

# Annual Report 2020



# Table of Contents

<b>Overview .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About RCAP .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Impact By The Numbers .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Program Highlights .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Understanding the Impact of the Pandemic on Small, Rural Communities Across America .....	8
Harnessing the Power of Technology to Meet Training and Service Needs .....	9
Nationwide Training .....	9
Advocating for Rural America .....	10
Helping Rural Communities Utilize Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as Tool to Modernize Their Water Systems .....	11
Promoting Regional Collaboration as a Strategy to Support Sustainability in Rural Communities .....	12
A Dedicated, Collaborative Mission to Restore Water for the Holidays in a Small Town in West Virginia .....	13
Protecting Public and Environmental Health in Rural America through New Prescription Take-Back Program .....	14
Beyond Water – Supporting Economic Development in Rural Communities .....	15
<b>Our Partners .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Financials .....</b>	<b>17</b>



# Stepping Up Together Amid Crisis

**If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that we are resilient, interconnected and cannot afford to leave any community behind.**

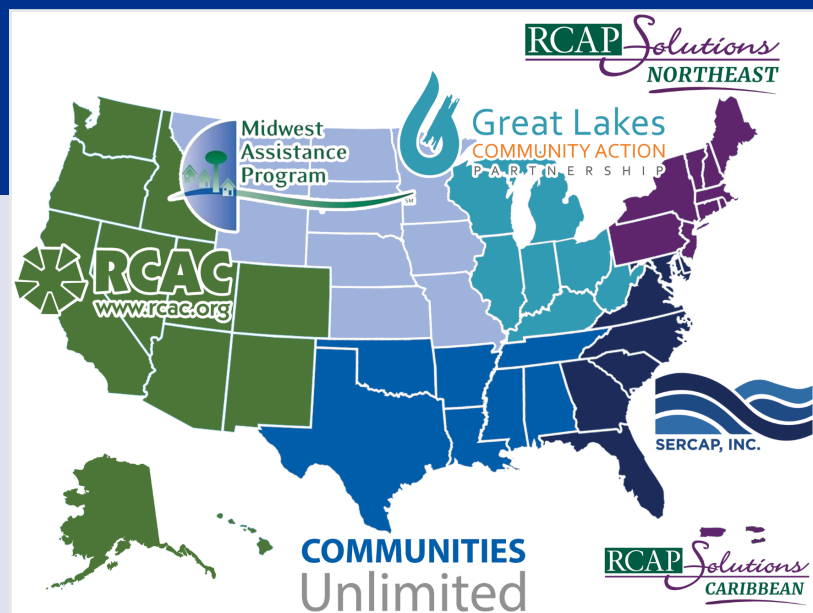
The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are still being felt acutely by many rural and tribal areas across the country. In this time of tremendous change for all of us, the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) has been working together with partners and rural communities to get creative, adapt and step up to provide help where it's needed the most. This past year, our collective efforts have ranged from identifying urgent national policy priorities, to assessing the needs of small water and wastewater systems nationally, to providing virtual training and on-the-ground support and supplies. Through it all, RCAP has been humbled and inspired by the stories of the courageous, hard-working individuals who make up the small and mighty rural and tribal communities we work with. We hope to continue to elevate the diverse needs and voices of rural America in the coming weeks and months ahead. There is much to be done together.



# About RCAP

As a national nonprofit network, RCAP works to improve the quality of life in rural America starting at the tap. Through RCAP's regional partners, more than 300 technical assistance providers (TAPs) support communities in building their own capacity through technical assistance and training focused on access to safe drinking water, sanitary wastewater, solid waste and economic development. RCAP works across every state, the U.S. territories, and tribal lands.

RCAP also brings awareness to issues facing tens of thousands of small, rural, and tribal communities by advocating for policies that will positively affect rural lives, providing data and research on important topics, and shining a light on stories and innovations that highlight the experiences and resourcefulness of rural America. Over time, RCAP has built trusted relationships with thousands of communities across the country with a focus on sustainability - helping them to support themselves in the long term.

