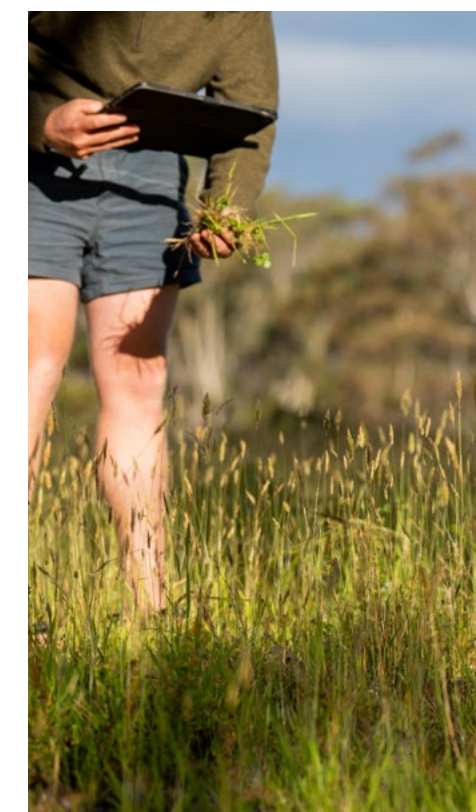
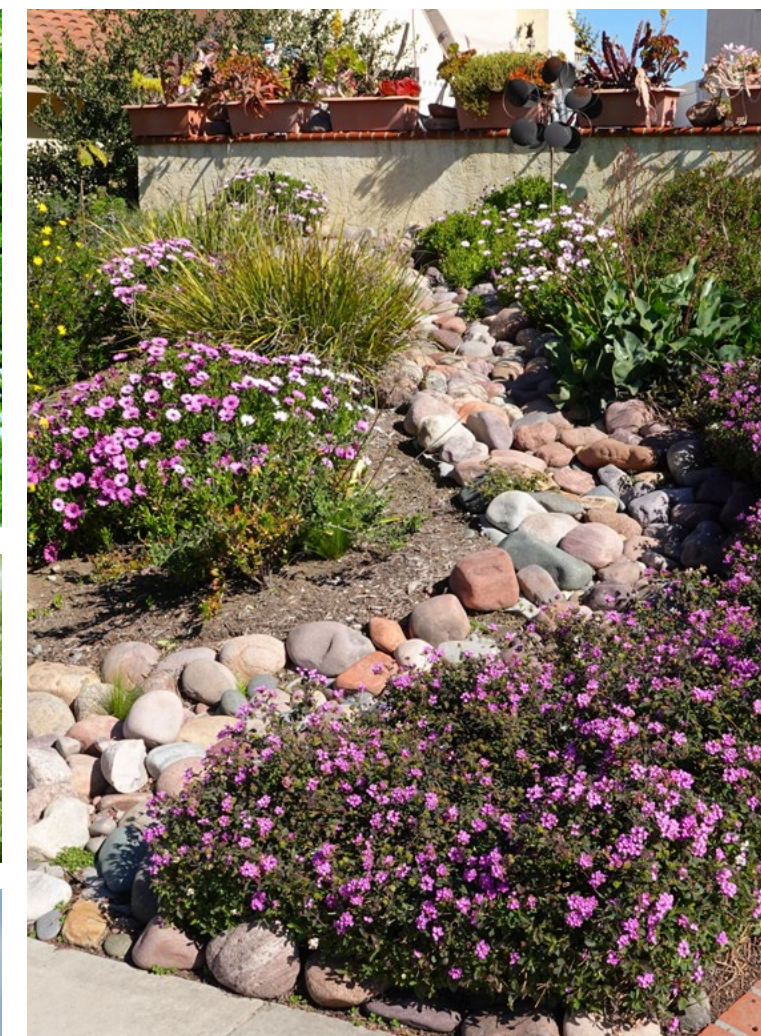
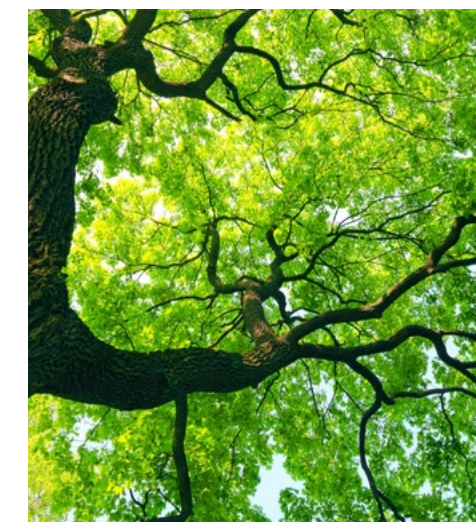


JULY 2026

Best in Class: Smart Practices for Residential Landscapes and Irrigation Programs Guidebook



About the Alliance for Water Efficiency

The Alliance for Water Efficiency (AWE) is a nonprofit dedicated to the efficient and sustainable use of water across North America. Based in Chicago, AWE advocates for water efficient products and programs and provides information and assistance on water conservation efforts. AWE works with more than 500 member organizations, providing benefit to water utilities, business and industry, government agencies, environmental and energy advocates, universities, and consumers.

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Suggested Citation

Alliance for Water Efficiency. *Best in Class: Smart Practices for Residential Landscapes and Irrigation Programs Guidebook*. Chicago, IL: Alliance for Water Efficiency, 2026.

Acknowledgments

The Alliance for Water Efficiency would like to thank **The Scotts Miracle-Gro Foundation** for funding this project and for its ongoing support of our work. We also extend our gratitude to the following organizations and individuals for their valuable contributions to this project:

Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority, NM

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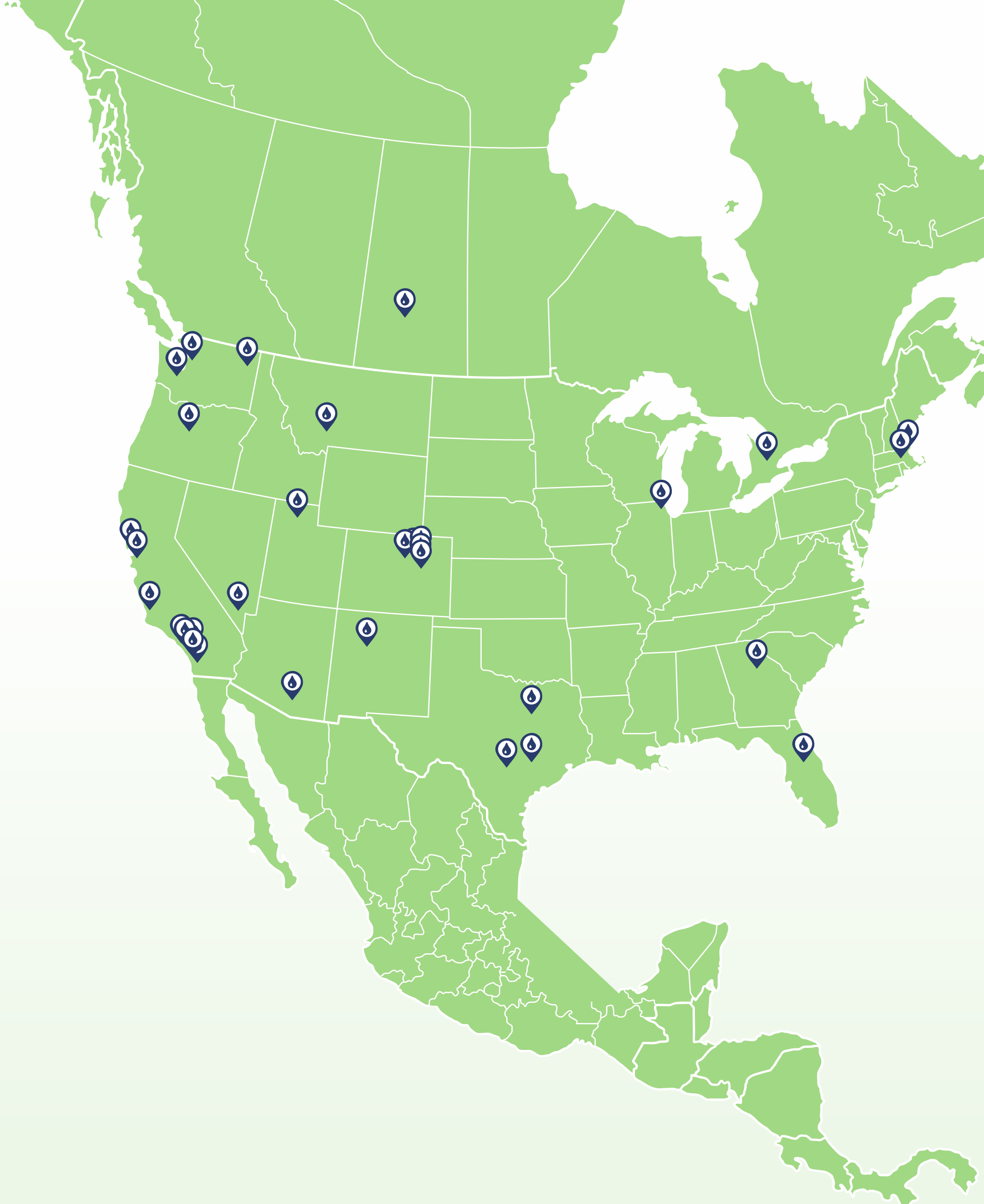
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Opportunity

Landscape maintenance is a significant contributor to outdoor water use in the United States, with most homeowners using 30 to 60 percent of their water outdoors (EPA, 2013). To promote water conservation and efficiency outdoors, many utilities offer programs that support landscape transformation and irrigation optimization, including site audits, rebates for efficient irrigation technologies, landscape removal and replacement assistance, and more. By transitioning traditional, high-water-use landscapes to water-efficient landscapes, these programs help residents increase water efficiency, reduce maintenance costs, preserve environmental integrity, and enhance communities through beautiful, climate-appropriate landscapes.

The *Best in Class: Smart Practices for Residential Landscape and Irrigation Programs Guidebook* (Guidebook) provides insights, lessons learned, and practical tips for developing, implementing, and evaluating utility-sponsored residential outdoor water efficiency programs. The Guidebook is designed to:

- ✓ Showcase examples of how utilities and organizations across North America are advancing water efficiency through landscape and irrigation programs.
- ✓ Share actionable best practices and guidance on how to design outdoor water efficiency programs.
- ✓ Highlight the evolution of utility-sponsored landscape and irrigation programs over time.

