

North Central Texas  
Council of Governments

# Targeting Water Affordability Challenges with Customer Assistance Programs

NCTCOG Webinar  
April 10, 2025

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*This project was funded by  
the U.S. Environmental  
Protection Agency through  
the Texas Commission on  
Environmental Quality.*

# Webinar Procedures

- The webinar is being recorded and will be posted to NCTCOG's website under the green banner called "Webinars" here:  
<https://www.nctcog.org/envir/natural-resources/water-resources>
- If you submitted an RSVP for this webinar, you will receive an email with the presentation slides and a link to the recording. If you did not RSVP and would like these webinar materials, please email [cbuckley@nctcog.org](mailto:cbuckley@nctcog.org).
- Please keep your microphone on mute until the Question-and-Answer period at the end of the presentations.
- Thank you!

## Welcome and Introduction of Speakers

# Webinar Agenda

- **“Addressing Unaffordable Water Bills Across the Nation”** - Erica DePalma
- **“Operation WaterShare”** - Cory Burns
- **“City of Arlington Water Utilities Care and Share Program”** - Medria Browhow
- **“Customer Assistance”** - Dean VanHorne
- Time for Q & A after the presentations

# Speaker Introduction

**Erica DePalma**

Program Manager, US Water  
Alliance



The US Water Alliance is a cross-sector membership organization that advances a One Water future for all.

A photograph of three people (two men and one woman) sitting in a meeting, looking at a laptop screen. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

## EDUCATE.

We educate the nation on the true value of water and engage an expanding base of One Water champions through mutual discovery, learning, and communications.

A photograph of a large water wheel and industrial infrastructure, possibly a dam or water treatment plant, with a blue tint overlay.

## INITIATE.

We initiate new approaches and solutions to our most pressing water challenges, leveraging powerful partnerships, authentic engagement, and cultural strategies to advance One Water.

A photograph of a hand writing on a notepad with a pen, with a coffee cup and other items on a desk in the background. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

## ACCELERATE.

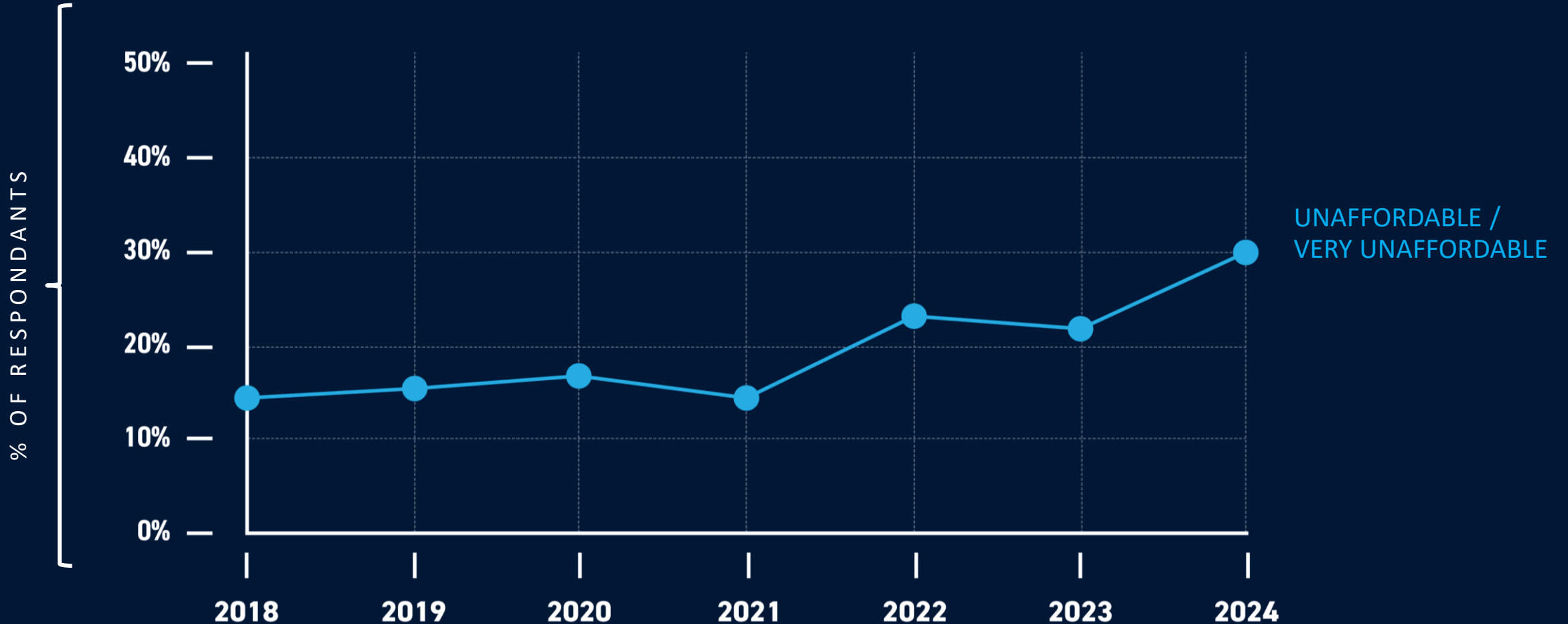
We accelerate the adoption and scaling of the mindset, practices, and policies behind the One Water approach to advance a better quality of life for all.

