

## **Enhancing Public Awareness of SRF Assistance Agreements**

### **Introduction**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently implementing an agency-wide initiative focused on signage to enhance public awareness of EPA assistance agreements nationwide. The intention of this effort is to communicate the positive impact and benefits of EPA funding around the country and increase publicity surrounding the improvements communities see as a result of EPA efforts. Projects implemented with Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) monies are included in this initiative, as many CWSRF and DWSRF assistance agreements have direct and tangible benefits to populations around the country.

EPA's Office of Water has developed guidelines as a way to inform states of this directive and how it should be implemented in the SRF programs. The primary objective is to enhance public understanding of the positive benefits of CWSRF and DWSRF funding to towns, cities, municipalities and water systems across the country. To that end, states are presented with a range of options for implementing these guidelines. All of these achieve the ultimate goal of communicating to a broad audience the positive role EPA funding of the CWSRF and DWSRF plays in building communities across the country.

The information in the guidelines was developed with input from EPA and state staff across the country as well as the members of the State-EPA Workgroup. It recognizes that not only are the country's 51 SRF programs vastly different from one another in nature, but that the projects implemented represent a wide range of project types. Therefore, affording states and SRF assistance recipients maximum flexibility is optimum. The guidelines allow selection of the implementation method which best balances two goals. First, it should satisfy the overall objective of communicating EPA's role in funding assistance agreements that achieve positive benefit. Second, the implementation method should remain practically and financially viable for states and communities and avoid any overly burdensome investment of time and resources. In some cases, it might be appropriate for a state to select a combination of options listed below, provided that this does not result in excessive cost to communities.

### **Project Selection Requirements**

Signage requirements will not be required to apply to all SRF projects. Signage will be considered an equivalency requirement for SRF programs. States should select a set of borrowers and/or projects totaling a funding amount equivalent to the amount of their federal capitalization grant to satisfy the signage requirement. There are no other requirements or restrictions on which projects should or should not participate in this initiative. Therefore, it is at the discretion of the state SRF program to select projects most able to efficiently and effectively comply in a way that meets the intention to enhance public awareness without significant financial hardship to the state or its borrowers. This can be done either through the selection of specific projects or borrowers, or by setting a threshold within the state for which projects will be requested to meet signage requirements. States should note that they have the option of selecting different implementation options for different borrowers depending

on the location, project type, and available resources. Borrowers and/or projects complying with the signage requirement must ensure limited English proficient individuals have meaningful access to activities receiving EPA funds, consistent with Executive Order 13166 and EPA Order 1000.32.

Although the signage requirement does not apply to all SRF projects, we recommend that states encourage all borrowers/projects to notify the public of the benefits of the projects and the role of the SRF, using one of the options below.

### Summary of Options

The guidelines present a number of options which communities can explore to implement EPA's signage policy. The option selected should meet all of the above basic requirements while remaining cost-effective and accessible to a broad audience. The guidelines describe the following strategies as acceptable options for communities to follow:

- Standard signage
- Posters or wall signage in a public building or location
- Newspaper or periodical advertisement of for project construction, groundbreaking ceremony, or operation of the new or improved facility
- Online signage placed on community website or social media outlet
- Press release

Each of these options is described in more detail in the sections below.

### **Implementation Option: Standard Signage**

EPA recommends that large projects that involve significant expansion or construction of a new facility elect to publicize through standard signage. This option should be selected for projects where the sign would be near a major road or thoroughfare or where the facility is in a location where this would effectively publicize the upgrades. Some facilities will not find this an appropriate or cost-effective solution. For example, investing in a large road sign for a facility that is located in a rural area or where access is limited to smaller service road would likely not be an optimal solution.

Signs can also be located away from the project site if there is another reasonable alternative. For example, a community may elect to place a sign advertising the project near a body of water that receives discharge from a particular facility.

### Signage Details & Language

States selecting projects that will implement this requirement through use of a traditional sign should ensure the following:

- (1) The U.S. EPA Logo must appear on the sign
- (2) The sign should be placed in a prominent location at or near the construction site, and
- (3) The sign should remain in place for the duration of construction.

States are required to ensure that recipients comply with the sign specifications provided by the EPA Office of Public Affairs (OPA) available at: [http://www.epa.gov/ogd/tc/epa\\_logo\\_seal\\_specifications\\_for\\_infrastructure\\_grants.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/ogd/tc/epa_logo_seal_specifications_for_infrastructure_grants.pdf). If the EPA logo is displayed along with logos of other participating entities, the EPA logo must not be displayed in a manner that implies that EPA itself is conducting the project. Instead, the EPA logo must be accompanied with a statement indicating that the recipient received financial assistance from EPA for the project. As provided in the sign specifications from OPA, the EPA logo is the preferred identifier for assistance agreement projects and use of the EPA seal requires prior approval from the EPA. To obtain the appropriate EPA logo graphic file, the recipient should send a request directly to OPA and include the EPA Project Officer in the communication. Instructions for contacting OPA are available at: <http://www2.epa.gov/stylebook/using-epa-seal-and-logo>.

### **Implementation Option: Posters or Brochures**

Smaller projects, projects located in rural areas, and other efforts may find that it is more cost-effective and practical to advertise efforts through creation of a poster or smaller sign. Posters should include the name of the facility and a very brief summary of the improvements or upgrades that are being funded. This can be achieved through a one-sentence description, for example, or through a brief listing of the specific water quality benefits that the project will achieve. If the project involves nonpoint source or Green Infrastructure components, those can be described at the discretion of the state or community.