Resource Development

To learn more about residential landscape and irrigation smart practices and to identify potential examples to highlight in this Guidebook, AWE reviewed a diverse range of examples from members, from pilot to long-established initiatives, and from traditional to niche approaches, to ensure broad representation of strategies.

From this review, AWE identified key examples and invited these members to participate in the project. Calls for project participation were also shared via AWE committees and newsletters. In total, 37 AWE members and other trusted utilities and organizations were invited to contribute to the Guidebook. Of these, 33 utilities and organizations participated in interviews and/or email exchanges to discuss the design and evolution of their residential landscape and irrigation initiatives.

From the relevant lessons, strategies, and suggestions gathered in these interviews, AWE identified smart practices for residential landscape and irrigation programs in phases of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Program examples were categorized according to these phases to illustrate and reinforce specific best practices.

All project contributors were given the opportunity to review the draft of the Guidebook and confirm that the information related to their programs was correctly presented.

How to Use the Guidebook

The *Best in Class: Smart Practices for Residential Landscape and Irrigation Programs Guidebook* is organized into three chapters to serve users at different stages of program design:



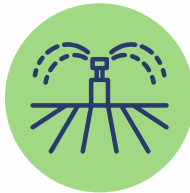
EXPLORE BY SMART PRACTICE

Each chapter provides step-by-step guidance to build a successful outdoor water efficiency program. Each action is followed by case examples of utilities or organizations that have implemented each smart practice. *(Examples highlighted in this Guidebook are representative of the time at which this report was published and may continue to evolve over time.)*

The Guidebook is designed to support organizations at different stages, whether they are beginning program implementation or evaluating an existing initiative. It allows users to focus on the content most relevant to their current needs while exploring a full range of smart practices that illustrate the iterative process of creating and refining residential landscape and irrigation programs.

EXPLORE BY THEMES

Throughout the Guidebook, icons are used as a visual wayfinding tool to highlight the primary themes of each case example. These icons help readers quickly identify the focus of each example and navigate to content that aligns with their interests or program priorities.



Irrigation Optimization



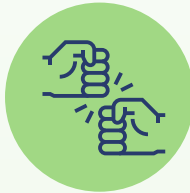
Landscape Transformation



Multiple Benefits



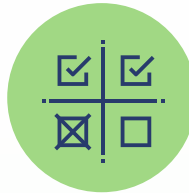
Outreach, Engagement, Communications



Partnerships



Policy



Program Analysis & Outcomes



Rebate & Incentives



Water Savings



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Phase 1 Program Development

Phase 1:
Program Development

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Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

1.1

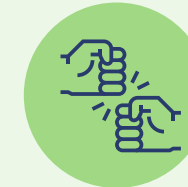
Identify Your Organization's Drivers and Constraints

Effective initiatives are grounded in a clear understanding of organizational drivers and constraints, including regulatory, financial, and operational factors. This understanding helps drive decision-making, recognize opportunities, and set realistic goals. Defining the focus of an outdoor water use program, whether short-term drought response, long-term water savings, or broader ecological health, and aligning it with available resources is essential to making a meaningful impact.



CASE EXAMPLE

Marin Water, CA – Irrigation Removal During Drought Emergency



In response to a local water shortage emergency in 2021, **Marin Water** launched a landscape rebate to help address immediate water conservation needs. The initial phase focused solely on stopping outdoor irrigation by encouraging customers to remove their lawns but hold off on installing new landscapes until water supplies stabilized. To assist with this, Marin Water partnered with Conservation Corps North Bay (CCNB) to help sheet mulch lawns (a practice where mulch is applied to topsoil) and abandon spray irrigation systems. While the approach was effective in addressing the emergency drought conditions, it was also costly and labor-intensive. As drought conditions eased, Marin Water shifted its focus back towards long-term water conservation goals. By mid-2022, the program evolved into a landscape transformation initiative with a tiered rebate structure under a Cash 4 Grass program, supporting both the lawn removal and replanting of water-efficient plants for lasting water savings.

Phase 1:
Program Development

- 1.1 Identify Your Organization's Drivers and Constraints
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Phase 2:
Program Implementation

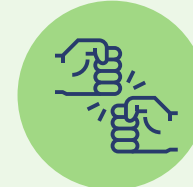
Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

1.2 Assess Community Needs and Interests

To create impactful programs, start by understanding your community's unique needs. This may include conducting focus groups or resident surveys, event tabling, hosting community workshops, assessing feedback and participation in past initiatives, and more. This understanding helps tailor initiatives that resonate with community members, in turn boosting participation and helping your organization meet your water savings goals.



CASE EXAMPLE
Denver Water, CO – Residential Landscapes Focus Group



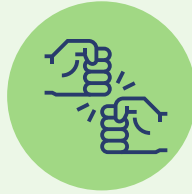
Denver Water worked alongside consultants at Berry Strategy to conduct focus groups, neighborhood walks, and phone calls to better understand homeowner landscaping attitudes and perspectives. This outreach led to recommendations for targeting messaging to water-conscious individuals and the development of incentive programs to assist with landscape design, sod removal, and plant procurement for residents. These insights guided Denver Water's program goals and design, leading to an expanded partnership with Resource Central to offer turf removal support to customers, as focus groups revealed this was one of the biggest hurdles for customers. Denver Water's turf removal program was piloted in 2024 and became a full program in 2025. The program supports customers with up to \$750 toward turf removal services. In 2024, the pilot supported 115 customers with their turf removal projects. In 2025, 150 customers participated in the program. So far, the program has resulted in over 100,000 square feet of non-functional turf removal.

Phase 1:
Program Development

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Phase 2:
Program Implementation

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Program Evaluation



CASE EXAMPLE

**City of Spokane, WA –
DIY Landscaping Guidance**

Many customers who participate in the **City of Spokane's** SpokaneScape Lawn Replacement Rebate¹ undertake DIY approaches to their projects, but they often express a need for clearer design guidance and practical support to bring their ideas to life. In response, the City of Spokane developed a complementary SpokaneScape Guide² in collaboration with local Master Gardeners and Native Plant Societies. The DIY guide provides comprehensive design and implementation advice, including templates; tips on drip irrigation, compost and mulch; and step-by-step instructions for applying for outdoor rebates.

The guide is updated annually to ensure accuracy and to integrate customer feedback. For example, the recent revision included a new “origin” attribute to their plant list key, in addition to those such as “pollinator friendly” or “fire wise,” to inform customers if a plant is native and its region of origin. Building on this resource, the City launched Designer at Your Door³ in 2023 after connecting with a local landscape architect passionate about sustainability. Now serving as the program's resident designer, the landscape architect conducts on-site visits to discuss customer goals, assess site conditions, and develop conceptual designs with recommended materials. Weekly appointments consistently fill, demonstrating strong community demand for hands-on design support.

Image Source



Phase 1:
Program Development

- 1.1 Identify Your Organization’s Drivers and Constraints
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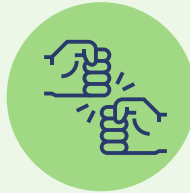
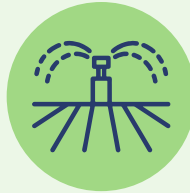
Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation



CASE EXAMPLE

**North Texas Municipal Water District, TX –
Water Behavior Survey**



In 2024, **North Texas Municipal Water District** (NTMWD) hired consultants Corona Insights to conduct a survey of residents within its service area to understand residential water users’ perceptions, awareness, and behaviors around water conservation. As a wholesale water provider, NTMWD also engaged its member cities and customers in the research effort by convening a workgroup of communicators and educators to provide feedback on the survey design and help shape how the findings could inform future messaging and programming. Survey outcomes are used to inform NTMWD’s water conservation outreach campaigns and programming across North Texas, including a new focus on homeowner’s associations (HOAs). Approximately half of surveyed residents live in HOA communities, and findings showed these residents were more willing to adopt water-saving behaviors. In response, NTMWD has begun outreach and partnerships with HOA groups, including launching a Water Efficiency Survey Pilot Program targeted to HOA customers, similar to existing surveys offered to commercial, industrial, and institutional (CII) and multifamily water users.⁴ Early findings suggest significant potential water savings through outdoor irrigation system adjustments and repairs, with many improvements estimated to pay for themselves within three months. The survey was also used to recruit residents to participate in a focus group, which further helped NTMWD understand what motivates residents to reduce their outdoor water use and embrace native landscapes.

Phase 1:
Program Development

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Phase 2:
Program Implementation

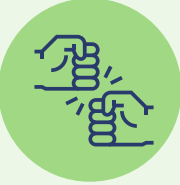
Phase 3:
Program Evaluation



1.3

Define the Target Audience

Defining a target audience, whether across the service area or within specific neighborhoods or customer segments, helps utilities design outdoor water use programs that maximize impact while using resources more efficiently. For example, a program meant to serve the highest water using customers may be designed differently than a program supporting financially constrained customers. This approach allows for more strategic use of staff time and funding, simplifies participation tracking and outcome measurement, and supports clear progress toward efficiency goals. Targeted programs also avoid a one-size-fits-all approach, ensuring initiatives are relevant to participants and deliver meaningful benefits for both the utility and the community.



CASE EXAMPLE

Helping New Gardeners Flourish Through the “MA Native Plant Palette” (MA)

In 2024, the **Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and Department of Conservation and Recreation** partnered with **Ipswich Utilities** and several other organizations across the state to develop the MA Native Plant Palette,⁵ an online resource specifically designed for beginner gardeners to make sustainable landscaping more accessible to gardeners of all skill levels. The tool aims to make sustainable landscaping more accessible to this audience by allowing users to select desired plants from curated palettes like “growing wild for pollinators” or “bouquet builder” or they can build their own. The tool also offers education on the benefits of native plants, such as supporting pollinator and wildlife habitat, soil health, water quality, and aesthetic appeal. Since launching, the team has installed two Native Plant Palette demonstration gardens and hosted numerous educational events to demonstrate the use of the tool in making native plant gardens come to life. Multiple organizations have created palettes to add as templates into the tool, including a Mass Audubon “bird palette”, an “urban meadow” palette by Grow Native Massachusetts, and an earth planter garden box palette designed specifically for Endicott Park in Danvers, MA.

