



## Technical Assistance

For eligible entities that have never successfully applied to receive SRF funding, knowing who to turn to for help can make or break a robust application. Indeed, even entities that have applied and secured SRF dollars before find the application process time consuming and complex. Technical assistance (TA) refers to a variety of support from experts to help water systems plan and apply for SRF funds. Remember: your utility may not know that these resources exist! As an advocate, communicating with appropriate staff at the local level is crucial—not just to highlight what needs to be done, but to build rapport and trust by serving as a connector to opportunities and resources they may not know about.<sup>5</sup>



**Technical Assistance (TA):** Targeted support that external experts or consultants provide to ensure a project application, process, or outcome is achieved. Technical assistance may include financial, legal, engineering, communications, grant writing, environmental assessments, and other services, including community engagement. Applicants and recipients can receive TA prior to preparing an SRF application, during the application process, and while the project is underway.

## How Do Utilities & Other SRF Applicants Access Technical Assistance?

Many utilities and other SRF applicants use different sources of technical assistance (TA) depending on their 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 the National Rural Water Association (NRWA), Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP), and Environmental Finance Centers (EFCs), among other providers. 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.

## How Can States Help Utilities & Other SRF Applicants Pay for Technical Assistance?

### Set-Asides

For both the Drinking Water SRF and Clean Water SRF, 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. States may also use an additional 2% of their DWSRF capitalization grants for technical assistance to systems serving fewer than 10,000 people. In addition, 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. BIL authorized set-asides from the SRFs of 2 to 3% for salaries, expenses, and administration. For DWSRFs (including lead service line replacement and emerging contaminants funds), **up to 31%** of the federal capitalization grant could potentially be set aside to help fund statewide TA programs as well as direct assistance to local utilities for “pre-construction activities.”

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to the SRF State Advocates Forum, particularly Katy Hansen from the Environmental Policy Innovation Center, for providing some of the content in the Technical Assistance section.



### EXAMPLE FROM ILLINOIS:

In their 2022 IUP, [Illinois EPA](#) indicated that they use Small System and Local Assistance and Other State Programs set-asides to provide TA with the Illinois Rural Water Association. The agency intends to use additional set-aside funds to provide support to northern Illinois public water systems, “with a focus on assisting disadvantaged communities in building their capacity for sustainable and equitable water management activities such as assistance with water rate studies, preliminary engineering or other facility planning, training activities, asset management plans, assistance with identification and replacement of lead service lines, and studies of efficiency measures through utility regionalization or other collaborative intergovernmental approaches.”

The technical assistance needs of small and/or disadvantaged communities can vary widely but should be underpinned by clear and open communication and the goal of increasing the number of communities who successfully apply for and secure SRF funding.



### ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

The need for technical assistance arises out of the fact that state SRF processes tend to be complex—an initial advocacy step is encouraging states to simplify their application processes where possible to lower the barriers for communities with limited technical, managerial, and financial capacity. Ideally, the balance of funding utilized for both TA providers to support the planning and application process and actual project implementation should be thoughtfully distributed, ensuring sufficient funding is available for actually addressing the water infrastructure needs of each community.



### RECOMMENDED READING

[Uncommitted State Revolving Funds](#), includes recommendations to enhance effective SRF administrative practices, by Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions (Duke University) and Environmental Policy Innovation Center.

[DWSRF Set-Asides: A State-by-State Analysis](#), EPA (reports range in publication from 2007–2015).

Encourage your state to use set-asides for TA and [proactively provide technical assistance](#) to disadvantaged communities. States are allowed under federal statute to use up to 4% of their annual capitalization grant for TA and program administration for CWSRF and DWSRF. Other DWSRF set-asides are eligible for TA use, but states tend to [not fully use them](#).

The following table, from the Environmental Policy Innovation Center’s report [Drinking Water Equity: Analysis and Recommendations for the Allocation of the State Revolving Funds](#), demonstrates that between 2011–2020, DWSRF set-asides were under-utilized by states and territories.