A photograph of a man and a woman standing at a podium, smiling. The podium has a sign that says "US WATER PRIZE 2022". The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

## CELEBRATE.

We celebrate what works to advance the One Water movement and solutions to inspire and spread innovation in water system transformation.

# WATER SERVICES ARE INCREASINGLY UNAFFORDABLE



*Public perception of the affordability of water services (water, wastewater, and stormwater) between 2018 and 2024.*

*When water is safe, reliable, and  
affordable - communities thrive.*



## ***Water Affordability:***

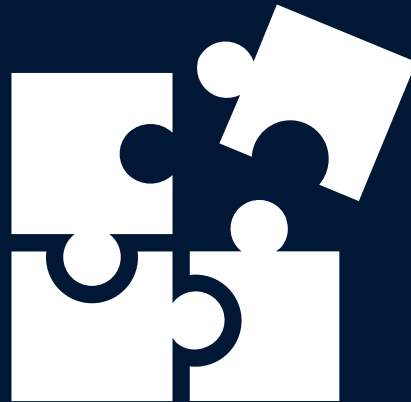
*means that all residents can pay for water and wastewater services without having to forgo or cut back on other necessary expenses, and that the utility can cover costs to meet their communities' essential needs.*





## ***Water Assistance:***

*usually involves temporarily reducing bills and/or relieving debt for low-income households that meet a defined eligibility criterion and apply for support.*



# Water Equity Network



(ABOVE: US WATER ALLIANCE NETWORK, INCLUSIVE OF ALL WATER EQUITY NETWORK MEMBER CITIES)

1. Seattle, WA	8. Dallas, TX	15. Richfield, MN	22. Jackson, MS	29. Cleveland, OH	36. Trenton, NJ	41. Washington, DC
2. San Francisco, CA	9. Houston, TX	16. Metropolitan Council, MN	23. New Orleans, LA	30. Charlotte, NC	37. Camden, NJ	42. Prince William County, VA
3. Tucson, AZ	10. Galveston, TX	17. Bloomington, MN	24. Louisville, KY	31. Pittsburgh, PA	38. Baltimore, MD	43. Richmond, VA
4. Fort Collins, CO	11. Johnson County, KS	18. St. Paul, MN	25. Cincinnati, OH	32. Buffalo, NY	39. Prince George's & Montgomery Counties, MD	44. Chesapeake Region, VA
5. Denver, CO	12. Kansas City, MO	19. Little Rock, AR	26. Columbus, OH	33. Reading, PA	40. Alexandria, VA	45. Raleigh, NC
6. San Antonio, TX	13. Des Moines, IA	20. Milwaukee, WI	27. Detroit, MI	34. Allentown, PA		46. Wake County, NC
7. Austin, TX	14. Cedar Rapids, IA	21. Chicago, IL	28. Atlanta, GA	35. Philadelphia, PA	47. Wilmington, NC	

**Water equity occurs when all communities have access to clean, safe, affordable drinking water and wastewater services; are resilient in the face of floods, drought, and other climate risks; have a role in decision-making processes related to water management in their communities; and share in the economic, social, and environmental benefits of water systems.**



# The Three Pillars of Water Equity



## PILLAR ONE

Ensure all people have access to clean, safe, affordable water service



## PILLAR TWO

Maximize the community and economic benefits of water infrastructure investment



## PILLAR THREE

Foster community resilience in the face of a changing climate



# Water Equity Network Affordability Taskforce

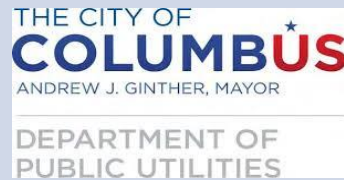
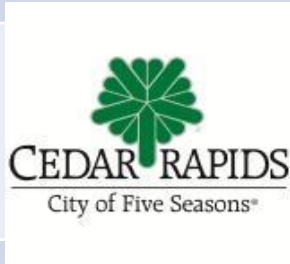


