

the who & how



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Attendees of last month's AWWA ACE13 in Denver (myself included) found it hard to resist reflecting on the recently released U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) survey, which indicated that a staggering \$384 billion in improvements is needed for drinking water infrastructure by 2030.

EPA's assessment shows that improvements are needed primarily for repair and replacement of distribution and transmission lines (\$247.5 billion), followed by treatment (\$72.5 billion), water storage rehabilitation (\$39.5 billion), and rehab and construction of intake structures (\$20.5 billion).

With much of the existing infrastructure reaching the end of its useful life, the need to focus on our nation's water infrastructure is more pressing than ever—and so is the question of who will pay and how.

According to the latest *Water & Wastes Digest* online reader poll, 55% of readers believe that the majority of the funding needed for drinking water infrastructure will come from public-private partnerships, followed by 35% who identified an increase of customer rates as the major source of funding for water infrastructure. Only 10% of poll

participants identified both an increase in federal support and the ability to borrow money at lower interest rates as viable solutions to help bridge the growing funding gap.

Among other pressures on the nation's drinking water systems, current industry reports estimate that there are more than 1 million miles of water mains in the U.S., and the condition of many of these pipes is unknown. Of those, approximately 4,000 to 5,000 miles of drinking water mains are replaced annually, according to EPA.

As 100-year-old water infrastructure surpasses its expected life span and federal and state budgets continue to shrink, many municipalities are finding themselves facing significant limitations in their ability to obtain the capital to make necessary infrastructure improvements.

To prevent falling further and further behind in maintaining and upgrading their infrastructure, communities increasingly are turning to the private sector for help.

While negative public perception of water system privatization has presented a significant stumbling block—with backlash against privatization usually associated with higher operational costs and fear of dramatic rate increases—the attitude is changing as alternative funding options are drying up.

At the end of the day, reliable water and sewer services are essential to public health, environmental protection and economic growth. To ensure that water continues to flow from the tap, municipalities will have to decide how they really feel about the private sector. Friend or foe, public-private partnerships will continue to gain momentum and may hold the key to answer the *who* and *how* of funding for water infrastructure.



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Water & Wastes Digest is published exclusively for the 80,000+ decision makers in the municipal and industrial water, wastewater and water pollution industries. These individuals actively design, specify, buy, operate and maintain the equipment, chemicals and services used for water treatment. Editorial content in this audited publication highlights new products and technologies concerning the supply, collection, treatment and distribution of drinking water; the collection, treatment and disposal of wastewater; and hazardous waste pollution control. A product directory is included in the annual June Buyer's Guide.

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