

# Workforce Development

## Developing and Retaining an Effective Workforce



2024 USET Tribal Utility Summit



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# Your Presenter



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# Agenda and Key Objectives

- Identify Tribal Workforce successes and challenges
- Workforce challenges the National Perspective
- Identify the Four Pillars of Workforce
- Identify ideas for programs to address workforce issues

# Let's Get Real

- **What we do well for workforce** (recruitment, retention, training, knowledge management) – Workforce Successes
  
- **What we don't do as well/challenges in workforce** – Workforce Challenges

# Workforce Successes

- Dedicated workers
- Flexibility to do a variety of jobs – leads to retention
- Stake in utility success – personal pride and contribution
- Commitment and dedication
- Salary survey – pay incentives
- Gain and maintain accreditation
- Investment in the organization
- Organization investment in employees
- Utility support of professional growth
- It's all about the attitude – positive, good behaviors

# Workforce Challenges

- Attraction to industry – people don't know about water careers
- Overworked employees
- People who say they are dedicated but take advantage of the organization
- Retention – If they are not trained, they will leave
- Leave for better jobs
- More money offered from other utilities
- Board resistance to workforce programs and utility programs
- Career advancement opportunities
- Head hunters
- Utilities don't negotiate with employees that are being drawn away for money, etc.
- Utilities relationship with boards and councils

# Further Workforce Discussions

- What is the most positive aspect of your current workforce?
- What is your biggest workforce challenge?

# **Question: Rank the biggest workforce challenges at your utility.**

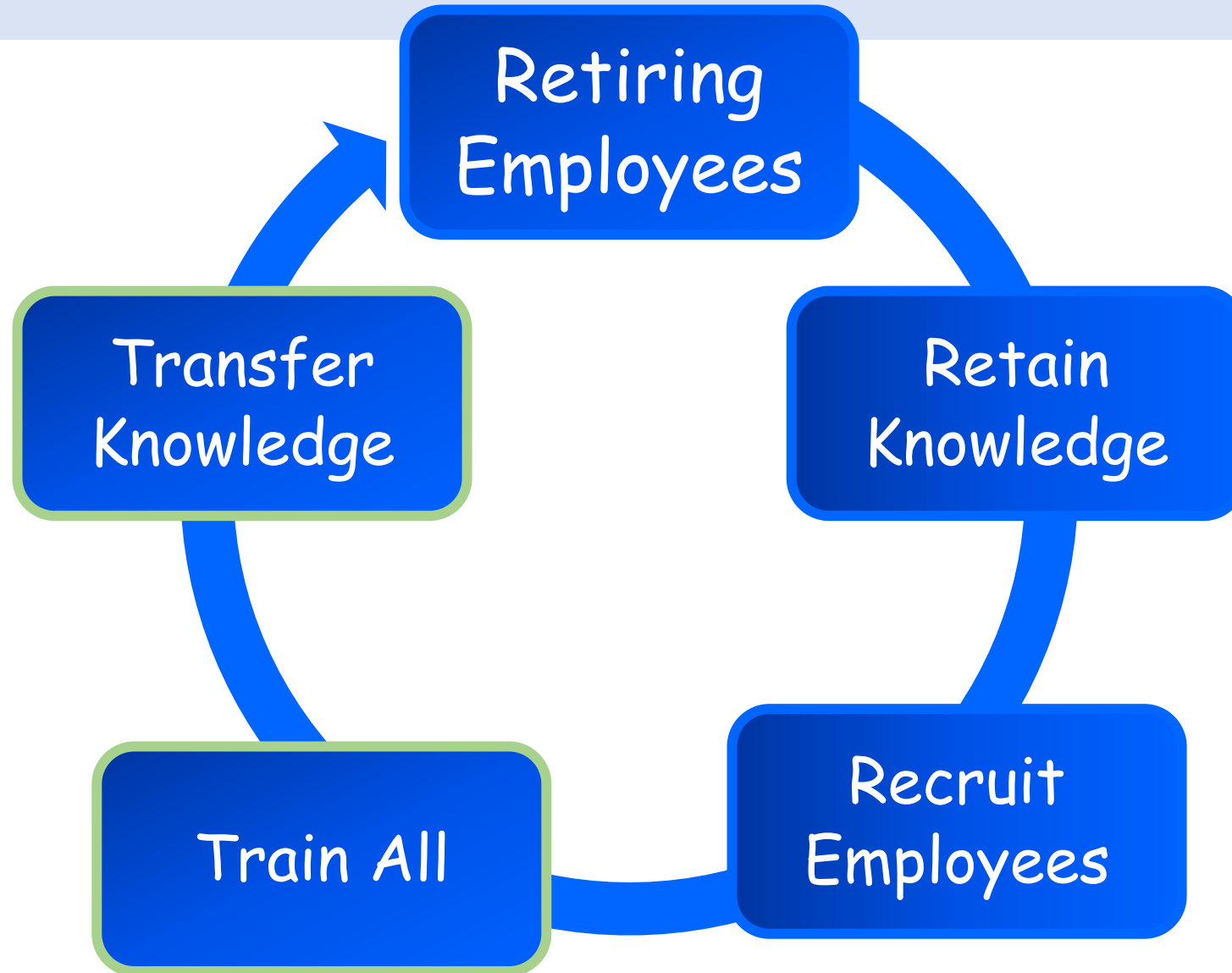
- Recruitment
- Training and Certification
- Retention
- Trained Employees “Stolen” by Other Utilities
- I’m Not Aware of Workforce Challenges in My Utility
- Other