Image Source

Phase 1:
Program Development

- 1.1 Identify Your Organization's Drivers and Constraints
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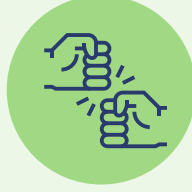


CASE EXAMPLE

**West Basin, CA –
Parkway Beautification Program**



West Basin Municipal Water District (West Basin), in partnership with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, offers a Parkway Beautification Program⁶ to engage underserved communities. The income-qualified program provides free installation of water-wise, native-plant parkway gardens, along with guidance on long-term maintenance. The program highlights multiple benefits to customers, including saving money on water bills, minimizing landscape maintenance, supporting local biodiversity, and reducing runoff and pollution. To effectively reach eligible households, West Basin uses Google Earth, GIS mapping, and on-the-ground verification to analyze neighborhood demographics and has developed bilingual (English/Spanish) door hangers for targeted outreach. Once the new parkway is installed, customers receive educational flyers and pamphlets and participate in a follow-up visit to ensure plant health and proper irrigation system operation. The program has proven highly successful, reflecting the strong performance of free, direct-install programs in income-constrained communities.

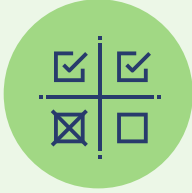


CASE STUDY:

**Santa Margarita Water District, CA –
Single-Family Residential Over-Budget
Outreach Program**



Santa Margarita Water District (SMWD) uses a budget-based tiered rate structure to encourage efficient water use, with Tier 1 covering indoor needs, Tier 2 covering outdoor irrigation, and a Tier 3 applies to customers exceeding 101% of their total budget. To support customers in reducing excess use, SMWD leveraged customer usage data, paired with GIS, to identify single-family households consistently exceeding their water budgets on a heat map of their service area. Overlaying an HOA layer allowed their Water Efficiency team to target neighborhoods with a higher percentage of over-budget residents for outreach. This strategy led to the implementation of the Single-Family Residential Over-Budget (SFR OB) Outreach Program in 2024, which offered customers of a targeted neighborhood a convenient 15–30 minute “Sprinkler Timer Turn Down” appointment to adjust irrigation timers and identify leaks. The SMWD team strategically timed outreach around billing cycles and often coordinated through homeowners’ associations, which proved to be an effective channel for reaching residents. The targeted approach increased the number of total water audits completed compared to previous years, and follow-up analysis from 2024 program data showed that 81% of participants reduced water use within three months of completing their appointment—saving an average of 6 CCF per month and reducing bills by up to 31% per household. The program demonstrates how identifying and targeting the right audience can improve participation and drive meaningful water savings.



Phase 1:
Program Development

- 1.1 Identify Your Organization's Drivers and Constraints
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Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

1.4

Identify Barriers to Participation and Opportunities to Enhance Equity

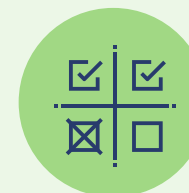
Residential customers may face barriers to participating in outdoor water efficiency initiatives, such as high up-front costs, eligibility constraints, language barriers, lack of knowledge and awareness, concerns over aesthetics, and maintenance, among others. By identifying the participation barriers and addressing them in your program design, utilities can enhance equity and increase engagement, ultimately leading to more successful and inclusive initiatives.



CASE EXAMPLE

San Antonio Water System, TX – WaterSaver Landscape Coupon

In 2013, **San Antonio Water System** (SAWS) introduced the WaterSaver Landscape Coupon to reduce financial barriers and increase participation in its landscape transformation program. Unlike the previous rebate model, which required high up-front costs and saw limited participation from lower- and middle-income residents, the new coupon system was implemented to provide immediate financial support to residents at the start of landscape transformation projects. Under the new program's incentive structure, customers may apply to the coupon online by submitting photos of their project area and are then eligible to receive \$125 coupons (1 coupon for every 200 square feet of turf and irrigation removed) to purchase approved plants to install in their landscape. By lowering the upfront cost burden, the new program significantly increased customer participation.



Phase 1:
Program Development

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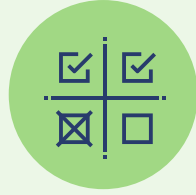
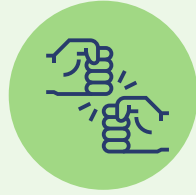


CASE EXAMPLE

**Tucson Water, AZ –
Rainwater Harvesting Grants and Loans**



Building on its existing Rainwater Harvesting Rebate Program, **Tucson Water** developed a Rainwater Harvesting Grant and Loan Program specifically for low-income customers to address upfront cost barriers. In partnership with the Sonora Environmental Research Institute (SERI), the income-qualifying program provides grants, and, when needed, 0% interest loans to support installation of new rainwater harvesting systems. The program was introduced after Tucson Water observed that participation in the general rebate program was concentrated in census tracts with higher socioeconomic status. In the last decade, nearly 400 customers have worked with SERI to design and install their subsidized systems that collectively save 2.3 million gallons annually. Additionally, grants have been provided to 265 of these customers and 19 customers that took out loans.



As with the rebate program, participants are required to attend a workshop prior to installation; however, the free design consultation provided by SERI now counts as workshop participation due to the one-on-one engagement experience that covers the same topics. In addition to financial assistance and education, SERI selects contractors to complete the installation work and pays the contractors directly to minimize time, technical and financial barriers. Under this model, qualifying customers first receive a grant from Tucson Water, in addition to the standard rebate, and may then secure a no-interest loan to cover remaining project costs, making participation more accessible than the standard rebate approach because there are no upfront costs.



CASE EXAMPLE

West Basin, CA – Grass Replacement+



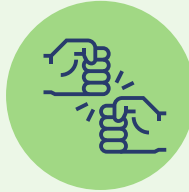
According to the California Environmental Protection Agency's CalEnviroscreen 4.0 Tool, an estimated 35% of **West Basin Municipal Water District's** (West Basin's) service area is considered a "disadvantaged community" (DAC). As a response to this, West Basin developed an enhanced version of their Grass Replacement Rebate⁷ to better support underserved communities. With grant funding from the CA Department of Water Resources, the Grass Replacement+ program offers an increased rebate amount of \$6 per square foot of grass removed (compared to the \$3 rebate of the general program), a free residential landscape design package, and a free water efficient tree to eligible customers. Customers can check their eligibility by accessing a GIS map that shows the Grass Replacement+ program target areas. Despite these efforts, the Grass Replacement Program+ has seen lower participation compared to the free Parkway Beautification Program. This may suggest that the upfront cost of installing new water-efficient landscapes is still a significant barrier to participation or that there are additional barriers to be explored.

Phase 1:
Program Development

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Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation



CASE EXAMPLE

Seattle Public Utilities Language Translation and Interpretation Services

Seattle Public Utilities has made a concerted effort to ensure its outdoor water efficiency resources are accessible to diverse communities. Its Natural Yard Care⁸ guide, which helps residents conserve water through practices such as smart watering, soil management, and native plant guidance, are available to customers in over a dozen languages. Related yard care brochures and educational resources are also translated in multiple languages, such as the Natural Landscaping Guidelines⁹ for landscapers and online videos on how to plant trees.¹⁰ Recognizing that translation alone may not be sufficient for customers with literacy barriers, Seattle Public Utilities is also incorporating more visual elements such as images, diagrams, and step-by-step graphics in its newer and updated resources. This “targeted universalism” approach helps make information more accessible while improving clarity and usability for all customers. In addition to printed materials, Seattle Public Utilities supports multilingual engagement through a gardening class offered in Spanish and Chinese, as well as live interpretation for residents contacting the Garden Hotline,¹¹ a free assistance service for residents with questions related to sustainable landscaping and gardening practices.

Image Source



5 Practique el cuidado natural de los prados



1. Corte el césped de manera que quede largo y deje los restos en el lugar.
Los pastos adaptados al noroeste del Pacífico funcionan mejor con un corte alto (de unas 2 pulgadas o 5 cm). Esto también ayuda a dar sombra a las semillas de maleza. Dejar los restos del pasto sobre el césped alimenta el suelo con materia orgánica y fertilizante gratuito; no causa paja ni enfermedades fúngicas.



2. Riegue a fondo y con poca frecuencia.
Regar a un bajo nivel de altura y de a poco puede ayudar a que las raíces del césped lleguen a metros de profundidad en lugar de a centímetros, lo que les ayuda a ser más resistentes entre riegos y mejora la salud del suelo. Los céspedes necesitan aproximadamente 2.5 cm de agua a la semana para mantenerse verdes entre mayo y agosto y menos de una pulgada cuando llueve.



Phase 1:
Program Development

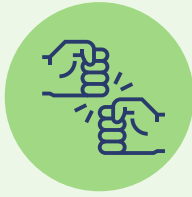
- 1.1 Identify Your Organization's Drivers and Constraints
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- 1.5 Consider Multiple Benefits and Unintended Consequences
- 1.6 Pilot and Incorporate Lessons Learned

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

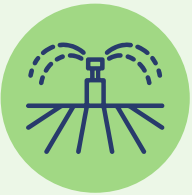


CASE EXAMPLE
Long Beach Utilities, CA –
Direct Install Gardens



The Long Beach Utilities Department's (LBUD) Direct Install Garden (DIG) program¹² offers free design, turf removal, installation, and periodic maintenance checkups for California climate friendly landscapes to income qualifying residents in historically underserved neighborhoods. The program aims to reach areas of the community that have not previously had access to outdoor water efficiency programs, as well as residents with little experience in landscaping. DIG is offered to residents within disadvantaged community census tracts outlined by California Senate Bill 535, or those who identify as income qualifying according to US Department of Housing and Urban Development guidelines. Design services, turf removal, and landscape installations are provided through partnerships with local organizations, such as Conservation Corps of Long Beach, California Eco Design, and Harvest Landscape Enterprises. The US Bureau of Reclamation and California Coastal Conservancy provided grant funding. By providing both the materials and labor services to conduct landscape conversions, LBUD is helping historically underserved residents create sustainable gardens while also reducing their water bills.

