**Decentralized Wastewater MOU Partnership**

**Workplans 2023 – 2026**

***Draft* November 28, 2023**

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| **PRIORITY #1: EDUCATION & OUTREACH**  **Increase public education and outreach through EPA’s SepticSmart program to ensure septic/decentralized wastewater systems are properly used and maintained to protect water quality and human health.** | | | | |
| **ACTION** | | **PRODUCT** | **WHO** | **WHEN** |
| **1-1** | **Create materials and messaging for SepticSmart Week (SSW) to amplify impacts on a national scale** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
| 1-1A | Identify dates for SepticSmart Week | * Create a ‘Save the Date’ postcard and logo to post on [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic) | Co-leads: MOU Partners, contractor | Sept 18-22, 2023  Sept 16-20, 2024  Sept 15-19, 2025  Sept 21-25, 2026 |
| 1-1B | Update resource materials for Tribal and indigenous audiences | * Identify specific materials to update and share | Co-leads: IHS, contractor, WHO/UNICEF | 2024 – 2025 |
| 1-1C | Revise and update SepticSmart Week social media guide for partners | * Produce social media guide to promote SSW materials and products | Co-leads: SSW Steering Group, MOU Partners | Annually |
| **1-2** | **Identify opportunities to promote the SepticSmart program** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
| 1-2A | Identify events, workshops, meetings, forums, webinars, and other industry campaigns to promote and collaborate on outreach | * Develop list of activities for MOU Partners to promote SepticSmart messages | Co-leads: SSW Steering Group, MOU Partners | Annually |
| 1-2B |  | * Produce webinars on decentralized technology topics and education | Co-leads: MOU Partners, Contractor | Two to four a year |
| **1-3** | **Assess SSW outcomes and effectiveness through partnership feedback** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
| 1-3A | Assemble list of engagement activities, social media, and outreach completed during SSW | * MOU Partners provide information on SSW activities | Co-leads: MOU Partners, contractor | Annually; 1 week after SSW |
| 1-3B | Assemble summary of social media and outreach analysis | * Produce a 4-pg partnership summary and 2-pg EPA management summary * Include proclamations, local events, news coverage, other activities | Co-leads: MOU Partners, contractor | Annually; 4 weeks after SSW |
| 1-3C | Outreach to communities to analyze the effectiveness of SepticSmart week | * Survey partner audiences to see what strategies and materials are performing well, evaluate any improvements | Co-leads: MOU Partners, contractor |  |
| **1-4** | **Integrate workforce development into SepticSmart materials** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
|  |  | * Produce poster highlighting career opportunities, salaries, and benefits in the decentralized industry | Co-leads: SSW Steering Group and contractor | 2023 (completed) |
|  |  | * Produce video series featuring professionals across the decentralized industry | Co-leads: SSW Steering Group and contractor | 2023 (completed) |

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| **PRIORITY #2: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR UNDERSERVED/DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES**  **Promote technical assistance (TA) resources and foster connections between TA providers and underserved communities (including tribes) to support the design, construction, and financing of sustainable decentralized wastewater infrastructure.** | | | | |
|  | **ACTION** | **PRODUCT** | **WHO** | **WHEN** |
| **2-1** | **Closing America’s Wastewater Access Gap Community Initiative: Path Forward** |  | **Lead: EPA** | **2024 – 2026** |
| 2-1A | Identify additional communities for TA | * Support additional communities with addressing decentralized infrastructure needs * Partnering with TA Providers (RCAP, NRWA) to leverage TA services and community engagement in communities | Co-leads: USDA-RD, NRWA, RCAP, NOWRA |  |
| **2-2** | **Connect communities to funding sources (i.e., federal, state, or innovative mechanisms/ resources)** |  | **Lead: EPA** | **2023 – 2026** |
| 2-2A | Promote and market funding strategies | * Identify and work with state and local finance champions to increase community accessibility to funding (e.g., CWSRF, USDA-RD, BIL) | Co-leads: USDA-RD |  |
| 2-2B | Compile information on other potential state financing and governance approaches (such as emergency or disaster relief funds) for decentralized systems | * Develop a document of best governance approach * Expand “Pathways” documents with learnings (from “Closing the Gap”) on how to better access CWSRF funding | Co-leads: SORA, EPA, NOWRA |  |
| 2-2C | Update and maintain decentralized finance information online | * Include updates on [EPA Water Finance Clearinghouse](https://ordspub.epa.gov/ords/wfc/f?p=165:2:15602433577351:::2,RIR::) * Identify ways to make it more user friendly |  |  |
| **2-3** | **Build the capacity of TA resources targeted towards underserved communities** |  | **Lead: EPA** | **2023 – 2026** |
| 2-3A | Connect homeowners in rural, underserved communities to funding and educational resources on septic system types and maintenance | * Develop educational/outreach materials geared toward TA providers on septic system maintenance and affordable funding strategies | Co-leads: GWPC, NOWRA, NRWA, DigDeep |  |
| 2-3B | Promote funding opportunities and TA resources for Tribal communities | * Engage with Tribal governments/organizations to assess needs; develop and promote relevant materials on septic management and affordable funding opportunities | Co-leads: IHS, WHO/UNICEF? |  |
| 2-3C | Compile and publish new decentralized technology resources online | * Include technological resources on [EPA Searchable Clearinghouse of Wastewater Technology (SCOWT)](https://ordspub.epa.gov/ords/wfc/f?p=259:1:12368761318191:::::) |  |  |