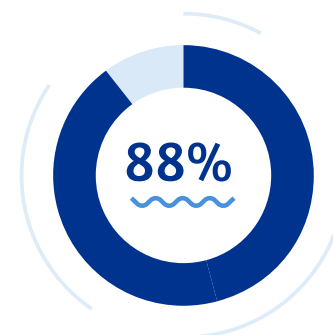


RCAP Regional map

RCAP serves small, rural communities across the country who need it the most:



Average population of community served



of communities served have 3,300 or fewer people



Average Median Household Income of communities served



“

“Rural Community Assistance Partnership shares our commitment to ensuring equitable water access for rural and tribal communities. RCAP’s grassroots work through its network of regional partners is vital for these often overlooked communities and the families that live there. We partner with RCAP on our Hometown H2o program because we know they have the local relationships, expertise, and heart to deliver sustainable water projects that improve quality of life. At the Chris Long Foundation, we envision a world that stands up to inequity to ensure access to clean water is considered a basic human right that no person lacks. RCAP helps us work towards this goal by delivering safe, clean water access for thousands of communities around the country.”



**Chris Long – Founder**  
**The Chris Long Foundation**

## Impact (By The Numbers)

In Fiscal Year 2020 our Technical Assistance (TA) projects served:



**3.4 million+**  
rural residents



**Over 2,000**  
communities in all  
50 states, Puerto  
Rico, and the  
US Virgin Islands



More than  
**1.1 million**  
people of color



**291,697**  
tribal members



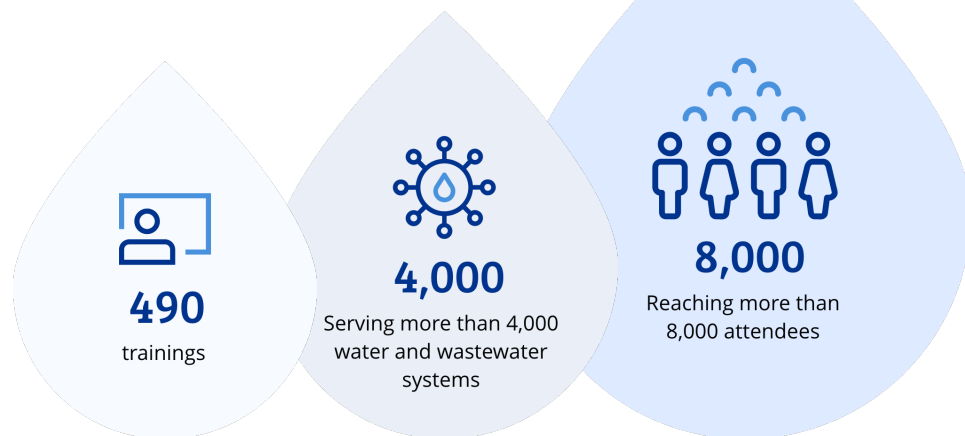
**949,505**  
individuals below  
the poverty line