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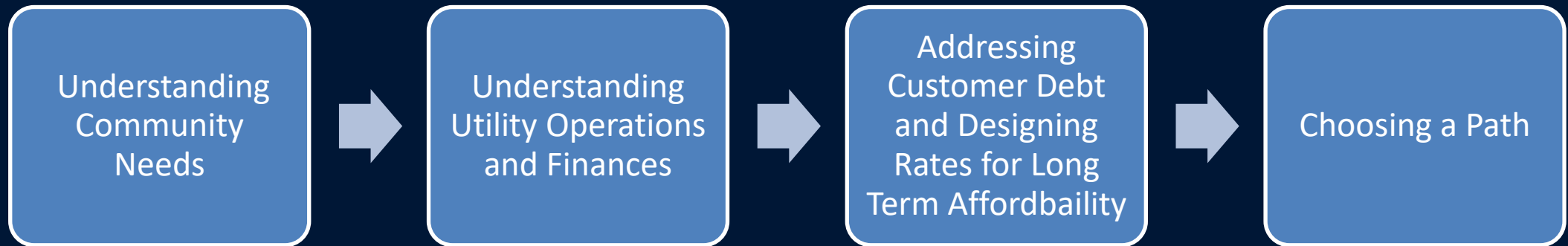
# Utility

# Community Partners



VEAP





# Understanding Columbus at a Glance: Demographics

**\$62,350**

median household  
income

**31% of households**

earning between \$50K-  
\$100K



## Largest Employers



Nationwide®



J.P.Morgan



Huntington



OhioHealth

amazon



HONDA



CardinalHealth

Lbrands

**9.9%**

of basic water and sewer costs  
to the average disposable  
household income for  
customers in the 20th income  
percentile

**18.3%**

persons below poverty line

**3.3%**

unemployment  
rate



**22 hours**

hours of work at minimum wage  
required to pay monthly  
water/sewer/  
stormwater bill



# Portland, OR

## Monthly low-income living costs

**For a household of two parents and two kids**

Expense	Cost	Annual
Housing	\$1,859	\$22,308
Food	\$1,170	\$14,040
Childcare for two kids	\$1,724	\$20,688
Transportation	\$1,446	\$17,352
Energy	\$141	\$1,692
Phone	\$100	\$1,200
Internet	\$60-66	\$760
Water, sewer, stormwater	\$80-135	\$1,290
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$6,641</b>	<b>\$79,692</b>

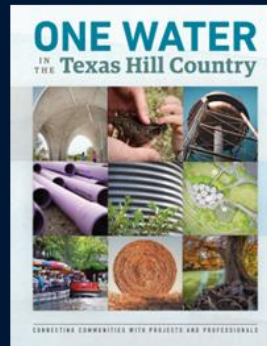
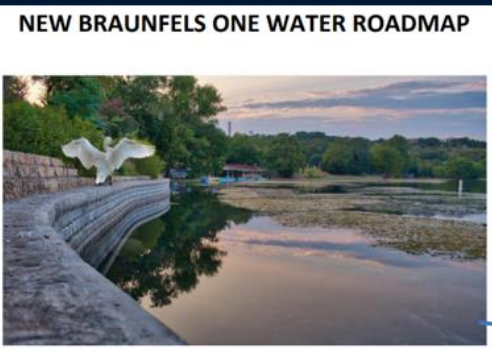
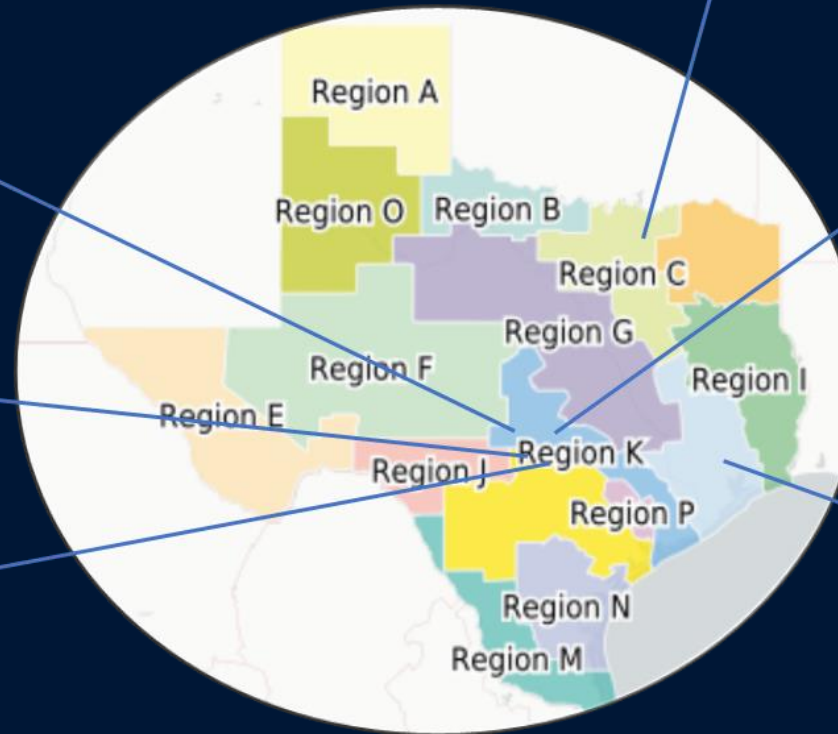
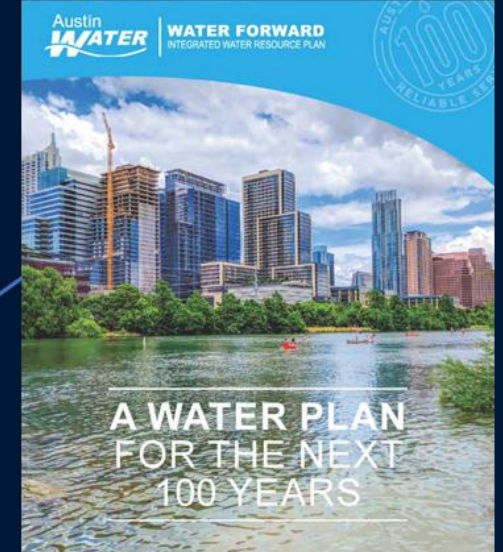
- Hours at minimum wage to cover living expenses
- Portland minimum wage \$15.95/hour
- $\$6,480 / \$15.95 = 416.36$  hours
- 52.05 full time days

