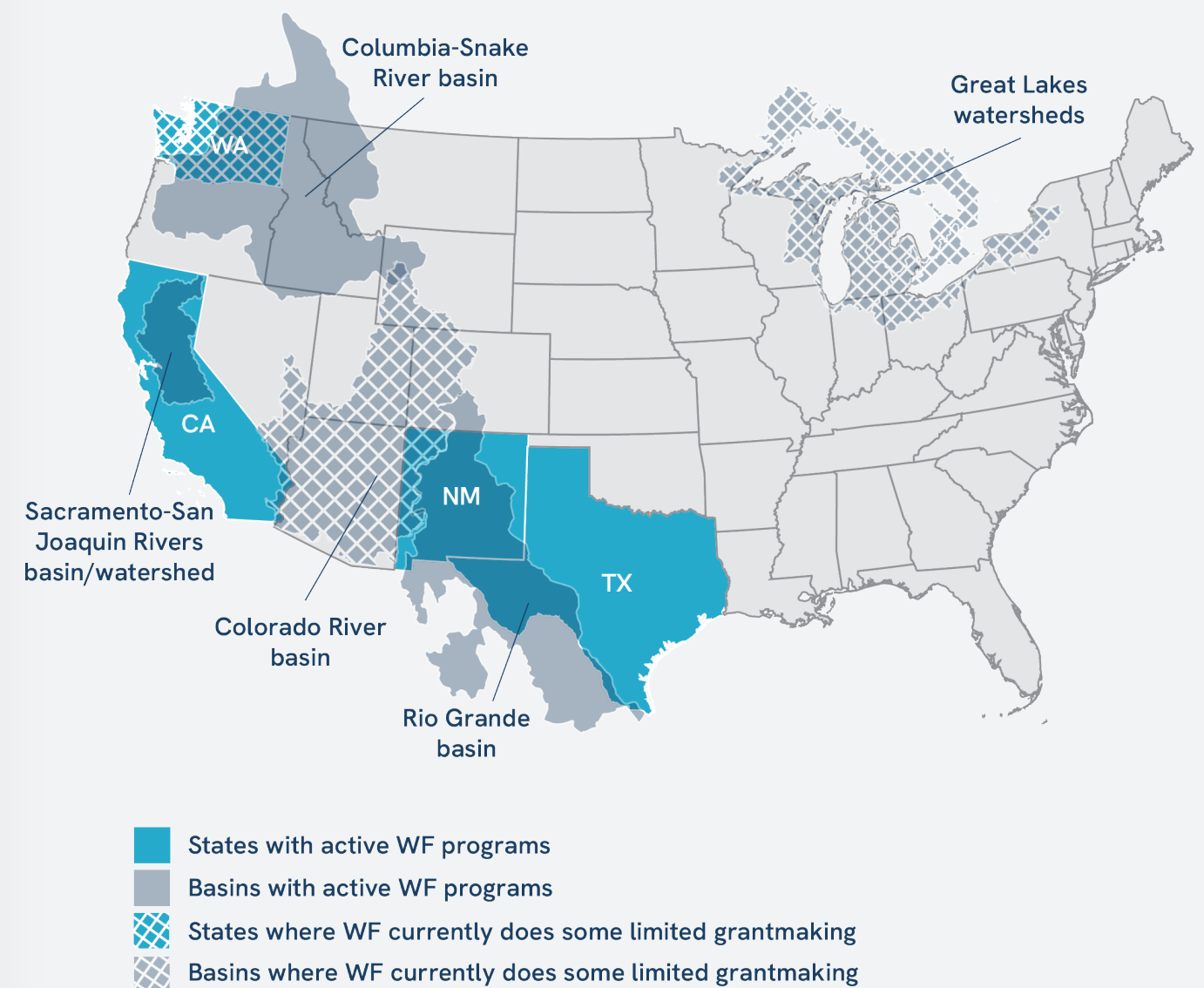
- Strengthening clean water protections;
- Advancing the human right to water by ensuring universal access through a national water affordability or low-income rate assistance program; and
- Maximizing the impact of federal water spending and securing sustained funding for equitable and green water infrastructure.

