



## 2026 Winter Conference

# Managing Instability: The Essential Role of Local Leadership

February 2 - 5 | JW Marriott Miami | Miami, FL

Δ Indicates Board Committees

*All meeting spaces are on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor unless noted otherwise.*

As of January 29, 2026

### Monday, February 2

*Morning*

**9:00 – 10:00**

**Audit Committee Meeting Δ**

*Buenos Aires I*

**10:15 – 11:30**

**Executive Committee Meeting Δ**

*Buenos Aires I*

**11:45 – 1:45**

**Board of Directors Luncheon and Meeting Δ**

*Salons EFG*

*Afternoon*

**1:30 – 4:00**

**Registration**

*Pre-Assembly Area*

**2:00 – 4:30**

**Committee Discussion Sessions**

*Salons ABCD*

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

**2:00 – 3:00**

**Biosolids Management Committee Meeting**

Statehouses are rapidly becoming the front lines of the PFAS debate—and biosolids are squarely in the crosshairs. As EPA signals next steps on its draft sewage sludge risk assessment for PFOA and PFOS, we anticipate a wave of renewed and expanded state legislation aimed at restricting—or outright ending—land application programs. NACWA has already pushed back on several bills that would have effectively dismantled these programs, and we expect more are coming. This Committee discussion will deliver critical federal updates on EPA's PFAS work in biosolids and preview our state advocacy strategy, including a look at NACWA's newly released State PFAS Guide and Model Legislation—tools the sector will need to stay engaged, informed, and influential.

**3:00 – 3:30**

**Networking Break**

**3:30 – 4:45**

**Communications & Public Affairs Committee Meeting**

Discover how the Little Rock Water Reclamation Authority developed a communications strategy to help turn a rate adjustment into a quiet win. Then learn how to use research and data to better understand customers and build a sound strategic communications plan. Attendees will walk away with practical strategies for engaging stakeholders, shaping compelling messages, and building campaigns that earn trust.

Evening

**4:30 – 5:30**

Pool, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor

### Registration

**5:00 – 6:00**

5<sup>th</sup> Floor Foyer

### Welcoming Happy Hour

Kick off the *Conference* by joining us at the Welcoming Happy Hour. Connect with fellow attendees in a beautiful outdoor atmosphere. Happy Hour is open to all, so meet us there to enjoy a quick bite before starting your evening!

## Tuesday, February 3

Morning

**7:30 – 9:00**

Pool Deck

### Women's Water Network Event *(Separate RSVP Required)*

The new year is underway, and a month into our resolutions—whether they're focused on personal growth, professional renewal, or both—NACWA's Women's Water Network is inviting you to take a moment and pause. Join us on the rooftop of the conference hotel for an early morning opportunity to help you reset and recharge. This experience will be a restorative and rejuvenating way to calm the mind, release tension, and start the day feeling centered and renewed.

**8:30 – 12:00**

Pre-Assembly Area

### Registration

**9:00 – 10:00**

Buenos Aires I

### Spouse & Guest Lounge

**9:00 – 5:00**

Buenos Aires II

### NACWA Networking Lounge

The NACWA Networking Lounge will give you an opportunity to connect with your peers on Tuesday and Wednesday.

**9:30 – 12:00**

Salons ABCD

### 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**

### Water Quality Committee Meeting

Water quality drivers continue to shape—and in many cases accelerate—major capital and operational investments for clean water utilities. While this Administration has not aggressively pursued new federal standards, states and environmental NGOs are intensifying pressure on utilities to go further and faster. From high-stakes nutrient debates tied to Puget Sound impairments, to escalating PFAS challenges in New England, to increasingly complex and consequential modeling assumptions, the regulatory and technical landscape is shifting. This discussion will highlight the issues NACWA members need on their radar now—and the emerging trends that could drive the next wave of utility decision-making and investment.

**10:30 – 11:00**

### Networking Break

**11:00 – 12:00**

### Security & Emergency Preparedness Committee Meeting

While cyber attacks continue to be a top issue of concern, utilities need to take a more holistic view of security. This discussion will focus on the convergence of cybersecurity and physical security, and how utilities must consider these interdependencies to maintain operations. Guest speakers from the Cyber Security and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), will provide information on what utilities should do to improve their security and how the no-cost resources available to utilities through CISA and other federal agencies can help. Updates will also be provided on how NACWA and other water sector associations are engaging on security issues.