# One Water in Texas

Meeting Key One Water challenges across the state

“Dallas’ One Water system will allow the City to manage watersheds, water resources, and water facilities in a more environmentally, economically and socially beneficial manner.”

T.C. Broadnax, Dallas City Manager



## CITY OF HOUSTON ONE WATER PLAN

Multi-phased, Multi-Year Project

Provide services that are:

- affordable
- reliable
- resilient
- sustainable

Development of Tools & an Equity Roadmap for a One Water Program

Integrated Planning for Water Systems





# Join our Texas One Water Mailing List!

## Opportunities Include:

- Quarterly virtual TX One Water Gatherings
- Invitations to future in-person One Water events
  - Texas Delegation at 2025 One Water Summit
- Access to a growing network of One Water Practitioners



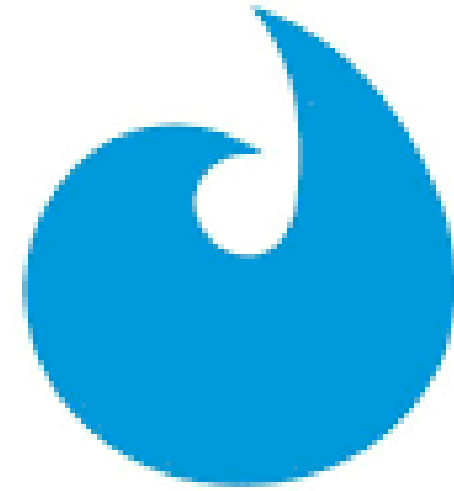
# Speaker Introduction

**Cory Burns**

Manager – Water Utilities, City  
of Dallas



Operation WaterShare



**dallas**  
**water**  
**utilities**

# Operation WaterShare Background

Since 1993, Dallas Water Utilities' Operation WaterShare (OWS) has made a difference in the lives of families who are temporarily unable to pay their water bills. Operation WaterShare is a program that is operated by DWU and administered by the Housing Department. The program has helped sustain hundreds of families who face the possibility of losing water and wastewater services. DWU customers can easily donate money to Operation WaterShare by simply adding a tax-deductible donation to their mailed water bill statement or when they pay online at <https://dallasgo.dallas.gov/>.

Donations can also be made by check and mailed to:

Operation WaterShare 1500 Marilla, 2D South Dallas, Texas,  
75201



# Operation WaterShare Agencies



- Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center (OWS)  
(214) 670-8416
- Senior Citizen Services (OWS)  
(214) 670-5227
- West Dallas Multipurpose Center (OWS)  
( 214) 670-6530.



# Screening of Applicants

- When customers needing assistance contact DWU through 311, Lobby or Credit Services; DWU staff will review customer's account for prior assistance. If customer's account reflects prior Operation Water share assistance within 12 months, customers should seek other assistance options. If customer's account does not reflect previous Operation Water Share assistance within the past 12 months, DWU staff will place a courtesy 30-day dunning lock on the customer's account to allow ample time for OWS to conduct their screening process and notify DWU of the response. DWU will closely review accounts marked "Credit Services" or "Employee" before any action is taken by OWS.
- When customers needing assistance contact OWS directly, OWS should notify DWU the customer's name and account number via the approved communication method, email to [operationwatershare@dallas.gov](mailto:operationwatershare@dallas.gov). If customer's account does not reflect previous Courtesy Lock within the past 12 months, and account status meets eligibility criteria, DWU staff will place a courtesy 30-day dunning lock on the customer's account to allow ample time for OWS to conduct their screening process.
- OWS has agreed to assume responsibility for qualifying applicants seeking assistance based on OWS's standard applicant screening process and criteria along with the following DWU guidelines.







