



**WATER  
EFFICIENCY  
EDUCATION AND  
OUTREACH  
PROGRAM  
TOOLKIT**

**For Local Governments and  
Public Water Systems**

**Developed by the Division of Environmental Assistance and Outreach  
for the  
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# **Water Efficiency Education and Outreach Program Toolkit**

## **For Local Governments and Public Water Systems**

### **Preface**

North Carolina is generally considered to have abundant water resources. However, water availability is becoming a major concern in North Carolina. The state's rapidly growing population has increased the demand for water, and the state's recurring drought conditions have caused many public water supply systems to experience limited availability of raw water.

Using water more efficiently will be a major part of the solution to meet water resource challenges of the future. By using water more efficiently, existing supplies can be used to meet additional demands.

A water efficiency education and outreach program can help water consumers make sound choices and preserve water resources for the future. These programs include placing efficiency tips in water bills and having specialized staff available to promote water efficiency.

The goal of this toolkit is to offer local governments a way to develop, implement, maintain and improve a water efficiency education and outreach program.

Water efficiency means using improved technologies and practices that deliver equal or better service with less water. Water conservation, on the other hand, is more often associated with doing "less" with less water during a water shortage such as a drought.

### **Step-by-Step Approach**

#### **Step 1: Line up support and resources**

- ◆ Crucial to the success of a water efficiency education and outreach program is management commitment, sufficient technical staff and financial resources, consumer awareness and participation, and well-publicized results.
- ◆ It is best to have a water efficiency manager, coordinator or team leader who will assume primary responsibility for overseeing water efficiency education and outreach efforts. This person will be the public face of the program and have primary responsibility for guiding its development and implementation. Responsibilities may include:
  - ◆ Review effectiveness of present water efficiency education and outreach activities for further improvements
  - ◆ Evaluate regulatory constraints and local water supply issues
  - ◆ Establish budget and funding
  - ◆ Seek outside funding, grants and available technical assistance

- 💧 Establish implementation criteria for designing water efficiency education and outreach activities
- 💧 Develop a plan to encourage consumer participation and create awareness
- 💧 Oversee implementation of water efficiency education and outreach activities
- 💧 Periodically review the program's progress and make modifications for improvements as needed.

### **Step 2: Establish goals**

- 💧 When beginning the process of developing a public education and outreach campaign, it is important to define what needs to be accomplished. Thinking about your program's specific needs up front will save time and energy while developing the educational message. Ask yourself: "What do we want to accomplish?"
- 💧 Some common goals of water efficiency public education and outreach efforts are to:
  - 💧 Initiate a new water efficiency program
  - 💧 Expand an existing program
  - 💧 Provide customers with the knowledge to make informed decisions
  - 💧 Increase participation
  - 💧 Reinvigorate a program
  - 💧 Reach new audiences.

### **Step 3: Get to know your target audience**

- 💧 In order to develop an educational approach that will be effective for your program, it is important to know and understand your target audience. Audiences may be determined by many factors, including age, place of residence and type of residence or business.
- 💧 When you identify your target audience, survey them to obtain an understanding of their range of beliefs and awareness of efficient water use. Mediums that will allow you to better understand your audience include: surveys, questionnaires on water bills and focus groups. You may also want to consider contacting local government or water system peers to see what mediums they have used. Some important questions to ask the audience to better understand their mindset are:
  - 💧 Do they support the idea of efficient water use? Why or why not?
  - 💧 Are they aware of the benefits of being efficient?
  - 💧 What do they find difficult or confusing about water efficiency?
  - 💧 What types of messages are effective or ineffective in motivating them to be efficient?

### **Step 4: Develop your message**

- 💧 The content of any message should be based on your water efficiency education and outreach program's goals, and should directly reflect the needs and values of your target audience. Think specifically about the things your target audience would want to know about using water efficiently, and communicate those ideas in a clear, concise and

consistent way using terminology that is common and understandable. Some important questions to address:

- 💧 Why should I be more water efficient? Focus on the specific environmental, economic and/or social benefits.
- 💧 How can I be more water efficient? Include all relevant details of the program you are promoting. Remember to include information that addresses who, what, when, where and how to be water efficient.
- 💧 Contact other local governments or water systems to identify education and outreach materials they developed to promote water efficiency. Discuss the potential for sharing best management practices, tools and resources.
- 💧 Use [Developing a Water Conservation Public Awareness Program: A Guide for Utilities](#) for information on developing an effective water efficiency public awareness program by making use of mass media.

The EPA partnership program [WaterSense](#) provides water efficiency promotional resources at no cost. Partners must agree to report annually on promotional activities.

#### **Step 5: Select an educational approach**

- 💧 It is important to research educational approaches and methods used successfully by other local governments and community water systems. Check the Internet and publications, post questions on listservs and contact peers who have done the same thing you are trying to do. Talking to peers about their programs can help you understand what needs to be done to reach your audience and allow you to borrow ideas from their programs and avoid pitfalls.