Afternoon

**12:00 – 2:00**

*London I*

### **Awards Committee Meeting & Lunch Δ**

**12:00 – 2:30**

### **Lunch on Your Own**

**2:15 – 4:30**

*Pre-Assembly Area*

### **Registration**

**2:30 – 5:00**

*Salons ABCD*

### **Committee Discussion Sessions**

*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 Meeting**

More than a year into this Administration's pullback on environmental justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion, utilities are facing tough choices and real consequences. What's changing inside organizations—and what's being abandoned? Are clean water utilities feeling pressure, facing resistance, or second-guessing past decisions? This discussion will take a candid look at how NACWA has embedded EJ into its new Strategic Plan and will take the pulse on how federal policy is reverberating at the state and local level.

**3:30 – 4:00**

### **Networking Break**

**4:00 – 5:00**

### **Operations and Utility & Resource Management Joint Committee Meeting**

Utilities are navigating growing and intersecting challenges with customer affordability, revenue growth, and clean water compliance. This joint session of the Utility & Resource Management and Operations Committees will provide updates on work that NACWA and the water sector are doing to examine alternative revenues and approaches utilities are taking to address the instability of federal funding and finance. NACWA will also introduce its new Clean Water Innovation Initiative and Innovation Blueprint effort to create a comprehensive clean water innovation advocacy strategy. The Initiative will be led by a Technology & Innovation Task Force and aimed at positioning clean water utilities for long-term success in an increasingly digital, AI-enabled, and data-driven future.

*Evening*

**6:00 – 7:30**

*Salons EFG*

### **Awards Ceremony & Reception**

Join us for a celebratory evening recognizing NACWA's National Environmental Achievement Award (NEAA) honorees. The evening will feature some of the very best initiatives from NACWA's member agencies, from operations to public outreach, as well as individuals who are making a difference for their communities. Following the ceremony, join your colleagues in celebrating the evening's honorees at the Awards Reception.

## **Wednesday, February 4**

*Morning*

**9:00 – 12:00**

*Pre-Assembly Area*

### **Registration**

**9:00 – 10:00**

*Buenos Aires I*

### **Spouse & Guest Lounge**

**9:00 – 5:00**

*Buenos Aires II*

### **NACWA Networking Lounge**

The NACWA Networking Lounge will give you an opportunity to connect with your peers on Tuesday and Wednesday.

**9:30 – 12:00**

Salons ABCD

## **Plenary Session I**

*Opening Remarks*

**Mickey Conway**, NACWA President  
Chief Executive Officer  
Metro Water Recovery | Denver, CO

*Welcoming Remarks*

**Jay Fink**, Director  
Miami-Dade County Water and Sewer Department | Miami, FL

*Introductory Remarks*

**Laura Briefer**, NACWA Treasurer  
Director of Public Utilities  
Salt Lake City Corporation | Salt Lake City, UT

**9:45 – 10:30**

## **Investing Holistically: It's a Money Issue, But It's Not Just a Money Issue**

With federal uncertainty, climate disruption, and rapid advances in technology, public clean water utilities continue to play a critical role and provide local leadership in protecting public health, safety, and the environment. During this challenging time, there's a powerful opportunity to reframe water infrastructure—not just as a cost, but as a smart investment in community well-being and economic vitality—to make the business case for the revenues needed to deliver our essential services. This panel will explore how several utility leaders have strategically crafted their story around water infrastructure funding.

*Moderator*

**Trent Stober**, Senior Vice President  
HDR Engineering, Inc. | Columbia, MO

*Panelists*

**Kyle Dreyfuss-Wells**, NACWA Vice President  
Chief Executive Officer  
Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District | Cleveland, OH

**Lisa Rhea**, Water Resources Director  
Hillsborough County Water Resources | Tampa, FL

**Todd Swingle**, NACWA Board Member  
Executive Director  
Toho Water Authority | Kissimmee, FL

**10:30 – 10:50**

## **Networking Break**

**10:50 – 12:00**

## **Achieving Your Greatest Potential: Best Leadership Practices for Your Utility**

As more communities face technical, social, and financial challenges, utilities are increasingly taking a leadership role. These leading utilities are demonstrating that innovative and skillful water management can significantly contribute to long term sustainability and resilience. Water leaders will highlight lessons learned from practicing adaptive management strategies and forming partnerships while remaining personally resilient in times of unprecedented disruption.