# Fund Use Guidelines

- Operation Water Share funds can be used for only Residential accounts.
- Operation Water Share funds cannot be used for Sprinkler Meter ONLY accounts.
- Operation Water Share funds CANNOT be used to pay for fees and deposits.
- Operation Water Share funds can only be used towards DWU accounts.
- A Termination Notice is not required in order to receive assistance with Operation Water Share funds.
- Operation Water Share funds can only be used one time per year, per household/individual.
- Maximum limit of \$100.00 per customer with management approval.
- Operation Water Share funds can be used to pay past due balances of 30 days or more.
- No pledges should be made on closed accounts.
- Customer must have current identification showing address needing assistance. Name on identification must match name on utility account.
- Pledge can be used on a disconnected account.

OWS's approval is based on the applicant provided information and subject to DWU review of the first three bullets listed above. OWS should notify the applicant that their approval is subject to such review.

OWS agrees to access candidates that may be referred directly by DWU following stated guidelines.

Candidates may apply directly with OWS without prior knowledge of DWU if all other pertinent criteria is met.

Pledges will only be accepted from OWS's provided list of authorized personnel. OWS should provide annual updated list and make updates as needed.



## Donations

- Operation Water Share receives customer donations via City of Dallas invoice payment slips or in person at the Lobby.
- Donations received are placed in an account specified for the sole purpose of use by Operation Water Share program.
- Once a month, by the 10th business day, DWU will send funding availability via email notification to the Supervisor list provided by Housing/Community Services Department.
- Donations are divided among the 3 Housing/Community Service Department locations: **Martin Luther King, Jr. Center, West Dallas Multipurpose Center and Senior Affairs.**
- Housing/Community Service Department locations are referred customers based on needs and qualifications by Water Customer Service.

# Speaker Introduction

**Medria Browhow, MAFM,  
CGFO**

Assistant Director of Water  
Utilities – Business Services,  
City of Arlington



# CITY OF ARLINGTON WATER UTILITIES CARE & SHARE PROGRAM

MEDRIA BROWHOW

WATER UTILITIES ASSISTANT DIRECTOR – BUSINESS SERVICES



# CARE & SHARE PROGRAM GUIDELINES



Available only to Arlington Water Utilities residential customers who are low-income based on HUD guidelines – 80% of city-wide median income



## Current Partnerships

- Catholic Charities
- Mission Arlington
- Arlington Urban Ministries



Provides for up to \$300 in assistance once every 12 months and can cover past due fees



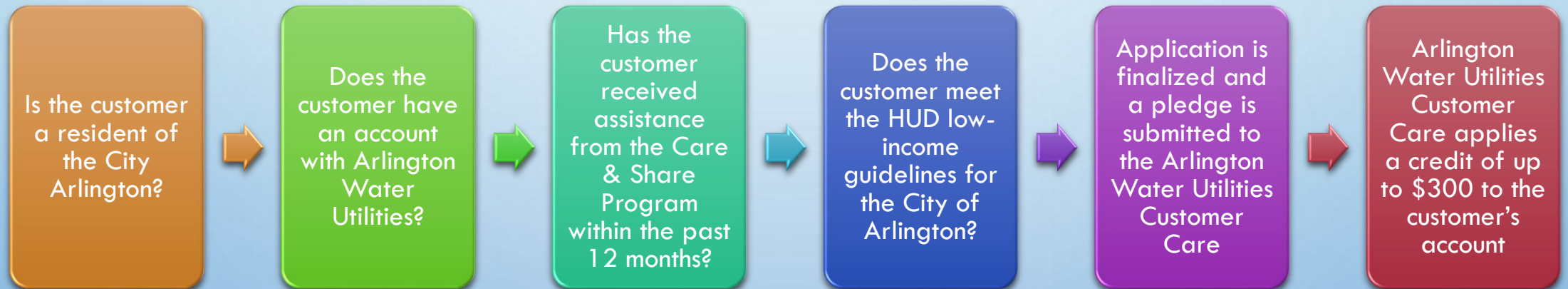
## Funded by

- Donations from customers and jurors
- Cell tower leases
- Gas royalties
- Partnership with Homeserve



- Will not cover
  - Deposit
  - Same day activation
  - After hours reconnect fees
  - Punitive fees

# HOW DOES THE PROCESS WORK?





# FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

2022

- 843 customers assisted
- Total assistance: \$173,744

2023

- 951 customers assisted
- Total assistance: \$194,682

2024

- 622 customers assisted
- Total assistance: \$93,695

The background is a light blue gradient with several realistic water droplets of various sizes scattered across the surface. The droplets have highlights and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. 

