



March 24, 2026

Learning Session

# Avoiding Water Shutoffs

Part 2: The Community Forum



# WELCOME!

## *While you wait ...*

- Please introduce yourself in the chat - your name, personal pronouns if you'd like to share, org, where you're based, and the native land you reside on.
- Please use the chat box for questions during the speaker presentations.
- Please fill out the post-webinar survey so we can improve!

# AGENDA & AGREEMENTS

## Agenda

- Introducing our newest resource
- Reviewing the 10 Best Practices
- Poll activity
- Group discussion
- Wrap-up, resources, and River Rally!

# GROUP AGREEMENTS

- 1. Acknowledge our shared humanity.*
- 2. Respect our diversity.*
- 3. Be present, be open, be authentic.*
- 4. Take space, make space.*
- 5. Assume positive intent and consider your impact.*
- 6. Listen to understand, respond with curiosity.*
- 7. Recognize your power in the room.*
- 8. Take the lessons, leave the details.*

# WHY FOCUS ON WATER SHUTOFFS?

- An average of **20% of households are in debt to their water utility**
- **Low-income households** are disproportionately affected by water shutoffs
- People of color are more likely to experience disconnections, specifically Black, Native American, and mixed-race households.
- Correlations exist between areas that experience water shutoffs and environmental & other factors such as:
  - urban heat islands,
  - poor air quality,
  - high unemployment, and
  - historical redlining.



**Water shutoffs are a visible symptom of an underlying, widespread condition of unaffordable water.**

**Disrupting a household's access to water has a cascading series of negative effects.**

# NEW RESOURCE

## ArcGIS StoryMap



**Introduction** 



**“The practice of shutting off water is a very clear disruption of water access, with really significant impacts for people and questionable value to utilities.”**  
- Anna-Lisa Gonzales Castle, Elevate

The benefits of keeping the tap on go far beyond drinking water. Think about how you use your water each day: washing your hands, cooking dinner, flushing the toilet, washing your clothes, watering your garden, and so much more. At-home water supply impacts sanitation: water access decreases the spread of disease and strengthens the economy. When [water access is expanded](#), it can lead to increased economic productivity and reduced healthcare costs.<sup>2</sup>

**Imagine a Future Where Everyone Can Access Water**

Water is a human right. But access to clean, safe, and affordable drinking water is not guaranteed in the United States. River Network envisions a future where everyone can afford to pay for the clean, safe, and reliable water coming out of their taps, where no one’s water is shutoff because of their inability to pay, where communities have adequate resources for water infrastructure maintenance, and where drinking water contaminants do not threaten public health. This vision can only become reality if community advocates and utility leaders feel equipped with the knowledge, capacity, and confidence to advocate and implement equitable access to clean drinking water and influence decision makers at the federal, state, and local levels.

