

# WATER WORKFORCE WEBINAR SERIES

It Takes Partnership: Filling the Pipeline of Water Workforce Professionals for Long-Term Sustainability

Office of Wastewater Management

Office of Water
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
September 18, 2024

We will start in a couple minutes. Thank you.



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## Office of Wastewater Management

Office of Water
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
September 18, 2024

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## Webinar Logistics

- This webinar is being recorded
- Participants will be in listen-only mode
- To submit a question, use the Q&A function



 Webinar slides and recording information will be sent out to all participants following the webinar

### Water Sector Workforce at EPA

#### • Reminders:

- Check out our website for resources and updates: <u>https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/water-sector-workforce</u>
  - Workforce Initiative
  - Past Workforce Webinars
  - Workforce Case Studies
- Stay tuned for information on our next webinar. If you are registered for this webinar you are automatically on the email list for future webinars!

## Having Audio Difficulties?

- Call in to any of these phone numbers:
- +1 669 254 5252
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Webinar ID: 160 584 4714

# Opening Poll: Please indicate the sector that you work in:

- Utility
- State or Local Government
- Federal Government
- Consultant
- Academia/Educator
- Military/Veterans
- Other



# It Takes Partnership: Filling the Pipeline of Water Workforce Professionals for Long-Term Sustainability

Jim Horne, Sustainable Utilities Program Manager, U.S. EPA Office of Wastewater Management















# CREATING THE WATER WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE WEBINAR SERIES

# It Takes Partnership: Filling the Pipeline of Water Workforce Professionals for Long-Term Sustainability

Increasingly complex challenges facing water utilities make it imperative that regional partners work together to train and prepare individuals to take on the critical role of operating our nation's water infrastructure. One successful example is taking place in Northwest Ohio, led by the Toledo Metropolitan Council of Governments (TMACOG), Owens Community College, the City of Toledo, and utility partners across the region. Together, they have developed an innovative program to provide education and training to prepare individuals to operate and maintain critical drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. The program offers training for certification, as well as job placement assistance. Please join us September 18<sup>th</sup> to hear more about this exciting program, including its successes and challenges.

This webinar is part of an ongoing webinar series hosted by EPA, in partnership with leading water sector organizations around the country. More information on this webinar series can be found at <a href="https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/water-sector-workforce-webinars">https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/water-sector-workforce-webinars</a>

#### SEPTEMBER 18, 2024 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM ET

#### **Moderators:**

O Jim Horne, U.S. EPA

#### Speakers:

- Kari Gerwin, Director of Water Quality
   Planning, Toledo Metropolitan Area
   Council of Governments
- Mary Kaczinski, Professor, Environmental Science, Owens Community College
- Chuck Campbell, Project Manager, City of Toledo Department of Public Utilities











## **Speakers:**



Kari Gerwin, Director of Water Quality Planning, Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments



**Mary Kaczinski**, Professor, Environmental Science, Owens Community College



**Chuck Campbell**, Project Manager, City of Toledo Department of Public Utilities

Webinar slides and recording will be sent to registrants within a week after the webinar.





# Building a Pipeline of New Water Operators

Kari Gerwin

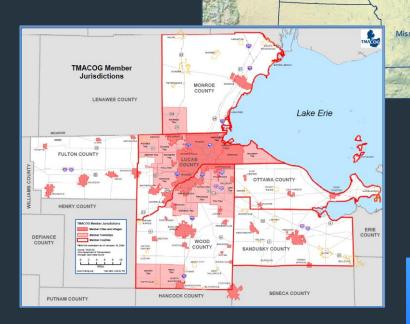
Director of Water Quality Planning

Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG)

# Who is TMACOG?

 Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG) is a partnership of local governments focused transportation, water quality, and economic development endeavors that affect quality of life for the people of northwest Ohio

- Drinking Water
- Wastewater
- Stormwater
- Agriculture and NPS
- Water Quality Policy