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| **PRIORITY #3: RESILIENCY & SUSTAINABILITY**  **Showcase information and technologies that demonstrate how innovative approaches can help decentralized systems be more resilient to climate change and natural disasters and become sustainable for the long-term.** | | | | |
|  | **ACTION** | **PRODUCT** | **WHO** | **WHEN** |
| **3-1** | **Identify how decentralized systems contribute to community resiliency** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
| 3-1A | Develop materials that showcase decentralized technologies and approaches’ benefits and challenges relative to climate and weather impacts | * Produce a series of factsheets on the benefits and challenges of decentralized wastewater technologies and approaches during extreme weather or natural disasters * Incorporate messages into SSW as appropriate | Co-leads: WRF, DigDeep, WEF,  NEHA? SORA? |  |
| 3-1B |  | * Identify resiliency benefits from decentralized systems and include on [EPA Searchable Clearinghouse of Wastewater Technology (SCOWT)](https://ordspub.epa.gov/ords/wfc/f?p=259:1:12368761318191:::::) |  |  |
| **3-2** | **Assemble information on the role of climate change on decentralized system function** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
| 3-2A |  | * Conduct literature review on climate change impacts on septic systems and opportunities to mitigate effects | ​​ Co-leads: Contractor, WRF? WHO? **​**  **​**  **​**  **​** |  |
| **3-3** | **Expand website focus on climate change and decentralized technology** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
| 3-3A |  | * Identify those states or municipalities that are developing actionable strategies to improve decentralized system resiliency related to climatic events such as flood, wildfires or sea level rise and share online | Co-leads: CDC, NACWA? |  |
| 3-3B |  | * Enhance [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic) to include resources on climate change and disasters for homeowners with septic systems |  |  |

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| **PRIORITY #4: DATA COLLECTION & APPLICATION**  **Utilize federal and MOU partners’ networks to collect, analyze and apply varying types of decentralized system data.** | | | | |
|  | **ACTION** | **PRODUCT** | **WHO** | **WHEN** |
| **4-1** | **Identify and leverage existing data on decentralized system use and performance** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
| 4-1A | Collaborate with partners for current data and statistics | * Produce an updated one-page factsheet on septic system prevalence and distribution in the U.S. and include on [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic) | Co-leads: NEHA, SORA, NOWRA |  |
| **4-2** | **Continue support for US Census’ addition of ‘septic system use’ question on American Community Survey (ACS)** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
| 4-2A |  | * U.S. Census completed analysis and recommended to OMB the inclusion of ‘septic system use’ question on 2026 ACS questionnaire; OMB decision expected in spring 2024 | Co-leads: USDA, NOWRA |  |
| **4-3** | **Utilize related data to extrapolate to septic system use and needs** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
| 4-3A | Use existing private drinking well data to extrapolate to septic system use | * Develop model that estimates septic system density for the entire US at a census block resolution | Co-leads: EPA-ORD/CESER | September 2024 |
| 4-3B | Visualize local and national decentralized needs through GIS maps and other geospatial tools | * Evaluate if computer vision can identify failed septic systems | Co-leads: CDC/National Center for Environmental Health |  |
| 4-4 | Evaluate strategies to address septage receiving issues at the local level | * Assess factors contributing to difficulties of local septage disposal at WWTPs | Co-leads: NAWT, ICC? |  |
| 4-5 | Develop strategies to quantify the inventory of large flow/commercial decentralized systems and estimate the number of new and replacement systems installed annually in the US. | * Develop report on this | Co-leads: GWPC? |  |

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| **PRIORITY #5: WORKFORCE & TRAINING**  **Expand mechanisms to address the workforce, training and research needs in the decentralized wastewater industry.** | | | | |
|  | **ACTION** | **PRODUCT** | **WHO** | **WHEN** |
| **5-1** | **Build capacity to expand outreach, share training resources and lead the expansion of the decentralized workforce** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
| 5-1A | Develop educational campaigns to promote workforce development in collaboration with higher education institutions | * Promote or develop materials geared towards young adults about the wastewater industry, the future of the industry and career opportunities | Co-leads: NACWA? |  |
| 5-1B | Reconvene workforce steering group to review workforce strategy and determine needs and future actions | * Identify new products or resources needed to expand the decentralized workforce | Co-leads: ICC? |  |
| **5-2** | **Identify decentralized research priorities** |  | **Lead: NOWRA** |  |
| 5-2A |  | * Develop prioritized list of research needs | Co-leads: DigDeep, WRF, NOWRA, NACWA? OSA? |  |
| 5-2B |  | * Leverage results of Horizon Scanning Research | Co-lead: WRF |  |
| **5-3** | **Identify online decentralized training materials** |  | **Lead: EPA** |  |
| 5-3A | Link to other relevant training websites | * Identify Partner ​materials, online trainings, websites, and resources to link to on [www.epa.gov/septic](http://www.epa.gov/septic) | Co-lead: NOWRA |  |
| 5-3B | Link to educational programs to build the decentralized wastewater workforce | * Identify university-based programs that can be promoted through MOU Partnership networks |  |  |