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California City Solutions: Livermore, Tri-Valley Region Achieves Water Reduction Rate through United Communication Outreach Campaign

This story is part of an ongoing series featuring Helen Putnam Award entries. The 2015 entries are available on the League's website as a resource for cities in a searchable database called [California City Solutions](#). Livermore's Collaborative Emergency Water Conservation Messaging in the Tri-Valley was submitted in 2015 for the Public Works, Infrastructure, and Transportation award category. For more, see Page 2.



Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program NOFA, Workshops Announced

The Strategic Growth Council is expected to release its [2016 notice of funding availability](#) today for the \$400 million Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities program. For more, see Page 4.



Take the CalPERS Employer Pension Prefunding Option Survey

The California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) is considering developing a new program that would allow eligible California public agencies to set aside additional funds in a trust to prefund the employer's annual required pension contributions to a defined benefit pension plan. For more, see Page 4.

Northern California's Tri-Valley region experienced an unprecedented drought-related water supply shortage in 2014. Consequently, water agencies in the region needed quick and effective water consumption reductions to avoid a public health and safety emergency. The city of Livermore partnered with other Tri-Valley water retailers and the water wholesaler on collaborative emergency conservation messaging. These efforts effectively resulted in a 25 percent water use reduction by residents and businesses in the cities of Livermore, Dublin and Pleasanton for 2014.

Located in eastern Alameda County, the Tri-Valley comprises the cities of Livermore, Pleasanton, and Dublin. The Zone 7 Water Agency is a State Water Project contractor and the water wholesaler for the entire Tri-Valley region. Four water retailers serve the Tri-Valley cities: Livermore, Pleasanton, the Dublin San Ramon Services District (an independent special district), and the California Water Service Company (a private investor-owned utility.) The Tri-Valley relies on allocations from the State Water Project for the majority of its water supply.

In January 2014, Gov. Jerry Brown declared a statewide drought emergency, and requested a voluntary statewide conservation level of 20 percent. The Tri-Valley water agencies promptly announced a 20 percent voluntary water conservation target for all water customers compared to 2013 use levels. By April it became clear that voluntary conservation measures were not effective. In most cases, water use reductions come close to less than 5 percent, and some areas experienced a small increase in water use.

The State Water Project eliminated allocations to its water contractors in Spring 2014. In mid-April, Zone 7 informed the four water retailers that a genuine water supply risk existed for the Tri-Valley. Without a 25 percent reduction in annual water use compared to 2013 use levels, surface water supplies would be short; water retailers would experience extraordinary difficulty maintaining adequate storage for fire containment during the summer when water demand normally peaks. Since it was mid-April, Tri-Valley water users had already lost three and a half months towards meeting the annual conservation target. If water customers did not ramp up from less than 5 percent conservation to over 25 percent, the water supply situation could be disastrous for the area by midsummer. Because of this, the Tri-Valley water agencies executed mandatory water conservation measures in late April and early May.

Unable to buy additional water supplies, the Tri-Valley water wholesaler and retailers faced a short amount of time to change the region's water use habits. Each water supplier and city normally communicated independently with their customers about water conservation issues. Spring 2014 exemplified an abnormal, unprecedented situation.

Staff from the cities of Livermore and Pleasanton, the Dublin San Ramon Services District, California Water Service Company, and Zone 7 Water Agency agreed to pool resources to implement a common public outreach strategy spanning multiple communication channels. The campaign had to provide clear information regarding the specifics of the Tri-Valley's water-supply situation during on-going heavy media coverage of different water conditions across the state.

To ensure maximum effectiveness, project staff developed five themes for inclusion in all outreach messages and materials:

1. State Water Project cuts severely impacted the Tri-Valley water supply causing a local crisis unseen in other regions of the state;
2. All Tri-Valley residents and businesses must immediately engage in mandatory water conservation efforts;
3. All Tri-Valley residents and businesses must immediately reduce outdoor irrigation more than 50 percent and indoor water use by 5 percent, achieving a combined 25 percent annual reduction;
4. A sufficient 2014 Tri-Valley water supply existed if all Tri-Valley residents and business achieved the conservation targets; and
5. Everyone was in the drought crisis together, so each individual represented part of the solution.

The various agencies divided up the work by individually taking the lead in communicating the above themes in various formats. Materials reminded the community that all the Tri-Valley water suppliers partnered on these efforts. The water agencies' public information and operations staff met weekly throughout the summer to refine and adapt the public communications messages.

Some agencies focused on direct mail flyers to residents; others took the lead on radio and cable television advertisements. Messaging platforms included: media outreach, newspaper and Facebook advertisements, social media postings, direct resident contact, automatic resident phone messages, conservation signs across the region, community meetings, mailers and water bill inserts, and newsletter items.

The agencies created a new, joint [website](#) and [Facebook Page](#): TriValleyDrought.org. Combined, approximately \$28,500 was spent on print ads; \$16,500 on TV ads; \$1,800 on Facebook ads; \$5,300 on the drought website, and \$4,100 on print ads. Due to the technical and occasionally deep nature of water policy, directly reaching out to residents comprised a substantial portion of outreach and messaging efforts. Staff often fielded questions via phone calls and social media direct messages. Some agencies established a dedicated drought hotline to specifically respond and document resident questions. City staff members spoke to local businesses, attended local farmers' markets, PTA meetings, and other community events to reach more water customers. Communication efforts also included outreach to local Spanish-speakers.

