

UNITED STATES WASH SECTOR DATABASE



Building a strong coalition to address domestic
Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WaSH)



THE PROBLEM

The U.S. lacks a robust, domestic WaSH sector

The U.S. Water Gap

In the United States, more than 2.2 million people live without access to running water and sanitation, and at least 44 million people are serviced with water that is unsafe to drink.¹ Our 2019 study, [Closing the Water Access Gap in the United States: An National Action Plan](#) found that race is the strongest predictor of water and sanitation access, and poverty is a persistent obstacle in overcoming these issues. Despite being a high-income country, households across the U.S.—from the Navajo Nation to rural Appalachia—still don't have running water.

A Fragmented Coalition

In order to close the Water Gap during our lifetimes, the U.S. needs a more robust WaSH sector. While there are many diverse actors working to improve domestic water and sanitation access in their own ways, they do not form a well-structured coalition or community of practice, as is often the case in other countries. The international WaSH sector has been successful in improving water access for over 2.6 billion people across the globe, in large part due to its well-developed network of implementers, funders, community champions, and government agencies working collaboratively towards shared goals, like SDG 6.² Those working on WaSH issues in the U.S. lack this level of connective tissue, leading to fragmentation, inefficiency, knowledge silos, and gaps in service delivery.

The Promise of Collaboration

Closing America's Water Gap will be impossible until there's a dedicated community of practice—working alongside impacted communities—to lead this charge. By coordinating efforts and combining resources, a domestic WaSH Sector can: boost critical public awareness and media attention, coordinate data collection and answer complicated questions, align their political advocacy to motivate government action, expand public and philanthropic funding, collaborate on projects that tangibly improve access, and coordinate emergency response (e.g., COVID-19). Most importantly, a robust WaSH-sector provides resources and visibility to impacted communities that are not currently centered in policy-making and public funding.



What is WaSH?

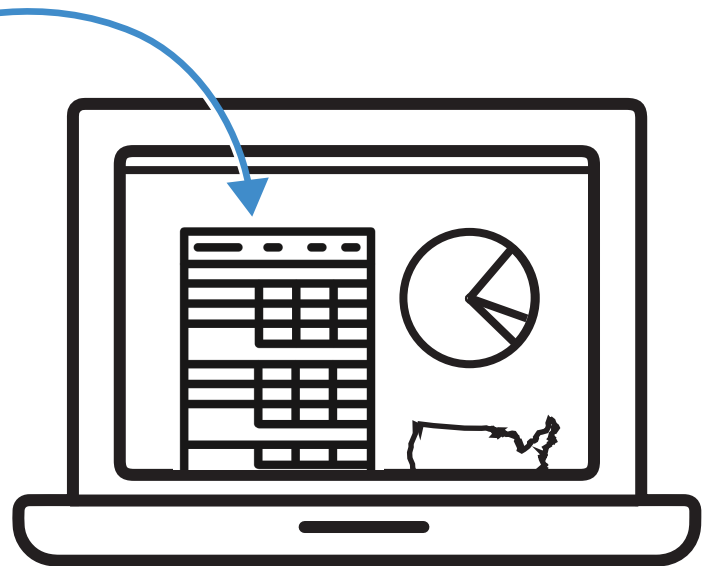
WaSH (or WASH) is an acronym that stands for "water, sanitation and hygiene". Universal, affordable and sustainable access to WaSH is a key public health and equity issue and is the focus of UN Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6).

A SOLUTION

A public database of U.S. WaSH contributors

First Step toward Sector-Building

This open-source database of key contributors in the domestic water and sanitation space is a critical first step toward building a more robust U.S. WaSH sector. We contacted more than 150 entities to complete a survey or interview to learn about their unique WaSH approach and how it could contribute to a cohesive U.S. sector. We then compiled and synthesized this information to create a database which we made publicly available to inform and strengthen engagement with others operating within the sector. Comprising WaSH implementers in every region of the U.S. and in both urban and rural contexts, this comprehensive database considers the unique contribution each provides, including the nature of their work, region of operation, intended beneficiaries, and more.



