

SAFER Drinking Water Advisory Group Meeting #4

Meeting Notes | December 7, 2023

Overview

The Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group participated in a meeting to discuss the SAFER program 2023 accomplishments, updates on the Fund Expenditure Plan (FEP), the Project Status Tool, and the 2024 Needs Assessment updates. The meeting included a Coachella Valley Regionalization tour to commemorate community leadership and to celebrate the 100th consolidation project since 2019.

SAFER Accomplishments in 2023

The Division of Financial Assistance presented the SAFER program accomplishments in 2023 and updates on the Fund Expenditure Plan for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 with details on the available funding, priorities, and targets. The Division of Drinking Water presented the SAFER project status tool. The SAFER Advisory Group provided the following observations:

Fund Expenditure Plan for Fiscal Year 2023-2024

- Request updates on advanced payments and expediting funding, especially for emergencies.
- Request information about the technical assistance expectations, metrics, and performance.
- Recommendation to track and report technical assistance providers SAFER fundings spending.
- Concerns about the availability of funding for technical assistance planning and construction.

SAFER Project Status Tool

- Overall positive feedback and interest for the tool.
- Focus on communication, transparency, and consistency of the information provided.
- Coordinate with the technical assistance providers to confirm the information on water systems.
- Recommendations to improve the content of the tool:
 - Provide context about each project and track progress (e.g. final budget approval, out to bid, finalizing design, executed agreement year, back to compliance date, milestones).
 - Include cultural considerations and communities' priorities rather than technical and complex information.
 - Break down funding spent on technical assistance components (e.g. capacity development, planning, and design).
 - Worries about displaying the engagement information to the public.
 - Needs to align the information about the appointment of administrators with the Board notification process.
 - Inform what types of systems are being targeted for administrator versus technical assistance.
 - List all interim and emergency fundings.
 - Add technical assistance providers contact information and their services to the community.
- Recommendations to improve the format of the tool:
 - Ensure the tool is compatible with smart devices.
 - Concerns about accessibility and technical language.
 - Give the tool its own webpage.
 - Add a map function to search for water systems by location and not just by name.

Needs Assessment Updates

Based on the recommendations of the SAFER Advisory Group, the Division of Drinking Water proposed changes to the Failing criteria and the Cost Assessment. The SAFER Advisory Group provided the following comments and recommendations:

Changes to the Failing criteria

- Requested information on what causes a system to fail (administrative versus physical fails), and who is responsible for such failures (contractor versus project managers).
- Need for the State Water Board to provide education to water systems about their responsibilities when working with third party contractors.
- Concerns that water systems receiving emergency funds to address major outages may not be considered at risk or failing if there is no current open enforcement action.
- Continue to get more water sampling and data on domestic wells and small water systems.

Changes to the Cost Assessment

- Needs to clarify if the updated cost assessment will impact grant funding limits.
- General approval of the new cost assessment model as it:
 - Addresses financial resources uncertainty.
 - Considers sustainable solutions where consolidation is not a viable option.
 - Increases funding to interim solutions.
- Importance to build non-profit capacity in local communities.
- Relabel decentralized treatments as permanent solutions when consolidation and centralized treatments are not viable.
- Keep operations and maintenance funding permanent for decentralized treatments.
- Concerns about domestic well owners' assistance needs.
- Recommendation to break down the cost assessment by county, by legislative districts, and by contaminant.

Public comments

- Positive feedback on the SAFER project status tool with the recommendation of adding a mapping option showing the project boundaries.

Advisory Group Attendance (P= present, A= absent)

Cástulo Estrada: P	Ethel See Winchell: A	Jennifer Hazard: P	Rami Kahlon: A
Chelsea Tu: A	Eva Dominguez: P	Kassy Chauhan: A	Rob Burroughs: P
Don James: A	Ileana Miranda: P	Kristin Dobbin: P	Sarah Rutherford: A
Erick Orellana: P	Isabel Solorio: A	Martha Curiel: P	Sergio Carranza: P
Esther Espinoza: A	James Sullivan: A	Michael Prado Sr.: A	Tonya Moreno: P

State Water Board Attendance

Board Chair: Joaquin Esquivel.

Division of Drinking Water: Andrew Altevogt.

Division of Financial Assistance: Christopher Stevens, Jeff Wetzel, Joe Karkoski, Matt Pavelchik.

Office of Public Affairs: Dimitri Stanich, Jackie Carpenter

Office of Public Participation: Adriana Renteria, Caroline Pradeau Fonseca, Johannus Reijnders, Marina Pérez, Rachel Wittenberg