Basin Policy

Water is generally viewed as a state, Tribal, or federal resource. But when water crosses political boundaries, a patchwork of private and public rights, responsibilities, and interests make managing it a complicated, multi-stakeholder process. The Rio Grande, for example, serves roughly 12 million people and almost two million acres of crop and pastureland across three US states, two countries, and multiple Pueblos. Meanwhile, six US states, two countries, and 12 Tribes depend on the Columbia-Snake River system, its salmon runs, and the hydropower it currently provides to the region.

River basin management requires the integration of federal, state, and local policy to balance the needs and interests of the full array of stakeholders. In our experience, basin-wide planning, infrastructure operations, and litigation and settlement present opportunities to ensure essential services are considered alongside ecological pressures and the impacts of climate change.

Over the next five years, we will continue to engage in our priority basins, which include the Columbia-Snake, Rio Grande, and Sacramento-San Joaquin. This work will focus on supporting Tribal and conservation coalition efforts to advance a comprehensive solution for the Columbia-Snake River, as well as emerging work to model, track, and align balanced support for all water needs on the Rio Grande. We will engage as opportunities arise or our particular skills or relationships are needed in the Sacramento-San Joaquin basin, and potentially the Colorado River and Great Lakes.



Mobilizing the Funder Community

As a partner to water philanthropy, the Water Foundation is well positioned to mobilize resources in support of the field. We work alongside, and where appropriate on behalf of, other water funders to channel funds where they are most needed. Expanding our efforts to increase both public and private funding for water policy solutions, we have recently taken on new roles in directly deploying public funding from programs we and our partners helped to establish, as well as hosting the Water Table funder collaborative.

Through strategic investment and collaboration, the Water Table is driving systemic change across the US at scale. Together, members from 12 foundations identify shared priorities for collective action and investment. Currently, these include:

- Western water, which integrates alternative approaches to irrigated agriculture in the Colorado River basin, state level water policy, and other solutions that balance resilience and equity in the face of climate change.
- Support for Tribes and Indigenous communities to engage in decision-making and governance to restore and protect ecosystems, sustain their communities, and affirm Tribal sovereignty.
- Urban water, which considers how to advance municipal One Water and other approaches that support public health, equity, climate resilience, and environmental justice, particularly in frontline communities, with affordability, workforce, and green infrastructure emerging as near-term priorities.



The Water Table is a coordinated effort that aligns with the Water Foundation's overarching goals and vision. The Table's priorities are in sync with the foundation's grantmaking programs, and extend into other key water issues. In some cases, the Water Foundation pools and deploys investments by Water Table funders and other philanthropic partners, such as with the Water Solutions Fund and Texas Wellspring Fund. On other priorities, such as the Colorado River basin and Tribal partnerships, Water Table funders directly make grants to field partners with Water Foundation support as needed. Across all priorities, Table members share information and learn from one another in order to maximize their shared impact. As of 2023, the collaborative is influencing and aligning \$100 million in annual funding toward its set of focal priorities.

Photo credit: Community Water Center



Highlight | Mobilizing Resources Through the Water Solutions Fund

In 2022, the Water Foundation and our philanthropic partners launched the Water Solutions Fund to maximize the equity and ecological impacts of federal water infrastructure funding. To date, the pooled fund has committed more than \$15 million to just under 50 unique grantees and partners. It supports organizations and communities to design and apply for innovative projects that advance clean water, climate resilience, safe drinking water, and/or ecosystem restoration; influences public program design to ensure transparent, equitable, and effective implementation of water-related funding; and strengthens the capacity of local and regional leaders to shape infrastructure programs and projects, thereby growing the influence of a community-led movement for water. By communicating successes along the way, the Water Solutions Fund is supporting the effective deployment of BIL and IRA funding and shifting the paradigm for future federal water spending.



Photo credit: Citizen's Committee for Flood Relief

Advancing Water Equity & Justice

The Water Foundation is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in our programs and operations. Continuing patterns of oppression and white supremacy perpetuate the harms of pollution, lack of clean water, and lack of access to resources and power that disproportionately impact communities and people of color. Across the country, historic and current exclusion and sacrifice zoning have harmed many of these communities and the water and natural systems on which they depend.

