

Investing in Water Reliability

Advice Checklist for Utilities

Step 1: Stick with Water Reliability and Water Quality

It is risky to ask the community to drink treated wastewater because you have nowhere else to dispose of it. The need for a new, high quality water supply is a better justification.

- **Define the Process of “Planning for Reliability”** - Defining the issues that go into water reliability planning provides an important context for any dialogue about investing in new supply. Discuss a drought-planning standard, the critical value of water storage, and the value of drought-proof water supplies like recycled water.
- **Define “Water Reliability”** - Define what you mean by water reliability by having a meaningful reliability standards or reliability goals. State your drought-planning scenario and the level of service you plan to provide during that scenario. Articulate natural disaster reliability scenarios and level of service if applicable.
- **Describe and Emphasize the Value of Water Storage Assets** - Groundwater basins and reservoirs are extremely valuable assets. Communicate the critical value of storage assets and the fact that Water Supply Replenishment maximizes their value by keeping water levels at optimum.
- **Address Water Quality Concerns** - Use the insights from the Water Quality Confidence checklist and tools to ensure that you are perceived as the trusted source of quality. Water Supply Replenishment creates a high quality water supply that typically improves the quality of the overall supply.

Step 2: Treat Your Community Like Investors

You are asking the community to trust you to make a major investment in water reliability. Give them meaningful information that relates to the investment needs.

- **Improve The Situation** - Whether water quality or drought resistance, people are more inclined to invest in improvement. Make sure your proposed investment demonstrates improvement in both water reliability and water quality.
- **Define the Local Problem** - Often utilities focus on the proposed project before the problem is clearly defined or accepted by the audience. Make sure that you define the needs of the community within the context of water reliability planning. Focusing on the problem establishes the fundamental motivations, and answers why the utility is reaching out to the community in the first place.
- **Communicate the Benefits of Water Supply Replenishment** - Use the “planning for reliability” context to demonstrate that Water Supply Replenishment is a compelling option. It improves water quality, increases drought resistance without having to build new reservoirs, does not require separate delivery or storage infrastructure, and leverages past investments made in transporting or treating water.
- **Express Costs in Meaningful Terms** - Show the costs of alternatives in terms of relative impact on rates or fees. Costs expressed in dollars are not meaningful.

Step 3: Develop Credibility and Build Trust

Make sure your audience is aware that you are open to alternatives, but are committed to investing in solving the water reliability problem. Utilities are often perceived as being “married to a pet project.”

- **Make Sure You State Your Corporate Values** - Express the key values that drive the behavior and decisions of the utility. These should be *commitments* related to ensuring a reliable water supply and preservation/management of key assets. For groundwater, this might be a commitment to balancing withdrawals and replenishment.
- **Present the Options for Solving the Problem** - People want to see that you have not adopted a specific solution without seriously considering alternatives. Show them that you have considered all the options. Always share your logic.
- **Make a Recommendation** - You *should* recommend a solution, but lead a dialogue about the alternatives. Make sure that the rationale for recommending Water Supply Replenishment is clear and that you are listening to people’s concerns.
- **Use Your Values to Manage the “No Growth” Argument** - It is not the role of water utilities to make growth planning decisions. Emphasize that your job, and your commitments, are focused on delivering water reliability. Part of this commitment involves taking into account projected growth. Not planning for growth would be malpractice. Do not be shy about your *commitment* to planning for reliability.