# Tribal Recruitment Challenges

- Difficulty attracting “qualified” candidates with certification and experience due to:
  - Job/Living Location(s)
  - Standard of Living (where’s the Starbucks?)
  - High Skill, High Wage
  - Accrued vacation and benefits (medical, etc.)
  - Retirement plans (vested)
  - Native Hiring Preference (does not apply to contractors)
- Out of date job descriptions
- Inadequate pay
- Workplace culture
- Lack of support from HR
- Retirements/leaving workforce
- Lack of workforce pipeline to bring in new recruits
- Other utilities recruiting trained staff (higher pay/benefits) to their workforce
- Local economy – effects pay
- Recruitment expense

# The Tribal Workforce Challenge



# The Real Tribal Challenges



# **Water Workforce Challenges – the National Perspective**

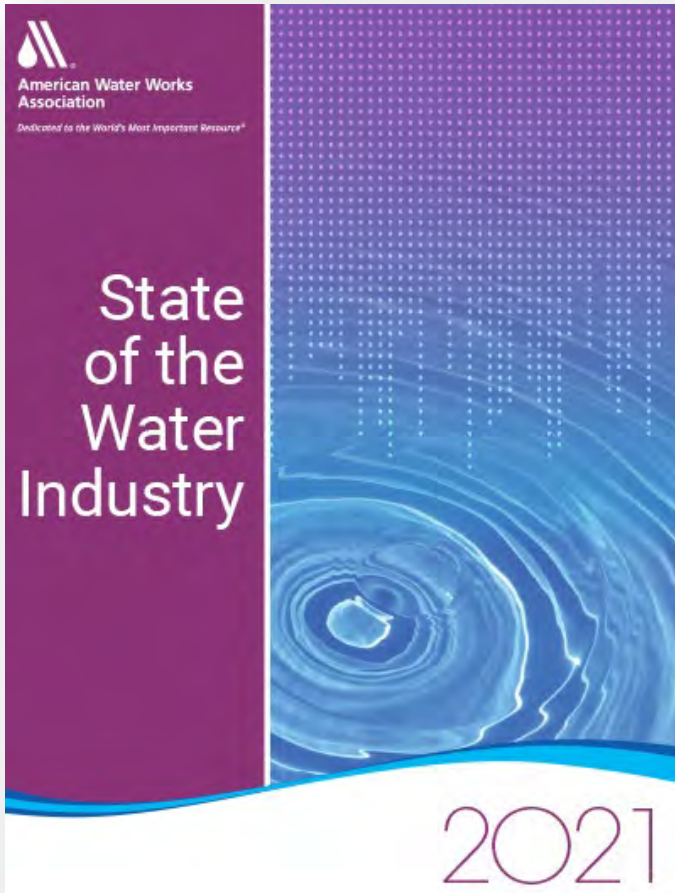
- **Overview of some key issues**
- **National Initiatives to Address Workforce Challenges**



