The Utility of the Future Today - 2025

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Water Environment Federation
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Application Information

ELIGIBILITY

- Public and private water sector utilities of all sizes that demonstrate achievement of the application requirements are encouraged to apply.

- Applicants must have no significant violations of their National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit requirements for the previous year based on the date of application. If specific questions arise regarding a significant violation, applicants are encouraged to contact their state NPDES point of contact for further information. If the state has not been delegated authority to operate the NPDES program, applicants should contact their NPDES point of contact in the EPA Regional Office.

Application Requirements

Applicants should submit the required documentation as requested in this application package on the online application platform at https://wef.secure-platform.com/a/solicitations/353/home **by 11:59 PM Eastern Time, April 30, 2025.** Attachments, graphics, charts, photos, and videos will be accepted as part of an application package. Videos may not exceed 500 MB. If you have questions about the application, please contact UtilityRecognition@wef.org.

Basis for Recognition

Successful applicants will demonstrate that they are engaged in developing and growing an Organizational Culture that supports Utility of the Future implementation, as well as advancement in one of the following Activity Areas:

- Beneficial Biosolids Reuse
- Partnering and Engagement
- Energy Efficiency
- Energy Generation & Recovery
- Nutrient Reduction & Materials Recovery
- Water Reuse
- Watershed Stewardship

Instructions for completing the application are provided below.

Notification and Presentation of Recognition

Applicants will be informed of recognition decisions by May 19, 2025. On September 30, 2025, a ceremony to celebrate honorees will be held at WEFTEC 2025 in Chicago, IL. Recognized utilities will receive a Utility of the Future Today banner, and/or a 2025 flag, and a Certificate of Recognition. Recipients are not required to attend the ceremony to receive recognition.

Duration of Recognition

Utility of the Future Today recognition is granted for three years – this applies to both the Organizational Culture narrative (Application Part 2) and the selected Activity Area (Application Part 3). After three years, utilities must reapply to renew their recognition by 1) demonstrating advancements in Organizational Culture and 2) either demonstrating advancement in a previously recognized Activity Area or applying in a new (not previously recognized) Activity Area.

Additional Activity Area Recognition

In the subsequent two years after receiving recognition, utilities can augment their recognition by submitting a new application describing one additional Activity Area per year. A new Organizational Culture narrative is not required; however, the previously submitted narrative must be included in the online application for scoring purposes.

For example, a utility recognized in 2022 in the Watershed Stewardship activity area may apply for augmented recognition in 2023 and 2024 for one additional activity area per year by submitting materials only for that activity area plus the original Organizational Culture narrative. In 2025, the utility may reapply to renew its recognition for another three-year period.

Sponsoring organizations reserve the right to withdraw recognition from any recipient at any time.

Application Part 1: Background Information

Utility Description (combine all plants if a multi-site system)	
Utility Name:	
Type (e.g., single plant, regional system, multiple plants, collection or distribution system only, stormwater, etc.):	
Service Area (square miles):	Average Annual Daily Flow or Demand (MGD):
Population Served:	

Location		
Street Address:		
City:	State:	Country:
Zip Code/Country Code:		

Utility Representative Point of Contact for Future Correspondence		
Name:	Phone:	Email:

If another entity has prepared this application on behalf of the utility, provide the information of the preparer below		
Name:	Title:	Contact Information (phone or email):

Previous Recognition

If this utility has previously received recognition, please indicate the year (s).

- ❑ 2016
- ❑ 2017
- ❑ 2018
- ❑ 2019
- ❑ 2020
- ❑ 2021
- ❑ 2022
- ❑ 2023
- ❑ 2024

Application Part 2: Organizational Culture Narrative

Each application must include a narrative describing the overall operational philosophy of the utility, including discussions of product quality, customer satisfaction, stakeholder understanding and support, financial viability, operational optimization, employee and leadership development, enterprise resiliency, infrastructure strategy and performance; community sustainability; water resource sustainability; advancing use of innovations in artificial intelligence; and how the utility has leveraged that success to become an equitable and inclusive employer. Please note that organizational culture is internal to the utility and external to the community.

The narrative should be between 500 and 1500 words. Appendices 1 and 2 provide examples of practices and measures relevant to Organizational Culture, including the role of an Anchor Institution. If your utility has been recognized previously and the current application is for a new Activity Area, please resubmit your Organizational Narrative.