We keep that history front of mind as we make funding decisions. We work with our partners to eliminate those inequities and address the systemic drivers behind them, and we encourage other philanthropic organizations to do the same. As a philanthropic intermediary, we have access to financial resources as well as relational and institutional power. We strive to use this positioning to elevate the voices and priorities of those communities committed to water solutions, impacted by water challenges, and historically underrepresented in water policy and decision-making.

Inspired by the [Climate Funders Justice Pledge](#), we are tracking our annual grantmaking with a goal of providing at least 30% of our program investments to Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color-led and serving organizations. We are streamlining our grant processes to reduce burdens on applicants. We are actively incorporating the voices and perspectives of our partners in our strategy and evaluation work, and we are updating internal policies and practices to diversify our staff and board and foster a culture of inclusion and belonging at the foundation. We are committed to continuing to improve our practices as our organization evolves and grows.



Adaptive Planning for Greater Impact

The process to get to this updated strategy involved a great deal of thinking, convening, consulting, and reflecting, but the framework is only a starting point. It will guide our efforts across issues and geographies and influence the decisions we make regarding where and how we invest, both in terms of the funding we deploy and where we concentrate staff capacity. We are committed to keeping our ears to the ground, tracking changes in context, learning as we go, and adapting as needed.

Alongside building and implementing a system for tracking these programmatic outcomes, we will monitor and adjust our ways of working with our partners over time. To do so, we have developed a series of learning questions to consider over the lifespan of this strategy:

- Are we making the most of our role bringing together and collaborating with nonprofit, philanthropic, and government partners?
- Is the policy wheel working the way we expect it to as a tool for our programs?
- What stories can we tell about our progress and that of the broader water field?
- Should we continue to look for opportunities to deploy public funding in the future?
- What are the costs and benefits of the addition of a 501(c)4? Will it allow us to do more with and for our partners?
- Are we centering DEIJ and the community-based organizations best positioned to advance water solutions?
- What challenges and barriers are we facing?

If there is anything we learned over the last five years, it is that the world around us will continue to change and evolve. In response to that dynamism, we will look for those moments where we face critical choice points—key national, state, and local elections, court rulings, legislative victories and defeats—to revisit the strategy and shape our goals and work plans to address the needs of the moment.

Over the course of the next five years, we will continue to work with our partners to develop programmatic efforts that allow us to achieve meaningful collective impact for the communities and ecosystems most affected by water issues.

Appendix

Appendix A

In 2023, the Water Foundation undertook a formal evaluation process with Estolano Advisors. This process involved outreach to almost 200 grantees, funders, and partners, as well as conversations with Water Foundation staff and board members. It resulted in a series of findings and recommendations that informed our strategic priorities and multi-year planning.

Finding | Building power is essential to advancing policy at the local, state, and federal levels.

- Since 2019, the Water Foundation has helped advance a number of policy wins.
- The Foundation lowered barriers and created space, especially for environmental justice groups, to participate in policy advocacy—supporting small organizations and work that could be perceived as “too risky,” as well as resourcing broad coalitions.

Recommendation | Build on the existing breadth of grantee partnerships to grow the power of the water sector to influence federal and state policy and public funding priorities.

Finding | Leveraging relationships and improving collaboration is key to building on previous success.

- The Foundation has grown into an effective funder outside of California, but most of that work is focused on individual states or watersheds.

Recommendation | Develop the necessary systems and resources to effectively and proactively share lessons learned across state and regional boundaries.

Appendix B: Setting Priorities

Determining geographic priorities requires a decision-making framework that incorporates factors such as place, issue, leadership, strategic wins, and financing. The table below highlights selection criteria and questions that we use to prioritize opportunities, possible uses of funds, and communication approaches. While these criteria provide a guide for decision-making, not all opportunities must satisfy every criteria question. For example, if a potential opportunity presents a high degree of conflict (see Degree of Conflict criterion), but people are ready to collaborate to solve the problem and make progress, we might see this as a “go.” The overarching purpose of the assessment criteria is to help our team identify ripe opportunities for philanthropy to bend the curve, co-create, and make progress in specific states and basins.