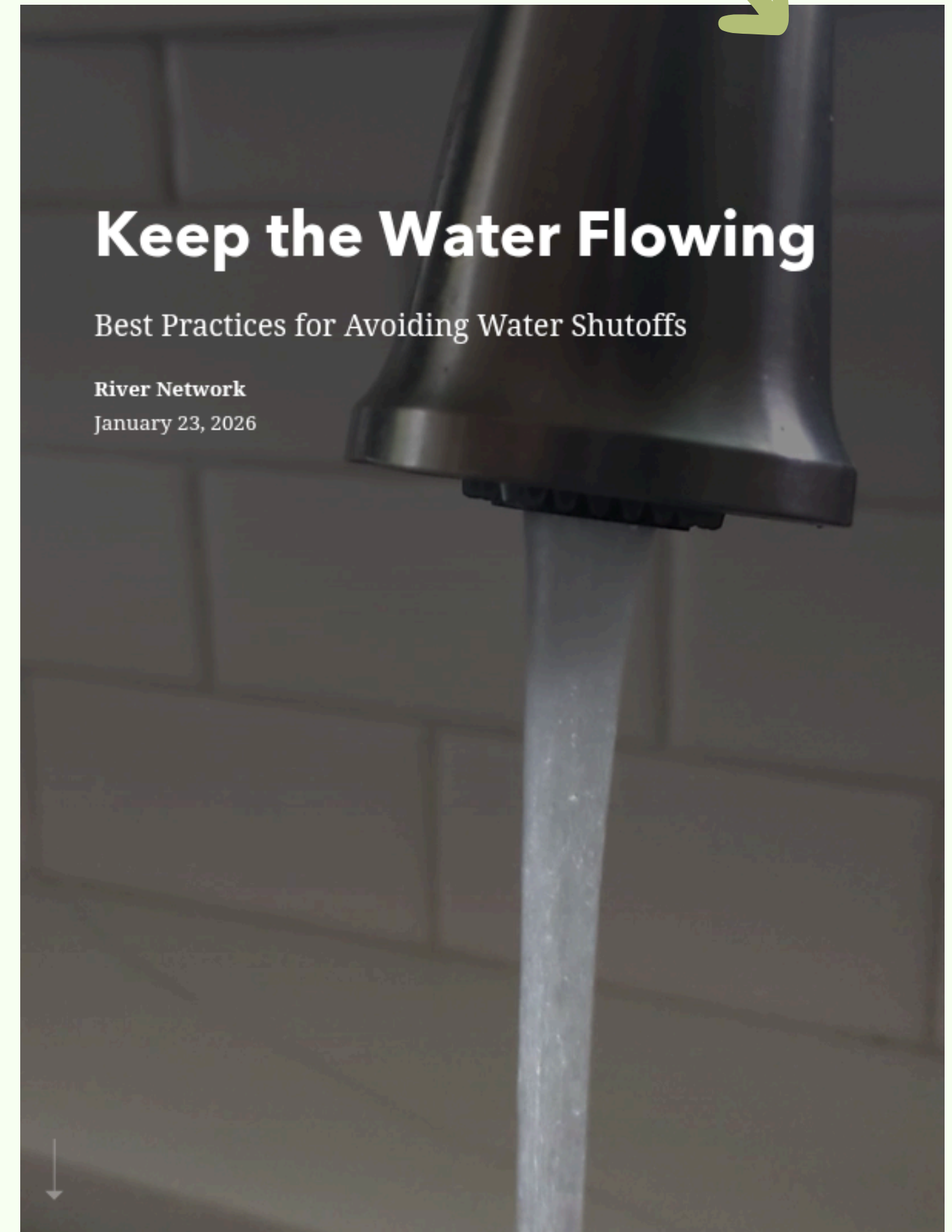
*We’re not alone in this vision. According to a [2023 Water Hub poll](#), 74% of voters support banning water shutoffs so that lower-income families can maintain water access even when they fall behind on their water bills.<sup>1</sup>*



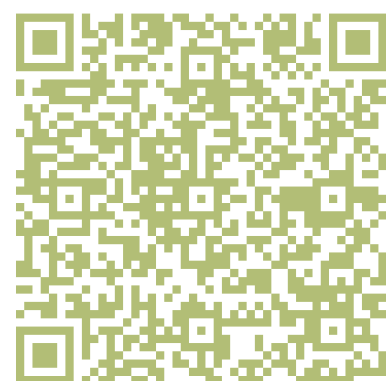
**74%**  
of voters support banning water shutoffs so that lower-income families can maintain water access even when they fall behind on their water bills.