Image Source



CASE EXAMPLE
Tacoma Water, WA – Water Saving Kits



Tacoma Water launched its Indoor and Outdoor Water Saving Kits¹³ in 2019 to promote water conservation, with a focus on peak summer months. The kits, which include a range of water efficiency products, are designed to help customers save water and lower their bills. Initially, these kits were distributed in person at community events or at the Tacoma Public Utilities office lobby, but in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program transitioned to an online request system. This online shift increased accessibility by allowing customers to receive kits via mail, eliminating the need to pick them up in person. With the online system, customers can also customize their kits by selecting only the items they need. Tacoma Water continues to refine the program, ensuring it meets the needs of its diverse service area by simplifying the online process and offering more direct mail options.

Image Source



Phase 1:
Program Development

- 1.1 Identify Your Organization's Drivers and Constraints
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Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

1.5

Consider Multiple Benefits and Unintended Consequences

Shifts toward water-efficient landscaping often bring additional benefits beyond water savings, such as encouraging native plants; supporting alternative grasses or ground covers; providing habitat for wildlife and pollinators; mitigating urban heat and adding shade; improving stormwater management; and enhancing wildfire safety. Conversely, if not carefully designed and implemented, landscape changes may present new challenges such as damage to urban tree canopy or loss of green space. Considering these potential benefits and tradeoffs during program planning can help utilities align outdoor water efficiency initiatives with broader community and environmental goals. Planning for both the benefits and unintended impacts can improve program design and support more balanced, sustainable outcomes.

CASE EXAMPLE

Albuquerque, NM – Managing Tree Loss

Originally, much of Albuquerque's landscape transformation was driven by drought, with programs encouraging the replacement of grass and water-intensive plants to conserve water. However, over the past decade, Albuquerque experienced significant tree loss,¹⁴ and residents raised concerns that water conservation programs were unintentionally increasing hardscapes and impervious surfaces. In response, the **Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority** (ABCWUA) has adapted its programs to address urban tree health while supporting water conservation. Its Desert-Friendly Xeriscape Conversion Rebate¹⁵ incentivizes planting trees, and the Tree-Bate program¹⁶ covers 25% of the cost of professional tree care, or for the purchase of new low and medium water use trees, up to \$100 per residential customer. The program also includes incentives for tree care, irrigation systems for trees, and the purchase of compost or mulch. In 2025, ABCWUA issued just over 1000 rebates for caring for and planting new trees. To educate customers on tree care, ABCWUA offers residents free workshops (with a \$20 rebate incentive for participating) and hosts resources on its 505 Outside¹⁷ educational website on choosing climate appropriate trees, properly watering trees, the urban heat island effect, and more.

Phase 1:
Program Development

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Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

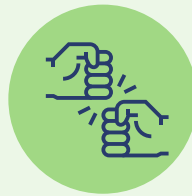


CASE EXAMPLE

Municipal Water District of Orange County, CA – Stormwater Feature for Turf Replacement Program



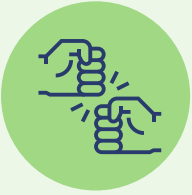
In 2019, the **Municipal Water District of Orange County** (MWDOC) added a sustainability feature requirement in its Turf Replacement Program.¹⁸ Turf replacement projects in this program must include a rain garden, vegetated swale, dry riverbed, rock garden, berm, or rain barrel. To better support residents in complying with this requirement, MWDOC expanded and updated the resources available on its website to provide clearer guidance and design support. In the summer of 2024, MWDOC added trees (from a select list of 38 evergreen trees with spreading canopies) as a qualifying sustainability feature to the Turf Replacement Program, recognizing trees' ability to capture rainwater, create shade, and reduce urban heat impacts. At the same time, an additional \$100 tree incentive was added to the program, which is offered to any new tree installed with a turf replacement project. While dry riverbeds and bioswales rock gardens are the most popular sustainability features, interest in trees has increased since its addition to the program. As of March 2026, the program has rebated nearly 600 trees. MWDOC also partners with the Orange County Public Works to deliver a joint RainSmart Rebate Pilot Program,¹⁹ providing rainwater collection and large landscape upgrade incentives.



CASE EXAMPLE

Guelph, Ontario – Rain Garden Rebate

Launched in 2019, the **City of Guelph's** Rain Garden Rebate Program²⁰ offers up to \$2,000 to residents who install an approved, inspected rain garden. The program is run in partnership with Reep Green Solutions, an environmental charity, which offers on-site support to ensure that rain gardens are implemented properly. Residents begin by booking a site visit with a Reep Green Solutions advisor, who will assess whether their yard is suitable for a rain garden and provide recommendations on size, location, plant species, and materials. Once participants submit a pre-approval application, the City provides a quote based on the rain garden's water-holding capacity and installation costs. The rebate is distributed after the rain garden is installed. This program helps Guelph residents reduce outdoor water use, manage stormwater runoff, and enhance their landscapes while saving money.

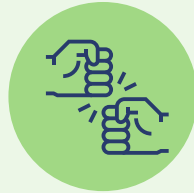


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Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation



CASE EXAMPLE

**Denver Water, CO –
Expanding Urban Tree Canopy in
Heat-Vulnerable Neighborhoods**

Denver Water's Turf Removal Program²¹ is a key pillar of the utility's outdoor water efficiency efforts, but they also recognize the importance of considering unintended impacts and broader community benefits when transforming landscapes. In partnership with the City and County of Denver and nonprofit groups such as The Park People, Denver Water supports efforts like Denver Digs Trees²² and the city's Equitable Community Tree Planting initiative²³ to expand tree canopy in historically underserved neighborhoods that were identified as being vulnerable to extreme heat. These areas often experience higher urban heat island effects due to limited vegetation, and increasing tree cover helps reduce temperatures, improve air quality, and enhance public health and livability. By investing in tree planting alongside turf conversion, Denver Water demonstrates how outdoor water efficiency programs can be designed to balance conservation goals with climate resilience and equity, ensuring landscapes continue to provide critical cooling and community benefits while using water more efficiently.

Image Source



Phase 1:
Program Development

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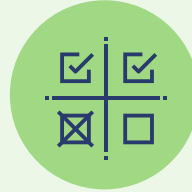
Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation



CASE EXAMPLE

**MWRD of Greater Chicago, IL –
Rain Barrel Program**



The **Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago** (MWRD) launched its Rain Barrel Program²⁴ in 2008, recognizing rain barrels as a key form of green infrastructure that helps prevent excess water from entering sewers, thus reducing flooding and backups. They offer discounted rain barrels to Cook County residents, working with vendors who promote repurposing materials and other sustainable practices to show that water conservation and waste reduction can take place at the same time. The MWRD sells and delivers the recycled rain barrels at a discounted price of \$43, with occasional further discounts available for senior citizens or Cook County residents.



To assess the program's impact, the MWRD estimates water savings based on the number of barrels distributed, their size, and the potential stormwater volume capture. MWRD's rain barrel program has kept millions of gallons of stormwater out of local sewer each year by reducing urban runoff, which eases the burden on storm sewers in the Chicago area and improves area water quality. Because of this initiative, other MWRD programs, and increased advocacy, the Chicago Area Waterway System is thriving, as demonstrated by the recent resurgence of local fish populations. By promoting water conservation at the individual resident level, MWRD's rain barrel program supports broader environmental goals and highlights the interconnectedness of urban water management and ecosystem health.

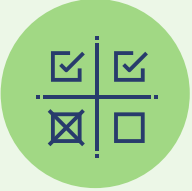


CASE EXAMPLE

**City of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan –
Civic Spray Pad Irrigation Efficiency Project**



In 2022, civic spray pads became part of the **City of Saskatoon's** Extreme Heat Response, extending hours to community members during heatwaves to help residents stay cool. However, this increased usage, combined with growing water demands, places additional strain on the municipal water system's infrastructure and long-term capacity. To address these concerns, in 2023 and 2024 the City of Saskatoon piloted a series of irrigation equipment upgrades at five civic spray pads across the City to improve water efficiency and reduce water use in spray pads.²⁵ The City undertook this program while acknowledging the importance of the spray pads for community cooling as summers become hotter and drier.



The results were strong: across the five sites, Saskatoon saved 24.3 million liters of water, reduced water bills by \$76,000, and cut carbon emissions by 10.4 tons—all while maintaining or even enhancing visitor satisfaction. These outcomes helped Saskatoon secure funding to scale water efficiency upgrades across all 23 spray pads in the city. In addition, Saskatoon is currently adding shade structures, misting stations, and water fountains to spray pads and paddling pools in neighborhoods where relief from heat is most needed. The City is now developing a standard design for water-efficient civic spray pads, demonstrating how outdoor water strategies can deliver conservation, climate resilience, and equity all at once.



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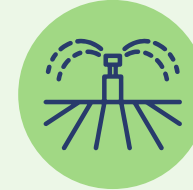
Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

1.6

Pilot and Incorporate Lessons Learned

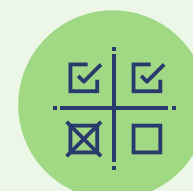
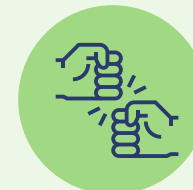
Starting small with an initiative allows utilities to learn from their initial iterations, which is especially important when focusing on new topics or trying new strategies. By pilot testing, intentionally tracking results, and gathering insights, utilities can refine their initiatives. This process helps to identify if additional resources are needed, if changes to the program structure are necessary, and highlights opportunities for overall improvement in a scaled-up and long-term version of the initiative. Alternatively, pilot testing may lead to a utility deciding not to continue in that direction, allowing it to shift gears based on the lessons learned. Embracing this process of learning and adaptation can significantly enhance an initiative's success and sustainability.



CASE EXAMPLE

Walnut Valley Water District, CA – Exterior Retrofit Pilot Program

In 2020, the **Walnut Valley Water District** (the “District”) launched its Exterior Retrofit Irrigation Program to enhance residential irrigation efficiency through direct installations and minor repairs. The program began as a pilot with an invitation-only model, which saw limited participation despite extensive staff time spent on personalized outreach and communications. In 2023, with support from a U.S. Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Grant and partnerships with Eagle Aerial Solutions and EcoTech Services Inc., the District used consumption reporting data and Waterview mapping to more effectively target high outdoor water users. Through these analyses, they found that irrigation repairs on properties with fewer watering zones were more practical, cost-effective, and likely to be completed, while properties with more watering zones often faced challenges following through on recommended repairs. As a result, the program shifted its focus to target smaller property lots with fewer watering zones.



