



## 2024 Utility Leadership Conference and 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting **Dealing with Disruption: A New Approach for the Water Sector**

July 23 - 26 | Hyatt Regency Buffalo | Buffalo, NY

*All meetings are on the Mezzanine level unless otherwise noted.*

Δ Board of Directors Committee

*As of June 12, 2024*

### **Tuesday, July 23**

*Morning*

**9:00 – 1:00**

**Women's Water Network Program** *(Optional - Separate Registration Required)*

*Afternoon*

**12:00 – 1:45**

**Executive Committee Meeting and Lunch Δ**

*Niagara*

**1:30 – 4:30**

**Registration**

*Grand Ballroom*

*Foyer*

**2:30 – 5:00**

**Committee Discussion Sessions**

*Grand Ballroom ABC*

*All Conference attendees are welcome to attend the committee meetings, whether or not they are members of the committee.*

**2:30 – 3:30**

**Environmental Justice Committee**

For the first time, the federal government set a goal through its Justice40 Initiative to invest in disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underinvested, and/or overburdened by pollution. But even before these federal goals were set, many clean water utility leaders were already working to implement Environmental Justice (EJ) initiatives that have resulted in clear community benefits – often while facing internal and external pushback. With a federal election ahead, the Committee will showcase how utilities can successfully “root” their EJ programs to insulate them from potential disruptive forces that may chip away at the progress made to date. All Conference attendees are welcome to attend the committee discussion, whether or not they are members of the committee.

**3:30 – 4:00**

**Networking Break**

**4:00 – 5:00**

**Legal Affairs Committee**

From issues the Supreme Court is tackling to major EPA initiatives, a lot is up for grabs in environmental law. The Committee will feature discussions about what is at stake for clean water utilities and how utilities can rise to meet the legal challenges the sector is facing. All Conference attendees are welcome to attend the committee discussion.

*Evening*

**5:00 – 6:00**

*Regency Ballroom*

*Foyer*

**Registration**

**5:30 – 6:30**

*Regency Ballroom*

**Welcoming Happy Hour**

**Wednesday, July 24**

*Morning*

**8:00 – 9:15**

*Franklin,*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Floor*

**Financial Plan Task Force Breakfast Δ**

**9:00 – 11:30**

*Grand Ballroom*

*Foyer*

**Registration**

**9:00 – 10:00**

*Ellicott Room,*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Floor*

**Spouse & Guest Lounge**

**9:00 – 5:00**

*Genesee Room,*

*Lobby Level*

**NACWA Networking Lounge**

The lounge provides an opportunity to connect with your peers during the conference.

**9:30 – 12:00**

*Grand Ballroom ABC*

**Committee Discussion Sessions**

*All Conference attendees are welcome to attend the committee meetings, whether or not they are members of the committee.*

**9:30 – 10:30**

**Utility & Resource Management Committee**

The Committee will feature a presentation and discussion exploring the balance between the benefits of digitalization and growing cybersecurity risks. Through the lens of recent cyber-attacks, the presentation will also look ahead to the impact of emerging technologies including artificial intelligence. Using a utility case study, the Committee will also discuss long range capital planning and the challenge of predicting future regulatory needs and drivers. All Conference attendees are welcome to attend.

**10:30 – 11:00**

**Networking Break**

**11:00 – 12:00**

### **Biosolids Management Committee**

Given the realization that PFAS – at least for the time being – is a concern that is here to stay, the Committee will discuss recent state and federal biosolids happenings and their impacts on biosolids management. We will hear from the Director of EPA’s Office of Science and Technology, Deborah Nagle, on the Agency’s final Biosolids Working Group discussions and what is coming later this summer on risk assessment. The Committee will also discuss concerns over how to effectively communicate relative risk of PFAS in biosolids absent any Clean Water Act Part 503 standards. All Conference attendees are welcome to attend.

*Afternoon*

**12:00 – 1:30**

### **Optional Lunch – Collaborative Delivery Fundamentals and Equitable Risk Allocation *(Free; Separate RSVP Required)***

Join the Water Collaborative Delivery Association (WCDA) for a lunchtime session on the fundamentals of collaborative delivery methods for water and wastewater, with a focus on equitable risk allocation for all parties. This event is open to all, and will be of particular benefit to senior leadership, legal counsel, and procurement professionals responsible for making risk-related business decisions and implementing them in design and construction contracts.

Please complete [this form](#) by **Wednesday, July 3** to RSVP for this event.

**12:00 – 2:30**

### **Lunch on Your Own**

**12:15 – 2:00**

### **Awards Committee Meeting and Lunch $\Delta$**

**2:00 – 4:30**

### **Registration**

*Grand Ballroom  
Foyer*

**2:30 – 5:00**

### **Committee Discussion Sessions**

*Grand Ballroom ABC*

*All Conference attendees are welcome to attend the committee meetings, whether or not they are members of the committee.*

**2:30 – 3:30**

### **Operations Committee Discussion**

The Committee will feature a presentation on smart sewer programs, including a utility case study. Discussion topics will include the successes of these programs over time, the improvements made along the way, and next steps as the programs reach maturity. The Committee will also feature a presentation on energy management and how utilities can establish energy goals and accelerate the growth of their energy programs. Opportunities for Department of Energy funding for energy conservation and production at clean water utilities will also be highlighted. All Conference attendees are welcome to attend.