Table 1: 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 <sup>22</sup> | 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 %                                   |

## Technical Assistance Providers

### Environmental Finance Center Network

**Environmental Finance Centers (EFCs)** are supported by the EPA and other funding partners to provide targeted technical assistance to local and state governments, tribes, and nonprofit organizations to secure public funding for infrastructure improvements. Until 2022 there were 10 EFCs, one per EPA region. In 2022 the EPA announced \$100 million in grant funding to **establish more EFCs**, including regional water infrastructures EFCs and national water infrastructure EFCs.

EFCs provide trainings, applied resources, direct assistance, and advising services. For example, the Environmental Finance Center at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill offers free **one-on-one technical assistance** for systems providing drinking water and wastewater services to up to 10,000 people. The EFC at Syracuse University developed a **funding guide database** for New York State municipalities and local governments, and the University of Maryland EFC runs a Municipal Online Stormwater Training Center (**MOST**).

#### Finding Help: Technical Assistance from Environmental Finance Centers

| EPA Region | States Served  | Environmental Finance Center   | Contact   |
|------------|--|--|---|
| 1          | Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont  | <a href="#">New England EFC at the University of Southern Maine</a>                                      | Efc@maine.edu   |
| 2          | New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands   | <a href="#">EFC at Syracuse University</a>   | <a href="#">Staff contact info</a>  |
| 3          | Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia  | <a href="#">EFC at the University of Maryland</a>  | <a href="#">Staff contact info</a>  |
| 4          | Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee  | <a href="#">EFC at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill</a>   | <a href="#">Staff contact info</a>  |
| 5          | Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin  | <a href="#">Great Lakes Environmental Infrastructure Center at the Michigan Technological University</a> | <a href="mailto:Gleic-support@mtu.edu">Gleic-support@mtu.edu</a> or call (906) 487-2102                     |
| 6          | Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas   | <a href="#">Southwest EFC at the University of New Mexico</a>  | <a href="mailto:Swefc@unm.edu">Swefc@unm.edu</a> or call (505) 277-0644                                     |
| 7          | Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska   | <a href="#">Wichita State University EFC</a>   | <a href="mailto:Efc@wichita.edu">Efc@wichita.edu</a> or call (316) 978-7240                                 |
| 8          | Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming   | <a href="#">National Rural Water Association EFC</a>   | <a href="#">Staff contact info</a> or call (580) 252-0629   |
| 9          | Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Marshall Islands, and Republic of Palau | <a href="#">EFC at Sacramento State</a>  |   |
| 10         | Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington  | <a href="#">EFC at the Rural Community Assistance Corporation</a>  | Kristin K'eit, EFC Coordinator at <a href="mailto:kkeit@rcac.org">kkeit@rcac.org</a> or call (907) 764-9798 |

## Technical Assistance Partners and Programs

**National Rural Water Association (NRWA)** – A nonprofit that provides training and support to water and wastewater professionals serving small communities. NRWA received grant funding from the EPA in 2022 to provide training and TA for small public water systems to improve financial and managerial capacity and to achieve compliance with the SDWA. NRWA also collaborates with USDA to operate the [Rural Water Circuit Rider Program](#).<sup>6</sup>

**Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP)** – A national network of nonprofits provides onsite TA, training, and technical, financial, and managerial tools and resources to rural communities. RCAP received grant funding from the EPA in 2022 to work with small public water systems to improve financial and managerial capacity and to achieve compliance with the SDWA. Check out [wateroperator.org](#), a collaboration between RCAP and the University of Illinois featuring training events and a resource library for small system operators. The six regional partners cover states, territories, and tribal lands.

