



PolicyLink



Technical Assistance Fact Sheet

Key Takeaways

- Utilities and other eligible applicants must overcome numerous technical barriers to learn about, access, and administer SRF resources.
- Technical assistance refers to external support to help water systems complete needs assessments, plan projects, engage stakeholders, and apply for and administer SRF awards.
- Technical assistance reduces the burden that utilities and other applicants must shoulder in accessing SRFs.

SRF Basics: Technical Assistance

Technical assistance refers to services that external experts and advisors provide. The type of assistance can include engineering, financial, legal, environmental, community engagement, grant writing, communications, and other services that supplement a utility's in-house technical, managerial, and financial expertise.

Who Receives Technical Assistance?

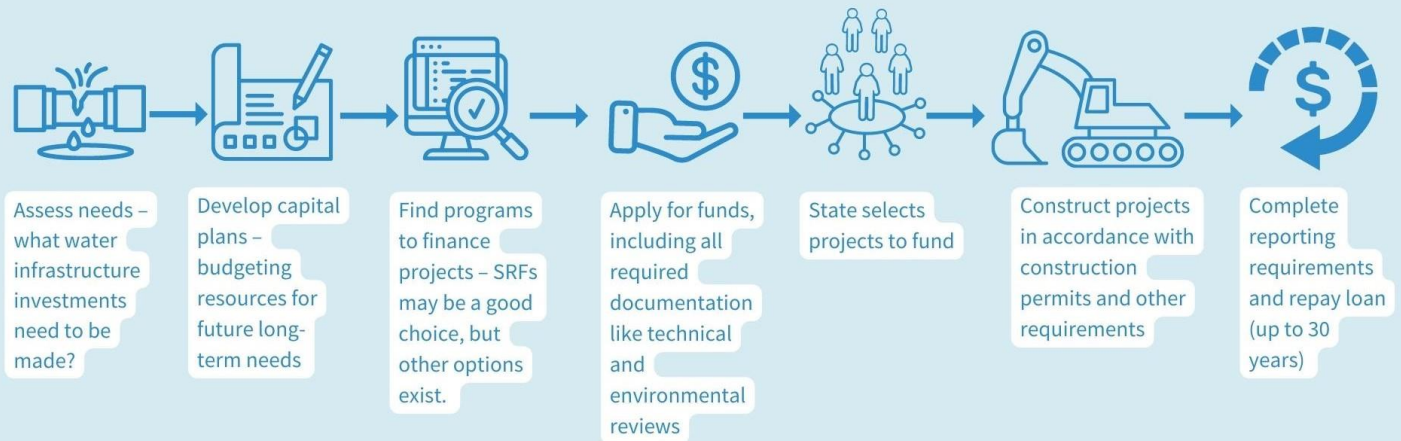
Utilities and other eligible applicants to the State Revolving Funds receive technical assistance. Only water utilities are eligible to apply for the Drinking Water SRF program. Municipalities, interstate agencies, non-profits, and others are eligible to apply for the Clean Water SRF program.

Why Does Technical Assistance Matter?

Utilities and other SRF applicants must overcome numerous barriers to access SRFs to finance water infrastructure. As shown in the figure on the next page, applicants must assess needs, develop capital plans, find programs to finance projects, and apply for funds to finance projects. Applications to the SRFs require technical components – e.g., engineering designs and environmental assessments – that are complicated and costly to complete: *estimates suggest the average cost just to apply for state programs that finance water infrastructure projects in California is \$17,000.*

For more information, go to www.srfadvocatesforum.org

Applicants need to ...



Utilities and other SRF applicants that are resource-constrained – due to size, revenue, staffing, or other capacity limitations – often have difficulty completing the technical components of applications. Such constraints can result in the inequitable distribution of resources. [Estimates](#) suggest that only 7.1 percent of eligible community water systems received a DWSRF award from 2011-2020. Given the technical expertise, time, and costs required to prepare applications, passive reliance on submissions of “shovel-ready” projects often yields a disproportionately wealthy applicant pool and hinders the equitable distribution of SRF awards.

To meaningfully change the number of disadvantaged communities that benefit from SRF funds, direct technical assistance must be provided to underserved communities. Technical assistance reduces the burden that utilities and other applicants must shoulder in accessing SRFs—from developing a project and applying to securing and managing the funds. Proactive technical assistance can increase the equitable allocation of SRF funds.

Who Provides Technical Assistance?

- [EPA](#)
- State agencies
- [Environmental Finance Centers](#) (EFCs) were university-based organizations with expertise and experience in developing innovative solutions to environmental protection and improvement challenges. In 2022, the EPA extended the number of EFCs. Now [29 organizations](#) serve as EFCs.
- [The Rural Community Assistance Partnership](#) (RCAP) is a national nonprofit partnership network that aims to provide resources, such as technical assistance and training, to rural communities across the US. RCAP works to build local capacity and provide support to rural communities in efforts to improve overall quality of life.
- [Rural Water Association](#) (RWA) are non-profit, professional associations that provide training, support, and overall promote small community-water and wastewater professionals in the US. RWAs aim to make resources more accessible to rural America and help bridge these existing resource gaps.
- Consultants and engineering firms
- Non-profits. For example, Environmental Protection Network offers a [Pro Bono Capacity-Building Technical Assistance Program](#) to communities and non-profits to translate regulator processes into lay language, provide advice on navigating regulatory or grants programs, connect groups to others in EPN’s network, and to identify contacts at regulatory agencies.

