

NACWA PRINCIPLES ON CLIMATE ADAPTATION & RESILIENCY

To protect public health and shared natural resources in the face of changing environmental conditions, the daily work of clean water agencies requires long-term planning, strategic investment and management adaptation. Confronted with intense storm events and flooding, the threat of rising sea levels at treatment works—traditionally located in low-lying coastal lands—as well as water scarcity in expanding drought-prone areas, clean water agencies already are responding to unprecedented challenges from rapidly changing climatic conditions. If clean water utilities are to continue supporting strong regional economies, vibrant communities and healthy ecosystems given the reality of these acute local impacts, regulatory flexibility, an integrated approach to oversight and sustained federal investment will be needed.

A changing climate creates profound water resource challenges and NACWA members support action on several levels. Relationships among resource consumption, emissions, opportunities for reuse and reclamation must be carefully considered as utilities build and maintain infrastructure capable of performing reliably in extreme weather conditions. At the same time, NACWA members are aligning behind the [Utility of the Future](#) concept—advancing beyond the requirements of the Clean Water Act to serve as sustainability leaders in their own communities and improve their environmental performance. Clean water agencies are innovating in energy efficiency and energy generation, water reuse, green infrastructure and watershed-based approaches.

NACWA's role also involves influencing external stakeholders—the policymakers who establish the framework utilities operate within and the federal resources available. NACWA and its members are already engaged and providing helpful perspective and leadership in numerous association, stakeholder and governmental efforts related to climate change and resilience. The association's objective for this statement is to outline a clear set of facts and principles to guide ongoing advocacy efforts and engagement on these critical and growing topics.

The guiding facts and principles are as follows:

CHALLENGES

- The core focus of any clean water agency is to be a well-run utility that meets or exceeds its public health and environmental obligations, provides value to its ratepayers, is a responsible steward of its assets and is financially sustainable. *A changing climate creates greater uncertainty regarding future conditions and can make each of these factors more challenging—making resilience planning imperative.*
- For many clean water agencies, changing weather patterns have become a management reality and responsibility. These responsibilities come on top of existing obligations and may require the utility to devote substantial resources to mitigate adverse impacts and make the utility more resilient.
- Addressing climate change and investing in resilience is technically and financially challenging. Water infrastructure investments often have a lifespan of many decades, and existing infrastructure may have been designed under parameters that no longer reflect current or future environmental conditions.

- Furthermore, existing investments were designed to comply with a statutory framework that may not be well suited to adapting to changing conditions or the increased uncertainty associated with climate change.
- To continue protecting public health and the environment and help ensure sustainable water resource management in their communities and regions, utilities may be taking on increased roles and responsibilities.

PRINCIPLES

- To better predict the impact of changing climate conditions and develop successful operating strategies, NACWA members support continued federal and cooperatively sponsored research on critical environmental topics that may guide local modeling and reduce planning uncertainty.
- To reduce vulnerability to extreme weather events, natural disasters and economic disruptions, NACWA members invest in resilient systems and share best practices.
- To adapt to future operating conditions that are changing and uncertain, NACWA members support regulatory flexibility and an integrated approach to federal oversight and programs related to the Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act and other statutes.
- To protect ratepayers against potential rate spikes due to unanticipated infrastructure investments, NACWA members support preserving and increasing the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program and protection for tax-exempt municipal bonds.
- To stretch limited resources, NACWA members support use of adaptive management and outcome-based approaches that stretch limited resources, minimize uncertainty, reducing risk and maximize net environmental benefits.
- NACWA members oppose additional regulatory burdens that reduce flexibility or increase obligations under the Clean Water Act without full consideration of the impact on ratepayers or provision of commensurate federal support.
- NACWA members support holistic, watershed-based approaches; innovative partnerships and greater collaboration across agencies, entities of government, and diverse partners and stakeholders.
- NACWA members believe resiliency should be addressed in an open and transparent process, guided by best available data. Technological and engineering innovations will be supported at all levels.
- Resiliency measures must reflect local conditions. NACWA members support state and local regulatory to make decisions in the best interest of their communities and benchmark progress based on their unique circumstances and similarly situated clean water agencies.

- Clean water agencies should own the role they play in driving local resiliency and transparently articulate to their customers the benefits their investments create. In addition to water resources management, NACWA members advance the recovery, reuse and conversion of valuable water, energy and nutrient resources associated with clean water utility operations as part of a resource recovery/sustainability ethic.