Organizational Culture is the backbone of a Utility of the Future Today. An organization's culture defines behavioral norms within the organization and the community served by the utility. This culture consists of shared beliefs and values established by leaders and then communicated and reinforced through various methods, ultimately shaping employee perceptions, behaviors, and understanding. It also includes how the organization makes decisions and treats its customers.

A UotFT organization has created and continues to grow and evolve an Organizational Culture that focuses on people within the utility and the community served. People within the utility provide and focus on continuously improving their skills and services and organizational performance. People throughout the organization feel respected by their leadership, with employee engagement strong at all levels. The UOTFT culture encourages self-improvement, learning, innovation, collaboration, and workforce/workplace flexibility and serves to help address Triple Bottom Line community-wide economic, environmental, and social outcomes. The benefits of becoming a UOTFT include enhancing the organization's ability to attract, retain, and develop top-notch water sector leaders and staff with the capacity to facilitate mission and vision achievement.

The UotFT serves as an "Anchor Institution" in the community. It is invested in the community's quality of life by providing leadership within the community, being an employer of choice, investing in placemaking, providing community education, and being a compassionate service provider, ensuring all customers receive equitable services regardless of income. Above all, an anchor institution is committed to optimizing environmental and public health outcomes for those it serves.

Application Part 3: Activity Area Description

Each applicant is required to submit a description demonstrating robust engagement in one of the following activity areas:

- Beneficial Biosolids Reuse
- Partnering and Engagement
- Energy Efficiency
- Energy Generation & Recovery
- Nutrient Reduction & Materials Recovery
- Water Reuse
- Watershed Stewardship

The description should be no more than 2000 words and include three main components.

1. Overview Paragraph: Describe the practices/actions/programs your utility has engaged in relative to the chosen Activity Area. For reference, a list of example practices is included in Appendix 1. This list is not meant to be comprehensive but instead demonstrates the types of actions that could be included in the scope of each area. Please include no more than 1-2 sentences per action described in this section.
2. Question & Answer: Please respond to the questions listed below in as much detail as possible to guide other utilities seeking to learn from your experiences and implement similar actions/practices in their systems.
    a. How did you implement the practices/actions/programs described in your Overview Paragraph?
    b. What type and level of resources were needed to support implementation? (e.g., financial, staff, other)
    c. Did you partner with other stakeholders or organizations in your implementation process?
    d. What was the most critical obstacle your utility had to overcome to succeed in this Activity Area, and how did you do that?
    e. Has "smart" information technology supported your implementation/optimization in this area? If yes, please describe.
    f. Where could other utilities go to find additional information on this Activity Area or the actions/practices/programs you implemented?

Performance Measures & Results: Using the table below, please describe the measures you use to gauge performance in this Activity Area, including the targets you set for each measure and your actual outcomes. For your reference, a list of example measures for each Activity Area is included in **Appendix 2**.

Measure *What are you measuring?*	**Targets** *What was your goal/intended outcome?*	**Outcomes** *What were your actual outcomes?*

Definitions of Activity Areas

Activity Area 1: Beneficial Biosolids Reuse
Wastewater-produced biosolids can be beneficially used to support agriculture, silviculture, horticulture, fire restoration, and general landscape maintenance through land application; production of marketable products such as compost, amended topsoil, or construction products (e.g., bricks, roadbed); and land reclamation as a substitute for other fill materials. This Activity Area does not include using biosolids to produce energy or recovering resources from biosolids

Activity Area 2: Partnering & Engagement
Partnering is collaboration with stakeholders to enable the utility to meet its Utility of the Future Today goals while enhancing the overall environmental, economic, and social well-being of the stakeholders and the community at large. Partnering between utilities (peer-to-peer exchange), whether offering or seeking such opportunities to advance utility performance, including, but not exclusive to, Utility of the Future Today goals, falls into this activity area.

Engagement is the interaction with customers and other stakeholders to provide ongoing opportunities for dialogue, communication, and education related to utility operations and the value of water and utility services. Through partnering and engagement, the utility proactively engages with stakeholders and community decision-makers to promote itself as a valued, competent, and trustworthy community asset.

Activity Area 3: Energy Efficiency
Energy Efficiency is reducing a utility's overall energy use. A utility is more energy efficient if it delivers more services for the same amount of energy or if the same services require less energy.

Activity Area 4: Energy Generation & Recovery
Energy Generation & Recovery captures efforts to minimize the use of non-renewable energy, generate renewable (green) energy to the maximum extent practicable, and recover thermal, chemical, and hydraulic energy to the maximum extent possible. In doing so, the water Utility of the Future will seek to optimize its water quality performance and minimize its carbon footprint, reduce its vulnerability to climate change, and better manage energy costs and requirements.