How Do Utilities and Other SRF Applicants Access Technical Assistance?

Many utilities and other SRF applicants use different sources of technical assistance depending on the specific need and in-house capacity. Some communities have contracts for ongoing TA with consultants. For larger, project-based work, a utility with sufficient resources might solicit proposals from a wider group of consultants. Other communities receive technical assistance through RWA, RCAP, and EFCs. While it varies state by state, the state typically coordinates the assistance and provides TA for utilities that meet certain socioeconomic and/or size criteria. In some cases, the provider works directly with the community.

State Can Help Pay for Technical Assistance through Set-Asides

Federal statute allows states to use up to 4% of the annual amount they receive from Congress – called the capitalization grant – for program administration and technical assistance for both [DWSRF](#) and [CWSRF](#). States may also use an additional 2% of their DWSRF capitalization grants for technical assistance to systems serving fewer than 10,000 people. Moreover, states can set aside up to 10% of their DWSRF capitalization grant for public water system supervision (PWSS) programs or to develop and implement a capacity development strategy. In addition, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) authorized set-asides from the SRFs of 2 to 3 percent for salaries, expenses, and administration. For DWSRFs (including LSLR and DW PFAS funds), [up to 31%](#) of the fed cap grant could potentially be set aside to help fund statewide TA programs as well as direct assistance to local utilities for "pre-construction activities".

Description, allowed percent, and average percent of capitalization grant allocated for authorized set-asides that include technical assistance.

Authorized set-asides that include technical assistance	Allowed percent of capitalization grant ²²	Average percent of capitalization grant
Administration and technical assistance	4 %	3.7 %
Technical assistance to systems serving fewer than 10,000 people	2 %	1.6 %
State program management, including supervision, technical assistance through source water protection program, capacity development, and operator certification	10 %	7.9 %
Local assistance for land or conservation easements, source water protection, technical and financial assistance for capacity development, and wellhead protection	15 %	6.5 %

States can provide technical assistance to small and disadvantaged communities for engineering, needs assessments, and asset planning, among other needs through PWSS and capacity development set-asides. The EPA's [BIL implementation memo](#) confirmed that set aside funds could be used for "other pre-project costs" in addition to identifying need, project development, and preliminary engineering steps, planning, and design.

1. Encourage states to simplify their application processes.
2. Advocate for setting aside SRF funds for technical assistance
3. Encourage the proactive identification, recruitment, and provision of TA to disadvantaged communities to develop shovel-worthy projects.
4. Provide direct one-on-one technical assistance to disadvantaged communities. While assistance in the form of training manuals, webinars, and other training can be valuable, many disadvantaged communities need tailored assistance to address their unique needs, including one-on-one support for completing needs assessments, engaging stakeholders, developing project plans, and filling out applications.

Case Studies

Supporting a community replacing lead service lines

The Environmental Policy Innovation Center (EPIC) selected the Village of Hazel Crest, IL to participate in its Lead-Free Water Challenge program with the goal of replacing all lead pipes in the Village. Hazel Crest is a suburb of Chicago with 1,105 service lines that are assumed or likely to be lead, which would cost approximately \$8.8 to \$11 million to replace. This cost for lead pipe replacement is a high burden for Hazel Crest, which has documented its need as a distressed community. Through the Lead-Free Water Challenge, EPIC, along with its partners, provides technical assistance, connections to resources and funders, policy guidance, and information-sharing through peer networks. The focus is on helping small- and medium-sized communities that have not had the capacity to address lead pipes in their drinking water systems. In November 2022, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) granted priority to Hazel Crest for \$4 billion of Drinking Water State Revolving Fund assistance to go towards lead pipe replacement.

Supporting a “Disadvantaged Community” with Nature-Based Solutions

Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA) partnered with the City of Camden to tackle major urban water infrastructure challenges with environmental, social, and economic implications. The City of Camden is a distressed urban municipality with a declining population and with nearly 39 percent of its residents living under the poverty line. Consequently, it lacks sufficient resources for optimal water and sewer systems management. The peer-to-peer partnership allows CCMUA to assist with operational oversight of Camden’s water and sewer systems, to obtain funding on behalf of Camden for grant writing, and to maintain parks and rain gardens. CCMUA prioritizes green infrastructure and environmentally beneficial upgrades to water infrastructure and focuses on Triple Bottom Line strategies.

This relationship demonstrates how a utility with a sufficient capacity can work with neighboring communities that have limited resources to achieve better overall community and environmental results. The partnership has now grown to a collaborative green infrastructure team (known as [Camden SMART](#)) that also includes the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, New Jersey Tree Foundation, Rutgers and Rowen Universities, Cooper’s Ferry Partnership, and others. They have invested over \$30 million in infrastructure upgrades, as well as [daylighted a stream and built five riverfront parks and many rain gardens](#), all financed through New Jersey’s SRF program.