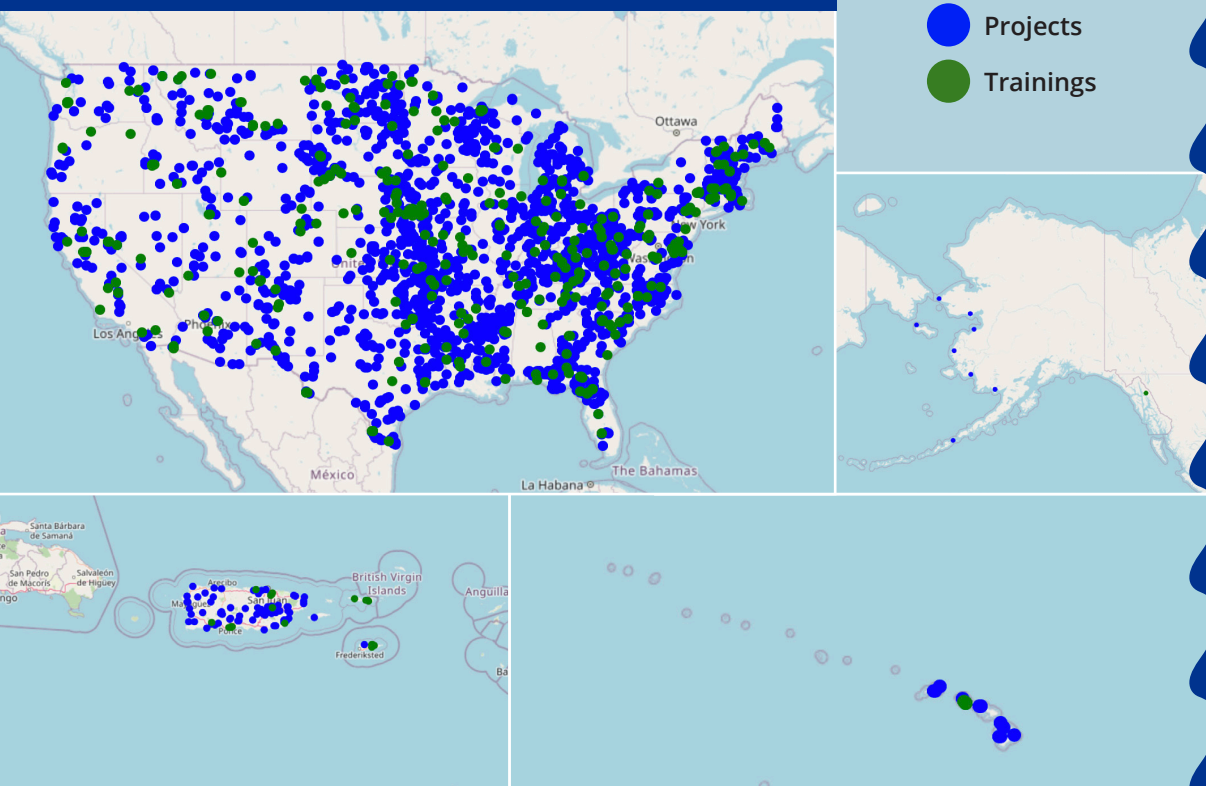
**Over 40%**  
(149 out of 353) of  
persistent poverty counties

## Impact (cont.)

Our training work included..



[View map of RCAP Projects and Trainings, FY2020](#)



We helped well owners  
protect their family's health by



Performing **288 private well assessments**  
to help homeowners understand how to protect  
their groundwater sources



We helped communities support  
and update their infrastructure by



Helping rural communities across  
the country leverage approximately  
**\$427 million** in infrastructure funding





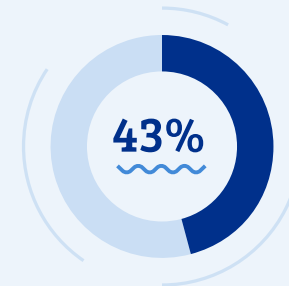
## Program Highlights





## Understanding the Impact of the Pandemic on Small, Rural Communities Across America

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, RCAP quickly got to work - helping assess the impact on rural utilities and share that information with policymakers. We spent the first two weeks of May surveying over 1,100 unique rural communities about the effects of the pandemic on their water and wastewater utilities. Through our work, we estimated the revenue loss for small water systems across the country was likely to exceed **\$3.6 billion** if the conditions at that time continued for a year.



For example, 43 percent of respondents indicated they utilized only one full-time operator or less for their utility.

This survey has also led to federal legislation being introduced to help small water systems, and provide emergency funding for low-income rate payers to assist with their water utility bills.

“Rebekah at RCAP reached out to us with the timely and unexpected offer of free N95 masks for the water district. The shortage of appropriate PPE has been a constant struggle for us since the pandemic began, so this was a big weight lifted off our shoulders. We are now equipped with proper masks for not only our crew but for any visitors to the district who may need one”

**Dan Harris, Town of Monroe in Massachusetts**

## Meeting the Critical Need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

As a result of the information gathered, shared and discussed through the COVID-19 Survey we conducted, RCAP announced a new partnership in July with Xylem Watermark and 120Water to directly ship 105,000 N95 masks to rural and tribal water, wastewater and solid waste utilities. Within eight weeks, all the masks had been distributed to utilities in 46 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. We also conducted specific outreach to remote areas in Alaska and Puerto Rico. 16,500 masks went to communities in Alaska and more than 15,000 to Puerto Rico.