| Criteria Characteristics | Criteria Questions |
|--------------------------|---|
| Crises/Opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there specific emergencies that need to be addressed or key opportunities on the horizon? |
| Leadership and Capacity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the leadership represent multiple scales and sectors? Are there well-positioned champions to advance change? |
| Partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are a range of key constituencies engaged? |
| Degree of Conflict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the degree of conflict or frustration factor? How much collaboration has already started? Are they ready to move forward and make progress? |
| Problem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the underlying imbalances in the system, such as ecosystem degradation or inequitable access to water, match our goals? |
| Data and Knowledge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do we already know about the problems, opportunities, and existing system fitness? |
| Replicability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the key challenges and opportunities similar to those in other identified states or basins? Does action in a state have the potential to ladder up to federal opportunities? |
| Forum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the current forum for state advocacy or basin-wide discussions? Does one exist or need to be created? |
| Political Will | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there an opportunity to galvanize people who are impacted to advocate for policy reform? |
| Funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there an opportunity for philanthropy to catalyze and seed public investment? Are there sufficient private and public resources available? |
| Multiple Benefits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there multi-benefit solutions that can be applied to the state or basin? |

Finding | Shaping the national narrative around water solutions can maximize the effectiveness of both the Water Foundation and its partners.

- The full vision and breadth of the Water Foundation’s work remain opaque to many partners, pointing to the need for better external communications.
- The Foundation is uniquely placed to develop and disseminate narratives or public education campaigns that advance the field.

Recommendation | Invest in storytelling and communications that highlight the importance of resilient and equitable water systems.

Finding | Facilitating philanthropic engagement in water can drive change on a broader scale.

- The Water Table funder collaborative helps to enhance the national visibility of water issues, but there is opportunity to further refine the Table’s priorities.
- The Water Foundation’s integrated roles as public foundation, funder collaborative, and field catalyst could be better integrated for impact and should be more clearly articulated.

Recommendation | Clarify how the Water Foundation’s programmatic work and its role hosting the Water Table fit together to maximize positive impact in the water field.

Glossary

The Water Foundation defines the **water field** broadly to include people, organizations, agencies, and communities working on freshwater solutions.

Our **grantee partners** are those organizations to which we are providing direct financial support.

Funder partners are the philanthropic individuals and institutions we work with to mobilize resources for the field. As a public foundation, the Water Foundation also acts as a funder partner to our grantees.

Integrated water management, as defined by the United Nations Environment Programme, promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land, and related resources to maximize economic and social welfare, without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems. It is closely related to the **One Water** approach, which “manages all water—whether from the tap, a stream, a storm, an aquifer, or a sewer—in a collaborative, integrated, inclusive, and holistic manner” (Source: US Water Alliance).

Natural infrastructure projects restore nature’s processes to provide key services and ecosystem functions. These projects use existing or restored natural landscapes and features such as forests, floodplains, wetlands to increase resilience to drought and climate impacts. Natural infrastructure is a subset of **nature-based solutions**, or the use and emulation of natural systems to provide societal and environmental benefits (Source: [Natural and Green Infrastructure in the Colorado River Basin](#)).

As defined in 2012 by California Assembly Bill (AB) 685 the **human right to water** means that “every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable and accessible water for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes.” The Water Foundation believes that right extends beyond the state of California. When we talk about **equitable water services**, we are describing a situation in which the human right to water has been operationalized for drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure, as well as recreational and subsistence uses of freshwater and freshwater habitats.

Power, most simply, is the ability to make others do what you would have them do. But that can be quite complicated. As Farhad Ebrahimi of the Chorus Foundation writes in “How We Got Here,” the introduction to a *Philanthropy and Power Supplement to the Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Winter 2024), “If we can’t see power for what it is, and we can’t ask why power operates the way it does, then we will find ourselves subject to the power of others, rather than becoming the agents of our own power. That is precisely how the status quo perpetuates itself... Power, as it turns out, is not a monolithic concept but instead a complex ecosystem that takes different forms and includes a web of relationships and interactions. There is no one right way to create a taxonomy in this vast ecosystem, but for Chorus, it has been helpful to name political, economic, and cultural power... Loosely speaking, we understand **political power** as the ability to influence or control collective decision-making... **Economic power** is the degree to which an individual or group controls valued assets and resources, including the decisions that surround their use... We understand **cultural power** as the capacity of a group to shape what it believes, values, does, and creates in ways that align with its worldview and preferred way of being.”

Water justice is the fair treatment, equal access, and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, in decisions about water use, management, and stewardship.