The UNC School of Government manages a number of [listservs](#), primarily for local government officials and employees. In particular, North Carolina governments interested in sustainable use of natural resources may join the [GreenGov](#) listserv, and North Carolina water managers may join the [NCWater](#) listserv.

- 💧 Based on your program goals, target audiences and ideas obtained from peers, select the types of activities and information sources that you believe will reach your target audience in the most effective way. Some possible ways to educate your audience are provided below.
  - 💧 Include water efficiency information for consumers on the water system or local government website and link to [Save Water NC](#). [Fayetteville](#) provides water efficiency tips and how to videos on its website.
  - 💧 Provide newsletters, posters, bill stuffers, stickers and handouts.

- 💧 Provide fact sheets to residential and non-residential users at educational events and public facilities (city hall, schools, library, et cetera). Free [fact sheets for home](#) and [fact sheets for businesses](#) are available on [www.savewaterNC.org](http://www.savewaterNC.org).
- 💧 Advertise using newspaper, radio and billboards. [Newland](#) runs a newspaper ad bi-annually and a radio advertisement annually.
- 💧 Use social media (Twitter, Facebook, et cetera). [Jamestown](#) occasionally posts water-related issues on its [Facebook](#) page.
- 💧 Provide presentations to consumer groups and school groups.
- 💧 Host workshops for residential and non-residential customers.
- 💧 Host annual events to get customers involved and thinking about being water efficient.
- 💧 Offer rebates, incentives and exchange programs. [Cary](#) has incentive programs for rain barrels, rebates for high-efficiency toilets and a turf grass replacement program. [Durham](#) has monthly showerhead giveaways, conservation kit giveaways and a toilet rebate program.
- 💧 Provide water audits to residential and non-residential customers. [Charlotte](#) offers customers a free water conservation kit for conducting their own home water-use audit.
- 💧 Participate in a multi-media campaign using free resources. Free multi-media campaign examples include [EPA's Fix A Leak Week](#) and the [Irrigation Association's Smart Irrigation Month](#).

#### **Step 6: Define success for your program**

- 💧 Once the education and outreach program is in place, it is important to establish measurable goals for your activities. These goals will help you to track the progress of the program and evaluate the effectiveness of the educational and outreach approaches. Each goal should have the following components:
  - 💧 Activities to be completed and at what frequency
  - 💧 Responsible staff member for ensuring each activity is completed
  - 💧 Quantifiable benchmarks to measure the effectiveness and progress toward overall program goals.

#### **Step 7: Develop a feedback loop**

- 💧 The goal of providing feedback to your audience is to make them feel appreciated for their efforts in being water efficient. Feedback will help reinforce positive behavior and correct negative behavior. Use some of the selected educational approaches to highlight things such as:
  - 💧 Water savings
  - 💧 Money savings
  - 💧 Positive impacts and successes of the program.

- 💧 On the opposite side of the feedback loop, your audience needs to be given the opportunity to provide you with feedback regarding the water efficiency education and outreach program. Your customers should be able to easily:
  - 💧 Ask questions and receive timely responses
  - 💧 Make recommendations
  - 💧 File complaints
  - 💧 Request information, materials or assistance.
- 💧 Carefully read questions and complaints that are received, document them and respond in a timely manner. Frequently, recurring themes help to provide useful feedback for your program and can indicate areas that need improvement, whether operational or educational.

### **Step 8: Evaluate your program and publicize success**

- 💧 Evaluations provide your organization with some of the most important information regarding the effectiveness of education and outreach efforts. Reviews of qualitative and quantitative data can help you evaluate, update and improve communication with your target audience. Develop a list of items that will serve as good indicators of success. When reviewing the data ask yourself the questions below.
  - 💧 Is the message being received and interpreted as intended?
  - 💧 How much progress have we made toward our goals? Focus on measurable data, such as number of customers reached, number of fixtures updated and decrease in actual water usage. If the goals were not met, find out why, make corrections and give the initiative more time to show success before beginning new education and outreach efforts. Without initial success, management support for future efforts is unlikely.
  - 💧 Do the customers understand the message? Are they responding?
  - 💧 Should we provide more or different information to our customers?
  - 💧 Does the approach warrant the time and money being spent?
- 💧 This data may be gathered through surveys, questionnaires on water bills and focus groups.
- 💧 Publicize the success of your program. Positive publicity promotes good relations with the community, other businesses and organizations that support economic development.

Remember, the goal is to implement, maintain, continually expand and improve the water efficiency education and outreach program, thus making your community water system more sustainable. This Toolkit provides a suggested order, but the order may vary on a case-by-case basis.