Senior staff from multiple agencies also regularly corresponded with print and television reporters to communicate the specifics of Tri-Valley conditions and conservation messaging relative to the greater Bay Area and the state.

The rush of media outreach and correspondence began in May 2014, with most of it occurring during the summer months when outdoor water use is high. In addition to local newspaper advertisements, nearly 2,000 announcements hit the radio airwaves from May through October along with 5,500 television ads. The Tri-Valley Drought Facebook campaign tallied 43,209 views and frequent social media postings encouraged participation in several community meetings to explain the water problem and conservation solution for the Tri-Valley community.

The collaboration of the two cities, two special districts, and the private investor-owned utility led to an immediate, significant reduction in water use. Just one month after the joint public outreach campaign began, all of the water retailers saw water reductions climb from less than 5 percent to the 20 percent-25 percent range. By June, all Tri-Valley water retailers calculated water use cutbacks in the 30 percent-35 percent range.

This higher level of conservation continued throughout the summer. By the end of 2014, the entire annual water demand in the Tri-Valley was approximately 25 percent lower than in 2013. Although public and private landscaping throughout the Tri-Valley was distressed because of severely limited watering, most of the landscaping was kept alive. Additionally, all the water retailers were able to keep sufficient water for fire-fighting needs in their reservoirs throughout the entire summer.

Prior to the partnership of the joint outreach program, the individual uncoordinated messaging of the agencies proved ineffective and at times contradictory. By collaborating and pooling resources, the two cities, two special districts, and water agency successfully achieved the incredible objective of 25 percent conservation for the entire year. The quick response by Tri-Valley residents and businesses demonstrated their support and understanding of the water conservation message.

The relationships and groundwork built during this partnership created a solid foundation for future joint messaging efforts by the agencies. This crisis communication effort also strengthened existing agency communication platforms like [nextdoor.com](#) and [community links](#) for future non-emergency purposes. The positive lessons earned from this project demonstrate that cities, districts, and private entities can collaborate successfully and quickly on critical regional issues.

'SGC' Continued from Page 1...

The League urges cities to act quickly: Concept applications are due on March 16.

[Full program guidelines](#) and a [series of workshops with first-come, first-served consultations](#), set for Feb. 2-Feb. 17 in six locations around the state, have also been announced.

The [AHSC program](#) receives a 20-percent ongoing allocation of the proceeds from the state's greenhouse gas reduction effort, commonly known as Cap-and-Trade. The program's purpose is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through projects that implement land-use, housing, transportation and agricultural land preservation practices to support infill and compact development.

It also seeks to support a number of related public policy objectives, including: reducing air pollution, preserving and developing affordable housing, improving conditions in disadvantaged communities, and increasing mobility options and transit ridership.

Local governments, transportation and transit agencies, and both for- and nonprofit developers are eligible applicants for competitive grants.

The program includes three project prototypes, all of which must demonstrate a reduction in vehicle miles traveled:

- Transit-Oriented Development Project Areas (TODs), which are designed to improve access to public transit, biking or walking infrastructure and affordable housing or mixed-use areas, with a focus on connecting residents to key destinations, like schools and neighborhood retail. Similar projects that impact a larger geographic area, such as regional transit hubs, and projects focused on improving transportation operations along transit corridors would also qualify.
- Integrated Connectivity Project Areas (ICPs), designed to reduce the number or length of automobile trips through mode shift to transit use, bicycling or walking within areas lacking high quality transit, with an emphasis on providing disadvantaged community benefits.
- Rural Innovation Project Areas (RIPA), which are similar to ICPs but instead target rural areas.

Examples of RIPAs and ICPs may include bike/pedestrian connections from employment centers to transit, transit station improvements or a vanpool fleet paired with at least one additional capital or program use, like transit station improvements, an affordable housing development or a transit ridership program.

AHSC funds are to be awarded bases on "the merits of the proposal to support sustainable development that expands and improves transit, walking and bicycling infrastructure and provides opportunities to reduce vehicle miles traveled by supporting connectivity between housing and key destinations to bring about reduction of greenhouse gas emissions."

For more information about this and other Cap-and-Trade programs, please see the League's [Cap-and-Trade Hot Issues page](#), which includes a recently updated, downloadable Cap-and-Trade Guide to the major funding programs affecting cities.

'Survey' Continued from Page 1...

CalPERS is asking employers to complete a short survey which is intended to better understand your agency's interest in this program and current approach to paying for future annual required pension contributions. The information gathered in this survey will help CalPERS develop a program that best meets the needs of its contracting public employers.

Please take a few moments to complete the survey. It's less than 10 questions in length, and participation is anonymous.

The survey is available [online](#).

Innovations in American Government Awards Applications due April 15

Applications are now being accepted for the \$100,000 Innovations in American Government Awards. Offered by Harvard Kennedy School's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, the Innovations Award is the nation's premier award for the public sector. It recognizes programs that demonstrate creative and effective government at its best. April 15 is the deadline to apply.

All units of government — federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial — from all policy areas are eligible to apply for recognition.

This year, the Ash Center is also once again offering the Roy and Lila Ash Innovations Award for Public Engagement in Government, a special Innovations Award that will recognize government-led programs that demonstrate novel and effective approaches to increasing public engagement and participation in the governance of towns, cities, states, and the nation.

The winners of the Innovations in American Government Award and the Roy and Lila Ash Award will each receive a \$100,000 grant to support replication and dissemination activities in 2017. Top finalists will also receive monetary grants.

Applications and additional information are [online](#).