Activity Area 5: Nutrient Reduction & Materials Recovery
Nutrient reduction in a cost-effective and efficient manner is a desired outcome for many utilities. Utilities of the future of all sizes will use creative operational protocols and innovative technologies to reduce nutrients discharged into the environment. Materials recovery is the extraction of ammonia, phosphorus, nitrogen compounds, metals, and other marketable commodities during the treatment process. It includes lower-tech activities such as recycling/reusing/repurposing paper, pallets, containers, and other materials that otherwise would be "wasted."

Activity Area 6: Water Reuse
Water Reuse covers opportunities to use treated waters for beneficial purposes such as irrigation for agriculture and landscaping, industrial processes, toilet flushing, surface/groundwater augmentation, fire protection buffering, saltwater intrusion, and human consumption. Effective water reuse preserves valuable resources and can provide cost savings.

Activity Area 7: Watershed Stewardship
Watersheds are geographic areas that channel drainage into a river or stream system. Topographic boundaries define them, and depending on where they are located, they might encompass complex natural ecosystems, highly urbanized landscapes, or elements of both. Watershed Stewardship refers to utility investments and actions to improve water flow (reduced flooding/increased local capture) and quality conditions outside the traditional utility span of infrastructure operations and control.

It also draws on integrated growth planning to integrate wastewater infrastructure expansion, repair, and replacement with community development planning (i.e., area plans), stormwater management planning (i.e., Total Maximum Daily Load implementation plans), climate resiliency planning, and economic development planning to maximize the benefits and fully assess cost implications (i.e., Triple Bottom Line feasibility analyses). Activities can include urban Green Stormwater Infrastructure investments, conservation easements to preserve the ecosystem functions of undeveloped lands and stream channel restoration.

Application Part 4: Certification Statement

*I,*_____[PRINT NAME]*, an approved representative of my organization,*_____[ORGANIZATION NAME], *certify all data and information provided in this application package is accurate to the best of my organization's knowledge and has not been falsified. I certify that my organization is in good standing and has had no significant permit violations in the 12 months before this application package's submission date.*

_____ [UTILITY REPRESENATIVE SIGNATURE]

_____ [DATE]

If another entity has prepared this application on behalf of the utility, preparer sign below:

_____ [PREPARER SIGNATURE]

_____ [DATE]

Appendix 1: Example Activities

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Internal Culture

- Leadership proactively engaged in both internal organizational and broader discussions with community leaders on critical community priorities
- Effective Utility Management (EUM)-based continuous improvement program in place
- Business focus that delivers the best environmental, economic, and community outcomes consistent with community values and needs
- Inclusive, participatory, and collaborative culture established, dedicated to continual learning, improvement, and innovation
- Workforce and leadership development program (that includes leadership and management skills training in support of formal and informal leadership opportunities) in place to ensure recruitment, retention, and continuous competency of utility staff in support of the utility's mission and community expectations
- Provides formal or informal mentoring for young (and seasoned) professionals to attract and retain top talent through commitment to their professional development and a supportive, encouraging culture
- Shares work experiences (including internal "peer-to-peer" partnering), ensures internal understanding and more significant support for the utility's key strategy relative to the Utility of the Future business model
- Establishes "peer-to-peer" relationships and actively partners with other utilities to offer and/or seek opportunities to advance the Utility of the Future goals broadly across the water sector
- Job enhancement and enrichment opportunities are available through a variety of standard and innovative job scope-broadening techniques that support a strong business succession and overall integration of organizational spirit
- A tuition refund program is in place to encourage employee career advancement
- Problem-solving is encouraged at all levels, and accepted solutions are adequately funded and supported for successful implementation
- Develops an integrated and well-coordinated senior leadership team
- Employs integrated organizational communications systems
- Opportunities provided for employees to find and fix inefficiencies and share ideas for solutions to problems
- Awareness and commitment to workplace safety established as a key organizational expectation
- Victories for organization celebrated and recognized
- Process established for periodic tracking of progress toward meeting goals and milestones around organizational Utility of the Future commitments