An Ever-Growing Resource

This database will help build a community of practice among existing entities and act as an entry point for organizations wishing to explore domestic programs—including U.S.-based global WaSH organizations seeking to add a local dimension to their work. We hope it fosters knowledge-sharing, strategic coordination, and most importantly, collaboration to bring impacted Americans the clean, running water we all deserve. In forming a strong community of practice, we believe it is necessary to include stakeholders across a wide spectrum of roles and operating methods. DigDeep will maintain the database by updating contact information and adding new contributors, ensuring that it remains a relevant resource. You can access the database and find contact information here:

<https://www.digdeep.org/wash-sector>

What is a community of practice?



A community of practice is “a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”³

BUILDING THE DATABASE

Methodology

1

Identify groups across the United States that address WaSH.



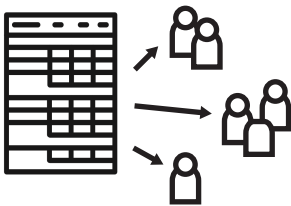
2

Gather information on each group through surveys & interviews.



3

Compile all information in an online database and share widely.



4

Ensure data remains up-to-date and add/remove contributors as needed.



Explanation of Terms

Entity

The type of group; includes government agencies, non-governmental organizations (e.g., non-profits), networks & collaboratives, companies, foundations, academic institutions, think tanks, and community groups.

Region

The geographic area in which WaSH initiatives are implemented; includes regions of the U.S. (e.g., New England) as well as designations for work nationwide, on Tribal Land, and in U.S. territories.

Approach

How WaSH needs are addressed; includes approaches such as technical assistance, direct service, funding, political & legal advocacy, communications, community organizing, capacity building & education, and research & development.

Focus

What aspect of WaSH is addressed; includes drinking water, wastewater, law/policy, affordability, public health, technology advancement, equity, and others.

Beneficiary

Who receives WaSH support; includes households, impacted communities, implementing organizations, state & local governments, utilities, the general public, and others.

DATABASE STATISTICS

As of database launch: September 14, 2021

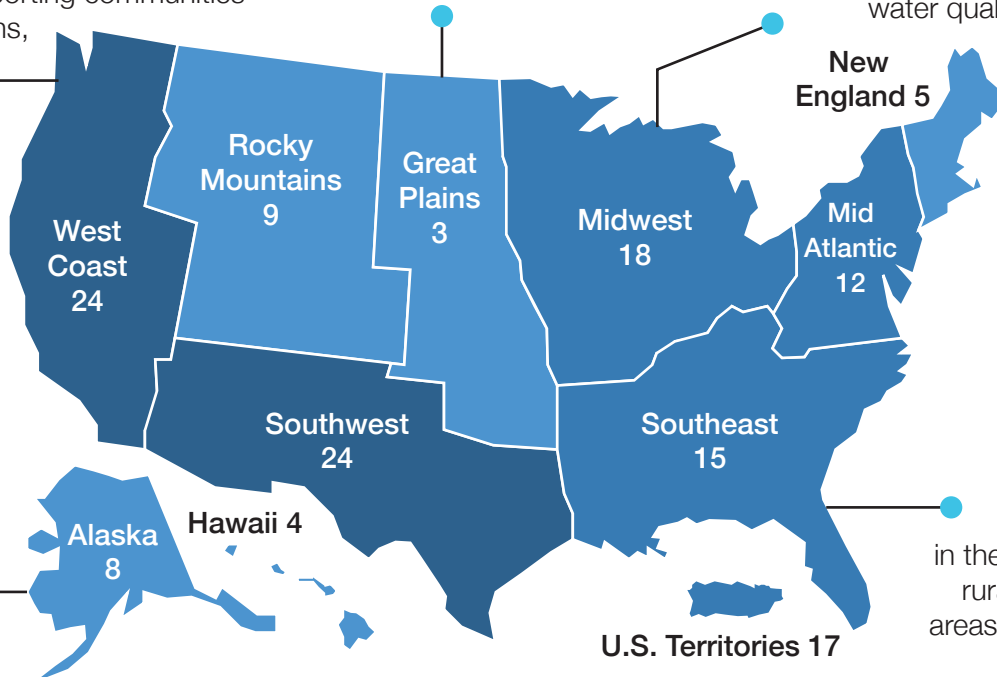
CONTRIBUTORS BY REGION

34% of contributors are concentrated in the West Coast & Southwest - supporting communities such as Tribal Nations, Colonias, rural communities in CA's Central Valley, and un-housed persons in urban areas.

We found few contributors within the Great Plains region.

Over 60% of contributors in the Midwest support communities such as Chicago, Detroit, and Flint in advocating for improved water quality and affordability.

