

# WORKING TOWARD EVERY UTILITY A MEMBER

## Engagement, Collaboration and the Next 50 Years of Clean Water Progress

BY KELLY BROCATO



There are over 15,000 publicly owned treatment works (POTWs) nationwide, plus thousands more public conveyance systems and stormwater utilities. While

NACWA represents the majority of the nation's sewered population, we still have significant room to grow.

Recognizing the even greater impact that NACWA could have if every public clean water utility were a member, in 2016 the NACWA Board of Directors set a goal of ensuring that the Association had representation in every state and every congressional district in the country – and the Every Utility a Member Campaign was born.

Looking at this challenge a little closer, the Board recognized that the majority of the membership potential was in the small to mid-size utility demographic. In the wake of the Flint water crisis and sector-wide discussions surrounding consolidation and privatization, the Board saw an opportunity for larger utilities and public agencies with enhanced resources to collaborate and partner

with their small to mid-size utility counterparts. Doing so would elevate environmental benefit and improve service to ratepayers and the clean water sector as a whole.

### Improving Membership Accessibility & Services for Small Utilities

The first step to achieving the Board's lofty goal was to make membership a feasible option for utilities with limited resources. So, in a bold and unprecedented move for most Associations, the leadership reviewed NACWA's dues structure and decided to lower dues for utilities that have service area populations under 75,000. They created a subscription rate membership with full member benefits, allowing utilities with populations less than 40,000 to join for \$750, and those with populations greater than 40,000 but less than 75,000 to join for \$1000.

The next step was to enhance the value and return on investment for existing small and mid-size utility members. To do this, the Association initiated the Small & Mid-Size Utility Workgroup. Chaired by two individuals who lead small utilities but are very

engaged in NACWA — Susan Holmes, Chairwoman of the Central Davis Sewer District in Utah and Todd Danielson, Chief Utility Executive at Avon Lake Regional Water in Ohio — the Workgroup’s mission is to identify and support the needs of small and mid-size utilities; and to facilitate relationship development and networking between small and large utility members.

members and national staff, providing resources and lessons learned from experience.

In addition to the Workgroup, NACWA has developed targeted communications identifying the potential impact key legislative, regulatory and legal advocacy issues may have on small and mid-size utilities.

“A SMALL OR MEDIUM UTILITY NEEDS NACWA, THEY HAVE BECOME ONE OF MY UTILITY’S GUARDIANS...BEING A CEO OF A SMALL WASTEWATER UTILITY, [I CAN ATTEST THAT] NACWA SAVES ME TIME AND MONEY!

DAVID PETERSON | CEO Caveland Environmental Authority, KY | Service Area Pop: 11,250

The Workgroup’s first initiative was to conduct a brief needs assessment survey, which identified what current small and mid-size members valued most about their membership and where the Association could improve and expand member service.

Next, the Workgroup established quarterly calls, open to all small and mid-size utilities, that address issues of importance to utilities in this demographic. These calls have addressed topics such as cyber security, state and regional advocacy best practices, opportunities and challenges regarding federal funding, and a small utility case study on the implementation of integrated planning concepts. Calls feature both utility

Furthering its benefit to utilities with limited resources, the Association has also increased the frequency of free webinars, allowing members to participate in programming without the burden of travel. NACWA’s online community, the Engage network, connects utilities to over 6,000 member contacts within the sector to address challenges and exchange information. And, online resources such as the annual Cost of Clean Water Index, triennial Financial Survey, Congressional Toolbox, MS4 Stormwater Permitting Guide and Consent Decree Library provide invaluable support for utility operations, working with policy makers, and benchmarking performance against other utilities.

The Engage network  
connects utilities to over

**6,000**

**MEMBER CONTACTS**

within the sector to address  
challenges and exchange  
information.

### Advancing Advocacy Priorities

The Association has also engaged its small and mid-size members to assist in critical advocacy efforts, such as the recent advancement of legislation to codify EPA's Integrated Planning Framework into law. The success of this effort was largely due to the membership engagement and outreach to congressional members by the Association's small members.

This legislative success exemplifies the concepts of "strength in numbers" and "all for one and one for all" – and that whatever benefits small utilities may derive from NACWA, the Association is ultimately stronger and more powerful because of small utility participation. It also validates the

Board's vision that increasing representation in congressional districts across the country strengthens NACWA's Advocacy voice and benefits the Association as a whole – both large and small utilities alike.

### Celebrating the Past and Looking to the Future

In this 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, the Association will utilize funds that have specifically been designated for the support of small and mid-size utility development to provide assistance for these utilities to attend NACWA's 50th Anniversary Conference and Gala. NACWA looks forward to having these members at the celebration and recognizing them for the work that they do.

With small and mid-size utilities now making up a third of the Association's membership and the overall membership continuing to grow, Every Utility A Member is becoming more than a lofty goal but a reality that is in our sights.

---

**Kelly Brocato** is the Senior Director of Membership Development & Retention for NACWA.