# Top 10 Issues Facing the Water Sector

2021	Change	2020	2019	2018	2017
Renewal and replacement of aging water and wastewater	↔	Renewal and replacement of aging water and wastewater	Renewal and replacement of aging water and wastewater	Renewal and replacement of aging water and wastewater	Renewal and replacement of aging water and wastewater
Financing for capital improvements	↔	Financing for capital improvements	Financing for capital improvements	Financing for capital improvements	Financing for capital improvements
Long-term water supply availability	↔	Long-term water supply availability	Long-term water supply availability	Public understanding of the value of water systems and services	Long-term water supply availability
Emergency preparedness	↑	Public understanding of the value of water systems and services	Public understanding of the value of water systems and services	Long-term water supply availability	Public understanding of the value of water systems and services
Public understanding of the value of water systems and services	↓	Watershed/source water protection	Watershed/source water protection	Public understanding of the value of water resources	Public understanding of the value of water resources
Watershed/source water protection	↓	Public understanding of the value of water resources	Public understanding of the value of water resources	Watershed/source water protection	Watershed/source water protection
Public understanding of the value of water resources	↓	Aging workforce/ anticipated retirements	Groundwater management and overuse	Aging workforce/ anticipated retirements	Emergency preparedness
Aging workforce/ anticipated retirements	↓	Emergency preparedness	Aging workforce/ anticipated retirements	Public acceptance of future W/WW rate increases	Cost recovery (pricing water to accurately reflect the cost of service)
Compliance with current regulations	↔	Compliance with current regulations	Emergency preparedness	Emergency preparedness	Public acceptance of future W/WW rate increases
Groundwater management and overuse	↔	Groundwater management and overuse	Cost recovery (pricing water to accurately reflect the cost of service)	Governing Board acceptance of future W/WW rate increases	Water conservation/ water use efficiency

# Workforce Issues Expressed by Survey Respondents



- **Aging infrastructure** as well as **aging operators** will leave this area in severe crisis
- Mentorship and building a **pipeline of young talent**
- Retaining **operators** and **training** and **certifying** young future operators
- **Retention of** institutional **knowledge** of long-term retiring staff
- Nationwide licensing to ease hiring from other states
- **Training workforce** in new technology, especially programming and data analytics
- **Pay** scale relevant to the criticality of the industry
- **Pay** compensation to reflect the value of personnel and attract new employees to have the knowledge to perform the work required to maintain a utility

