

Invest in Water, Strengthen America's Workforce

The People Behind the Systems

Behind every pipe and pump are skilled professionals who keep water safe and reliable. The U.S. water sector directly employs over 2 million people in jobs ranging from plant operators to construction laborers to engineers. Yet, the workforce faces a looming challenge: a large share is approaching retirement age, and too few younger workers are stepping in.

Ripple Effects and Opportunities

Closing the nation's water infrastructure investment gap is not only about systems — it is about people. Doing so over a 20-year period would directly support over **396,000 jobs per year** in water infrastructure and indirectly support more than **950,000 jobs per year** through supply chains and household spending. Closing the water O&M gap simultaneously brings these numbers to **472,000 jobs per year** and **1.4 million total jobs per year** respectively.

These jobs are local. Unlike many sectors, they cannot be offshored, and every state across the country stands to gain—with some states set to realize more than 150,000 new jobs from closing the investment gap.

TODAY'S WATER WORKFORCE

More than 25% of the workforce is 55+ years old, while only 5% are 20-24.

Many small systems still rely on *volunteer operators*, often nearing retirement themselves.

A wave of retirements could *drain critical institutional knowledge* just when infrastructure needs are greatest.

State	Jobs Supported or Created through Investment as Percent of State Workforce	Employment Impact (Total Number of Jobs Supported or Created)
West Virginia	2.1%	14,319
Louisiana	1.7%	33,305
Vermont	1.7%	5,099
Iowa	1.6%	24,559
New Hampshire	1.5%	10,273
New Mexico	1.5%	12,928
Maine	1.4%	9,355
Arkansas	1.4%	17,821
Georgia	1.4%	65,774
Mississippi	1.3%	15,444

Table 11 (from *The Economic Benefits of Investing in Water Infrastructure*, pg. 42):
Top Ten States by Percentage of Jobs Supported or Created by Meeting the Water Infrastructure Funding Needs

Quality Jobs, Accessible Pathways

Water jobs are not just plentiful; they are good jobs. Eight of the top ten occupations supported by water infrastructure investment pay above the national median personal income. Managers and project specialists average over **\$100,000/year**. Operators, laborers, and technicians also earn wages higher than the national average.

Water careers also tend to have low barriers to entry. Most training programs take less than two years to complete, and many require less than one year. After the IIJA passed, completions of water workforce programs rose by nearly 17% in a single year. With continued investment, the water sector could be a launchpad for workers at all stages of life.

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A Resilient Sector

During the Great Recession, U.S. unemployment neared 10%. In the water sector, it never rose above 5%. Since 2014, the total water workforce has grown nearly 28%, double the pace of the national workforce. This is a healthy, expanding job market that also offers resilience in downturns.

At the Source

Investing in water is investing in America's workforce. It opens doors to stable, family-sustaining careers while meeting urgent national needs. With targeted training and sustained funding, we can build a workforce ready to serve communities for generations.

Read the full report, *The Economic Benefits of Investing in Water Infrastructure*, at www.thevalueofwater.org

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Unemployment in the water sector never rose above 5% during the Great Recession.”

Figure 19 (from *The Economic Benefits of Investing in Water Infrastructure*, pg. 43):
Percent Difference in Wages for Water Sector Workers vs All Workers by State