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Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

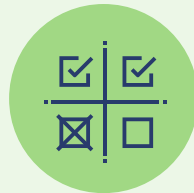


CASE EXAMPLE

Denver Water, CO – Landscape Transformation for Lead Reduction Pilot Program



Denver Water tested a lawn transformation program alongside its Lead Reduction Program, which involves Denver Water crews and contractors removing lead service lines and restoring the exterior landscape to its existing condition. For the pilot program, Denver Water offered a landscape transformation option to 60 customers in a neighborhood undergoing lead pipe replacement. Collaborating with Denver Botanic Gardens and a contractor, Denver Water offered multiple garden designs options and sourced and planted the materials for the 23 customers who participated.



After evaluating the outcomes and reflecting on the program, Denver Water decided to discontinue the pilot program due to high costs for small areas transformed and the mixed results of transformations. Monitoring pilot landscapes showed that long-term maintenance and follow-through were ongoing challenges, with some customers allowing turfgrass to return. Moving forward, Denver Water plans to focus on customers who demonstrate a strong commitment to sustaining their landscape changes to improve long-term success.

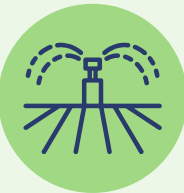
Phase 2 Program Implementation

- 2.1 Provide Customer Support and Multiple Pathways to Action
- 2.2 Leverage Community Partnerships
- 2.3 Engage with Landscaping and Irrigation Professionals
- 2.4 Offer Learning and Engagement Opportunities
- 2.5 Pair Education and Support with Enforcement Strategies

2.1

Provide Customer Support and Multiple Pathways to Action

Recognizing the diversity of a community and the various ways to achieve goals is essential for effective landscape and irrigation initiatives. Everyone has a unique understanding of outdoor water conservation, shaped by their values, resources, and personal landscaping and irrigation objectives. Offering a range of programs and multiple pathways to action can foster greater engagement and increase the likelihood of successful outcomes.



CASE EXAMPLE

Albuquerque Bernalillo County, NM – Xeriscape Rebate



Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority's

Desert Friendly Xeriscape Conversion Rebate Program²⁶ requires replacing high-water-use turf grass with xeriscaping and switching from spray irrigation to drip irrigation, bubbler systems, or hand watering. The program offers \$3 for every square foot that is converted. Participants must choose desert-friendly plants from a provided list and make sure their selected plants total more than half the square footage of the area being converted. The program leverages the use of a point system to encourage the installation of low water use plants by awarding higher point scores to lower water use plants. The model also provides flexibility in design, allowing participants to choose from a variety of plant options that meet their needs. The Xeriscape How-To Guide²⁷ includes a plant list with ideal growing conditions, steps for xeriscaping, and tips for drip irrigation to help residents complete the program.



Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

- 2.1 Provide Customer Support and Multiple Pathways to Action
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Phase 3:
Program Evaluation



CASE EXAMPLE
**Marin Water, CA –
Cash 4 Grass Tiered Rebate**



In 2022, **Marin Water** established their Cash 4 Grass rebate program²⁸ using a two-tiered rebate structure, featuring a Standard Rebate and Best Practices Rebate. The Standard Rebate, offering \$1.50 per square foot, is simpler and more flexible, allowing for easier changes like replacing lawn with permeable patios. The Best Practices Rebate, offering \$3 per square foot, is more involved and supports comprehensive landscape transformations rooted in watershed-friendly practices such as sheet mulching, planting climate-appropriate natives, and using alternative water sources. This tiered approach lowers the barrier to participation while still encouraging meaningful change—currently, 88% of participants opt for the more accessible Standard Rebate.



CASE EXAMPLE
**Orange County Utilities, FL –
Water Wise Neighbor Program**



Orange County Utilities (OCU) launched the Water Wise Neighbor Program²⁹ in 2017 as a one-stop-shop for all its residential water conservation incentives under one comprehensive educational initiative. This program aims to educate customers on water conservation best practices through classes and providing participants with incentives to support changes in their water use behavior. The OCU Water Conservation Team offers multiple general and advanced classes on residential water conservation topics, integrating hands on and demonstration learning whenever possible. The program is designed to provide customers with tailored step-by-step assistance in improving their homes' water efficiency.

Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

- 2.1 Provide Customer Support and Multiple Pathways to Action
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Phase 3:
Program Evaluation



CASE EXAMPLE

City of Bozeman, MT –
Sprinkler System Assessments



Every summer, the **City of Bozeman** offers free Sprinkler System Assessments³¹ to residential customers to evaluate their sprinkler system and identify ways to make the system more efficient while keeping the landscape healthy. The two-hour, in-person assessments allow customers to ask questions and learn about their irrigation systems and aim to provide education and guidance on efficient irrigation solutions tailored to customer needs. The assessment visits include reprogramming the controller settings to best meet the needs of the landscape and customer landscape preferences and connecting a submeter to the system to identify leaks. After the assessments, staff follow up with a report that includes a list of recommended repairs, efficiency upgrades, a recommended watering schedule, and a site map outlining sprinkler system zones and heads to make implementation of repairs and upgrades easier for the customers. The assessments serve as a way for staff to identify applicable rebate programs and to encourage qualifying customers to participate.



CASE EXAMPLE

Austin Water, TX –
Landscape Survival Tool Rebate



Austin Water's Landscape Survival Tools Rebate,³⁰ launched in 2014, offers financial assistance to residents for implementing compost, mulch, or core aeration to their manicured lawns or plant beds. The program aims to promote landscape maintenance that conserves water and promotes environmental protection by providing tools and resources that can minimize surface water pollution or enhance ecosystem health. Since its inception, the program has made minor adjustments such as raising the amount of the compost rebate to better align the market price. As a result, Austin Water has observed a gradual decrease in water use over time. As more residents adopt sustainable landscaping techniques and the community's awareness of water conservation increases, the collective impact on water efficiency and environmental health grows, reinforcing the importance of ongoing participation of the program.

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- 2.2 Leverage Community Partnerships
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2.2

Leverage Community Partnerships

Successful landscape and irrigation initiatives rely on a mix of resources, expertise, and community connections that can be strengthened through partnerships. While few organizations have every skill in-house, collaborating with partners brings specialized knowledge, additional staff capacity, and shared commitment to the cause. These partnerships not only enhance program delivery but also build community trust and engagement. By working with local organizations, industry experts, and other stakeholders, initiatives can be more comprehensive, effective, and impactful.



CASE EXAMPLE

Irvine Ranch Water District, CA – Sprinkler Repair Program

Irvine Ranch Water District launched its Sprinkler Repair Program³² in 2021 to support residential customers in optimizing their irrigation systems to achieve water savings. In partnership with Conserve, Inc., a local water conservation company, this cost-share program allows customers to pay half of the landscape evaluation cost, and if applicable, half of the repair costs, while IRWD covers the other half. Costs are separated into two tiers based on the number and type of repairs needed. IRWD provides a table of program costs as a resource for participants to help them know what to expect.

Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

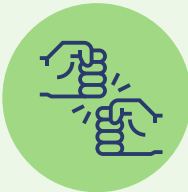
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Phase 3:
Program Evaluation



CASE EXAMPLE

Long Beach Utilities, CA –
California Climate Action Fellows

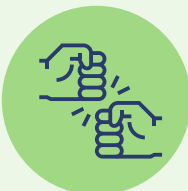


From 2023-2024, **Long Beach Utilities Department** (LBUD) was a host site for 2 California Climate Action Corps (CCAC) Fellows. Fellows work for 11 months and receive a stipend and educational awards from the program. The CCAC program has goals relating to urban greening, community engagement, and volunteerism, and the LBUD site supervisor aligned the Fellows’ work with the goals of CCAC, the department’s objectives, and the Fellows’ personal interests and passions. The Fellows supported existing outdoor water use efficiency efforts and developed innovative new programs. One of the key initiatives they supported was the utility’s implementation of California Assembly Bill 1572, which prohibits public agencies from watering non-functional turf with potable water. The Fellows’ visits to neighborhoods, presentations to community groups, and other outreach strategies enabled LBUD to engage in meaningful discussions about outdoor water use and environmental stewardship.



CASE EXAMPLE

Guelph, Ontario –
Subsidized Tree Planting Program



Since 2021, the **City of Guelph** has partnered with Reep Green Solutions, a local environmental charity, to offer a Subsidized Tree Planting Program.³³ This initiative grew out of the City’s successful collaboration with Reep Green Solutions on the Rain Garden Rebate Program. Through the Subsidized Tree Planting Program, Guelph residents can request a consultation with a qualified arborist, who will recommend the most suitable trees for their outdoor space and the best planting locations. Then, residents can order trees at a subsidized price and receive full-service delivery and planting, mulch, and a care guide. The program ensures that native trees are planted in optimal conditions to maximize their benefits and that residents have the financial and technical support needed for long-term success.

Phase 1:
Program Development

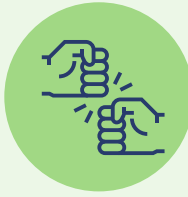
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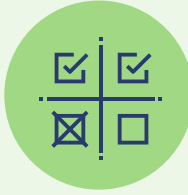
Phase 3:
Program Evaluation



CASE EXAMPLE
Daily Acts, CA – Land Resilience Partnership



Daily Acts, an environmental education non-profit organization focused on creating equitable and climate-resilient communities, managed a pilot of the Land Resilience Partnership (LRP) Program³⁴ developed by Watershed Progressive and in partnership with several organizations, including Sonoma Resource Conservation District, the City of Petaluma, Conservation Corps North Bay, local contractors, and volunteers. Funded by the CA Department of Water Resources (CA DWR) Urban Multi-Benefit Drought Relief Grant Program, this first phase of the LRP program supported the implementation of community-based drought resilience projects across Petaluma, providing services such as irrigation upgrades, lawn conversions, habitat creation, shade canopy enhancement, and green infrastructure solutions.