Learn more at [www.rcap.org/about-us/](http://www.rcap.org/about-us/)

### RCAP REGIONAL PARTNER CONTACTS

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Western RCAP</b> <i>Alaska, Hawaii, California, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah</i><br/>Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)<br/>3120 Freeboard Drive, Suite 201<br/>West Sacramento, CA 95691<br/>(916) 447-2854   <a href="http://www.rcac.org">www.rcac.org</a></p>             | <p><b>Midwest RCAP</b> <i>Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming</i><br/>Midwest Assistance Program (MAP)<br/>309 East Summit Dr,<br/>Maryville, MO 64468<br/>(660) 562-2575   <a href="http://www.map-inc.org">www.map-inc.org</a></p>              |
| <p><b>Northeast &amp; Caribbean RCAP</b> <i>Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands</i><br/>RCAP Solutions<br/>191 May St   Worcester, MA 01602<br/>(800) 488-1969   <a href="http://www.rcapsolutions.org">www.rcapsolutions.org</a></p> | <p><b>Great Lakes RCAP</b> <i>Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia, Wisconsin</i><br/>Great Lakes Community Action Partnership<br/>P.O. Box 590   127 S. Front St., 2nd Floor<br/>Fremont, OH 43420<br/>(800) 775-9767   <a href="http://www.glracap.org">www.glracap.org</a></p> |
| <p><b>Southern RCAP</b> <i>Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas</i><br/>Communities Unlimited<br/>3 East Colt Square Drive<br/>Fayetteville, AR 72703<br/>(479) 443-2700   <a href="http://www.communitiesu.org">www.communitiesu.org</a></p>   | <p><b>Southeast RCAP</b> <i>Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia</i><br/>Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project (SERCAP)<br/>347 Campbell Ave. SW   Roanoke, VA 24016<br/>(866) 928-3731   <a href="http://www.sercap.org">www.sercap.org</a></p>       |

Environmental Protection Network's [Pro Bono Capacity-Building Technical Assistance Program](#) offers pro bono assistance to communities and nonprofits to translate regulator processes into lay language, advice on navigating regulatory or grants programs, connecting groups to others in EPN's network, and identifying contacts at regulatory agencies.

EPIC's [Funding Navigator](#) program aims to connect under-resourced water utilities to technical assistance to navigate each step of the funding application process.

[MI Water Navigator](#) helps water systems navigate Michigan's infrastructure funding systems by assessing, identifying, and applying to relevant funding sources, including SRFs.

[Drinking Water 1-2-3 Technical Assistance](#) – Metropolitan Planning Council offers technical assistance and on-the-ground implementation of best practices in drinking water management. Applicants must be representatives of a municipality or a municipal partnership within northeastern Illinois.

WaterNow Alliance's [Project Accelerator](#) provides public drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater agencies with pro-bono support to jumpstart sustainable water projects. Recent application cycles focus on projects that support under-resourced communities. To learn more, email [aw@waternow.org](mailto:aw@waternow.org).

[Center for Watershed Protection](#) provides assistance in preparing Clean Water SRF applications, including developing budgetary cost estimates and concept designs, helping ensure compliance with labor and material-sourcing requirements, and more.

[US Water Alliance's Water Equity Network](#) advances equitable water management practices; participants receive coaching and support to address local challenges and improve policies and programs.

[Moonshot Missions](#) works with utilities and communities to review their technical, management and, and financial conditions to assess their needs and capacity.

## Tribal Technical Assistance for SRFs

The Inter Tribal Council of Arizona (ITCA) provides [tribal water and wastewater technical assistance](#) in partnership with federal agencies and other organizations to tribal water utility operators and managers to develop technical, managerial, and financial capacity (TMF) as well as water and wastewater utility sustainability. Services are provided free of charge.

Other tribal assistance providers include [Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada](#), [Native American Water Association \(NAWA\)](#), and [United South & Eastern Tribes \(USET\)](#).

For a full list of funding sources for tribal water and wastewater projects, [see this table](#).

<sup>6</sup> NRWA provides vital support to small and rural systems but may not meet every water system's goals and needs. Exploration of additional TA providers, such as Environmental Finance Centers, can help communities identify their best partner for their water infrastructure needs