88 percent of the requests from communities came from drinking water or wastewater systems serving populations of 3,300 or less. Systems had access to cloth masks through FEMA, but in many cases, in order to pick them up, they faced an added difficulty of traveling great distances from small remote areas to larger cities or utilities. As is the case during many disasters, small communities often struggle to connect with federal resources. Organizations like RCAP serve as the connector to those resources and opportunities.





## Harnessing the Power of Technology to Meet Training and Service Needs

Though in many ways it felt like normal life stopped when the pandemic hit, the need for basic services such as water and wastewater did not. The importance of essential workers like utility staff became even more clear, and their critical training and assistance needs did not go away. Our network of TAPs quickly pivoted to provide online training to continue to provide important guidance while maintaining the safety of these essential workers. TAPs adapted significantly to meet the needs of communities. They shifted from offering fewer than 2% of trainings virtually before March 15, 2020 to offering more than 72% of trainings online after that period. An added benefit of providing more online trainings was that there were an average of 5 more attendees per training versus in-person sessions.

One example of innovation from our TAPs to serve communities during the pandemic is the work done by the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), the Western RCAP. Trainers could not visit and provide needed assistance because many reservations were closed to protect their members from COVID-19. TAPs at RCAC decided to load virtual trainings onto tablets and personally deliver them to tribal reservations. They met utility staff at the border of the reservations to hand off these trainings and ensure they were not missing key information to keep their water/wastewater systems running smoothly at a time when access to those basic services became more important than ever.

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## Nationwide Training

The RCAP National Conference brings together TAPs from across the country to provide training, resources and networking opportunities with their peers across the country. For the first time, due to the pandemic, it was held virtually. Though in-person interaction was missed, more TAPs from across the country were able to attend than ever before – the virtual conference had 395 attendees.



“Really impressed by what RCAP was able to pull together, during this pandemic and short time frame. RCAP has a new vibrant feel and it is a privilege working for this organization.”

RCAP National Conference participant



## Advocating for Rural America

This past year brought the importance of advocating for rural America to new heights. COVID-19 magnified issues that have been affecting rural areas for decades. The urgent examples of communities being left behind during this time made it clear that we must collectively advocate to make lasting policy change. Our advocacy work on behalf of those we serve, coupled with bringing together coalitions of organizations focused on rural issues, has made an impact on policy and funding that will benefit rural America for years to come.



In May, Ines Polonius, Chief Executive Officer of Communities Unlimited (Southern RCAP) and Vice-President of the RCAP Board of Directors testified in front of the U.S. House Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Rural Development, Agriculture, Trade, and Entrepreneurship on the “Effects of COVID-19 on Rural Economies.” Her testimony focused on CU’s work with assisting financially impacted rural businesses and communities through the worst of the COVID-19 Pandemic utilizing various Small Business Administration (SBA) and Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) programs in addition to the emergency Paycheck Protection Program.

## 2020 Fly-In and Congressional Award Winners

Right before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, RCAP hosted the annual RCAP Fly-In. This event brings in representatives from the six RCAP regional partners across the country to generate awareness for rural issues on Capitol Hill and meet with government agencies. The event featured over 100 participants including TAPs, RCAP staff, Board Members, and leaders from communities that RCAP has worked with. They came to Washington, DC to meet with their members of Congress and reinforce the importance and value of federal programs for rural economic development and water and wastewater infrastructure. More than 300 meetings were held, and RCAP hosted the Congressional Champions Reception where we honored U.S. Congresswoman Terri Sewell of Alabama’s 7th congressional district, and U.S. Senator Shelly Moore Capito of West Virginia for their outstanding service, dedication, and tireless advocacy on behalf of the rural communities and small towns we serve across the nation.



## Coalition Building

RCAP partnered with the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA CLUSA) and the National Association of Counties to create the Rural Network - a coalition of more than 80 rural development-focused organizations to collectively advocate for rural economic development policies and issues. This is the first coalition of its kind to focus on rural economic and community development, engaging top decision makers and thought leaders in the rural space. The Rural Network also includes top White House and Capitol Hill staff, helping to align policy to better fit the needs of rural and tribal regions across the country.