- Mentoring program or other informal engagement with other utilities to help address key challenges and promote Utility of the Future practices established as an organizational practice
- Employees are recognized and rewarded for suggesting improvements that save time, money, resources and/or improve outcomes
- The organization adopts core values aligned with community needs and desires
- Intentionally uses diversity, equity, and inclusion factors to inform staffing, operational, and investment decision-making
- Leadership actively seeks employee engagement opportunities, including developing and implementing the organization's Strategic Business Plan, core values, and annual/biannual budget.
- Stresses organizational efficiency by supporting decision-making authority and responsibility at the lowest appropriate level in the organization
- The organization has a compelling and inspirational vision and mission that describes its desired organizational culture.
- The organization is advancing the use of innovations in artificial intelligence

Leadership in Community, including Examples of Anchor Institution Activities:

- Cultivates collaborative community partnerships and serves as community conveners to advance shared utility and community goals and expand the collective impact of decisions and investments
- Maximizes employment opportunities within the community as employers through contracting and procurement and through education, training, apprenticeship, and strategic investment programs
- Creates multi-benefit investment policies, programs, and practices that achieve community benefits across a broad range of social, economic, and environmental community goals
- Implements equitable and inclusive internal policies, evaluating how utility programs may disproportionately affect or burden low-income communities or communities of color
- Leadership proactively engaged with community leaders on critical community priorities
- Major capital and operating investments integrate both community priorities and Triple Bottom Line decision-making into the selection of investment alternatives that provide the greatest benefit-to-cost ratio, such as the Augmented Alternatives Analysis (AAA) or Envision Sustainable Infrastructure decision-making process
- Provide active civic leadership and participates in and adds to the community quality of life
- Seeks to create co-benefits in the community, watershed and region, including multi-benefit capital infrastructure investments that also create community value (E.g.,

parks/soccer fields above underground wet weather storage basins)
    - Support community and economic development in the region through partnerships and collaborations
- Provides job creation and contracting opportunities in the community.
- Builds an effective workforce pipeline to underrepresented community members (e.g., minority populations, low-income residents)
- Beneficially impacts employment practices of service providers, suppliers, and construction contractors
- Incubates local and regional workforce through strategic economic investment
- Develop partnerships that link community well-being to utility health, such as participation in innovative solutions (i.e. wastewater surveillance)
- Encourage enhanced public access and green space adjacent to utility facilities
- Creates/staffs a water environment center for educating the public on the value of water and wastewater services in protecting the environment and public health while reducing climate impacts
- Advances public health through wastewater surveillance initiatives
- Provides resources, knowledge, and capacity to assist its community with projects that benefit the community, such as applying for funding or permits, that the community might not have the ability to accomplish on its own
- Serves as a community liaison to other governmental divisions or agencies when problems arise, such as reaching out to public works or the electric company, when there are challenges that the community may lack the capacity or expertise to address

Appendix 2: Additional Examples of Performance Measures & Results

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

- Number of training sessions, % of individuals trained, and type of leadership/workforce development activities conducted (e.g., safety training)
- Internal leadership and supervisory training programs in place
- Apprenticeship programs in place
- Mentoring program in place
- Level of employee engagement in the goals and vision of the Utility of the Future business model
- Active wellness program
- Number of open positions that internal candidates can qualify for because of employee training and enrichment programs
- Resource efficiency improvements related to staff utilization
- Employee job satisfaction (percent based on a comprehensive employee survey)
- Continuous improvement in employee engagement
- The percentage of vacancies filled through the promotion of in-house candidates
- Peer-to-peer utility partnering program in place

ACTIVITY AREA 1: BENEFICIAL BIOSOLIDS USE

- Percent of biosolids beneficially used vs. total volume produced on an annual basis
- Quantification of natural resources conserved through substitution (e.g., pounds of phosphorus or other fertilizers substituted for by biosolids)
- Demonstrated performance against projected performance in business cases (e.g., actual versus projected biosolids volume acquired for soil amendment by agricultural producers)
- Tons of carbon sequestered in the soil via land application of Class A and/or Class B biosolids
- Impact on customer rates
- Increase in agricultural land application
- Increase in silviculture land application
- Increase in agricultural or silviculture growth yields
- Increase in improved soil characteristics resulting from biosolids-amended soils
- Amount of biosolids used for landscaping for green infrastructure projects
- Amount of biosolids used for recreational fields, golf courses, and domestic use

