

# A Golden Opportunity to Engage

BY LAURA BRIEFER | SALT LAKE CITY, UT

The workers that comprise America's public clean water sector are often the unsung heroes in any given community. They ensure access to water services 24 hours per day, fix service issues in the middle of the night, and when there is a sewer overflow or similar problem, they are there to fix it expeditiously.

NACWA's awards and recognition programs are designed to be a vehicle to lift up these unsung heroes and provide them with recognition from their colleagues and peers. Traditionally, these awards are presented at NACWA's annual conferences throughout the year and present a worthy cause for celebration by award winners and fellow clean water employees. The awards offer a wonderful opportunity for utilities to promote their staffs' hard work and inventive nature.

I have served on the NACWA Awards Committee for four years, and this year I have the privilege to serve as Chair. The Awards Committee is part of NACWA's Board of Directors and is charged with reviewing applications for the Association's multiple awards and recognition programs.

I know I speak for many of my colleagues when I say this is the most rewarding committee to serve on at NACWA because we get a national view of the amazing ways utilities across the country are elevating water in their communities. From continued excellence in meeting their National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits to the initiation of best management practices, technological innovations, and community engagement programs, NACWA members are making a positive impact, and this is our chance to acknowledge and celebrate their efforts.




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Each of NACWA's award programs honors a different perspective on how a utility is making this contribution. Through the Peak Performance Recognition Program, utilities can share their dedication to meeting their NPDES permits and ensuring clean water. The Excellence in Management Recognition Program provides a more comprehensive acknowledgment of a utility's dedication to being a well-run business – committed to financial feasibility, product quality, being a good employer, and steward of the environment. While the National Environmental Achievement Awards celebrate utilities' efforts to be innovative in their operations and engagement with their community.

Moreover, these awards programs are an opportunity to share our stories with the communities we serve. As we continue to grapple with the ever present "flush it and forget it" problem and lack of acknowledgment of the work we do, we must take advantage of every chance to engage with our ratepayers and the households we serve; not just to inform them of proposed rate increases, water main breaks, or service disruptions.

Educating both the public and policymakers through positive news stories and social media posts about your contributions to public health, recreation, and the environment is crucial to being viewed as a

valued partner and resource.

Recently, we have seen an uptick in the communications efforts taken by member utilities who have won an award. By contacting local media outlets, be it newspaper, television, or digital media, utilities can meet their ratepayers on neutral ground where they will be most receptive to learning about their local utilities.

Like most Americans, I love to take pride in my local community. Whether that means the local high school won the State Championship or a beautiful new park is built in my neighborhood, it fills me with pride and joy to be part of my community. I would encourage all award winners to adopt this mindset and apply it to your circumstance: let your neighbors know that the clean water facility in their hometown is one of the best in the nation!

Then, take that news story and share it to your social media platforms. Invite discussion. Explain how you came to win this award and the tangible effect this work has had on their lives. Over time, ratepayers will come to view their local public clean water facility with pride and appreciation.

I encourage you to look at the Awards section of the NACWA website, [nacwa.org/awards](http://nacwa.org/awards), and participate in one of the programs listed this year. Take this opportunity to broadcast and celebrate the great work you are doing with your colleagues and with your community.

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**Laura Briefer** is the Director of the Salt Lake City Department of Public Utilities in Utah, a member of NACWA's Board of Directors, and Chair of NACWA's Awards Committee.

NACWA is proud to announce the winners of this year's National Environmental Achievement Awards. The recipients are member public agencies whose award-winning initiatives have made a remarkable impact on environmental protection, the advancement of the water sector, and the betterment of their respective communities. Please join us in celebrating their accomplishments!

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OPERATIONS & ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

**Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, WI**  
Improving Our Neighborhood One Tree at A Time

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PUBLIC INFORMATION & EDUCATION: E-MEDIA

**City of Garland, TX**  
Garland Water Utilities Story Map

**Lynchburg Water Resources, VA**  
Water Wonders

**Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, WI**  
Water Drop Alert™

**South Platte Renew, CO**  
SPR Education and Outreach Program

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PUBLIC INFORMATION & EDUCATION: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

**Beaufort-Jasper Water & Sewer Authority, SC**  
Trick or Treatment: A Guided Tour of BJWSA's Water Reclamation Facilities

**East Bay Municipal Utility District, CA**  
EBMUD Virtual Tour Program

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PUBLIC INFORMATION & EDUCATION: PRINTED MATERIALS

**City and County of Honolulu, HI**  
Anatomy of Wastewater (Children's Book)

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PUBLIC INFORMATION & EDUCATION: VIDEO

**Great Lakes Water Authority, MI**  
Flushables: Educating and Influencing Public's Behavior

**NEW Water, WI**  
"Thank You, Farmers!" Video - NEW Water Team

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WATERSHED COLLABORATION

**Capital Region Water, PA**  
Joint Pollutant Reduction Plan with the Paxton Creek Cooperative

**Des Moines Public Works, IA**  
Restoring Easter Lake

**East Bay Municipal Utility District, CA**  
Regional Monitoring Program for Water Quality in San Francisco Bay

**South Platte Renew, CO**  
SPR Watershed Collaboration: SPCURE and Barr Milton

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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Alexandria Renew Enterprises, VA**  
Urban Alliance Workforce Development Partnership

**North Texas Municipal Water District, TX**  
Waterworks Program

