

New Water Residential Assistance Program Aims to Make Regional Impact



The Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) will administer a new program that aspires to impact the need for water utility assistance within the GLWA service area. With more than 685,000 individuals living in poverty across the region, there has been a notable increase in the need for assistance.

The creation of a Water Residential Assistance Program (WRAP) was identified in the language of the supporting documents outlining the organizational stand-up of the GLWA. The WRAP will receive \$4.5 million in its piloting year as a financial requirement of the GLWA. The program will then receive one-half percent of the GLWA operating revenues each year after. This funding will be used to supplement regional assistance efforts, and to fund the administrative cost of the program.

A WRAP Advisory Group was created to aid in the development of the program. The group included municipal representatives from the City of Detroit, and Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland Counties. In addition to these municipal employees, representatives from seven non-profit organizations volunteered their time and individual expertise to create an effective assistance program for the region. Work teams were created from this collection of individuals to evaluate varying aspects of the

program. The collaborative effort of these groups developed the program framework, focusing on eligibility criteria, forms of assistance provided, performance metrics, and community outreach.

The development of this program proved to be a challenging task as its services would be provided to more than 100 communities within the GLWA service area. Each of these communities differs in their delinquency protocols, further complicating the creation of the program. Additionally, the amount of need varies significantly by community, reinforcing the need for program flexibility.

The WRAP is designed to encourage long term self-sufficiency in two ways: by providing bill payment assistance for those in immediate crisis, and providing water use efficiency tools in the hope of reducing future utility bills. Households with water usage 20% above the regional average will receive a water audit to identify areas where consumption can be reduced. If a leak is discovered that contributes to the high usage, minor plumbing repairs of up to \$1,000 will be provided for home owners. Water use management and conservation information will be provided to every household, along with the opportunity to attend a free conservation education class.



Unemployment, hospitalization and other challenges can quickly change economic conditions for individuals and families. The WRAP is designed to assist low-income customers with their water and sewer bills to maintain service while increasing self-sufficiency through the provision of water conservation measures.

To be eligible for WRAP assistance, a household must have a combined gross income at or below 150% of the federal poverty level, with an account that is past due or at risk of utility disconnection. To receive assistance, individuals are required to provide a “good faith” payment totaling 5% of their account arrearage or \$50, whichever is lower. Bill assistance of up to \$1500 will be provided to eligible households and will be credited directly to the delinquent account. This payment must be able to prevent utility shut-off or remove the individual from shut-off status in order to receive assistance. Payment assistance will be provided once per year, and plumbing repair assistance will be performed only one time per eligible household.



The WRAP Advisory Group, comprised of representatives of the incorporating municipalities and seven non-profit organizations, developed the framework for the WRAP as described in the Program Design Report.

The next step in the implementation of the WRAP will be the issuance of a Request for Proposal for a program administrator. Once an administrator is selected, public outreach and program implementation can begin. Forming partnerships with other assistance programs and identifying additional funding opportunities will be critical to the success of the program. While the need is far greater than the amount of assistance WRAP can provide, the program has been designed to assist 2,500 to 5,000 households, annually.

WRAP services are expected to be available in early 2016, following the completed organizational stand-up of GLWA.

For additional information regarding the GLWA Water Residential Assistance Program, please click on the following links:

[WRAP Advisory Group Video](#)

[WRAP FAQ](#)

[WRAP Presentation](#)