*Moderator*

**Rick Warner**, Water Market Strategic Leader  
Jacobs | Milwaukee, WI

*Panelists*

**Tanya McCoy-Caretti**, Director for US Water Business  
Arcadis | Sewickley, PA

**Brian Valentino**, NACWA Board Member  
Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer  
Western Monmouth Utilities Authority | Manalapan, NJ

**Kamuron Gurol**, NACWA Board Member  
Division Director  
King County Wastewater Treatment Division | Seattle, WA

**12:00**

### **Closing Remarks**

**Laura Briefer**, NACWA Treasurer

*Afternoon*

**12:00 – 2:00**

### **Lunch on Your Own**

**1:45 – 4:00**

*Pre-Assembly Area*

### **Registration**

**2:00 – 5:00**

*Salons ABCD*

### **Plenary Session II**

*Opening Remarks*

**Calvin Farr Jr.**, NACWA Secretary  
General Manager/Chief Executive Officer  
Prince William Water | Woodbridge, VA

**2:05 – 2:45**

*Keynote Address*

### **Leading Across the Systems That Shape Communities**

Public clean water utilities operate at the intersection of multiple systems that shape community life, including public health, environmental conditions, economic activity, workforce stability, and community trust. As a result, utility leaders are increasingly called to think and lead beyond their organizational boundaries.

Stephanie Norling, President and CEO for Communities of Resilience & Excellence or CORE will introduce a systems leadership perspective focused on understanding interdependencies, aligning efforts across sectors, and creating conditions for shared progress. Drawing on CORE's work with communities nationwide, she will illustrate what leading across systems looks like in practice and how utility leaders can expand their impact without needing to control every lever.

*Speaker*

**Stephanie Norling**, President/Chief Executive Officer  
Communities of Resilience & Excellence | San Diego, CA

**2:45 – 3:30**

### **Utility Leaders are Community Leaders: Advancing from Utilities of Excellence to Communities of Excellence**

Utilities have an integral role in ensuring their communities grow and strive for excellence despite external challenges. Through meaningful community engagement and involvement as well as intentional and adequately resourced efforts, utilities can foster community engagement, organization, and communication. This panel will explore how utilities can enable their communities to thrive through real world stories and outcomes.

*Moderator*

**Kristen Atha**, NACWA Board Member  
Executive Director  
Columbus Water & Power | Columbus, OH

*Panelists*

**Kishia Powell**, NACWA Board Member  
General Manager/Chief Executive Officer  
WSSC Water | Laurel, MD

**Andrew Lee**, NACWA Board Member  
General Manager/Chief Executive Officer  
Seattle Public Utilities | Seattle, WA

**Tony Parrott**, Executive Director  
Louisville & Jefferson County Metropolitan Sewer District | Louisville, KY

**3:30 – 3:45**

### **Networking Break**

**3:45 – 4:00**

### **Veolia Workforce Academy Announcement**

Veolia, the Water Environment Federation (WEF), and the American Water Works Association (AWWA) are thrilled to announce the launch of Veolia Workforce Academy in North America here at the NACWA Winter Conference. This announcement will include a discussion on the evolving needs of the water workforce with a focus on opportunities for collaboration, as well as how Veolia Workforce Academy can help strengthen the talent pipeline nationwide.

#### *Moderator*

**Anna Wildeman**, Senior Vice President, Stakeholder Affairs & Sustainability Municipal Water  
Veolia North America | Boston, MA

#### *Speakers*

**Ralph Exton**, Executive Director  
Water Environment Federation | Alexandria, VA

**Karine Rougé**, Chief Executive Officer  
Veolia North America | Boston, MA

**4:00 – 4:55**

### **Using Creative Solutions to Maximize Benefits with Fewer Resources**

Public utilities have long been in strong partnership with their state and federal regulators in ensuring public health, environmental stewardship, and affordability for their communities. Nevertheless, as challenges rise for utilities to obtain capital funding and manage competing interests and expectations at the local, state, and federal levels, public utilities are finding innovative ways to navigate our new normal. This panel will explore how utility leaders are using tools like Integrated Planning to stay in the “driver’s seat” despite changing landscapes and are continuing to meet state and federal requirements while also providing affordable and sustainable solutions for their communities.