WATER WORKFORCE COALITION

**United States Midwest Region** 

Minnesota

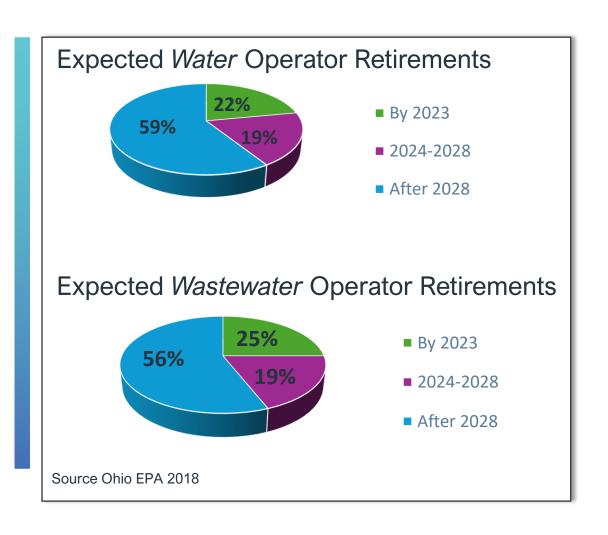
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North Dakota

South Dakota

Nebraska

# Water Workforce Challenges in NW Ohio



- Water utilities are central to the vitality of NW Ohio
- Shortage of operators to fill expected retirements across the state
- Challenges of small communities
- State testing barrier
  - May 2023 stats 24% pass rate for the Wastewater I exam and a 30% pass rate for the Water I exam.



# Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grant Program

- Early 2021 TMACOG applied in partnership with Owens Community College and City of Toledo
- Late 2021 Awarded \$494,874 to build the Water Workforce Coalition and training program
  - Subcontract to Owens Community College- \$292,960
  - \$163,800 *in-kind commitment* from City of Toledo (0.75 FTE term over 3 years)
- Spring 2022 Project Launch







# Northwest Ohio's Water Workforce Coalition

#### Goal

 Develop a network of partners to recruit, train, and employ the water sector workers of the future

#### Intended outcomes

- Improve training opportunities for those entering the water utility workforce
- Expand pool of trainers faculty and water utility employees
- Open lines of communication between water utilities and potential employees
- Strengthen collaborations among partners who may not typically work together
- Ultimately, more individuals entering the water utility workforce



# Program Framework

#### **Partnerships**

• Develop collaborative partnerships to address water workforce needs

#### Recruitment

• Recruit trainees through targeted and innovative approaches

#### **Training**

• Provide training through intensive 16-week program

#### Curriculum

• Develop new training program to prepare participants to pass the Ohio EPA operator exams

#### **Connections**

Connect trainees with local utilities

#### Scaling-up

• Make the program available to other areas of Ohio and the U.S.

# **Collaborative Partnerships**

Goal –Understand
Operator and Partner
Perspectives and Gain
Their Commitment

Understand Current workforce needs

Understand Dynamics Between Small and Large Facilities

Understand Barriers to Success and Employment

Plan with Sustainability in Mind

**Recruit Trainers** 

#### **Approaches**

Early Engagement of Key Partners

-Utilities

-Educational institutions

-OEPA

-Social Services

-Industry Groups

Partner Kickoff Aug 2022

Formed Ad Hoc Committees to Guide Program Development

-Recruitment

-Training

-Employment



#### Recruitment

# Goal – reach 5 primary audiences

secondary/post secondary students

people reentering workforce

current utilities employees

veterans

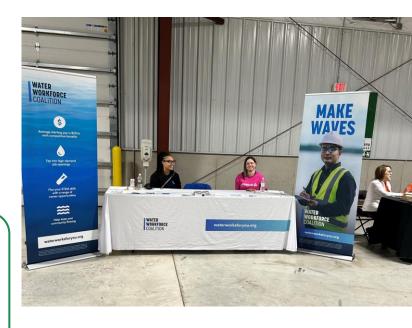
underemployed

#### **Approaches**

- -Kickoff with Press Conference
- -Rolled out Digital Media Campaign
- -Partnership with Groups Serving Target Audiences
- -Representation on Recruitment Committee
- -Presence at Career Fairs and Events