River Network 6

## Two Formats





## PDF



Scan the QR code to access both versions

# STATE & FED POLICY EXAMPLES



Policy Focus	State Example
 <p data-bbox="2049 384 2309 459"><b>Climate and weather related protections</b></p>	<p data-bbox="2359 187 2565 234"><b>Washington:</b></p> <p data-bbox="2359 262 3242 553">A 2023 <a href="#">law preventing utility shutoffs for nonpayment during extreme heat</a> outlines requirements for both electric and water utilities. If the national weather service issues a heat-related alert, disconnection of services may not occur, and if a resident is currently disconnected, they may request the utility to reconnect service during heat-related warnings, advisories, or similar alerts. The utility may require the customer to enter into a payment plan before reconnecting service, but the law caps payment plans such that they cannot exceed 6% of the customer's income. These protections apply to homeowners and tenants.</p> <p data-bbox="2359 581 3182 684">The Act also outlines requirements for different sized utilities on reporting disconnection numbers during national weather service heat-related alerts on an annual basis.</p> <p data-bbox="2359 722 3225 938"><b>New Jersey</b> expanded a <a href="#">Winter Termination Program</a>, active November 15-March 15, which protects electric, gas, water, and sewer services from disconnection for eligible households - including those already receiving assistance through LIHEAP, TANF, SSI, PAAD, and other assistance programs, as well as individuals who may suddenly face unemployment, illness, medically related expenses, a death of a family member, or "any other circumstances resulting in financial hardship."</p>
 <p data-bbox="2049 1200 2299 1322"><b>Baseline shutoff protections for low-income households</b></p> <p data-bbox="2049 1350 2315 1435"><b>Reduce reconnection fees</b></p> <p data-bbox="2049 1463 2299 1547"><b>Establish reporting requirements</b></p>	<p data-bbox="2359 984 2532 1031"><b>California:</b></p> <p data-bbox="2359 1059 3242 1388">The <a href="#">Water Shutoff Protection Act</a>, passed in 2018 and recently amended in 2023, requires utilities to take a set of minimum measures before shutting off water service due to non-payment. The Act helps to achieve California's goal of fair treatment by giving residents the ability to contest a water bill or seek alternative measures to ensure that water bills can be paid and shutoffs will not occur. The policy includes requirements for community water systems to create their own discontinuation policy, including alternative payment schedules and options for deferring payment, and offer transparency and frequent communication to their users. It also requires that systems do NOT:</p> <ul data-bbox="2382 1416 3225 1557" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discontinue service until a payment is <u>at least 60 days late</u></li> <li>• Shut off service for residents with <u>health risks or threats to life</u>, and are suffering from financial hardship</li> <li>• Shut off service if the customer is <u>currently undergoing an appeal</u></li> </ul> <p data-bbox="2359 1585 3242 1725">The policy also <u>restricts reconnection fees for low-income households</u>. To increase transparency and information, community water systems are also <u>required to report on the number of water shutoffs annually</u> as well as make the policy available in a number of different languages based on the population.</p>

# 3 CASE STUDIES, 10 BEST PRACTICES



**Chicago, IL**



**DeKalb County, GA**



**San Antonio, TX**

## Reducing or Eliminating the Practice of Water Shutoffs: Recommendations at the Local Level

Easier to  
Implement

1. Be proactive & communicate early and often
2. Shift shutoff notification and disconnection timelines
3. Establish consumer protection policies
4. Create or improve assistance programs that work for the most vulnerable customers
5. Collect data consistently & transparently to understand your community's water affordability needs
6. Establish debt forgiveness or repayment plans
7. Establish rate structures that enable all to afford their water bills
8. Advocate for local ordinances that prohibit the use of water shutoffs due to customer's inability to pay
9. Centralize utilities' administrative needs & pursue regional collaborative structures
10. Tap into state and federal funding for affordability planning & critical infrastructure upgrades

More  
Effort to  
Implement

*Plus: Advocate for state and federal solutions (see Appendix A)*

- 1. Be proactive & communicate early and often**
- 2. Shift shutoff notification and disconnection timelines**
- 3. Establish consumer protection policies**
- 4. Create or improve assistance programs that work for the most vulnerable customers**
- 5. Collect data consistently & transparently to understand your community's water affordability needs**

- 6. Establish debt forgiveness or repayment plans**
- 7. Establish rate structures that enable all to afford their water bills**
- 8. Advocate for local ordinances that prohibit the use of water shutoffs due to customer's inability to pay**
- 9. Centralize utilities' administrative needs & pursue regional collaborative structures**

