



Using American Rescue Plan Act Funds to Improve Our Fragile Water Infrastructure

Texas' water infrastructure is fragile. Our state's drinking water infrastructure rates C-minus — and its wastewater infrastructure gets a D — according to the American Society of Civil Engineers' [2021 Report Card for America's Infrastructure](#). Texas would need \$80 billion simply to implement projects in the [State Water Plan](#) — a huge sum, but Texas faces dire economic and human consequences without such an investment.

A single winter storm knocked out water service for more than half of all Texans.

Weather disruptions like Winter Storm Uri, along with droughts and floods, are becoming more frequent and severe and every Texan is being affected. Texas must invest in more resilient water infrastructure that can hold up to a changing climate.

COVID-19 is straining communities' ability to maintain, upgrade, and protect their citizens' water. This exacerbates the systemic, historic inequities that underserved communities, particularly communities of color, face in accessing clean water and coping with the effects of flooding and sewer failures. Under-resourced rural areas with aging water infrastructure are also at risk to get left further behind.

A thriving Texas economy needs water. It supports our growing population, people's health, and the natural resources that underlie Texas' character and fuel local economies across the state.

All Texas communities are feeling the effects of decades of under-investment in our water infrastructure. Texas is changing, and the way Texans approach water infrastructure must change too. It's time to act.

ARPA represents a historic opportunity to invest in a resilient future.

The [American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\)](#) provides federal funds to help state and local governments address the pandemic's impact and speed their economic recovery. ARPA explicitly authorizes the use of these funds to make needed investments in water and sewer infrastructure. A [recent poll](#) by Texas 2036 shows that 88 percent of Texas voters support using \$3 billion of federal stimulus funds for water projects. ARPA should be welcome news to Governor Abbott and the Texas Legislature as they consider how to address Texas' massive needs with limited funds. This is an unprecedented chance to ensure Texans can access the water they need to live while also safeguarding the economy against the devastation of a dry future.

How should Texas use ARPA funds to improve water and sewer systems?

Four guiding principles will help Texans take full advantage of this funding to address potential crises and ensure a sustainable and resilient water future.



GRANTS

Direct grants help communities plan, prepare for, and implement water and sewer projects. In recent years, Texas has increased state funding and used federal money to pay for water infrastructure improvements, especially through low-interest loans to Texas communities. But many such communities — particularly in historically underserved and under-resourced areas — cannot afford to take on loans. Grants are also critical for non-capital water projects, such as efforts to conserve water and develop science and data to inform good management strategies. **State leaders can and should use ARPA funds to award grants to communities with big water infrastructure needs but few resources to address them.**



INNOVATION

People across Texas are thinking creatively about how to address water and sewer challenges. Communities are diversifying water supplies; reusing water; doing integrated water planning; creating more-resilient distributed water infrastructure; and combining struggling small systems. Communities are also using nature-based solutions, such as conserving land to protect source water; building green infrastructure; deploying aquifer storage and recovery projects; and focusing on demand management, among other strategies. **ARPA funds can catalyze this innovation and spread it to communities that need it.**



RESILIENCE

Extreme weather and climate-related problems continue to afflict Texas, and better water infrastructure can help. By integrating climate projections and interventions into their water planning, design, implementation, and operations, communities can better avoid, recover from, and overcome the paralyzing effects of droughts, floods, freezes, and other emergencies. **ARPA funds can help communities update and upgrade their plans, strategies and projects — and ensure they have the science and climate data they need to do so.**



EQUITY

Solutions must recognize, address, and work to remedy inequities facing underserved communities — especially communities of color that have been historically unserved and communities located in smaller rural areas that cannot afford large-scale water system improvements. Texas must center these communities' experiences and needs in identifying, developing, and funding water projects. **State leaders should prioritize investing ARPA funds in underserved communities, emphasizing community-supported planning to help ensure that infrastructure funding tracks with lived experiences.**



WATER RESCUE

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