



Know your Water Sector Systems

A firm understanding of your community’s water system is critical to the success of providing safe and reliable water and wastewater services for residents. While there is a great deal to know about your community’s water systems, the following questions can serve as the foundation for understanding the challenges your utilities face. Use them as a guide for your conversations or as the core information in a fact sheet from your utility management.

Although the majority of questions can apply to both drinking water and wastewater facilities, it is important to note those questions that are only relevant to one particular type of system.

	Drinking Water Facilities	Wastewater Facilities
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many service connections do we have and what is our population served? • When was our utility formed and how old are the oldest parts of the system? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the main components of our drinking water system? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Include treatment train, storage, and distribution • How much drinking water is our present treatment system(s) capable of producing per day? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ How much of that capacity do we typically use? • What is the source and quality of our drinking water? • How many miles of distribution pipe do we have? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the main components of our wastewater system? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Include collection, treatment train, and discharge • How much wastewater can our present system treat per day? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ How much of that capacity do we typically use? • Where does our wastewater treatment system discharge? • How many miles of collection pipe do we have?
	Decentralized Wastewater/Septic Systems	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does a portion of our community rely on septic systems or other onsite wastewater treatment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ If so, what percentage and in what areas of the community? • Do we have information on the soundness of septic systems in our community? • Do we have water quality challenges resulting from failing septic systems? • Do we have policies, codes, or approaches for managing septic systems, or is that left up to individuals? 	

Sustainable Water Infrastructure & Local Officials



	Drinking Water Facilities	Wastewater Facilities
Rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are our present rates? • What has been our history of rate changes over the past 10 years? • Do we offer subsidized or “lifeline” rates to any of our customers? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is our drinking water rate structure and does it encourage conservation of water? • Do all customers have meters that measure their water use? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is our wastewater rate structure and is it linked to drinking water use?
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we had any violations or significant deficiencies in the past three years? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ If yes, have the causes been corrected? • What are the three most common customer complaints? • What are the biggest challenges our water utility faces? 	
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we have an inventory or registry of all the components that make up our system? • Do we have a complete map of all the assets that make up the system—and is it digital or on paper? • Do we have a system for determining the useful life of infrastructure assets based on their condition? • Do we prioritize capital investments based on the likelihood and consequences of assets “failing”? • Do our rates cover the costs of operations, maintenance, and capital investment needs? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ If not, how are we paying for everything—or what areas are we underfunding? • Do we have projections of how our service population is likely to change? Is the capacity of our infrastructure suited to those changes? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At what rate have we been replacing our distribution pipes? • What percentage of drinking water is lost to leaking distribution pipes? • Have we studied the long-term stability of our water supply? What were the conclusions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At what rate have we been replacing our collection system pipes? • What percentage of wastewater reaching our treatment plant is the result of inflow and infiltration?

To learn more about how local officials can help support sustainable water infrastructure in their communities, visit <http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/sustain/localofficials.cfm>.