**And, last but not least:**

**10. Tap into state and federal funding  
for affordability planning &  
critical infrastructure upgrades**



# OPEN DISCUSSION

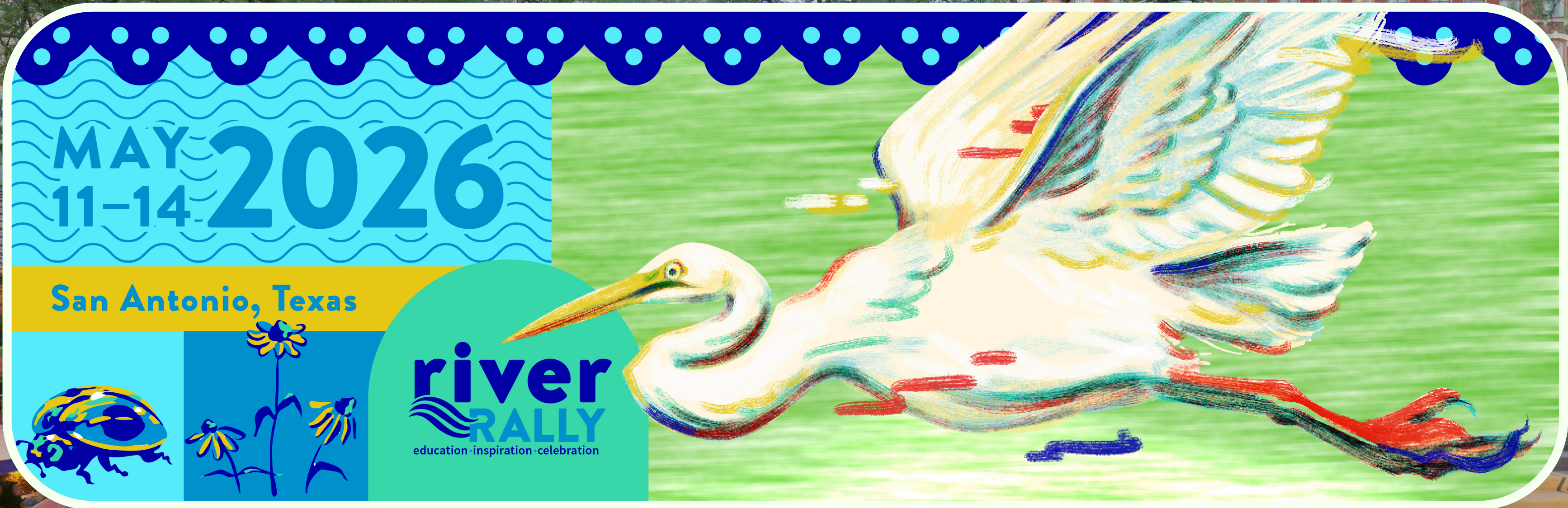
- **What questions do you have?**
  - Pop them in the chat or come off mute!
  - This space is for open, collaborative, and honest discussion about water shutoffs.
  - What are you or your community facing?
  - How do you see yourself applying this resource to your work?

# RESOURCES

- DW Digest & Online Community
  - Monthly newsletter
- Drinking Water Guide
- Building Blocks of Trust
  - Online training (2025)
  - Original report
- LIHWAP Blogs
- Water Equity & Climate Resilience (WECR)  
Caucus and Water Affordability for All platform
- [Community Groups Worksheet](#)

*For details on River Network memberships, visit:*  
**[rivernetwork.org/membership](https://rivernetwork.org/membership)** ←





**REGISTRATION IS OPEN!**

*May 11-14, 2026 in San Antonio, Texas*

→ [rivernetwork.org/river-rally](https://rivernetwork.org/river-rally)

# ***THANK YOU!***

This learning session will be available online.

*We would love your feedback on this event!*

*[bit.ly/RN-Feedback](https://bit.ly/RN-Feedback)*

