

Environmental Finance Center Network Announces Inaugural Cohort of National Water Leadership Program

The three-month program will provide 38 water professionals from 20 states with leadership and management training to help improve water infrastructure for residents of their communities

4/10/23 - Today, the [Environmental Finance Center Network's](#) (EFCN's) Water Leadership Program announced the inaugural cohort of 38 water professionals from around the country who will participate in a three-month professional development program. The program aims to give rising water leaders the training and resources needed to face the challenges of utility management with confidence and improve the quality of life of their residents. While there are a number of technical training opportunities available for water professionals, there is a lack of leadership-focused training specific to the water sector. EFCN's [Water Leadership Program](#) aims to close this gap by piloting this new program over the coming months.

To kick off the program, water professionals joined experts from three Environmental Finance Centers last week for the first of several weekly training sessions. Over the next three months, participants will join sessions focused on asset and data management, disaster resiliency and planning, environmental justice, strategic communications, culturally responsive leadership, and other subject areas that are critical in an increasingly diverse and rapidly changing water sector.

The EFCN Water Leadership Program's inaugural cohort represents a wide range of experiences and geographies, working at the local, county, and state levels across 20 states and Singapore. 15% of the water professionals participating in the program identify as Hispanic or Latino. **47% of the inaugural cohort identify as women**, compared to just [14.9% percent of the water workforce, according to a report by the Brookings Institute](#).

"This cohort brings together an exciting and diverse group of water professionals from all over the country, and we're glad to bring them all together through this virtual program," said Michelle DeHaven, Program Manager at the Wichita State University Environmental Finance Center. "Over the years, our Centers have organized hundreds of trainings for tens of thousands of water and wastewater professionals, but this is the first time we're bringing a group together to do a deeper dive into developing leadership skills and learning from each other, as well as from our network."

EFCN's Water Leadership Program is being led by the [Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center](#), in partnership with the [Wichita State University Environmental Finance Center](#) and [Southwest Environmental Finance Center](#) at the University of New Mexico. Staff from all three Centers, as well as experts from EFCN's national network of partners, will work with the accepted water professionals to offer training and support individual career development. Since EFCN's launch in 2012, the Network has trained more than 32,000 water and wastewater professionals from thousands of communities across the country.

The program is funded by a grant awarded by the United States Environmental Protection Agency's [Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Program](#), which launched in 2021. The pilot program is one of several receiving a total of \$3.8 million in funding to help build the water workforce and connect individuals to career opportunities in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector, as well as expand public awareness about job opportunities at drinking water and water treatment utilities.

"There's a lot of workforce development research from institutions like the Brookings Institution and Harvard Kennedy School showing the importance of building out pilot programs that are flexible, sector-specific, and receive financial support from the federal government," says Patrick Lynch, Program Manager at the Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center. "We hope this program will both support the first cohort in achieving their career goals and supporting their communities, and help Centers like ours to improve and scale up our workforce development programs at the local and regional levels."

"Programs like this are critical to engaging, supporting and connecting water leaders across the country," says Joni Palmer, Project Director at the Southwest Environmental Finance Center at the University of New Mexico. "We believe there is a lot of value in a program that gives people the opportunity to explore complex issues, examine gaps in knowledge, and assess their leadership skills. Going forward, we hope to learn from this inaugural cohort so that we can grow this program, such that it continues to help future water leaders face the challenges and emerging trends in this very dynamic work sector."

Members of the inaugural cohort of water professionals who will participate in EFCN's Water Leadership Program are:

EPA Region 1

Jason Randall (NH)

EPA Region 2

Cassandra Buell (NY)

EPA Region 3

Ran Liu (PA)

Clinton McKinley (PA)

Matthew Lamb (PA)

Julie Paluda (MD)

Julie M. Floyd (VA)

EPA Region 4

William Schmahl (NC)

Harold Brady (NC)

Julie Johnson (SC)

Maria Betancur (FL)

Amir Abdelnaby (GA)

EPA Region 5

Leo Dion (MI)

Marcus Hagberg (IN)

Ariel Zoldan (MI)
Justin Evans (IL)
Marianne Evangelista (IL)

Robert E Hall (IN)
Brian Jones (IN)

EPA Region 6

Anna Mondragon-Metzger (NM)
Karen Pereira (NM)

Indira Aguirre (NM)

EPA Region 7

Matt Mahler (IA)

EPA Region 8

Paul Young (CO)
Juan Jose Perez Gonzalez (CO)

Valerie Lovato (CO)
Erik Jorgensen (CO)

EPA Region 9

Francisco Gonzalez (CA)
Everett Hullquist (CA)
Andrew Hall (CA)

Joseph Jarvis (AZ)
Sandra House (AZ)

EPA Region 10

Kristina Gillespie-Jaques (ID)
Sarah Bruce (OR)
Amy Sumner (WA)

Shantelle Clark (WA)
Ghazi Ozair (WA)

Other:

Chakradhar Kundu (Singapore)

About the Environmental Finance Center Network

The Environmental Finance Center Network (EFCN) is a university- and nonprofit-based organization creating innovative solutions to the difficult how-to-pay issues of environmental protection and environmental infrastructure. EFCN works collectively and independently to address these issues across the entire U.S., including the 5 territories and the Navajo Nation. EFCN aims to assist public and private sectors through training, direct professional assistance, production of durable resources, and innovative policy ideas. For more information, please visit EFCN's Website at www.efcnetwork.org.

Media Contacts:

Averi Davis, adavis02@syr.edu
joni palmer, palmerjonim@unm.edu