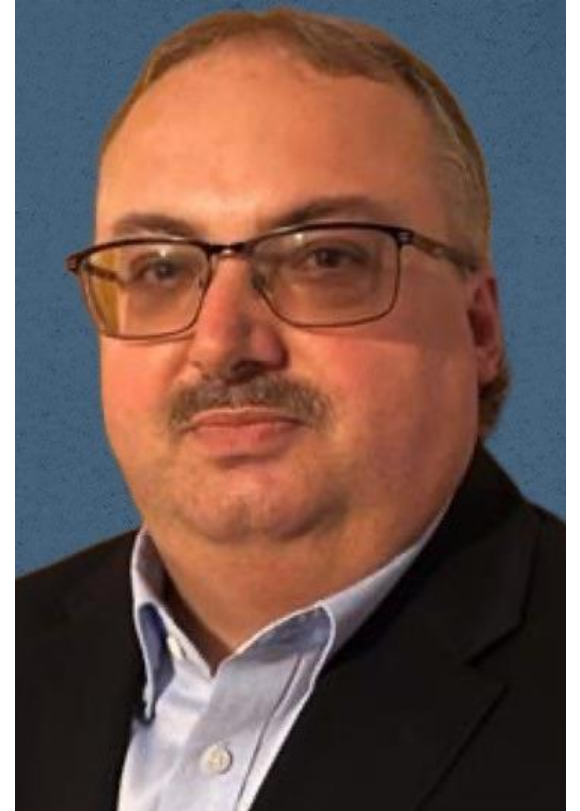
**QUESTIONS?**



# Speaker Introduction

## **Dean VanHorne**

Director of Business  
Performance, Texas Water  
Utilities



*We've got this!*

# Customer Assistance

Dean Van Horne



**Texas  
Water Utilities**

# Programs Offered

- Water Assist - Water
- Water Assist - Sewer
- Elderly Assist – Water
- Elderly Assist – Sewer
- Water Assist Catastrophic Program

- How to Apply – Option #1

- In the following counties:

Bandera  
Comal  
Gillespie  
Grayson

Guadalupe  
Henderson  
Johnson  
Kendall

Medina  
Smith  
Van Zandt

- Contact a partner agency to schedule appointment
    - Community Council of South Central Texas
    - Texoma Council of Governments (TCOG)
    - The Henderson County Help Center
    - Family Resource Center

- How to Apply – Option #2

- Send application directly to TWU
  - Call TWU directly

- Requirements
  - Household income equal or below 150% of the current poverty level

<u>Household Size</u>	<u>2024 Federal Poverty Level</u>	<u>Multiplier</u>	<u>Water Assist Fed. Pov. Level</u>	<u>Water Assist Monthly FPL</u>
1	\$15,060	1.5	\$22,590	\$1,883
2	\$20,440	1.5	\$30,660	\$2,555
3	\$25,820	1.5	\$38,730	\$3,228
4	\$31,200	1.5	\$46,800	\$3,900
5	\$36,580	1.5	\$54,870	\$4,573
6	\$41,960	1.5	\$62,940	\$5,245
7	\$47,340	1.5	\$71,010	\$5,918
8	\$52,720	1.5	\$79,080	\$6,590

- Must be primary residence
- Current photo ID matches address
- Account has been active at least (3) months
  - In good standing
  - Established payment history of at least (3) months
  - Have no delinquencies or disconnects
- Proof of residency for additional household members may be required

- Process Steps

- TWU sends projected funds to partner agencies start of year
- Partner agency tracks applicants by quarter
- End of quarter, partner sends TWU list and check
- TWU applies (3) month credit to accounts
- End of year, funds are reconciled and any administration costs paid

# Elderly Assist Water and Sewer

- How to Apply - Water
  - Program is in Tariff
  - Apply directly w/ TWU
- How to Apply – Sewer
  - Program follows Water Assist process
- Requirements
  - Customer is 65 or older
  - All Water Assist program requirements apply
- Process Steps
  - Water – TWU applies credit to account immediately
    - Re-occurs monthly
  - Sewer - Follows Water Assist program process

# Water Assist Catastrophic Program

- Must be active customer at time of event
- Applicant is customer of record
- Detailed nature of event is provided
- Reason for payment assistance is provided
- Other potential factors:
  - Assistance provided 1-time within a 12 month period
  - Prior payment history
  - Length of time w/ company

