

2023 Water Workforce Virtual Workshop

On December 5 – 6, 2023, NACWA hosted its [2023 Water Workforce Virtual Workshop](#), an event focused on addressing the pressing challenges and emerging opportunities within the water sector workforce. Bringing together experts, practitioners, and policymakers from across the nation, the workshop served as a collaborative platform for the exchange of innovative ideas, best practices, and strategic insights aimed at bolstering the water workforce amidst a rapidly changing environmental landscape.

This summary write-up aims to encapsulate the key discussion themes and some of the actionable solutions that emerged from the workshop, reflecting NACWA's commitment to fostering a resilient and sustainable water sector workforce for the future.

Aging Workforce & Recruitment: The impending retirement of a significant portion of the workforce creates a gap that is challenging to fill, as younger individuals often opt for careers in more technology-driven industries.

- ❖ *Recommendation: Develop targeted recruitment campaigns to attract younger talent, including internships and partnerships with educational institutions.*

Compensation and Prestige: Workshop discussion tackled the issue of below-average compensation in the water sector compared to other industries. The workshop suggested enhancing the perceived value and prestige of water sector roles to make them more attractive to potential candidates.

- ❖ *Recommendation: Conduct sector-wide salary reviews and create promotional campaigns to enhance the sector's image. Review and adjust compensation structures to be both competitive and recognize the value of the water sector, with the goal of promoting a workforce that is bought into the mission of the organization.*

Diversity and Inclusion Efforts: This session delved into the importance of cultivating a diverse and inclusive workforce. It discussed various strategies and initiatives aimed at breaking down barriers to entry and career progress for underrepresented groups, thereby enriching the sector with diverse perspectives and talents.

- ❖ *Recommendation: Implement diversity training, establish recruitment partnerships with minority-focused organizations, and create inclusive workplace policies.*

Technological Evolution: Focus was placed on how emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and digital systems, are revolutionizing sector practices, necessitating a workforce skilled in these areas.

- ❖ *Recommendation: Invest in employee training for new technologies and digital tools and encourage innovation-focused mindsets.*

Collaborative Strategies: The importance of cross-sector collaboration was stressed, advocating for joint efforts in learning and strategizing to prepare a skilled and diverse workforce for the future challenges of the water sector.

- ❖ *Recommendation: Foster partnerships with other sectors to share knowledge and best practices for workforce development. Sector collaborations may include: higher education systems, veterans support organizations, community outreach programs, environmental and conservation organizations, and local governments.*

Upskilling and Reskilling: This workshop theme focused on the necessity for continuous professional development in the water sector. It highlighted the evolving nature of technologies and practices, underlining the importance of equipping the current workforce with new skills and capabilities to stay abreast of these changes.

- ❖ *Recommendation: Focus on developing specialized training programs for current employees to adapt to new technologies and encourage long-term buy-in and staying power within the sector.*

Culture and Employee Engagement: Discussions emphasized the critical role of a positive organizational culture and active employee engagement. This approach is seen as key to enhancing job satisfaction, fostering a sense of belonging, and ultimately improving employee retention and productivity.

- ❖ *Recommendation: Implement initiatives to enhance workplace culture and actively involve employees in decision-making processes and the organization's strategic planning.*

Leadership Development: The need to identify and nurture future leaders within the water sector was a key discussion theme. Workshop discussions covered the implementation of targeted training programs and mentorship opportunities, aiming to develop leadership qualities and skills among the workforce.

- ❖ *Recommendation: Establish internal mentorship programs and leadership training workshops to nurture future leaders.*

Succession Planning: Addressing the challenge of leadership transitions, this theme stressed the importance of effective succession planning. The goal is to ensure a seamless transfer of knowledge and responsibilities, safeguarding the continuity and stability of operations within the water sector.

- ❖ *Recommendation: Create detailed succession plans for key positions to ensure knowledge transfer and continuity. Establishing a structured process for identifying and training successors for key roles will help ensure continuity of best practices and better customer satisfaction.*

Workforce Flexibility and Adaptability: The final workshop theme underscored the need for a workforce that can quickly adapt to changing demands. Flexibility in job roles and responsibilities and the ability to rapidly acquire new skills were identified as key factors in building a resilient and responsive workforce.

- ❖ *Recommendation: Advocate for policies that encourage flexibility in job roles and responsibilities, allowing for a more responsive and agile workforce. Implement cross-functional training and promote a culture that embraces change and continuous learning.*