# THE GREAT RESIGNATION



uvaro.com



surveysparrow.com

**MARGINALLY ACCEPTABLE  
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES**

**EMPLOYEES BECOME  
MORE STRESSED**

**INADEQUATE STAFF TO  
MEET DAILY DEMANDS**

**INABILITY TO REWARD  
REMAINING EMPLOYEES**

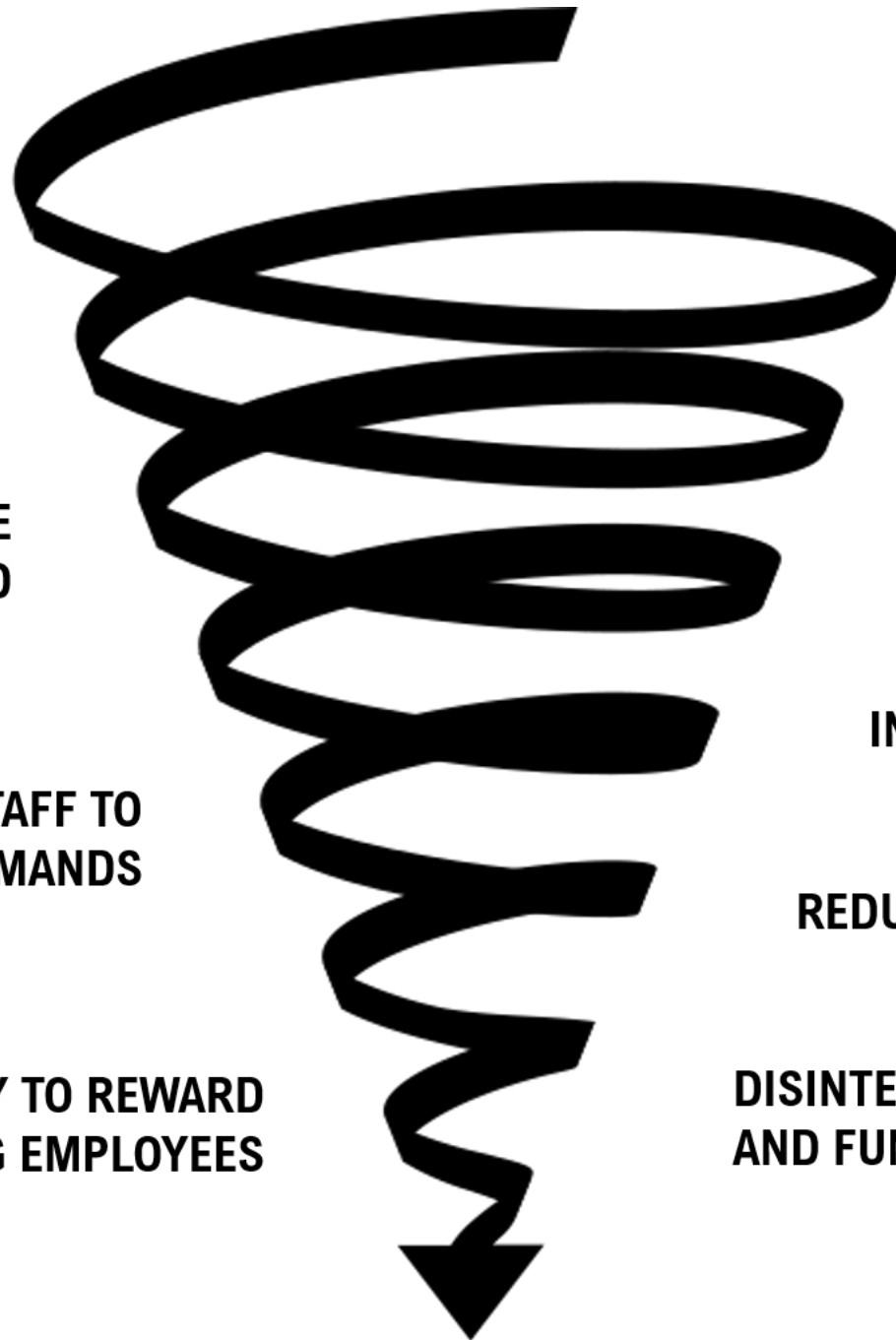
**INCREASED DEMAND ON  
CURRENT EMPLOYEES**

**NEGATIVE RELATIONAL  
BEHAVIOR INCREASE**

**INCREASED CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS**

**REDUCED REVENUE**

**DISINTEGRATION OF CULTURE  
AND FUNCTIONING**





# What are the 2 Top Challenges Facing the Water Industry?

- Aging Assets
- Aging Workforce

# Did You Know?

*WERF estimates that with the looming departure of senior personnel, utilities will lose an estimated 80% of knowledge that is tacit, that is, understood but not documented.*

## **In the water/wastewater field:**

- The average age at retirement is just over 56 years
- The average length of employment at the same facility is 24 years



# National Water Sector Workforce Convening

Two-day convening held in November 2018 included over 75 participants with a mix of professional backgrounds from within and outside of the water sector including workforce and human resource development experts, adult education and training professionals, Federal and state agencies, and utility executive managers

## Key Objectives

- Deepen our collective understanding of current workforce initiatives and the opportunities they present for leveraging and scaling efforts in the water sector
- Set the stage for sector partners to develop an action agenda/strategy in response to gaps and opportunities identified during the convening
- Establish a framework for effectively communicating workforce efforts to utilities and other partners



# Four Pillars

Strategic Workforce Planning

Recruitment

Retention

Competency

Partnerships

# STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING USING THE FOUR PILLARS

**Utilities Implement Best Practices for Preparing a Strategic Plan to Support Acquiring, Developing, and Retaining the Organization's Workforce in Full Alignment with Business Requirements**

## **1. Recruitment**

Stable, Robust, Qualified Pool of Applicants Available to the Utility - Competes Effectively for Needed Skills and Talent

## **2. Retention**

Achieve Desired Workforce Retention Levels with Qualified, Motivated, and Adaptable Staff – Organizational Culture and HR Motivate Staff and Support Retention