ACTIVITY AREA 2: PARTNERING & ENGAGEMENT

- Number and type of specific projects completed (e.g., rain gardens installed, innovative technologies, or other innovative practices adopted) associated with a partnership
- Number and type of formal recognitions of partnerships by outside groups (e.g., state or national award) and any associated results for the community (e.g., acres of green

space added in the community)
- Performance improvements resulting from a partnership (e.g., reduced volume of flooding or reduced greenhouse gas emissions)
- Number of ongoing communications network actions/activities (e.g., website hits, newsletters, social media activity)
- Type and number of working agreements and collaborative initiatives for growth planning between and across different levels of government
- Type and number of changes in operating practices of other partners (e.g., nonpoint source controls by agricultural producers, food producers, consumers)
- Level of community support for the benefits and costs of becoming a Utility of the Future (e.g., annual survey results regarding community support for utility priorities)
- Support from and amount of contracting with local businesses
- Level of stakeholder involvement in decisions that affect them
- Number of outreach events conducted to publicize and build support for water and wastewater services
- Type and number of collaborations on data collection and assessment
- Amount and effectiveness of public outreach as an integral part of project planning
- Number of active utility-to-utility partnerships (can be providing or receiving services/training/resources, etc., from another utility)

ACTIVITY AREA 3: ENERGY EFFICIENCY

- KWh reductions in site energy use/intensity – to date or anticipated in the future (e.g., change in energy required per million gallons treated or change in energy required per hour of pump operation)
- Translation of energy use/intensity reductions to greenhouse gas emission reductions – to date and anticipated in the future
- Current and anticipated investment (in USD) in energy efficiency projects or activities and anticipated savings (in USD)
- USD value of other re-investments made because of the savings from reduced energy costs
- Percent of annual budget allocated to implementing priority energy efficiency improvements identified in an energy audit

ACTIVITY AREA 4: ENERGY GENERATION & RECOVERY

- Reduced non-renewable energy use and carbon footprint (e.g., percent of non-renewable energy use reduction, percent of greenhouse gas emissions reduction)
- Reduced reliance on the power grid (e.g., percent reduction of energy utilization coming from the grid), and corresponding reduced vulnerability to climate change and energy price fluctuations
- Cost savings (e.g., return on investment proceeds and/or avoided energy costs)

- Percent increase in renewable energy production (e.g., solar generation) or utilization (e.g., purchase of renewable energy through the grid)
- Amount of carbon sequestered
- The amount of transmission losses eliminated when providing outside power to the facilities
- Increase in use of renewable energy sources, including Renewable Energy Credit generation, and/or percent of energy use that is renewable
- Percent of total plant power demand that is generated on-site from renewable sources

ACTIVITY AREA 5: NUTRIENT REDUCTION & MATERIALS RECOVERY

- Type and percentage of materials recovered vs. materials available
- Revenue generated and/or costs avoided from materials recovery and marketing activities
- Demonstrated performance as projected in assessment market assessment
- Number of external and/or public-private partnerships for recovered material sales
- Cost avoided using advanced technology to achieve nutrient reductions (e.g., capital cost avoided through more efficient use of existing infrastructure)

ACTIVITY AREA 6: WATER REUSE

- Water beneficially reused
    - Percent change of static water levels of a reservoir due to new actions (augmentation)
    - Ratio of reuse quantity vs. wastewater volume processed (normalized change)
- Environmental benefits
    - Amount of movement or reduction of saltwater front (in feet)
    - Amount of decreased diversion of freshwater from sensitive ecosystems
    - Area irrigated solely by recycled water
- Local supply
    - Reduced dependence on purchased water and energy used to treat purchased water
    - Climate-independent water supply of reused water
- Costs for, or sales of, treated water fit-for-purpose reuse
- Level of public acceptance of reuse commitments for non-potable opportunities
- Use of advanced treatment (ultrafilters (UF), reverse osmosis (RO), granular activated carbon (GAC)
- Type and use of enhanced disinfection of reuse water besides chlorine residual, such as UV light

ACTIVITY AREA 7: WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP

- Reduction in wet weather impacts (e.g., flooding, CSOs, SSOs, gallons of infiltrated water not reaching collection systems)
- Reduced unit costs for water quality improvements (e.g., financial benefits of a water quality trade)

- Enhanced pollution mitigation (e.g., sediment captured through green stormwater infrastructure)
- Increased hydrologic stability (e.g., reduction in flood-prone land area)
- Reductions (e.g., VSAT Risk Reduction Units change) in vulnerability to climate change
- Created or enhanced wetlands and riparian habitats (e.g., number of projects, or acres covered)
- Rate payer savings resulting from planning and projects between transportation and other public utilities

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