## Helping Rural Communities Utilize Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as a Tool to Modernize Their Small Water System

GIS is a powerful tool that can be used by utilities to improve distribution system maintenance, data collection, communication, and more. It can feel out of reach for smaller utilities due to high costs and not understanding how to use it. RCAP provides GIS assistance to communities to modernize and streamline their operations.

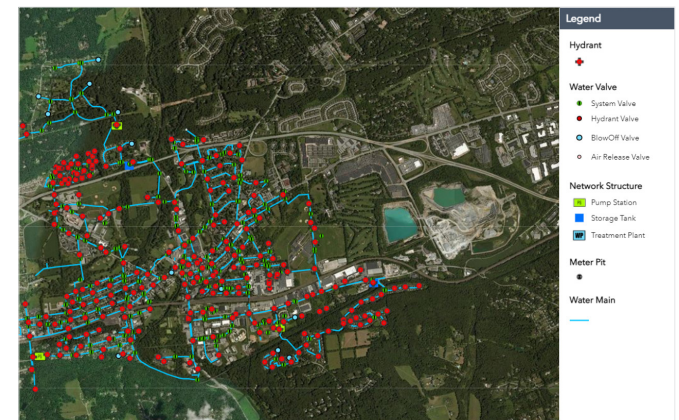
The Downingtown Municipal Water Authority (DMWA) was looking to update their collection of outdated and incomplete water distribution maps. The Borough of Downingtown is a small community of around 7,000 people in southeastern Pennsylvania. The authority employs several water operators with an extensive background in technology and strong desire to implement a modern GIS program. The DMWA reached out to the Philadelphia EPA Region 3 office about potential GIS mapping technical assistance, which in turn connected DMWA with RCAP's TAPs to see how RCAP could help.

Thanks to new programming available through technical assistance funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), RCAP is working with the system to complete a Global Positioning System (GPS) inventory of the water distribution system. RCAP will provide the authority with a cutting-edge GIS program where they will be capable of viewing and editing their water system maps on any smart phone or mobile device utilizing the ESRI GIS platform. The water operators, field staff, and management at the authority will soon be able to fully leverage a modern and secure GIS solution.



"We're in the process of modernizing our plant. After that our next season will be spent updating our distribution system to allow analysis, control and automation. GIS is critical for us to track our distribution network improvements and will ultimately be a crucial foundation piece to our implementation and operation of centralized control systems. None of this would be possible without RCAP's technical assistance and expertise. Our outlook is excellent."

**Jesse Lavigne, Water Plant Operator**





## Promoting Regional Collaboration as a Strategy to Support Sustainability in Rural Communities

One of RCAP's major strategic programs is regional water and wastewater utility collaboration, also known as regionalization. RCAP defines regionalization as a spectrum of collaborative activities, ranging from the most informal to the most formal of partnerships between communities in the same geographic area. RCAP sees regional collaboration as a potential pathway to enhanced sustainability for small systems, a means to providing additional capacity and resources to ensure improved public and environmental health.

### Type of Regional Collaboration

Increasing Transfer of Responsibility →			
Informal Cooperation	Contractual Assistance	Shared Governance	Ownership Transfer
<p>Work with other systems, but without contractual obligations</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing equipment</li> <li>• Sharing bulk supply purchases</li> <li>• Mutual aid agreements</li> </ul>	<p>Requires a contract, but contract is under systems' control</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contracting operation and management</li> <li>• Outsourcing engineering services</li> <li>• Purchasing water</li> </ul>	<p>Creation of a shared entity by several systems that continue to exist independently (e.g., regional water system)</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing system management</li> <li>• Sharing leadership</li> <li>• Sharing source water</li> <li>• JPA</li> </ul>	<p>Takeover by existing or newly created entity</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquisition and physical interconnection</li> <li>• Acquisition and satellite mgmt</li> <li>• One system transferring ownership to another to become a larger existing system or a new entity</li> </ul>



Graphic adapted by RCAP and RCAC from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency resources



March 10 & 11, 2020  
State College, Pennsylvania

View our [highlight reel](#) of the event

We kicked off FY 2020 with a stakeholder convening in Springfield, Illinois, and in March 2020, RCAP published its community-based research report: *Resiliency Through Water and Wastewater System Partnerships: 10 Lessons from Community Leaders*. The report looked at small community utility partnerships from a rural and tribal perspective. As part of the research roll-out, RCAP hosted a second statewide convening in State College, Pennsylvania. 85 people from across the water industry attended the workshop.