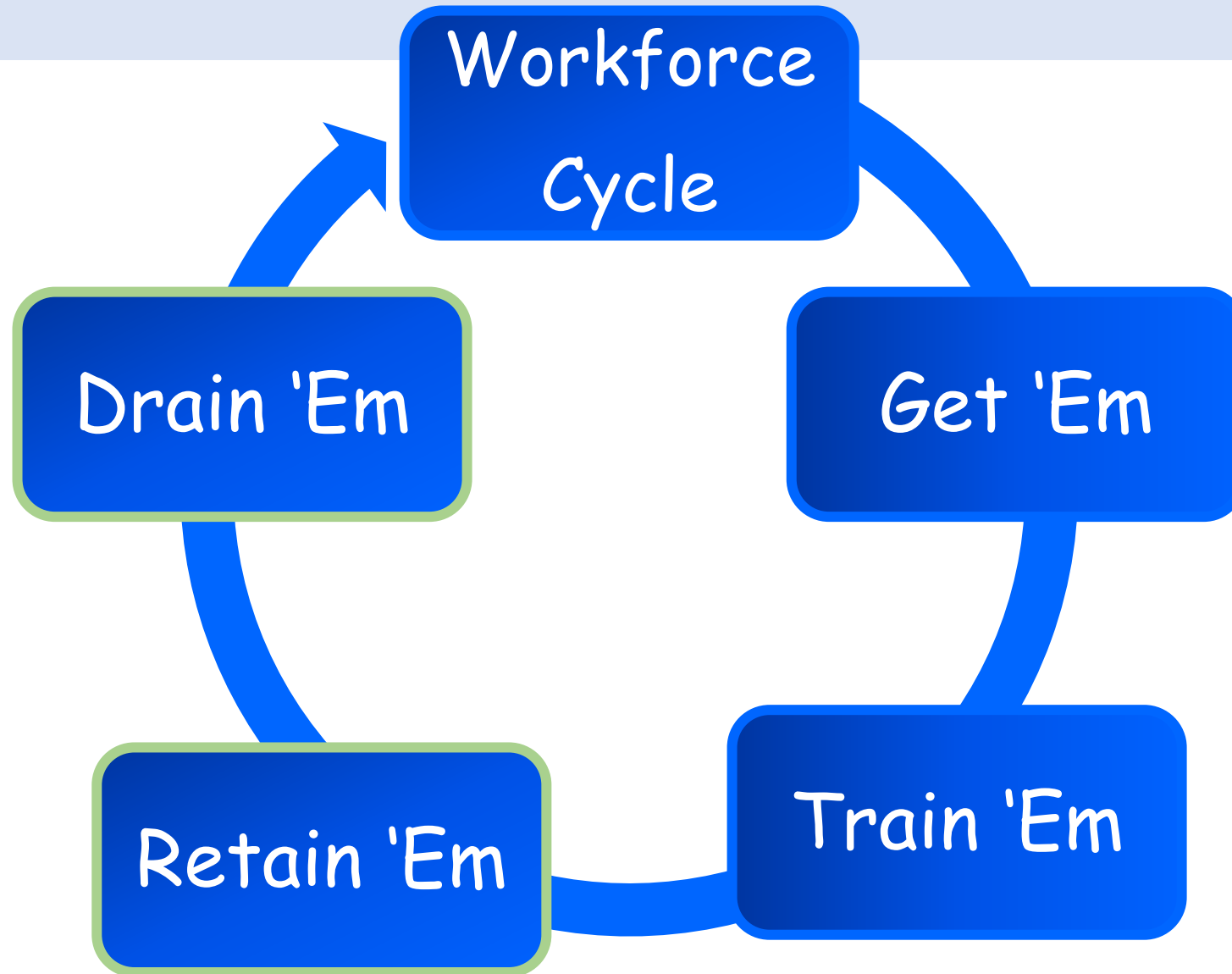
## **3. Competency**

Core Competencies and Emergent Skill Needs are Well Characterized, with Sufficient Training and Certifications in Support – Skills Evolve with Business Requirements

## **4. Community Partnerships**

Utilities' Workforce Strategy and Hiring Practices Support Community Economic and Social Goals

# The Workforce Cycle



# How to Eat an Elephant



# Four Pillars to Address Workforce Issues

## Recruitment

- Job Descriptions
  - \*accuracy in KSAs,
  - \*appropriate pay for skills
- Org. Culture
- Apprenticeship programs
- Awareness of Water Industry – programs to education from high school to second careers
- Hiring – getting them on team
- Marketing

## Retention

- Org. Culture & Values
- Career Path clear for each position
- Apprenticeship/Internship programs
- Entrepreneurial Environment – individual contributions are valued
- Onboarding programs
- Knowledge retention programs – SOPs
- Mentorship
- Coaching
- Leadership development

## Competency

- Culture of growth & development
- Career path goals tailored to job roles
- Clear expectations of job skills required
- Training
- Leadership development

## \*\*Partnerships\*\*

- This is the most important category  
Develop effective partnerships with:
- HR professionals
  - Educational institutions – colleges, high schools, technical schools, high school counselors, and more...
  - Other utilities



# The Top Five Workforce Issues Picked at 2024 Workforce Convening in the Rocky Mountain Section of AWWA

- 1. Workplace Culture** -- Creating the right **workplace culture** that supports and fosters the proper setting, programs, and tools for a sustainable workforce.
- 2. Awareness** -- Building a beginning level of **awareness of the water sector**.
- 3. Bridge** -- Building a “**recruiting bridge**” into the water sector as a career for a spectrum of prospective employees – from high school to second careers and more.
- 4. Hiring** -- Getting prospects **hired and on the team** – with three-part focus on recruiting, interviewing, and onboarding.
- 5. Career Path** -- Building a meaningful and encouraging **career path** to both help staff grow personally and professionally and to encourage retention in the organization (and sector).