### **Acknowledgements**

**Material has been adapted from:**

- 💧 [Sustainable Office Toolkit](#) developed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- 💧 [Ten Steps for a Recycling Campaign](#) developed by Katie Brown and Scott Pasternak

- ◆ [Water Efficiency Manual for Commercial, Industrial, and Institutional Facilities](#) developed by the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources

## **Additional Resources**

- ◆ [Developing a Water Conservation Public Awareness Program: A Guide for Utilities](#) is a resource developed by Texas that provides information on how to develop and implement an effective water efficiency public awareness program by making use of mass media.
- ◆ [EPA's WaterSense](#) program is dedicated to protecting the future of the nation's water supply by promoting and enhancing the market for water-efficient products and services. The WaterSense website contains a wealth of information about water efficiency and WaterSense labeled products and services.
- ◆ [Guidebook of Best Practices for Municipal Water Conservation in Colorado](#) offers a detailed description of specific water conservation measures, program elements, regulations, policies, and procedures that can be implemented by water providers to help ensure reliable and sustainable water supplies for future generations.
- ◆ [The Municipal Handbook](#) is a series of how-to documents designed to help local officials implement green infrastructure in their communities. Topics include financing, operation and maintenance, incentives, designs, codes and ordinances.
- ◆ [Save Water NC](#) is North Carolina's official website for water efficiency.
- ◆ [Water Conservation Plan Guidelines](#) is a comprehensive publication that provides in-depth conservation planning advice tailored for systems of three different sizes (fewer than 3,300 people, between 3,300 and 10,000 people, and more than 10,000 people).
- ◆ [Water Efficiency Manual for Commercial, Industrial and Institutional Facilities](#) is a comprehensive water manual for short- and long-term efficiency solutions.

## **Sources of Technical and Financial Assistance**

- ◆ [N.C. Division of Environmental Assistance and Outreach](#) provides technical and financial assistance to businesses, industries and municipalities.
- ◆ [N.C. Division of Water Resources](#) administers programs for river basin management, water supply assistance, and water resources development.
- ◆ [N.C. Public Water Supply Section](#) provides guidance and technical and financial assistance to units of local government and certain non-profit water corporations in order to provide safe drinking water in the state of North Carolina.
- ◆ [UNC Environmental Finance Center](#) offers applied training programs and technical assistance in order to enhance the ability of governments to provide environmental programs and services in fair, effective and financially sustainable ways.
- ◆ [Waste Reduction Partners](#) is a team of experienced volunteer engineers, architects and

scientists that provide North Carolina governments, businesses, industries and institutions with free water-reduction, waste-reduction and energy-reduction assessments and technical assistance.

## **Glossary**

- 💧 **Billboard:** a flat surface or board, usually outdoors, on which large advertisements or notices about water efficiency are posted.
- 💧 **Bill stuffer:** an advertisement or notice included with a utility bill.
- 💧 **Education:** the act or process of imparting or acquiring water efficiency knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment.
- 💧 **Exchange program:** a planned, coordinated group of activities, procedures, et cetera, to replace one thing with another.
- 💧 **Handout:** any printed, typed, mimeographed or photocopied copy of information, such as a speech, policy statement or fact sheet given to reporters, attendees at a meeting or others about water efficiency.
- 💧 **Incentive program:** a planned, coordinated group of activities, procedures, et cetera, to motivate customers to use water efficiently.
- 💧 **Newsletter:** a written report, usually issued periodically, prepared by or for a group or institution, such as a business firm, charitable organization or government agency, to present information to employees, contributors, stockholders or the like, and often to the press and public on efficient water use.
- 💧 **Newspaper:** a publication on water efficiency issued at regular and usually close intervals, especially daily or weekly, and commonly containing news, comment, features and advertising.
- 💧 **Outreach:** the act of extending services, benefits, et cetera, to a wider section of the population.
- 💧 **Poster:** a placard or bill posted or intended for posting in a public place, as for advertising about efficient water use.
- 💧 **Presentation to consumer groups and school groups:** a demonstration or lecture about water efficiency presented to consumers.

- 💧 **Radio announcement:** a short message or commercial heard on the radio.
- 💧 **Rebate program:** a planned, coordinated group of activities, procedures, et cetera, to return part of the original payment for a more water efficient appliance or fixture.
- 💧 **Social media:** any form of online publication or presence that allows end-users to engage in multi-directional conversations in or around the content on the website.
- 💧 **Sticker:** an adhesive label promoting efficient water use.
- 💧 **Water audit:** an on-site survey of an irrigation system or other water use setting to measure hardware and management efficiency and generate recommendations to improve its efficiency.
- 💧 **Website:** a connected group of pages on the World Wide Web regarded as a single entity, usually maintained by one person or organization and devoted to promoting water efficiency.
- 💧 **Workshops for residential and non-residential customers:** a seminar, discussion group or the like, that emphasizes exchange of ideas and the demonstration and application of efficient water use.