

## **Community Water Systems Alliance 2023-2027 Strategic Plan**

### *History*

The Community Water Systems Alliance (CWSA) was launched in 2019 as an initiative of the California Association of Mutual Water Companies (CalMutuals) with funding from founding partners. CWSA initially focused on the invalidation of the former Chromium 6 standard, and opposition to a proposed meter tax, which was successfully defeated and addressed with a CalMutuals/CWSA alternative of funding support for small systems through the state's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund.

### *Mission*

The mission of the Community Water Systems Alliance is to galvanize a clear and compelling voice for water systems that serve or want to support small and disadvantaged communities; and to ensure that local elected officials who care about drinking water and managers are heard by legislators, regulators and the Governor's office. CWSA advocates for members' needs and issues and the small and disadvantaged communities they serve or support, which typically are not given priority attention by mainstream water associations.

### *Membership Profile*

Typically, CWSA members align with one of two main categories:

1. Public agencies, typically smaller cities and districts, whose needs are not well represented by other water associations;
2. Larger public agencies that are willing and motivated to aid their smaller "sister agencies" with more limited resources.

Members currently range geographically from the Sonora Desert to Orange County, and north to the Central Coast. Several of the charter members serve regional water supply and management needs, and support small systems within their area with technical and sometimes financial support, such as bridge funding to make the use of state grants possible.

### *Accomplishments*

In its first five years, CWSA has doubled membership from its 9 founding members to over 20 members today. The relatively small number is magnified during advocacy efforts, when individual cities and water suppliers under our regional members such as WRD, or OCWD that serve disadvantaged communities send representatives or write comment letters.

The Alliance brings geographically diverse systems together to collaborate on common goals. As a result of the solid commitment and participation of CWSA's charter members, the Alliance has strengthened its unique voice and credibility of water systems serving disadvantaged communities. CWSA has significant legislative reach and impact, weighing in with equal commitment on issues that directly impact individual members and those that do not. CWSA has further successfully promoted the efforts by several Alliance members to share resources and expertise to support the needs of small systems in their service territories and contribute to the State's Human Right to Water aspirations.

## Strategic Priorities

### Legislative Priorities

- Expand outreach, education, and strategic engagement with state and local legislators.
- Tackle legislative dysfunction and overreach. Work to stop knee-jerk actions that override established pathways with legislation.
- Approach legislation proactively rather than reactively.
- Seek Bipartisan support in the U.S. House & Senate on questions such as PFAS.
- Continue to advance unique perspectives on emerging issues.
  - 2023 - Engage economists to assess economic feasibility of chromium 6 regulation.
- Track and leverage what regional opinion leaders are doing.
- 2023 Legislative Priorities
  - New water rate assistance program legislative proposals
  - Renewed efforts to increase indoor & outdoor water use standards
  - Inconsistent efforts to target and regulate Constituents of Emerging Concern in Drinking Water Program.
  - Cannabis - illegal (and water theft).
  - Cannabis - legal (and water demands).

### Regulatory Priorities

- Expand outreach/ education and strategic engagement with regulators.
- Ensure that the needs and concerns of small and disadvantaged communities are considered as regulations are being developed.
- Speak out against “one size fits all” regulatory solutions.
- Advocate for more effective communication and increased guidance & resources for the implementation of regulations.
- Work to identify, articulate, and clear regulatory roadblocks for small systems and Disadvantaged Communities.
- Account for the true cost of drinking water, not just volumetric rates.
- Continue to advance unique perspectives on emerging issues.
- Highlight the fact that providing safe drinking water to those in need internationally is easier than delivering safe drinking water to those in need in California.
  - *Water for People of California?*
- 2023 Issues of Concern
  - Operator Certification
    - Explore certifications/continuing education credit for operators who assist small and DAC systems/projects.
  - PFAS MCL and Potential EPA Designation as Hazardous Waste
  - Chromium 6 MCL
    - Ensure regulation is based on sound science, with technological and economic feasibility.
    - Ensure opportunity for systems to meet regulations.

- Water Supply and Conservation
  - Colorado River - Engage Congressman Napolitano and Senator Padilla.
  - Indoor and outdoor water efficiency standards.

#### Communication/Marketing

- Continue to document the success of member agencies, including small systems that are often overlooked.
- Continue to highlight the work of members in providing assistance and support to small and disadvantaged systems.
- Codify best practices for larger systems helping smaller systems into a guide/framework/resource to share with other larger systems with this interest.
- Lead in defining the term “disadvantaged community” to include emerging groups such as fixed income seniors, and develop creative ways of addressing them.
- Update/refresh website to include video testimonials and videos or features to highlight successes and priorities and calls to action.
- Strengthen social media messaging.

#### Membership Development

- Develop clear membership criteria and profiles of prospective CWSA members.
  - Host 2023 sponsor mixer at ACWA spring conference to recruit prospective members.
  - Investigate opportunities and set regional priorities for membership growth.
  - Explore collaboration with Water Education for Latino Leaders (WELL).
- Strengthen the awareness and engagement in CWSA of small system staff, boards of directors, city staff, and councilmembers who are extended CWSA membership through Charter members.
  - Include in CWSA Newsletter distribution list.
  - Invite new staff and elected officials to participate in the Annual Lobby 101 Workshop.
  - Promote Water 101 webinar series for new staff and elected officials.
  - Engage in CWSA letter writing campaigns and participation in hearings.
- Cultivate interest in membership through engagement on legislative and regulatory issues of shared concern.

#### Alliance Building

- Cultivate partnerships and collaborations focused on advocacy with Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), Community Water Center (CWC), Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), American Water Works Association California-Nevada (AWWA:CA-NV) and California Rural Water.
- Explore partnerships with local community members, businesses, and governments to raise funds to bring sustainable water to the people of California.

- *Water for People (of California) ?*

#### Assistance to Small and Disadvantaged Systems

- Continue to highlight the work of members in providing assistance and support to small and disadvantaged systems.
- Continue to support small systems through advocacy efforts.
- Continue to develop a process that supports small systems in obtaining assistance from any of our larger system members.
  - Explore the adoption by CWSA member companies, districts or cities of a regional small or disadvantaged system.
  - Explore reimbursements for larger systems to address Prop 218 issues.
  - Communicate small systems needs as they emerge with CWSA members in the event that they may be in a position to provide assistance.

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