This LRP program was the first to set a goal of implementing 25% of projects in or within four blocks of Disadvantaged Communities (DACs). To meet this goal, Daily Acts partnered with social service organizations that served as trusted messengers with residents and “land stewards,” a term used by Daily Acts to be inclusive of renters and others who care for land they do not own. Partners expanded language access through translation for outreach, canvassing, and workshops. The team conducted an intake call with land stewards followed by a site assessment to identify needs and appropriate interventions. Free installation labor was provided through Conservation Corps North Bay, and a sliding-scale, income-based cost share for materials (capped at 50%) helped reduce financial barriers. Through this partnership model, Daily Acts conducted 125 assessments at residential and public sites and completed 60 installations of water-saving solutions that conserve 4.7-acre feet of water per year and created 1.2 acres of habitat, while also providing multiple benefits including fire resilience, flood reduction, and urban shade. Lessons learned from this pilot are now being applied to greater Sonoma County where Daily Acts is supporting the spread of LRP with additional funding from CA DWR, with a focus on converting 5 acres of turf.



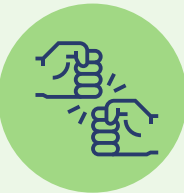
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- 2.1 Provide Customer Support and Multiple Pathways to Action
- 2.2 Leverage Community Partnerships
- 2.3 Engage with Landscaping and Irrigation Professionals
- 2.4 Offer Learning and Engagement Opportunities
- 2.5 Pair Education and Support with Enforcement Strategies

2.3 Engage with Landscaping and Irrigation Professionals

Developing a skilled landscape and irrigation workforce is essential to achieving and sustaining water-efficient landscape transformations. As more communities and property owners shift toward climate-resilient, low-water landscapes, the demand for professionals trained in sustainable design, efficient irrigation technologies, and maintenance best practices continues to grow. Workforce development ensures that these transformations are not only installed correctly but also managed long-term to maximize water savings, protect investments, and enhance landscape performance. Supporting education, certification, and career pathways in this field is a critical component of scaling up water conservation efforts and building climate-adaptive communities.



CASE EXAMPLE City of Bend, OR – Contractor Outreach

Providing landscape and irrigation professionals with opportunities to engage in and learn sustainable landscape practices continues to be a fundamental goal for the **City of Bend**’s conservation program. In working with contractors, the City found that landscaping information is more often effective when reiterated by trusted messengers beyond City staff, such as university faculty or local irrigation vendors. Partnering with these messengers through workshops and educational field day events has proven to be a worthwhile strategy to spread advocacy. To stay connected with contractors and professionals, the water conservation team distributes a quarterly “Conservation Connection” newsletter with program and policy updates and conducts tabling at irrigation stores to facilitate informal, face-to-face conversations. They are also active members of the local Oregon Landscape Contractors Association (OLCA) Central Oregon Chapter, which provides opportunities to distribute information, gather feedback, and stay engaged with local members. Creating these relationships, maintaining open channels of communication, and leveraging contractors as community liaisons are key to advancing the City’s outdoor water use goals and programs.

Image Source



Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

- 2.1 Provide Customer Support and Multiple Pathways to Action
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Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

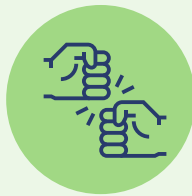


CASE EXAMPLE

City of Spokane, WA –
SpokaneScape Certified Professionals



When the **City of Spokane** created its SpokaneScape Lawn Replacement Rebate³⁵ in 2018, they also developed a SpokaneScape Pros resource,³⁶ a directory of local and small-business landscape professionals, including landscape architects, designers, contractors, plant nurseries, and material suppliers. This resource, available on the City’s website, allows customers to connect with professionals who can provide support or services for their SpokaneScape project. To join the list of SpokaneScape Certified Professionals, applicants must complete a mandatory assessment to ensure that the professional understands the requirements of the SpokaneScape Rebate program. Additionally, professionals on the list are required to attend an annual training course to maintain ongoing communication and engagement with City staff.

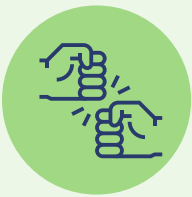


CASE EXAMPLE

Irvine Ranch Water District, CA –
Better Yards by Design Expo



In 2022, the **Irvine Ranch Water District** (IRWD) hosted its inaugural Better Yards by Design Expo,³⁷ connecting customers with local landscape professionals. The event featured nine landscape designers and nine vendors specializing in landscaping, gardening, and irrigation. The event was for IRWD customers only and registration was required. Around six hundred people registered and attended. Attendees had the opportunity to sign-up for landscape design services and receive a \$150 voucher from IRWD for the initial landscape design consultation. At the Expo, 120 people met with designers, 25 vouchers were redeemed, and 10 households signed up for the Turf Replacement Rebate Program. The Expo also included engaging activities such as presentations, plant raffles, free food, and a petting zoo. Following the Expo, IRWD has organized smaller workshops in collaboration with landscape professionals, which are also well-attended. IRWD plans to host another Expo in the future, making minor adjustments to improve logistics.



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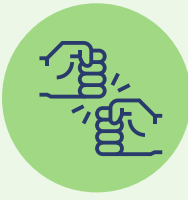
2.4 Offer Learning and Engagement Opportunities

Residents may want to reduce their outdoor water use or make changes to their landscapes, but many don’t know where to start. Building understanding around topics like selecting appropriate plants, managing irrigation, working with contractors, or general yard maintenance can help residents feel more confident taking action. By offering in-person or virtual learning opportunities—such as workshops, classes, or community events—water providers can break down participation barriers, offer clear guidance, and support greater participation in landscape and irrigation initiatives.

Collaborate with trusted community partners and professionals to add credibility to your program, reach more residents, and deliver information effectively.



CASE EXAMPLE
City of Bend, OR –
Design Consultations at Field Day Event



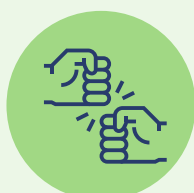
Providing community learning opportunities on the subject of Water Wise landscaping practices prepared for participants to take part in the **City of Bend’s** Turf Removal Rebate. The City organized a field day event in partnership with the Master Gardeners and the local Parks District to offer hands-on learning activities. During the event, participants could attend multiple classes with local experts on various subjects from irrigation conversions to creating pollinator habitat or join a guided tour through the on-site demonstration garden. Free consultations with participating landscape designers were offered during the event so attendees could receive project specific advice. In addition, green industry vendors hosted booths displaying project related materials and services.

Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

- 2.1 Provide Customer Support and Multiple Pathways to Action
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Phase 3:
Program Evaluation



CASE EXAMPLE
**City of Spokane, WA –
SpokaneScape 101 Workshops**

Since launching the SpokaneScape Lawn Replacement Rebate in 2018, the **City of Spokane** has offered SpokaneScape 101 workshops, crash courses on native landscaping to guide customers through applying for and completing the program. The City began by hosting two to four general classes each season and now hosts more frequent, in-depth workshops. These include advice on design ideas and plant choices, hands-on drip irrigation learning, a tour of the SpokaneScape demonstration garden, and more. Hosted in collaboration with Washington State University Extension Master Gardeners, the workshops are catered towards people interested in learning about or starting their SpokaneScape projects.

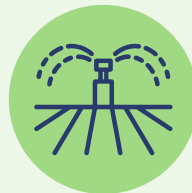
Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

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Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

Organize opportunities that are easy for residents to access and attend.



CASE EXAMPLE

Irvine Ranch Water District, CA – The Shed Show



Irvine Ranch Water District (IRWD) has produced multiple videos for their “The Shed Show”³⁸ series. The series began in 2022 as an expansion of the District’s newsletter column “Ask Juan,” named after IRWD’s Senior Water Efficiency Specialist who leads the initiative. “The Shed Show” caters to a diverse audience with varying goals: topics range from tips on native plants for those looking to modify their gardens to advice on efficient irrigation for those wishing to maintain their current landscapes while improving water efficiency. In 2023, “The Shed Show” hit the road and expanded its reach by collaborating with organizations such as the City of Irvine and the Native Plant Society, bringing landscaping lessons directly to the community. IRWD regularly hosts events with Home Depot connected to their programs, such as the Smart Controller Rebate where customers can purchase a smart controller from Home Depot and apply for a rebate on the spot. They can also attend a mini workshop facilitated by Juan outside at the shed and then implement what they learned at home. Juan and his traveling shed have become recognizable sources for sustainable landscaping and irrigation information.

Image Source



CASE EXAMPLE

Fort Collins, CO – Xeriscape Incentive Program Education and Engagement



Fort Collins Water Utilities launched its Xeriscape Incentive Program³⁹ in 2016 to encourage the conversion of high-water landscapes to low-water, efficient designs. The program offers up to \$1 per square foot of area converted, with a maximum of \$1,000 per year, per address. Over time, the program has evolved based on customer feedback, internal evaluations, and research into similar initiatives, all aimed at better meeting customer needs and optimizing staff resources.

This “cash-for grass” program initially required participants to watch an orientation video and attend a multi-hour landscape and irrigation training to enroll in the program to ensure participants understood the program and learned water efficient landscape practices. To make it simpler and more accessible to participate, the Xeriscape Incentive Program now offers a range of optional virtual or in-person education resources, classes, and irrigation design assistance. Today, Fort Collins Water Utilities staff engage more directly with participants through mandatory pre-installation meetings to review their landscape designs and address any questions or concerns. They also host an annual “EcoFest,” which connects residents with local landscape professionals and organizations. The event features activities like a free native plant swap and live music, fostering a sense of community. These changes to offer more flexible educational opportunities have broadened participation, improved project quality, and strengthened relationships with the community while also allowing staff to manage their time more effectively.

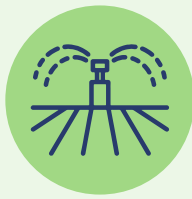
Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

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Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

Make learning enjoyable by including interactive, hands-on experiences.

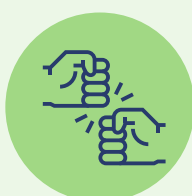


CASE EXAMPLE

City of Bozeman, MT – Garden Party

In June of 2024, the **City of Bozeman** hosted its second annual Garden Party, bringing together outdoor water conservation resources for the community with support from local groups and gardening experts. Attendees enjoyed free giveaways, including drought tolerant perennials, native seed mixes, compost, irrigation supplies, and raffle prizes. The event featured tours of drought-tolerant demonstration gardens and hands-on demonstrations of water-smart irrigation technology, offering a variety of activities and resources to cater to diverse sustainable landscaping interests.