The majority of contributors in Alaska develop climate- and culturally-appropriate WaSH solutions with Alaska Natives.



Nearly 60% of contributors do work nationwide.

At least 2/3 of contributors in the Southeast serve rural communities in areas such as Alabama and Appalachia.

CONTRIBUTORS BY APPROACH

The largest number of contributors engage in capacity building & education, which includes a range of approaches from workforce development to community education.

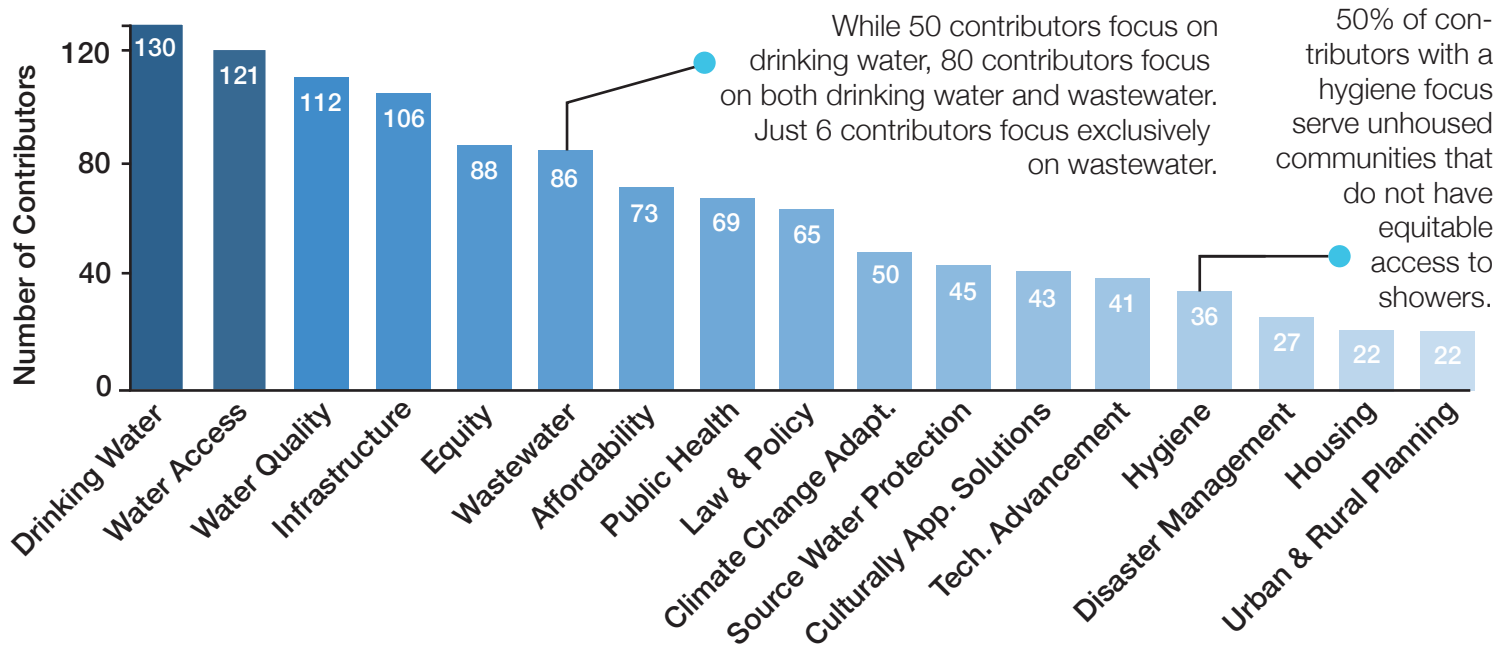
The fewest number of organizations engage in direct service, including "infrastructure implementation" which only 19 contributors (13%) take as an approach.



