

SAFER Drinking Water Advisory Group Meeting #3

Meeting Notes | August 11, 2023

Overview

The Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group participated in a meeting to discuss the draft Fiscal Year 2023-24 Fund Expenditure Plan (FEP) and the SAFER website revamp. Staff shared written updates on previous and upcoming SAFER related events.

Draft Fiscal Year 2023-24 Fund Expenditure Plan

The Division of Financial Assistance presented the draft Fund Expenditure Plan for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 with details on the available funding, priorities, and targets. The SAFER Advisory Group members provided the following feedback:

Projects and funding targets

- Use available funding to address hexavalent chromium issues.
- Prioritize technical assistance for emergencies and for domestic well sampling.
- Continue funding for state smalls and domestic wells.
- Need for clarity among the funding resources, and review if there are underfunded projects.
- Streamline processes and make fundings more accessible for smaller communities.
- Include other funding sources that might affect targets.

Operations and maintenance funding approach and targets

- Operations and maintenance should remain at the forefront and receive increased funding.
- Prioritize consolidations and avoid operations and maintenance to non-sustainable systems.
- Provide more technical assistance and operations and maintenance for domestic wells.
- Ensure a good transition in between Tier 1 – statewide prioritization projects and Tier 2 – case-by-case projects under operations and maintenance assistance.

Other topics or issues regarding the Fund Expenditure Plan

- Residents need clarity on the roles and responsibilities of administrators and technical assistance providers.
- Need for fiscal accountability of technical assistance providers and administrators to report back on progress.
- Concern about the administrator program:
 - Legal definition could limit the staff's ability to fund certain projects.
 - Accountability and availability of administrators.
 - Continued increased costs.
 - The administrator program should respond to community concerns and be informed through community engagement activities.
- Develop metrics related to the administrator program.
- Concerns about continued increased costs and costly technical assistance for state small water systems and domestic wells.
- Plan for contingency and for increased costs of construction and implementation.
- Continued concerns on the pace of the funding process in relation to the amount of funding available.
- Specific concerns on timing for amendments to be executed.
- Question on if advance payment can be utilized more often in agreements.

- Concerns on accountability of counties in relation to developing programs for residents served by state smalls and/or domestic wells.
- Recommendation to learn from past experiences and to show trends where possible in relaying back metrics/program performance over time to address today’s needs and challenges.

Other topics related to the Needs Assessment

- Understand which tribes, both federally and non-federally recognized, are served by public water systems, and include that data in the Needs Assessment.
- Develop a map of where tribal systems meeting failing criteria are located.

SAFER Website Revamp

Based on the recommendations of the SAFER Advisory Group, the Office of Public Participation presented a mock-up of the SAFER webpage. The SAFER Advisory Group provided the following recommendations:

Layout

- Use colors, user-friendly design, and a casual tone (non-technical) appealing to a younger audience.
- Infuse vibrancy with rotating photo banner and use of lively design that resonates with the audience.
- Develop engaging messaging and plain language content for both website and social media.
- Prioritize icons that underscore the sense of community and collaborative responsibility.
- Include “hover over” some technical terms with definitions.
- Explore the possibility to create a mobile application with SAFER program information.

Content

- Enhance the “About” section by adding a glossary and delving more into SAFER’s mission and history.
- Add resources for domestic wells and state small water systems.
- On the Advisory Group page, maintain focus on members’ represented groups rather than highlighting members themselves.
- Occasionally share highlights from member communities and related projects to inform the public and build program support and engagement.
- Announce public comment periods and funding availability under “What’s New”.

Advisory Group Member Announcements

- Cástulo Estrada, Coachella Valley Water District – Planning and inviting everyone to a community party in January 2024 to celebrate the construction of a 5-mile pipeline that will allow the consolidation of small water systems.
- Jim Sullivan, domestic well owner, Mendocino – The Town of Mendocino applied for technical assistance. The first step to explore a community water system for the area is underway with a draft workplan on community engagement.

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

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

State Water Board Attendance

Division of Drinking Water: Andrew Altevogt

Division of Financial Assistance: Christina Raynard, Jasmine Oaxaca, Jeff Wetzel, Meghan Tosney

Office of Public Affairs: Tara Albertoni

Office of Public Participation: Alisha O'Loughlin, Caroline Pradeau Fonseca, Elizabeth Herrera, Jen Gross, Luke Tia, Mandy Roman, Marina Pérez

Office of Chief Counsel: Douglas Bojack