# Recruitment – How We Get ‘Em

- **Human Resources & Finance Department Partnerships**
  - What’s the relationship and how does this partnership serve the utility – Job descriptions, pay lines
- **Internal cultural adjustments:** updating job descriptions, increasing compensation and benefits, improving work/life balance, expand educational opportunities and career development, add workplace perks such as food and drink, potlucks
- **Organizational culture:** is this a positive culture where people can contribute and thrive, diversity, equity and inclusion is a positive part of the culture

# Change in Recruitment & Career Development Strategy

- Shift from certification, life experience and skills approach

**TO:**

- Recruit for *Attitude* and *Aptitude*

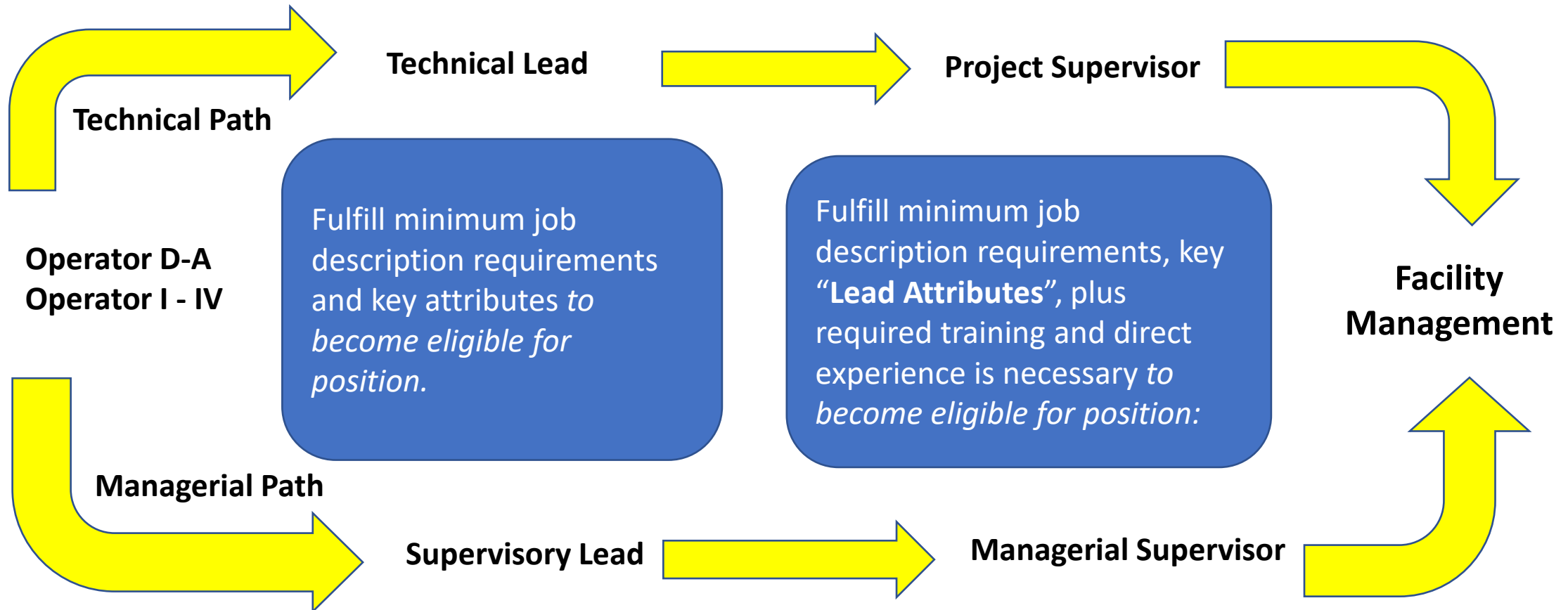
***You*** bring ***your*** positive attitude and wiliness to learn,  
and ***we*** will teach the skills!