Image Source



Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

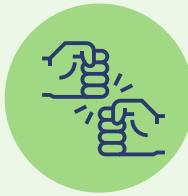
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Phase 3:
Program Evaluation



CASE EXAMPLE

Colorado Springs Utilities, CO –
Conservation & Environmental Center



Colorado Springs Utilities brings outdoor water efficiency education to life through its Conservation & Environmental Center and the Water Wise Demonstration Garden.⁴⁰ Created in 1991, the garden provides a free public space to inspire landscapes that thrive in the region’s semi-arid, drought-prone climate, which is characterized by unique soils and limited water resources. The garden showcases a variety of low-water landscape designs, plants, and irrigation approaches suited to the region’s semi-arid climate, allowing its 20,000+ annual visitors to see what water-efficient yards can look like and apply those ideas at home. Education and community engagement is at the heart of the Garden’s mission. Interpretive signage, guided tours, and seasonal displays educate the public on practical strategies to reduce water use while advocating for water-wise solutions that support wildlife, pollinators, and people. Each year, staff host or present at more than 75 events on waterwise landscaping, native grass conversions, and sustainable irrigation; and over 50 dedicated volunteers contribute over a thousand hours annually to maintain plantings, lead tours, and support educational programming. Partnerships with local landscape professionals also build capacity and serve as a catalyst for the local green industry. By offering a tangible, real-world example of water-wise landscaping, the demonstration garden serves as a hub for the community to build the confidence and knowledge to reimagine their landscapes to reduce water demands and increase biodiversity.

Image Source



Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

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Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

Consider requiring learning and engagement components as part of your program to ensure effective implementation



CASE EXAMPLE

**Tucson Water, AZ –
Workshop Requirement for Rebate**



For their Rainwater Harvesting and Greywater System Rebate Programs,⁴¹ **Tucson Water** requires participants to attend a workshop before they install their rainwater harvesting system. They can attend any in-person or virtual qualifying workshop hosted by one of Tucson Water’s local partners such as the Watershed Management Group⁴² or the Sonora Environmental Research Institute.⁴³ The workshop usually includes a tour of a constructed rainwater harvesting system, best design and maintenance practices, rebate requirements and Q&A for specific questions.

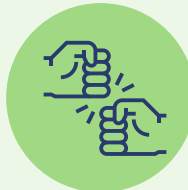


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**RAINWATER HARVESTING
ONLINE WORKSHOP**

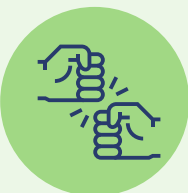


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- 2.5 Pair Education and Support with Enforcement Strategies

2.5

Pair Education and Support with Enforcement Strategies

Clear expectations and consistent enforcement can help ensure that landscape and irrigation programs translate into meaningful water savings. While education and incentives are important, they may not be sufficient on their own to achieve lasting behavior change. Enforcement strategies—such as ordinances, inspections, water waste rules, or compliance follow-up—can reinforce program goals, encourage proper installation and maintenance, and create accountability. These approaches may be especially important during drought conditions, when water providers must implement mandatory restrictions or meet specific water reduction targets. By pairing enforcement with education and support, water providers can protect program investments, promote fairness among participants, and help ensure long-term outdoor water use efficiency.



CASE EXAMPLE

City of Bozeman, MT – Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance

The **City of Bozeman** adopted a Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (WELO)⁴⁴ in 2024 that requires sustainable landscaping and efficient irrigation in new developments. The City developed a multi-pronged strategy to ensure compliance with the ordinance. First, developers must submit landscape and irrigation plans for approval as part of the development review process. After receiving plan approval, the developer is required to attend a pre-installation meeting with the City’s Water Conservation Division to discuss their site’s soil health requirements, irrigation watering window requirements, and subsequent soil inspection requirements. The Division also conducts inspections of new development sites before issuing a certificate of occupancy. To support these efforts, the City of Bozeman has hired two full-time staff members. In addition to WELO implementation and enforcement, Division staff host subsidized continuing education classes for local landscape and irrigation professionals to ensure that the professionals required to comply with the WELO have the resources, knowledge, and required skill sets.

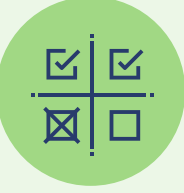
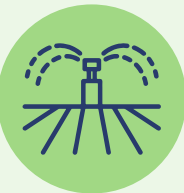
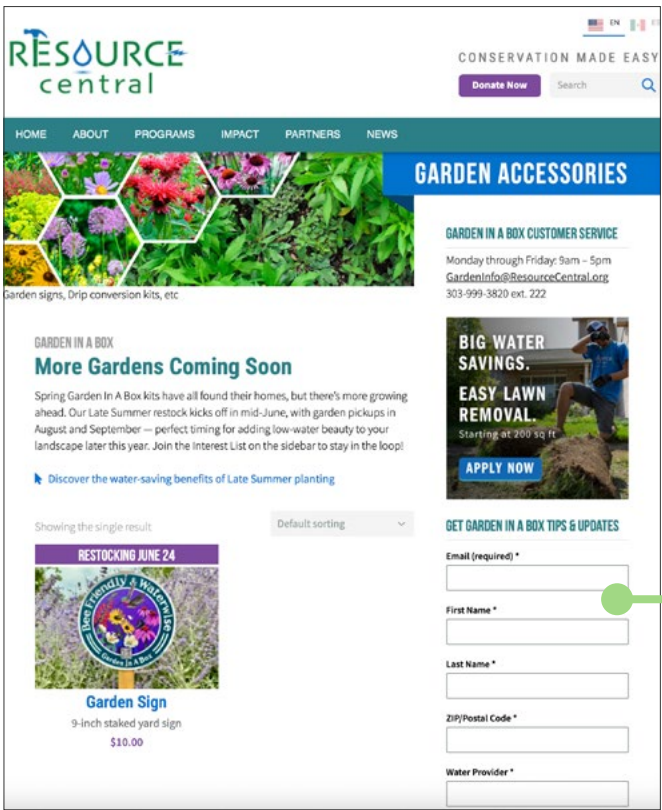
Phase 3 Program Evaluation

- 3.1 Evaluate and Report Quantitative Program Outcomes and Savings
- 3.2 Collect Feedback from Participants
- 3.3 Update Programs and Implement New Strategies

3.1

Evaluate and Report Quantitative Program Outcomes and Savings

Evaluating program outcomes and water savings helps utilities understand whether landscape and irrigation initiatives are achieving their intended goals and delivering meaningful benefits. Tracking quantitative results can inform program improvements, strengthen future planning, and ensure resources are used effectively. Documented outcomes and metrics also help provide justification to leadership, support requests for continued or expanded funding, and demonstrate accountability by reporting progress and impacts back to the community.



CASE EXAMPLE

Resource Central, CO – Garden in a Box Impact Analysis

Resource Central’s Garden in A Box program⁴⁵ aims to provide Colorado residents with low-maintenance, cost-effective gardens that save water and support environmental conservation. To assess long-term water savings, Resource Central, with funding support from the Colorado Water Conservation Board, conducted an impact analysis across several Colorado cities.⁴⁶ Results from their study found that Garden in A Box participants used an average of 8 gallons of water per square foot per year across their entire landscape, about 5,000 gallons less per year than the 19 gallons per square foot per year typically used by cool-season turf grass. They also found that multi-year participants saved more water on average than those who purchased a garden in just one year. A survey of both program participants and non-participants also revealed that Garden In A Box aligns with Colorado residents’ landscaping values and appeals to a wide variety of customers. This evaluation helped Resource Central better understand community landscaping perspectives and to quantify their impact on water conservation through their landscaping program.

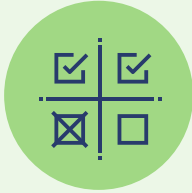
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Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

- 3.1 Evaluate and Report Quantitative Program Outcomes and Savings
- 3.2 Collect Feedback from Participants
- 3.3 Update Programs and Implement New Strategies



CASE EXAMPLE

**Southern Nevada Water Authority, NV –
Water Smart Landscapes Program**

Since its inception, **Southern Nevada Water Authority** (SNWA)’s Water Smart Landscapes Program⁴⁷ has implemented than 95,000 projects with more than 250 million square feet of living grass converted to desert landscaping. It is responsible for more than 14 billion gallons of water saved annually and 217 billion gallons cumulatively, or over 43,000 acre-feet per year in a region with a 300,000-acre-foot water allocation. To produce and substantiate these program results, SNWA combines long-term empirical research with ongoing measurement. In the late 1990s, ~ 370 residential properties were evaluated to establish a baseline change in consumption for converting grass and spray irrigation to desert landscaping and drip irrigation. The multi-year study determined that in the southern Nevada climate, an average square foot of grass consumes 73 gallons per square foot per year, whereas desert landscaping in the same area consumes 18 gallons per square foot per year. The resulting savings was estimated to be 55 gallons per square foot per year. Follow up studies were conducted in 2006 and in 2021 analyzed meter consumption pre-and-post landscape conversion for different, larger populations. The results reported nearly identical reductions in consumption from converting to desert landscaping and drip irrigation. This methodology allows SNWA to confidently report and communicate program outcomes in clear, quantitative terms.

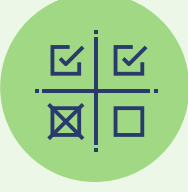
To evaluate the program beyond its water savings, SNWA also conducts customer surveys, which are sent to program participants post conversion along with the final rebate documentation. The surveys seek to 1) understand general customer perceptions of the program, 2) learn who is doing the conversion work (themselves or utilizing a contractor and if a contractor, which contractor), and 3) how much it costs customers to complete the conversion. This information is critical tool in a continuous evaluation of the program and how it can be successful going forward.

- 3.1 Evaluate and Report Quantitative Program Outcomes and Savings
- 3.2 Collect Feedback from Participants
- 3.3 Update Programs and Implement New Strategies

3.2

Collect Feedback from Participants

Collecting feedback from participants helps water providers understand customer experiences, identify barriers to participation, and assess what aspects of a program are working well or may need improvement. Participant input can reveal opportunities to refine program design, improve communication, and better meet customer needs. Engaging participants in this way can also strengthen relationships, increase satisfaction, and support continued participation in water efficiency efforts.



CASE EXAMPLE

Albuquerque, NM – Program Refresh Study

Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (ABCWUA) continuously evaluates and refines its Desert Friendly Xeriscape Conversion Rebate,⁴⁸ which has been evolving for nearly 30 years based on customer feedback and staff insights. Recently, ABCWUA commissioned an ecological consulting group to conduct a formal “Xeriscape Rebate Program Refresh” evaluation. Expert discussions and community input led to new strategies, such as incorporating a water harvesting rebate, incentivizing organic mulch, simplifying the program name, and introducing a mini-grant for low-income residents. ABCWUA plans to integrate these recommendations into the program to expand its reach and more effectively achieve its goals.

Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

- 3.1 Evaluate and Report Quantitative Program Outcomes and Savings
- 3.2 Collect Feedback from Participants
- 3.3 Update Programs and Implement New Strategies

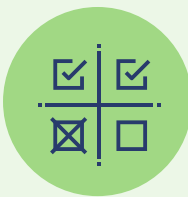


CASE EXAMPLE

City of Bend, OR –
Turf Replacement Program



In 2024, the **City of Bend** completed the first pilot year for their Turf Replacement Rebate, aimed at converting lawns to low-water landscapes that promote biodiversity. During this initial year, 85 applications were approved and 58 successful projects were completed resulting in the replacement of 42,165 square feet of cool season grass. In 2025, participation numbers grew with 80 successful residential projects completed. Over the course of the two pilot years 2.3 acres of cool season lawn were removed and replaced with high efficiency irrigation and low water use/ native plantings. The calculated water savings equates to 2.4 million gallons saved across all projects post establishment. Each project has a required pre-and-post consultation with water conservation staff to collect site data, track improvements and offer as pre-and-post customers with questions about their project or the process.



Participant feedback was collected through a survey each year to inform program improvements. Survey results supported the efficacy of the program with 80% of participants responding they could not have undertaken the conversion without rebate funds. Reducing water bills, improved aesthetics and reduced maintenance were the top listed reasons for participation. Respondents listed short YouTube videos or a transformation guide as additional resources that would be helpful in completing a successful project. The City of Bend will consider collaborating with local experts to assemble these resources in coming years.

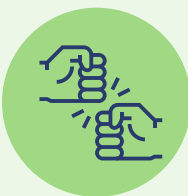


CASE EXAMPLE

Weber Basin Water Conservancy District, UT –
Tree Requirements for
Landscape Lawn Exchange



The **Weber Basin Water Conservancy District** launched its Landscape Lawn Exchange Program⁴⁹ in 2021. Initially, tree canopy did not count towards the program’s plant coverage requirement. This omission led customers to interpret it as discouraging the planting of new or existing trees. As a result, local urban foresters expressed concerns about water conservation efforts due to their potential impacts on trees. Weber Basin Water responded to these concerns by updating the program in 2024 to include trees in the plant coverage requirements: for projects over 3,000 square feet, at least one drought-tolerant shade tree must be planted. Additionally, Weber Basin now offers customer guidance focused on tree health. This includes hosting free classes covering topics such appropriate tree selection, installation, and maintenance for water efficiency and a partnership with the Utah Community Forest Council, the state chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture, to develop educational materials focused on tree care.



Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

- 3.1 Evaluate and Report Quantitative Program Outcomes and Savings
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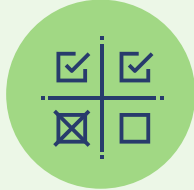


CASE EXAMPLE

Resource Central – Landscaping Barriers Focus Group



When **Resource Central** launched its Grass to Garden program in 2018, participants with recently removed turfgrass were eligible to receive a DIY “Garden In A Box” kit tailored to the size of the lawn for installment. However, after learning more about customer landscaping needs, Resource Central adapted how their programs facilitated turf replacement.



With funding from Walton Family Foundation and Colorado Water Conservation Board, Resource Central conducted a focus group study to better understand residents’ barriers to implementing water-wise landscaping. Participants were recruited from past program participation and divided into groups, each focusing on different incentives: turf removal, sprinkler conversion, landscape design and consultation, and Garden In A Box kits. A final group was allowed to choose their preferred incentive.



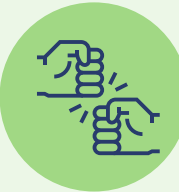
Findings revealed that while landscape consultations and Garden In A Box kits helped participants feel inspired and confident to transform their yards, physical turf removal remained the biggest challenge and thus served as the best incentive. Based on this feedback, Resource Central piloted a turf removal program and encountered challenges such as finding landscapers for small projects and helping homeowners remove turf on their own. In 2020, they hired a program manager to expand the pilot and completed 100 projects. By 2024, the Lawn Replacement Program⁵⁰ has grown to complete 800 projects. The program offers turf removal at a cost of \$2.50 per square foot, or as low as \$1 per square foot for customers of Resource Central’s partner water utilities. This initiative complements other Resource Central landscaping programs, such as Garden In A Box, by effectively addressing barriers the other programs do not.

- 3.1 Evaluate and Report Quantitative Program Outcomes and Savings
- 3.2 Collect Feedback from Participants
- 3.3 Update Programs and Implement New Strategies

3.3

Update Programs and Implement New Strategies

Designing and implementing residential landscape and irrigation programs is an iterative process. Even after successful implementation, opportunities exist to enhance and refine these efforts. After understanding an initiative’s impacts through evaluation and feedback, utilities can develop a plan to implement changes or build upon areas of success as resources allow.



CASE EXAMPLE **Marin Water, CA – Rain Barrel and Cistern Rebate**

Marin Water offers a Rain Barrel and Cistern Rebate⁵¹ of \$0.75 per gallon, with a maximum rebate of \$2,000 for the installation of a new rain water harvesting system. Initially, the program provided a flat rebate of \$50 for any rain barrel installation, regardless of size. In 2019, the program shifted to a volume-based rebate of \$0.50 per gallon, with a maximum of \$1,000, to encourage the installation of larger systems. This change resulted in an increase in the average rainwater system size from 90 gallons to 840 gallons. Recognizing the mutual benefits of a rainwater harvesting program, additional funding support from the local stormwater agency allowed Marin Water to increase the rebate to \$0.75 per gallon and the maximum to \$2,000. As Marin Water continues with the program, it continues to monitor how increased financial incentives impact participation. In 2025 the average rainwater system size continued to grow to 941 gallons.

Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

- 3.1 Evaluate and Report Quantitative Program Outcomes and Savings
- 3.2 Collect Feedback from Participants
- 3.3 Update Programs and Implement New Strategies



CASE EXAMPLE

City of Greeley, CO –
Residential Irrigation Assessment Evolution

When the **City of Greeley**’s Residential Irrigation Assessment Program⁵² launched in 1999, assessments involved the installation and programming of irrigation systems or rain sensors, with data manually collected by staff using pen and paper, followed by report generation in the office. With technological advancements and evolving community expectations, Greeley recognized the need to modernize and streamline its approach. Today Greeley’s Conservation Program staff use an online scheduling platform and mobile tablets for Residential Irrigation Assessments, streamlining on-site data collection and calculations and improving staff efficiency. With these tools, staff conduct visual inspections of irrigation zones, measure water applications, check water pressure, and provide recommendations for system adjustments. A custom watering schedule is created based on test results, along with guidance on the landscape’s seasonal water needs. While most of the program’s outreach is driven by word of mouth, the city also promotes the program through social media, email, and radio ads to raise awareness of its benefits.



CASE EXAMPLE

Eastern Municipal Water District, CA –
Landscapes for Living

Since 2015, **Eastern Municipal Water District** (EMWD) has offered residential landscape water efficiency programs to reduce water use. In 2021, recognizing the need for greater accessibility and engagement, EMWD overhauled its outdoor water use efficiency program by launching Landscapes for Living,⁵³ a one-stop shop website that consolidates all residential outdoor water efficiency programs and resources. The enhanced program offers streamlined landscape consultation applications and free, direct installation of advanced irrigation equipment, such as weather-based controllers and high-efficiency sprinkler nozzles. It also includes a free landscape evaluation to guide residents to the most suitable rebates, verify eligibility for direct installations, and to simplify the application process.

In addition to these structural changes, EMWD has also evolved its messaging strategy from focusing solely on water conservation and efficiency to embracing broader themes of beauty, environmental protection, and land stewardship, ensuring the program resonates with the community’s values and aspirations. Most recently, EMWD added an Irrigation Tune-Up feature to the program to provide minor irrigation repairs for customers whose malfunctioning irrigation systems prevented them from qualifying for installation services and rebates.

Image Source



Phase 1:
Program Development

Phase 2:
Program Implementation

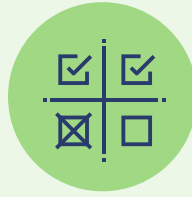
Phase 3:
Program Evaluation

- 3.1 Evaluate and Report Quantitative Program Outcomes and Savings
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CASE EXAMPLE

Municipal Water District of Orange County, CA – Updates to Turf Replacement Program



The **Municipal Water District of Orange County** (MWDOC) manages a Turf Replacement Program,⁵⁴ with base funding provided Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. To maintain stable rebate amounts, MWDOC regularly applies for grants and has been able to increase their funding to offer \$3 per square foot instead of the original \$2. If their retail agencies secure additional funds or obtain their own grants, they can offer even higher rebates to customers.

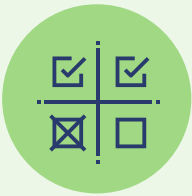


In 2024, MWDOC adjusted the program’s structure to address challenges of the Turf Replacement Program for both the agency and its customers. The high costs for MWDOC and lack of implementation or follow-through from the program’s free landscape design assistance led them to shift to a rebate model. Participants who purchase a professional landscape design and successfully complete their Turf Replacement Project will receive an additional \$1000 rebate. These changes aim to provide more impactful and cost-efficient support for program participants.



CASE EXAMPLE

San Antonio Water System, TX – Irrigation Design Rebate



Through earlier landscape redesign programs, **San Antonio Water System** (SAWS) found that changing landscape plants alone did not always result in water savings. As a result, SAWS launched the Residential Irrigation Design Rebates⁵⁵ in 2013 to improve irrigation efficiency alongside potential landscape changes. The program provides flexible options for customers based on customer needs. Participants can remove portions of their irrigation system, remove the entire irrigation system, or keep the system while upgrading it to improve efficiency. Customers must first complete a free WaterSaver Irrigation Consultation⁵⁶ to receive customized recommendations and a preliminary rebate offer. Program participants can choose from multiple options and rebate amounts vary depending on the options selected. Once the work is completed and reviewed, participants receive their appropriate rebate in the form of a check.



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JULY 2026

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