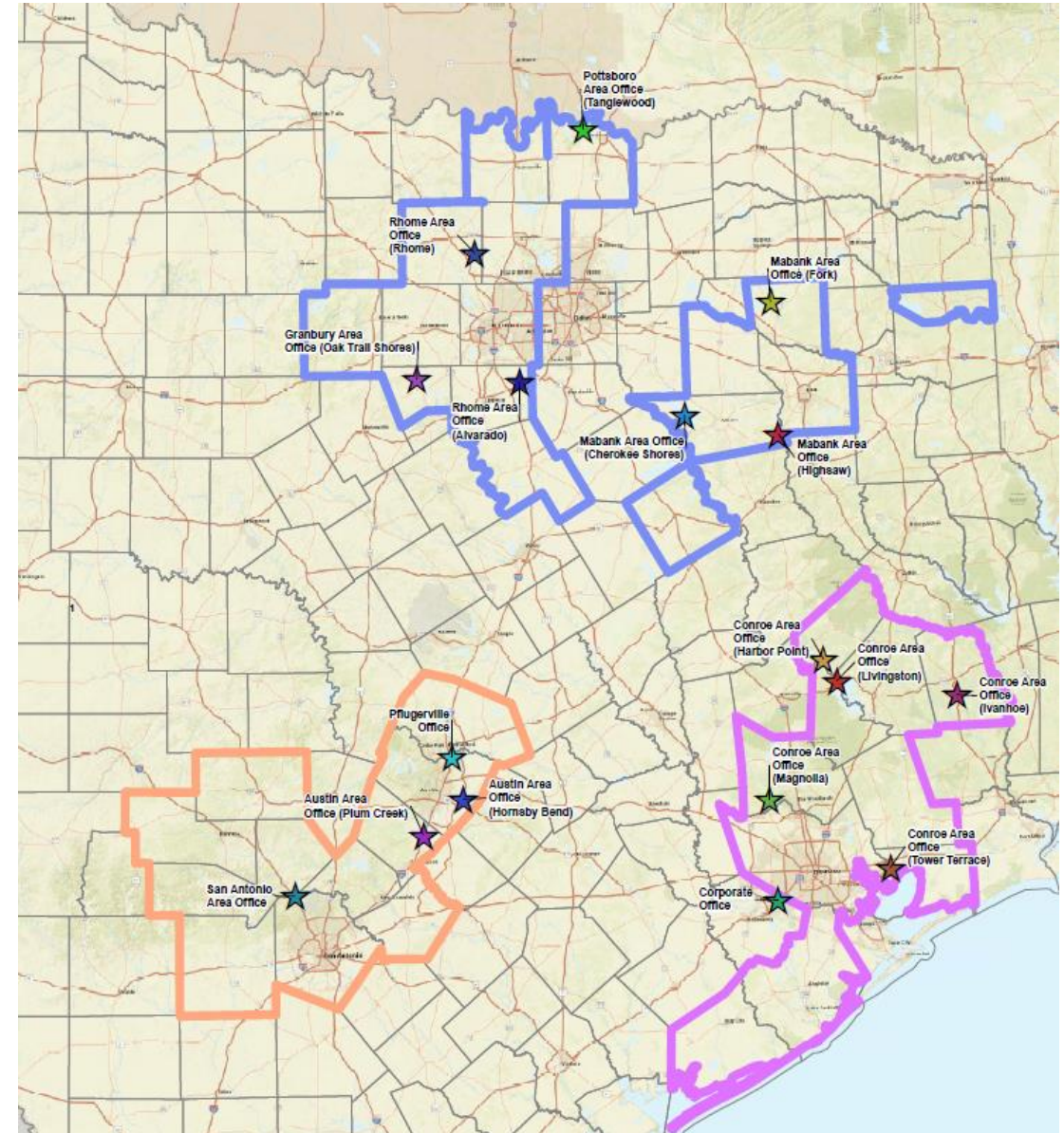


# All Assist Programs - Benefits

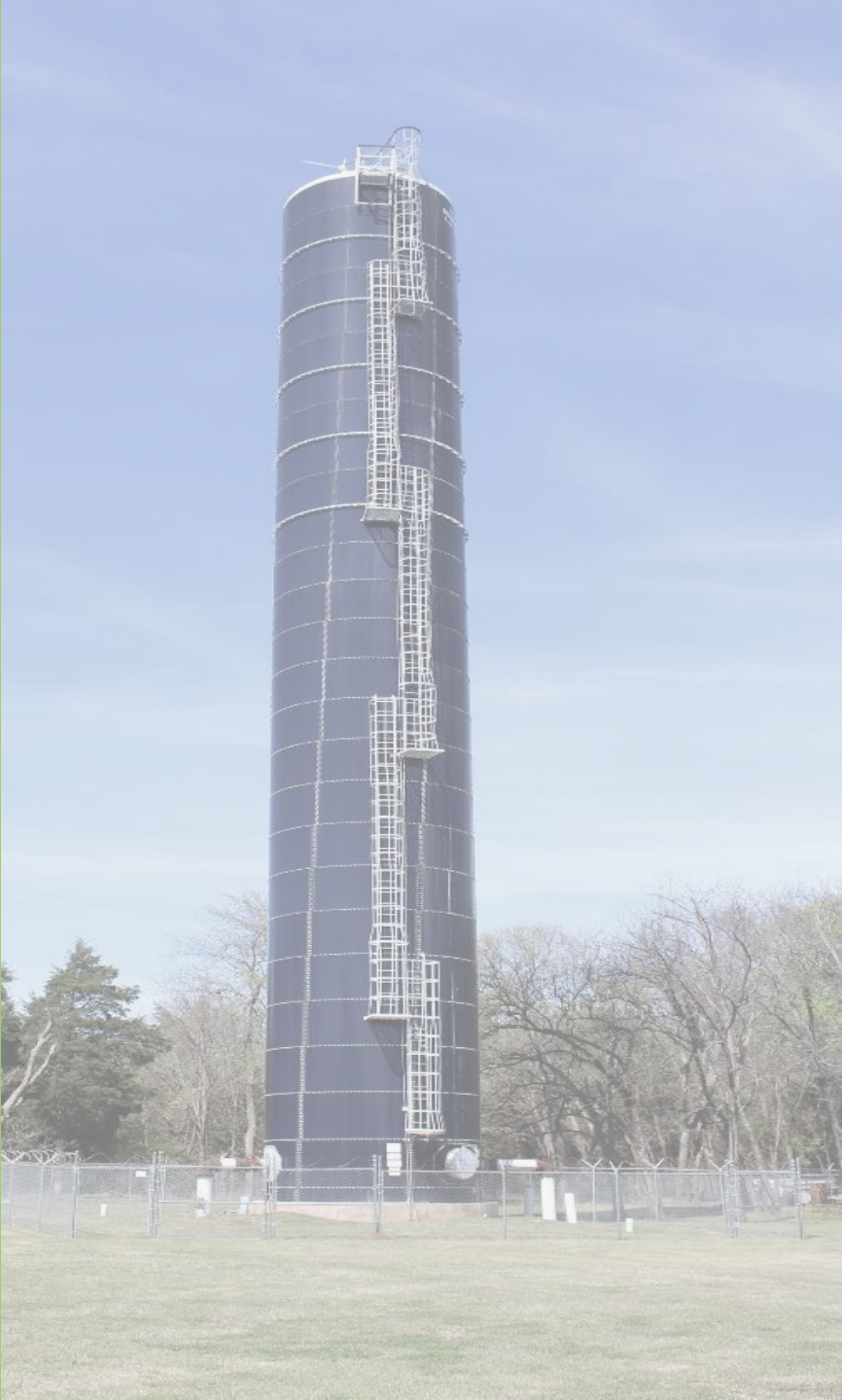
- Account receives monthly credit of \$20 for Water
- Account receives monthly credit of \$20 for Sewer
- Account receives monthly credit of \$40 for Both Water & Sewer
- Account receives 1-time credit of \$100 for Water Assist Catastrophic Program

- Program Challenges

- Self-administered vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> Party
  - Administrative Costs
  - Posting Delays
  - Monthly vs. Quarterly
- Multiple Tariffs
- Service Territory Coverage
  - Limited Partners
- Effective Messaging
- Stigma of income driven programs



- What is next for programs?
  - Review income requirements
    - Recently increased from 125% to 150% of poverty level
  - Review credit amount
    - Flat amount vs. % of average base fee?
  - How to increase participation?
  - Long-term – move to self-administered programs



# Questions?



**Texas  
Water Utilities**

# Questions?



# Webinar Feedback

- Please provide your feedback on today's webinar in this brief survey. Thank you!

[Provide Webinar Feedback Here](#)

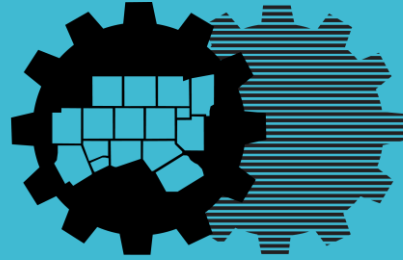


# Water for North Texas Online Library

- Resources related to today's topic and other water-related subjects can be found on the [Water for North Texas Online Library](#)

# Wrap-Up

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# Thank you for attending!

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*This project was funded by  
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Protection Agency through  
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