# Retention - Culture Shift: Career Development as an Organizational Responsibility

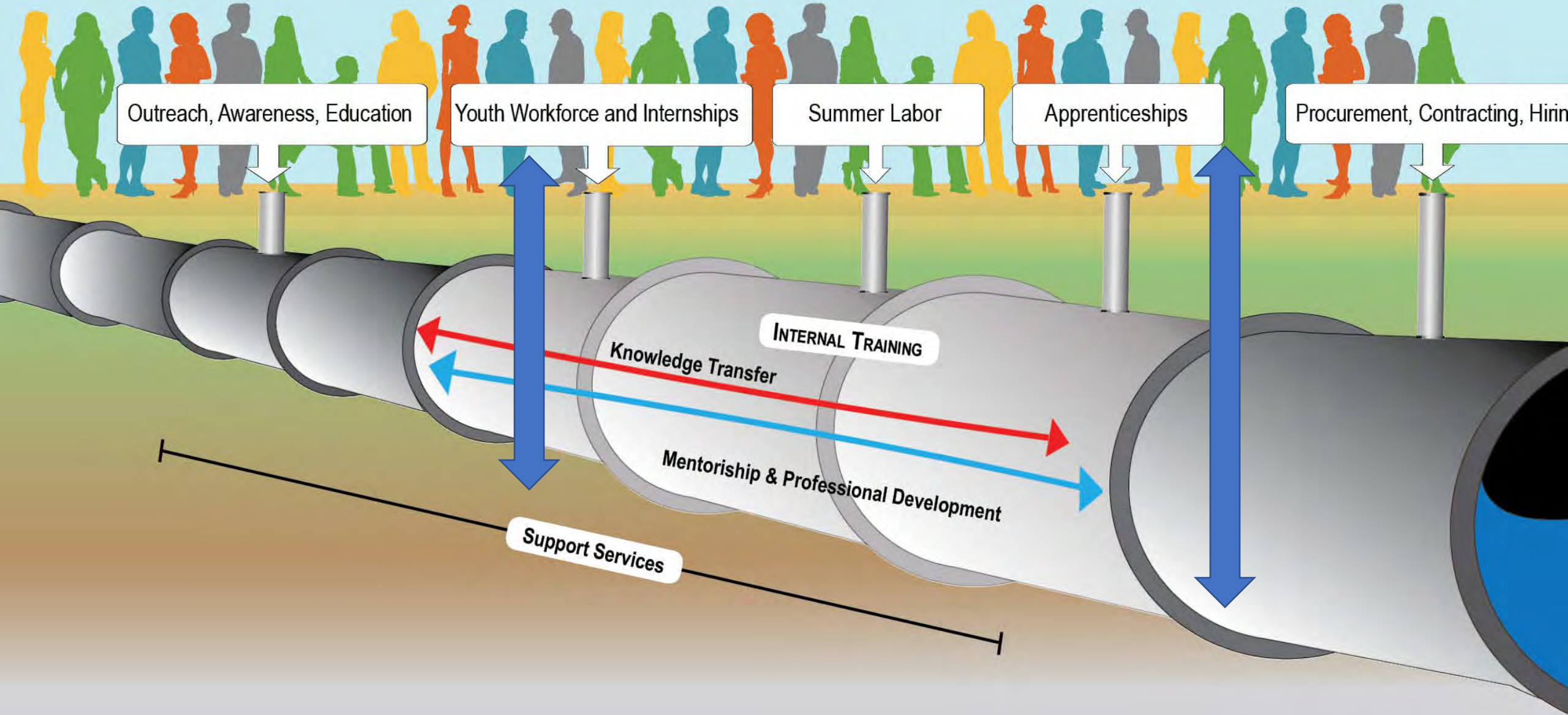
## Successful Programs:

- Apprenticeship Operator Program (Get 'Em/Train 'Em)
- Internships through partnerships with high schools and colleges (Get 'Em/Train 'Em)
- Onboarding & In-boarding (Train 'em)
- Career Path – Clear path for personal and professional growth (Retain 'Em)
- Knowledge Management / Transfer (Drain 'Em)
- Leadership Development

# Operator Career Path



# Water Utility Workforce Development Pipeline



Question: At your utility do you have...

- Internship Program
- Apprenticeship Program
- Mentoring Program
- Knowledge Management Program
- None of the above

# Competency: Train 'Em: Organizational Commitment to Training and Development

- Once someone gets hired...

How do they get trained?



# Internal Training

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- Intern and Apprentice programs
- Onboarding and In-boarding programs
- Staff developed programs such as SOPs, safety, & regulatory
- Mentoring program – knowledge transfer
- Guest speakers/instructors
- Internally sponsored training events with USET or RCAC

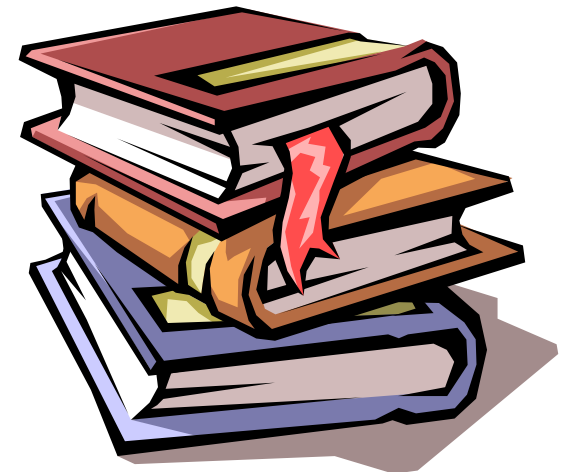


# External Training

- USET sponsored training events
- Online training and webinars
- Local seminars / Workshops / Conferences
- Commercial seminars
- Training sponsored by other utilities
- Community College programs