#### *Moderator*

**Mickey Conway**, NACWA President

#### *Panelists*

**Susan Pekarek**, NACWA Board Member  
General Manager  
Johnson County Wastewater | Olathe, KS

**Jay Bernas**, NACWA Board Member  
General Manager/Chief Executive Officer  
Hampton Roads Sanitation District | Virginia Beach, VA

**Julia Anastasio**, Executive Director & General Counsel  
Association of Clean Water Administrators | Washington, DC

**Andrew Sawyers**, Director, Office of Wastewater Management  
US Environmental Protection Agency | Washington, DC

4:55 – 5:00

### Closing Remarks

**Mickey Conway**, NACWA President

Evening

6:00 – 7:00

Pool, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor

### Reception

Join us for our reception to connect with fellow attendees and expand your network at the beautiful outdoor pool.

## Thursday, February 5

Morning

8:30 – 11:00

Pre-Assembly

### Registration

9:00 – 11:15

Salons ABCD

### Plenary Session III

Opening Remarks

**David Persinger**, NACWA Board Member

General Manager

Anchorage Water & Wastewater Utility | Anchorage, AK

9:00 – 10:00

### Breakout Sessions: Choose Your Own Adventure

This session will provide a discussion opportunity on priority topics with fellow participants. Each table will have a different topic and a discussion leader to help facilitate the conversation.

Table Topics:

- Communications
- Data and Technology
- Climate and Resiliency
- Community and Business Engagement
- Governance and Transparency
- Environmental Stewardship and Energy Efficiency
- Lessons for Water's Future

10:00 – 10:45

### Fireside Chats: Digital Transformation in Wastewater Treatment

As AI and digital water technology continues to advance, collaboration between utilities and the technology sector becomes more essential. However, it's critical that adoption of any new technology is done in a way that is cognizant of the needs of each utility and their community, as well as done on a timetable that gives the utility adequate time to adapt. This session will allow utilities and their technology partners to walk through how they navigated and adapted new technology uses to their unique needs and goals.

#### Chat #1: Treatment Optimization and Asset Management

**Rob Whitson**, Director of Operations, US West Region

Aquasight | Troy, MI

**Nitin Goel**, Planning and Optimization Division Manager

Central Contra Costa Sanitary District | Martinez, CA

#### Chat #2: Managing Real-Time Wet Weather Operations

**Tim Ruggaber**, Founder and Principal

HydroDigital | South Bend, IN

**Eric Horvath**, Director of Public Works

City of South Bend Wastewater Treatment Plant | South Bend, IN

### Chat #3: Proactive Operational Intelligence and Insights

**Jennifer Steffens**, Director of Digital Water  
Carollo Engineers, Inc. | Atlanta, GA

**Robert Smith**, UE Asset Management Specialist  
San Jacinto River Authority | Conroe, TX

10:45 – 11:15

#### Leading the Way on Resiliency and Adaptation

Given today's political and economic reality, clean water utility leaders are under extreme pressure to make smart decisions with less time, funding, and resources to adapt to increasingly unpredictable weather and climate conditions while maintaining operational readiness and flexibility and supporting growth. How then, can utilities prepare for the future resiliency and sustainability of their operations and communities? This session dives into how forward-thinking utilities and their partners are pushing past current barriers and creating a new, more resilient and adaptable future.

##### *Moderator/Panelist*

**Karen Dettmer**, Director of Water Resources  
Ramboll | Arlington, VA

##### *Panelists*

**Marisela Aranguiz-Cueto**, Deputy Director of Planning,  
Regulatory Compliance & Capital Infrastructure  
Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department | Miami, FL

**Amanda Kinnick**, Assistant Director of Utility Engineering  
Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department | Miami, FL

11:15

#### Closing Remarks

**David Persinger**, NACWA Board Member