Additional coverage of the work can be found in the Fall 2019 Regionalization issue of [Rural Matters](#).





## A Dedicated, Collaborative Mission to Restore Water for the Holidays in a Small Town in West Virginia

Right before the winter holidays in 2019, before COVID-19 entered the picture in the U.S., RCAP received a distress call from the small town of Davy, located in southern West Virginia, right in the heart of the Appalachians. Their water system has a customer base of 170 and the distribution system is 12 miles of a variety of piping, with very few valves and hydrants. The system had six households without water and another six with minimal pressure. The dedicated and devoted staff of two for the town was delivering water to the customers every day, sometimes twice a day, throughout the outage. The system has “old school” devices called geophones, for leak detection, and they were listening everywhere, in hopes of a Christmas miracle. Unfortunately, they kept coming up dry. Just before the outage began, a private company had performed a separate infrastructure project that ran along three miles of the system without any notice to the town. The town had already repaired a break caused by this project, however this new leak just so happened to be in the same three-mile stretch.

The first obstacle was that they had already canvassed the area in question with no result in their leak detection efforts. The second obstacle was that the town has a limited supply of repair parts and money. RCAP and town staff walked and listened to every foot of line with no luck and no noise present. On the second day, the team located a valve, some pipe, and clamps

to split the three-mile area in half by installing a shut off valve. They were able to acquire some spare parts from the neighboring system that was eight miles away. After the installation of the valve, the team determined the leak was on the latter half, which was good news for the six customers with low pressure - they were now back to full water pressure.

After three days, the team decided to dig up several guard rail posts past the newly installed valve to get an idea of the proximity of the posts to the water line and to get a direct point for noise using RCAP's leak detector. As the crew was digging up the mainline, RCAP took one last stroll down the road with the leak detector, but still didn't hear any noise. However, as the TAP walked back up the hill towards the crew, he got a whiff of chlorine in the air! RCAP had the crew move down to this location and dug up the mainline to find the leak. A guard rail post had severed the three-inch water pipe in half. It had pushed the lower half of the pipe down 12 inches below the other section of the pipe which explained why there was no noise during the search. The repairs were made using parts borrowed from the same neighboring system – the City of Welch. The residents had safe drinking water just in time for the holidays thanks to the efforts and collaboration of RCAP, the Town of Davy, and the nearby City of Welch. This is a great example of information regional collaboration, or regionalization as we call it.





## Protecting Public and Environmental Health in Rural America through a New Prescription Take-Back Program

In recent years, rural communities across the U.S. have struggled with the devastating effects of the opioid epidemic. To do our part to help find and implement solutions with the communities we work with, thanks to a program supported by USDA, RCAP developed a prescription take-back program - distributing thousands of prescription disposal bags across the country. The goal of this program is to keep opioids, and prescription drugs more generally, out of our water and wastewater systems and our solid waste stream to protect both public and environmental health. This program has been especially successful in [Alaska](#) and [Puerto Rico](#) as demonstrated by the videos that were created for these communities specifically, and speak to the unique challenges and cultural needs of these areas.



## Beyond Water – Supporting Economic Development in Rural Communities

RCAP's holistic approach to serving communities means that our work doesn't stop with water and wastewater access. Rural regions also need economic opportunity which requires intentional, focused work around economic development. The deep knowledge and experience our TAPs have in working with rural and tribal communities provides a clear pathway to economic development work. This work is focused on embedding wealth locally and utilizing local assets to ensure communities plan and leverage opportunities that benefit the region.

The Rural Economic Development Innovation (REDI) initiative is a cooperative agreement that RCAP has had with USDA's Innovation Center since 2018 that will continue through September 2021. The program has helped 29 communities develop economic plans to better support rural quality of life through the WealthWorks model. WealthWorks is an economic development approach centered on embedding wealth locally. The program enables local, rural leaders to assess their community's assets, engage local stakeholders, especially those who are financially insecure, and create new opportunities by connecting these assets to regional market demand.