# “Prepared” Resources

- College programs (RRCC)
- WEF multi-media training modules
- Internet resources (ABC study guide)
- Sacramento Self Study Course
- USET
- WEF/AWWA

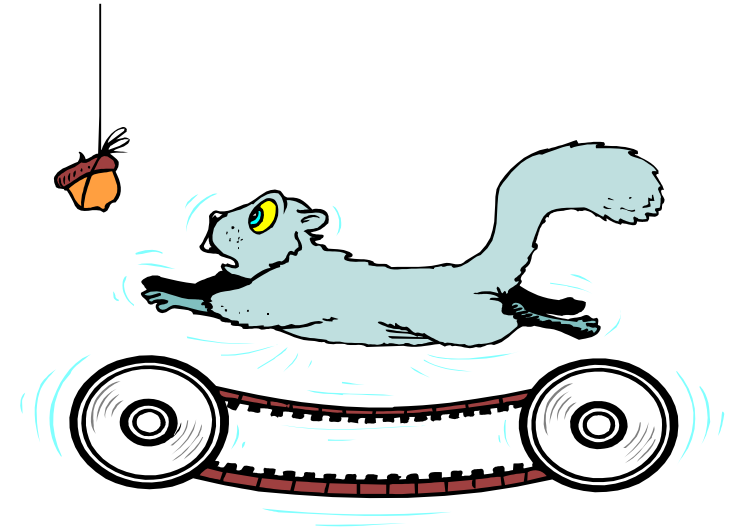


# Retain “Em” – The “Stay Incentive”

Retaining candidates with experience and certification



- ✓ Competitive salary
- ✓ Clear path to career advancement
- ✓ Life balance/Accrued vacation
- ✓ Accrued benefits (medical, etc.)
- ✓ Retirement plans (now vested)
- ✓ “Ownership”
- ✓ Facility recognition



# Retain 'Em! Invest in Employees' Careers!

- Career development program and payline advancement
- Entrepreneurial culture – people generate and implement new ideas
- Employee ownership - ideas come from-bottom up throughout the organization
- Commitment to employee training and development
- Recognition and reward program(s)
- Culture of engagement

# Competency - Drain 'Em

**Knowledge is an Asset**

**Assets must be maintained, improved upon, and tracked.**

# Drain 'Em

- Knowledge management/transfer program
- Standard Operating Procedures
- Succession planning
- Mentorship
- Leadership development

# Partnerships – THE most important to help meet the Workforce Challenge

- HR Professionals – most important to assist with job descriptions, competencies, KSA's, paylines and marketing
- Finance Partners – Assist with budgeting and setting rates appropriate to support personnel costs;
- High school trade and technical schools – participate as much as possible;
- Community Colleges and Universities – partner on course work, internships, apprenticeships;
- High School Counselors – Why not? This is a career!
- Science Teachers – go to science fairs, get into the curriculum, bring classes in for tours;



# Key Strategic Success Factors To Recruit, Retain, Train, and Drain

- **Sustainable** *recruitment* program for long term success
- **Culture** of education, training, career growth and entrepreneurship to promote retention
- **Knowledge** is an asset that must be maintained, documented and shared - competencies
- **Program** mechanics that are defined and support success of people, processes and programs to ensure ***“the right people have the right skills at the right time to perform work needed”*** - competencies
- **Partnerships!**



# Resource Tool Kit

- <https://www.ncai.org/ptg/workforce-development/toolkit>
- <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/water-sector-workforce-webinars>
- <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/production/water-and-wastewater-treatment-plant-and-system-operators.htm>
- <https://www.careeronestop.org/CompetencyModel/Competency-Models/water-sector.aspx>
- <https://www.careeronestop.org/CompetencyModel/competency-models/pyramid-download.aspx?industry=water-sector>
- <https://www.arcadis.com/en-us/knowledge-hub/blog/united-states/carlton-serrette/2021/building-the-pipeline-for-a-diverse-utility-workforce>
- <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/water-workforce/>



# Questions?



# Thank you!



**Thank you for  
your participation!**

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