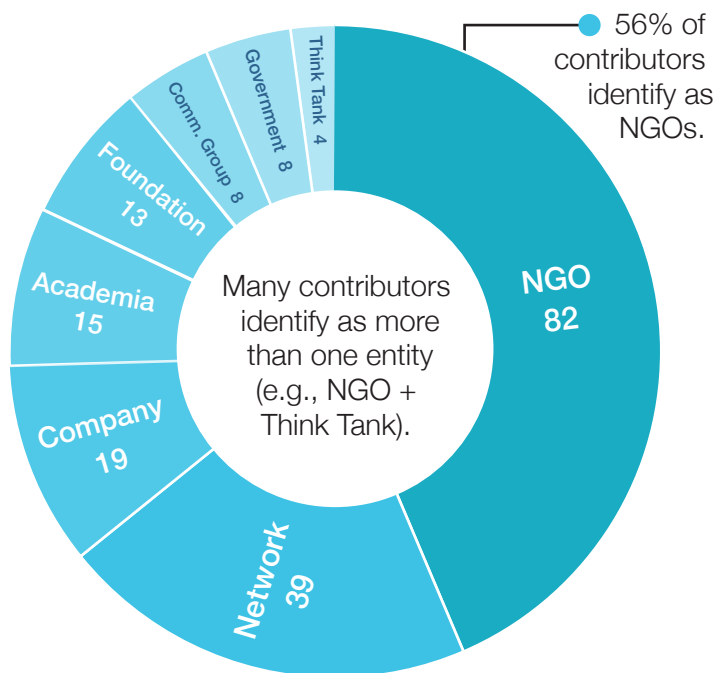
DATABASE STATISTICS

As of database launch: September 14, 2021

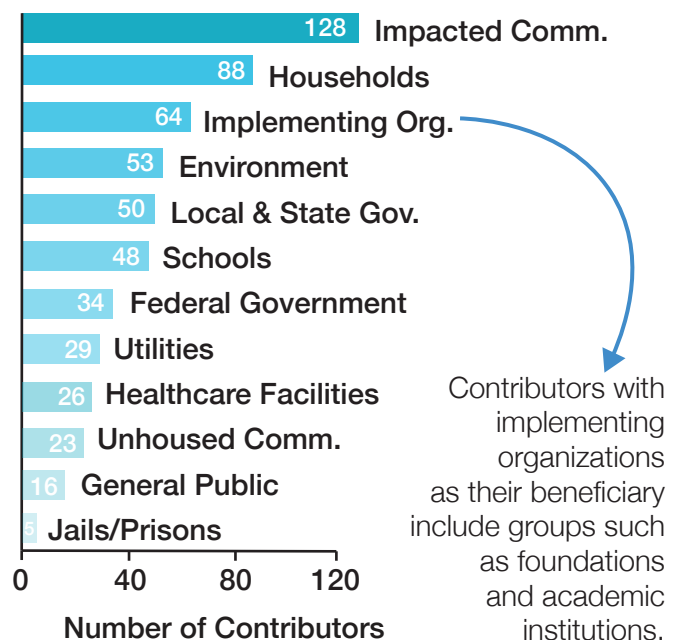
CONTRIBUTORS BY FOCUS



Contributors by ENTITY

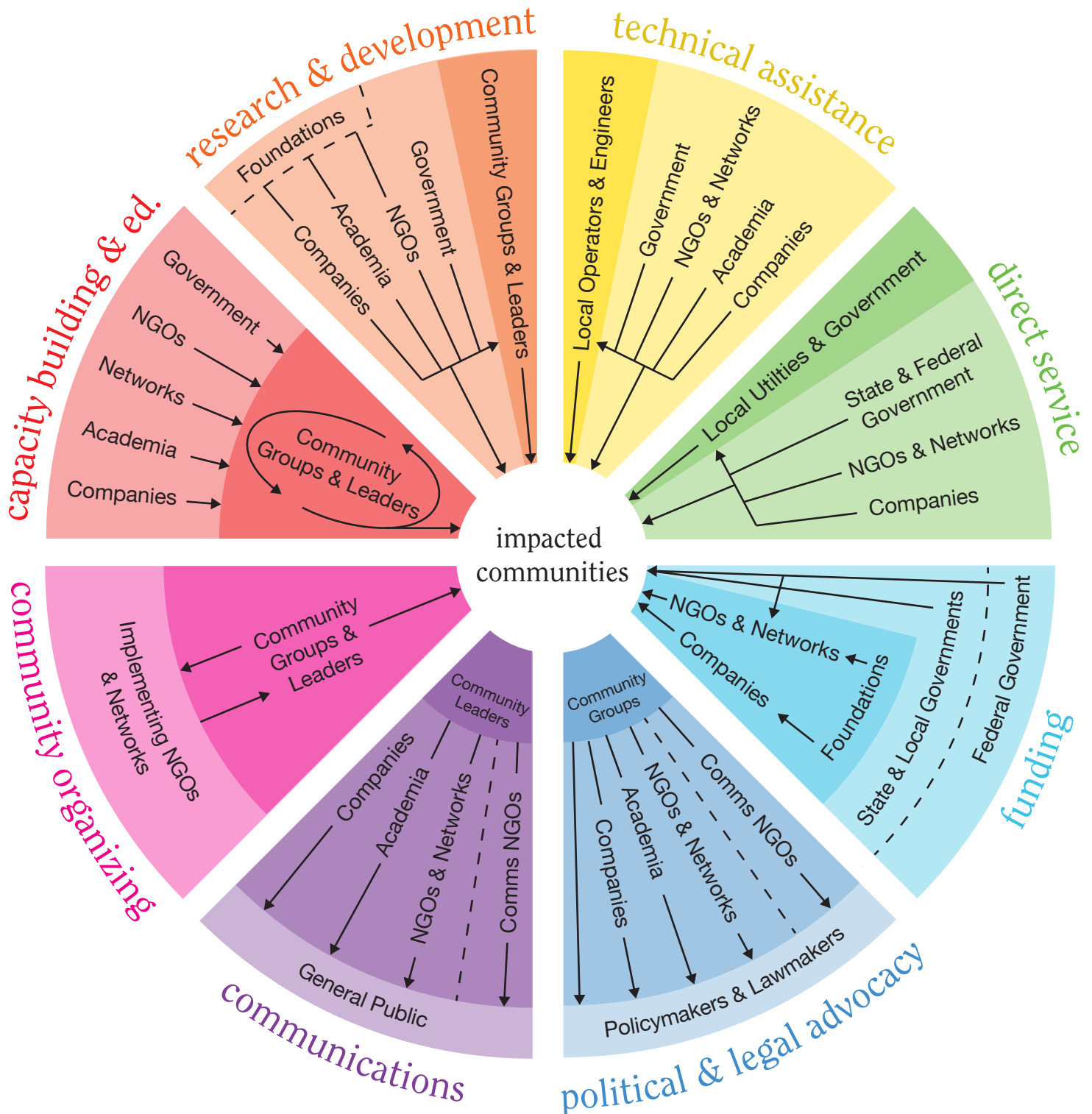


Contributors by BENEFICIARY



U.S. WASH STAKEHOLDER MAP

Approaches to U.S. WaSH Support



STAKEHOLDER MAP: EXPLAINED

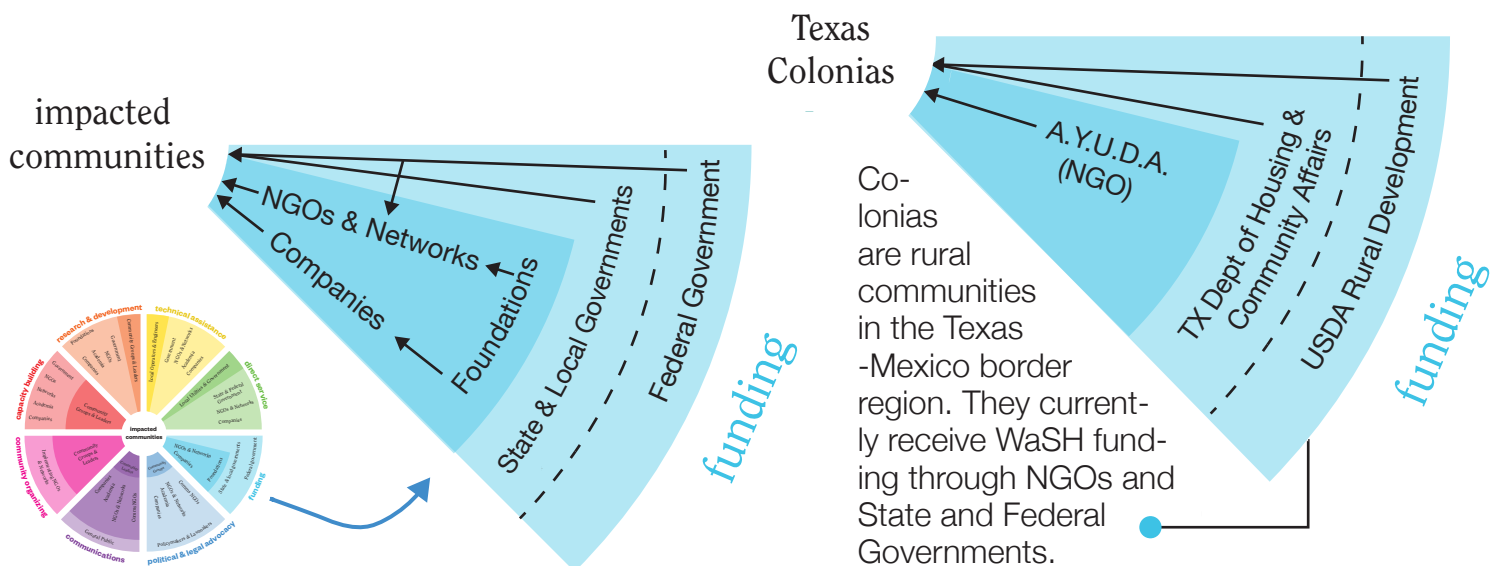
Pathways of Support

While the U.S. WaSH sector is not yet a well-structured coalition, dozens of contributors are already channeling support to impacted communities across the country. In analyzing the database information, we found that this support flows through established pathways, regardless the region or contributors involved. We have mapped these support pathways to better understand how the nascent sector currently addresses U.S. WaSH needs. Mapping this support reveals areas of unmet need and opportunities for collaboration, and can serve as a resource for new organizations wishing to enter the sector.

Reading the Stakeholder Map

On the stakeholder map, each color represents a different Approach from the database (Note: “workforce development” is categorized as capacity building & education, and “infrastructure implementation” and “services & utilities” are categorized as direct services). Many contributors engage in multiple Approaches. Each