**3:30 – 4:00**

**Networking Break**

**4:00 – 5:00**

**Water Quality Committee Discussion**

The Committee will discuss a variety of water quality-related “disruptions” that are poised to make regulatory compliance more challenging and expensive for clean water agencies. These upcoming federal water quality criteria updates – especially EPA’s forthcoming recommended human health criteria for PFOA and PFOS – will have serious impacts on utilities. The Committee will discuss what is likely coming on the PFAS front along with other updates, like emerging nutrient issues from EPA Regions 5 and 10 dealing with hypoxia and dead zones that may set the tone for the rest of the country. All Conference attendees are welcome to join us to learn how to best prepare your agency for the water quality race to zero ahead.

*Evening*

**5:30 – 7:00**

*Grand Ballroom EFG*

**Awards Ceremony & Reception**

**Thursday, July 25**

*Morning*

**8:45 – 11:30**

*Grand Ballroom*

*Foyer*

**Registration**

**9:00 – 10:00**

*Ellicott Room,*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Floor*

**Spouse & Guest Lounge**

**9:00 – 5:00**

*Genesee Room,*

*Lobby Level*

**NACWA Networking Lounge**

The lounge provides an opportunity to connect with your peers during the conference.

**9:30 – 12:00**

*Grand Ballroom ABC*

**Plenary Session I**

**9:00 – 9:20**

**Opening and Welcoming Remarks**

**9:20 – 9:50**

**Keynote Address**

Although artificial intelligence (AI) in general is not new, the power of generative AI suddenly gained the attention of the world with the launch of ChatGPT in late 2022. The publicly available, free service raised questions about the appropriate use of AI, how it will impact jobs and the economy, and the legal issues involved with its use. Our keynote speaker will explore how AI is currently being used and how the future will be shaped by this technology.

**9:50 – 10:40**

**AI... The Big Picture and What May Be Coming Water's Way**

As AI continues to evolve and new uses for it emerge, our current ways of doing business may rapidly change. Although the impacts of AI in the water sector are just beginning, utilities can learn from organizations outside of the water sector that are already experiencing disruptions from AI. Building on the keynote address, panelists will discuss the benefits, as well as the potential pitfalls, of using AI in their operations, from how they analyze data and make decisions, to how their workforce needs are evolving.

**10:40 – 10:55**

**Networking Break**

**10:55 – 11:40**

**How Community Engagement Drives Better Outcomes. . . The Buffalo Case Study**

With utilities under pressure to address complicated issues such as PFAS, affordability, and environmental justice, community engagement has never been more important. Developing partnerships and listening to the perspectives of community members can help utilities understand the impacts of their investment priorities, as well as raise support in the community for the actions required to meet increasing regulatory demands – including raising rates. In this case study of the City of Buffalo, panelists will discuss the successes and ongoing challenges of community engagement.

**11:40 – 12:00**

*Grand Ballroom ABC*

**Annual Association Business Meeting**

*Afternoon*

**12:15 – 2:15**

*Regency Ballroom*

**Board of Directors Meeting Δ**

**2:00 – 4:00**

*Grand Ballroom*

*Foyer*

**Registration**

**2:30 – 5:00**

*Grand Ballroom ABC*

**Plenary Session II**

**2:30 – 3:35**

**Rethinking Relationships . . . Getting Out of Our Comfort Zone**

With the challenges of meeting complex and costly regulatory requirements, growing affordability pressures, and rapidly evolving technology, utilities are being asked to rethink existing and consider forming new partnerships. Whether it is a new way of interfacing with public officials and politicians, close partners in the private sector including engineering and consulting firms, or investor-owned utilities, efforts by NACWA and its utility members to collaborate may need to take more nontraditional paths. Panelists will focus on the

trends demanding new partnerships and how utilities and the organizations that represent them must adapt.

**3:35 – 3:50**

### **Networking Break**

**3:50 – 5:00**

### **What Can the Clean Water Sector Learn from Alternative Perceptions?**

Regulatory developments related to PFAS have captured the attention of the media and the public, but long-time concerns related to aging infrastructure, wet weather and affordability remain. Utility leaders' preferred approaches to these issues often differ from environmental groups and other organizations. While it is easy to keep our heads down and focused on the issues at hand, it is important to listen to the perceptions of these organizations and alternative opinions from within the sector. Although these conversations may at times be uncomfortable, they can help utilities to learn new approaches to dealing with their challenges and potentially find a middle-ground where collaboration based on mutual understanding can be reached.

*Evening*

**6:00 – 7:30**

*Top of the Falls,  
Goat Island Rd.,  
Niagara Falls, NY*

### **President's Reception**

Bus Transportation will be provided.

## **Friday, July 26**

*Morning*

**9:00 – 10:30**

*Grand Ballroom  
Foyer*

### **Registration**

**9:30 – 12:00**

*Grand Ballroom ABC*

### **Plenary Session III**

**9:30 – 10:00**

### **Improving the Messenger: Words that Work for Water**

Utilities know they do vital work to protect health and the environment under increasingly complex and difficult regulatory challenges and that their communities could not function without them. But does the public understand this? How can utility leaders sharpen their messaging around their mission – locally and nationally? How can we more compellingly describe our work in ways that break through to the media, to our ratepayers and our local stakeholders? Karyn LeBlanc and Vincent Morris will provide a synopsis of their findings based on survey and focus groups conversations and provide suggestions on how we can refine our "Elevator Pitch" – and begin building a renewed interest and appreciation for our work.

**10:00 – 11:15**

**Navigating Turbulent Leadership Waters**

Utility leaders are finding that their roles are expanding from simply running a treatment facility that meets its regulatory requirements, to guiding their agency through complex financial situations, HR/workforce issues, and an increasingly political environment. This panel will dive into the top challenges of today's utility leaders, how some leaders are dealing with these challenges more effectively, and how these skills and strategies can be developed and passed along to their peers and staff, as well as the next generation of water sector leaders.