The Genesee Valley Project in New York has been an exemplary project for what it means to follow the WealthWorks approach. Nicole Manapol, the REDI Network Coordinator for this project, worked with a local initiative made up of 70 partners across the Genesee Valley region to help identify existing assets to reinvest in and attract tourists to spur economic growth.




## Our Partners

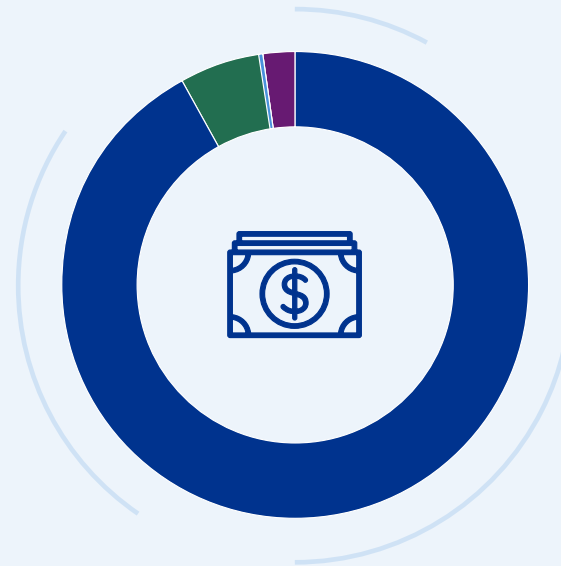
120Water  
American Bankers Association  
American Public Works Association  
American Water Works Association  
Appalachian Regional Commission  
Arizona State University  
Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group  
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies  
Association of State Drinking Water Administrators  
Bipartisan Policy Center  
Brookings Institute  
California State University – Chico  
Community Roots  
Center on Rural Innovation  
Central Appalachian Network  
Chris Long Foundation  
CoBank  
Council of Infrastructure Financing Authorities  
Columbia University-Earth Institute  
Duke University-Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions  
Esri  
EveryLibrary  
Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation  
Farm Credit  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis  
Federal Reserve Board  
Georgetown University  
Heartland Forward  
Housing Assistance Council  
International Economic Development Council  
Inter Tribal Council of Arizona  
Land O'Lakes  
LOR Foundation  
Misfit  
Moonshot Missions  
Native Americans in Philanthropy  
National Association of Clean Water Agencies  
National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship  
National Association of Counties  
National Association of Development Organizations  
National Association of Regional Councils  
National Association of Water Companies  
National Center for Resource Development  
National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA  
National Environmental Health Association  
National Governors Association  
National Groundwater Association  
National League of Cities  
National Rural Water Association  
Network Kansas  
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development  
Pacific Institute  
Partners for Rural Transformation  
Pennsylvania State University  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
Rogue Water Lab  
Rural Assembly  
Rural Development Initiatives  
Rural LISC  
Rural Youth Project  
Small Business Majority  
Smithsonian Institution  
Solid Waste Association of North America  
Spring Point Partners  
Texas A&M University  
The Recycling Partnership  
The United States Conference of Mayors  
The Water Research Foundation  
United States Chamber of Commerce  
United States Department of Agriculture  
United States Economic Development Administration  
United States Environmental Protection Agency  
University of Illinois Urbana- Champaign — Illinois State Water Survey and WaterOperator.org  
University of Kentucky  
University of Rhode Island  
Urban Institute  
Ureeka  
US Water Alliance  
Virginia Tech University  
Water and Wastewater Equipment Manufacturers Association  
Water Environment Federation  
Water Finance Exchange  
Water Foundation  
WaterReuse  
Water Systems Council  
Xylem Watermark






# Financials

## Revenue

	Federal Grants	91%
	Private Grants	6%
	Other Revenue	1%
	In-kind	2%



## Expenses

	Programs	98%
	Management & General	1%
	Development	1%







## Rural Community Assistance Partnership

1725 I St NW

Suite 225

Washington, DC 20006

(202) 408-1273