The poster or brochure and acknowledge should be visible, as well as a website or other source of information for individuals that may be curious about the SRF program. The community could also implement this option as a short pamphlet or brochure that is placed in one of these locations for community members to read.

Posters or brochures should be placed in a public location that is accessible to a wide audience of community members. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Town or City Hall
- Community Center
- Locally owned or operated park or recreational facility
- Public Library
- County/municipal government facilities
- Court house or other public meeting space

Given the low-cost for producing multiple copies of the same poster, pamphlet, or brochure, communities can explore options for displaying these posters in several locations simultaneously. This would achieve the overall objective of reaching a broad audience and publicizing the project.

States have the option of creating a template verbiage and layout to provide to borrowers, particularly smaller or disadvantaged communities. This could reduce the burden on small municipalities which may or may not have the staffing capacity to meet signage requirements on their own.

### **Implementation Option: Newsletter, Periodical or Press Release**

For communities where there is no suitable public space or where advertisement through signage is unlikely to reach community members effectively, projects can be advertised in a community newsletter or similar periodical. States can use guidelines from their standard public notice practices. As with the posters, the description should include the name of the facility and the community that it will benefit as well as a brief description of the project that outlines broad water quality benefits. The description should clearly state that the project was funded partially or wholly through EPA funding provided to the State CWSRF or DWSRF and include contact information for the CWSRF or DWSRF, and the State Agency administering the program. For new construction, if a groundbreaking ceremony is to be held, an announcement could publicize or accompany publicity for this event.

In some cases, it may be appropriate for the state agency to issue a formal press release announcing construction of a new facility. Distributing a single prepared statement concisely summarizing the project purpose and the joint funding from EPA and state resources can reach a wide audience as it goes through multiple news outlets. Programs should consider whether or not this is an option that is likely to effectively publicize the CWSRF or DWSRF program in local news sources.

If a recipient decides on a public or media event to publicize the accomplishment of significant events related to construction as a result of EPA support, EPA must be provided with at least a ten (10) working day notice of the event and provided the opportunity to attend and participate in the event.

### **Implementation Option: Insert or Pamphlet in Water/Sewer Bill**

In some cases, publicity regarding SRF projects may most effectively reach community members as part of regular communication regarding water and sewer rates. Utilities can consider including a single-page insert within water and sewer bills that are mailed to residents and users in the area. This approach would effectively publicize the project to those individuals directly benefitting from the project. The insert should briefly summarize the facility name and the improvements being made, as well as the benefits this will have for residents and rate payers. For cases where rates increased as a result of project costs, the flyer or insert could emphasize the interest rate and financial savings that the community achieved by taking advantage of SRF-funds as well as the environmental and public health benefits to the community.

### **Implementation Option: Online & Social Media Publicity**

Many communities are increasingly finding that the online forum is not only the most cost-effective approach to publicizing their SRF programs, but also reaches the broadest audience of stakeholders. Online “signage” should follow the poster guidelines above, and may appear on the town, community, or facility website if available. The posting should include a brief project description and contain links to information about the state SRF programs as well as EPA and the CWSRF and DWSRF program websites. In some cases, communities may be active on social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter. These can be used as an additional opportunity for publicizing projects and information about how SRF funds are being used in the community. These online announcements/notices may be appropriate for settings where physical signage would not be visible to a wide audience. They can be a more cost-effective

option than traditional signs or publicity in print media outlets. However, it is necessary that the website be well-known to community members as a standard source of information.

In the case of some projects, such as nonpoint source or sponsorship projects, there might be additional opportunities for online publicity through partner agencies or organizations. This could take place either on the organization's website or again through social media outlets.

### **Suggested Language for Alternate Options**

For any of the alternate implementation options listed above, SRF programs have full discretion to structure their signage as they see appropriate. The language below is offered as an option for use in posters, pamphlets, brochures, press releases, or online materials. States may consider using the following:

“Construction of upgrades and improvements to the [Name of Facility, Project Location, or WWTP] were financed by the [Clean Water/Drinking Water] State Revolving Fund. The [CWSRF/DWSRF] program is administered by [State Agency] with joint funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and [State Name]. This project will provide water quality benefits [options details specifying particular benefits] for community members in and near [name of town, city, and/or water body or watershed to benefit from project.] [CWSRF/DWSRF] programs operate around the country to provide states and communities the resources necessary to maintain and improve the infrastructure that protects our valuable water resources nationwide. “

For projects in certain areas, states should consider whether or not it is appropriate to include additional details about the projects. Specific benefits, such as reduction of CSO events, lessening of nutrient pollution, or improvements to a particular water body, may be of interest to community members. In these cases, including them would further serve to showcase positive efforts financed by the SRF programs. Additionally, for projects with components that meet Green Project Reserve (GPR) criteria, States may elect to detail these particular improvements. For example, the state could include quantitative improvements in energy efficiency or water conservation achieved by project upgrades. If the project includes green infrastructure components such as rain gardens and green roofs that have environmental and aesthetic benefits to the community, these can be described briefly as well. Again, this additional information can be included at the discretion of the state when it is appropriate given the project type, location, and the type of signage of publicity effort selected.