colored Approach section indicates the typical contributor(s) by entity type, and the arrows show the direction of support, whether flowing toward impacted communities (for example, as funding) or away from impacted communities (for example, as political and legal advocacy). The color shading within each Approach indicates subgroups of contributors.

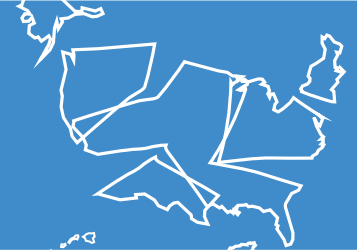
Approach Example: Funding



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1.

While there are many contributors to U.S. WaSH, they do not form a well-structured coalition.



Many contributors did not identify as “WaSH organizations” or see themselves as part of a larger WaSH sector. The consequence of this fragmentation is a significant loss of efficiency, collaboration, and strategic planning needed to solve the U.S. water crisis.

2.

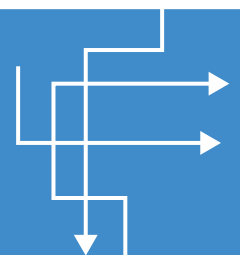
The database reveals collective strengths & weaknesses of an emerging U.S. WaSH sector.



While WaSH contributors are working across the country, this support is not evenly distributed. Analyzing the data reveals programmatically and geographically underserved areas. Those looking to foster sector growth can use this analysis to direct support where it's needed most.

3.

WaSH support to impacted communities flows through ingrained paths that can be mapped.



While a robust U.S. WaSH sector does not yet exist, we observed that support (e.g., funding, engineering) flows between contributors through established pathways, regardless of geographic region. The stakeholder map can direct impacted communities toward avenues of potential partnership and support.

CITATIONS

Database website:
digdeep.org/wash-sector

Questions? Contact database@digdeep.org

1. DigDeep & U.S. Water Alliance . (2019). Closing the Water Access Gap in the United States: A National Action Plan. Retrieved from http://uswateralliance.org/sites/uswateralliance.org/files/publications/Closing%20the%20Water%20Access%20Gap%20in%20the%20United%20States_DIGITAL.pdf
2. McGraw, G. (2020, June 29). The United States Needs Its Own WASH Sector. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Retrieved from <https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/columns/ssir-pnd/the-united-states-needs-its-own-wash-sector>
3. Wenger-Trayner, E., & Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015, April 15). Communities of practice: a brief introduction. Retrieved from <https://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/07-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf>

Icon acknowledgement: Many of the icons used in this report were used directly or altered from AutoDraw by Google Creative Lab, <https://www.autodraw.com/>



DIGDEEP