Information Sessions and Bus Tours leading up to each semester

INVESTMENT IN BRANDING AND MARKETING





# Marketing



# WATER WORKFORCE COALITION

#### **Branding**

Logos, slogans, tag lines

#### Media Engagement

Press, Print media, TV and Radio

#### Website -

www.waterworksforyou.org

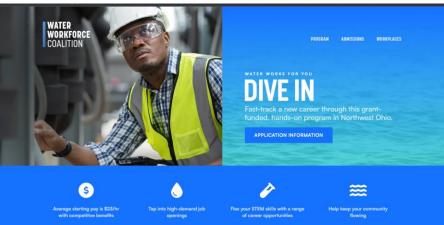
#### **Printed and Branded Materials**

• Tri-folds, business cards, stickers, water bottles, etc.

#### Digital Ads

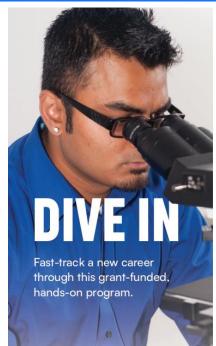
- 2 months to kick off campaign
- Targeted audiences and geographies

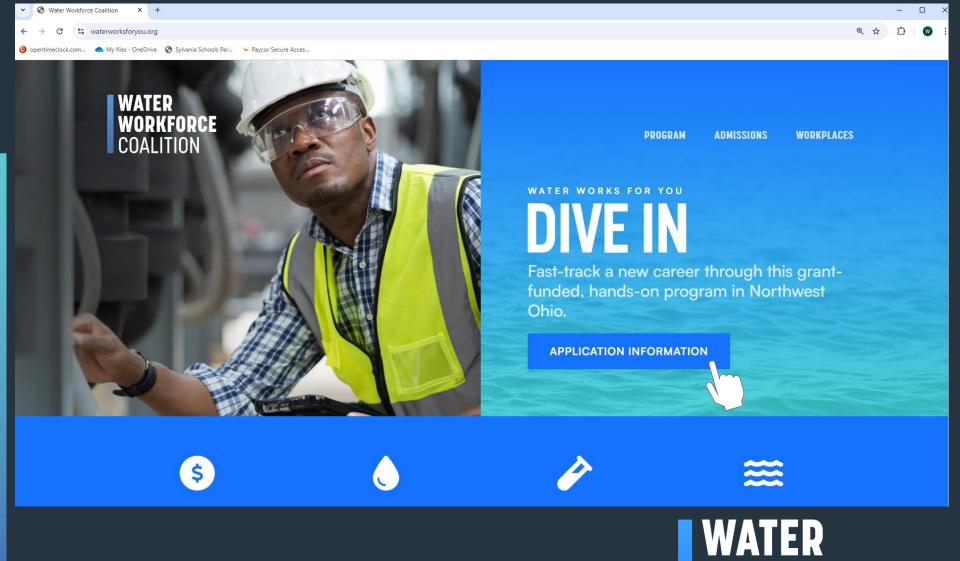
#### waterworksforyou.org

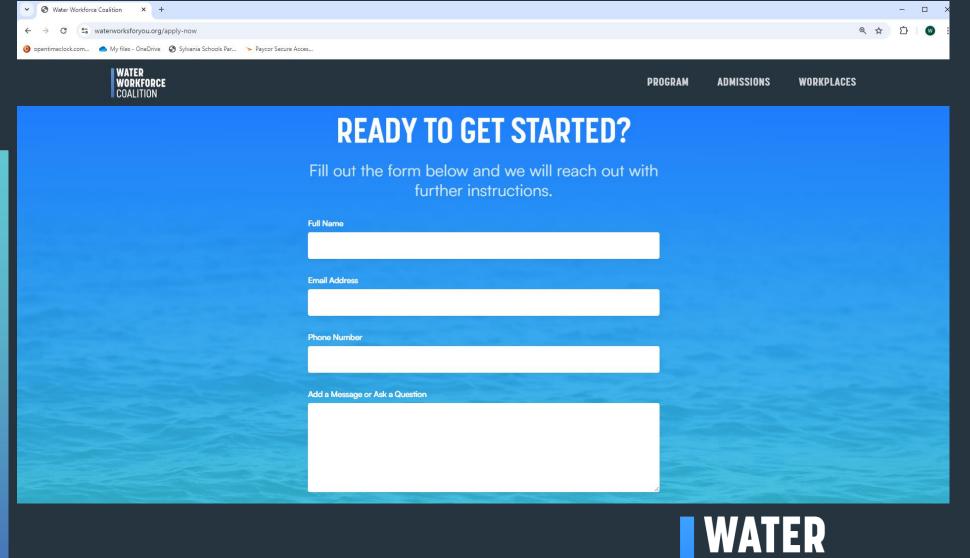


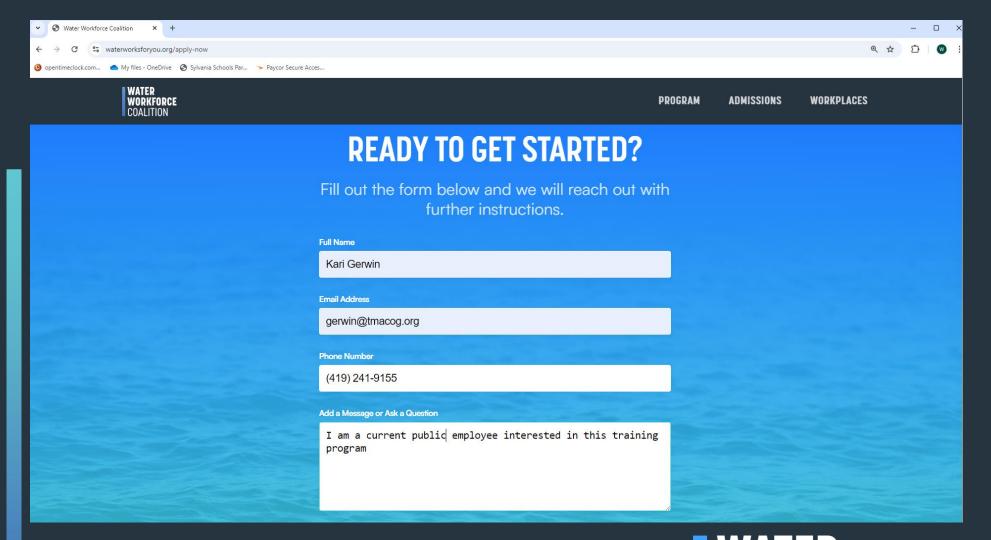


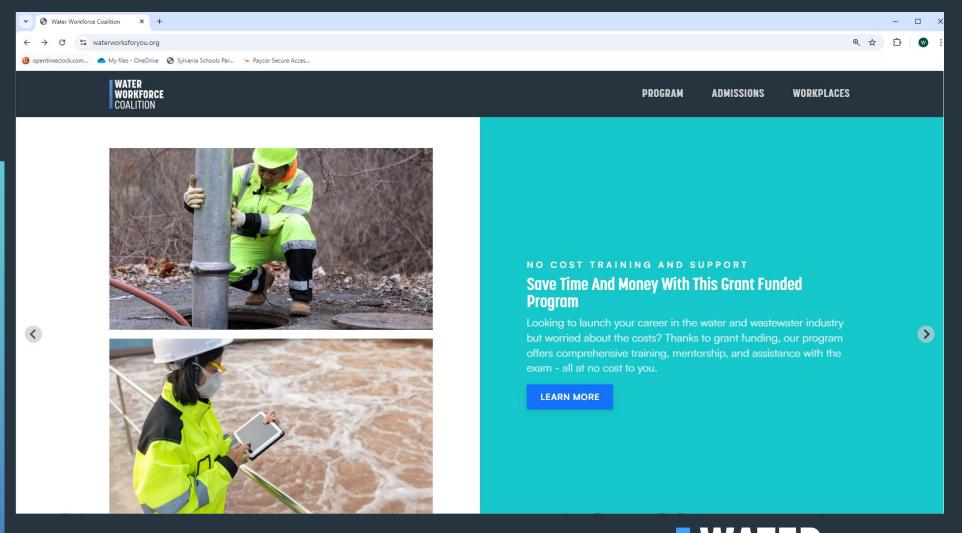


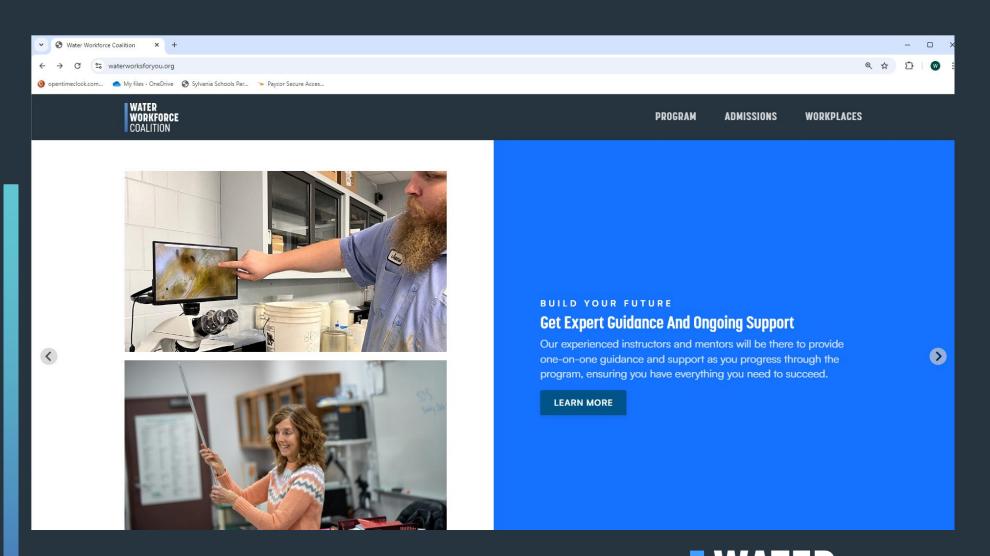


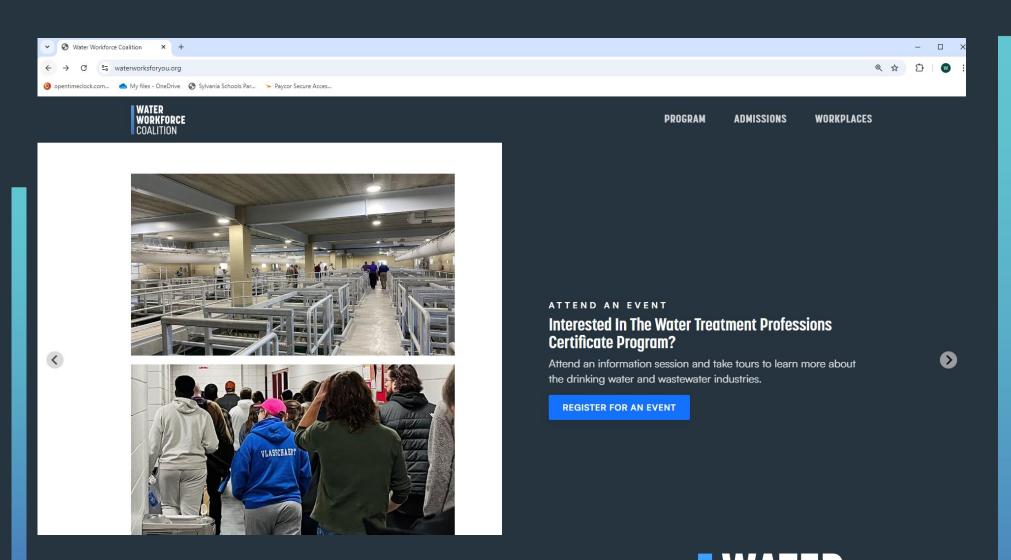


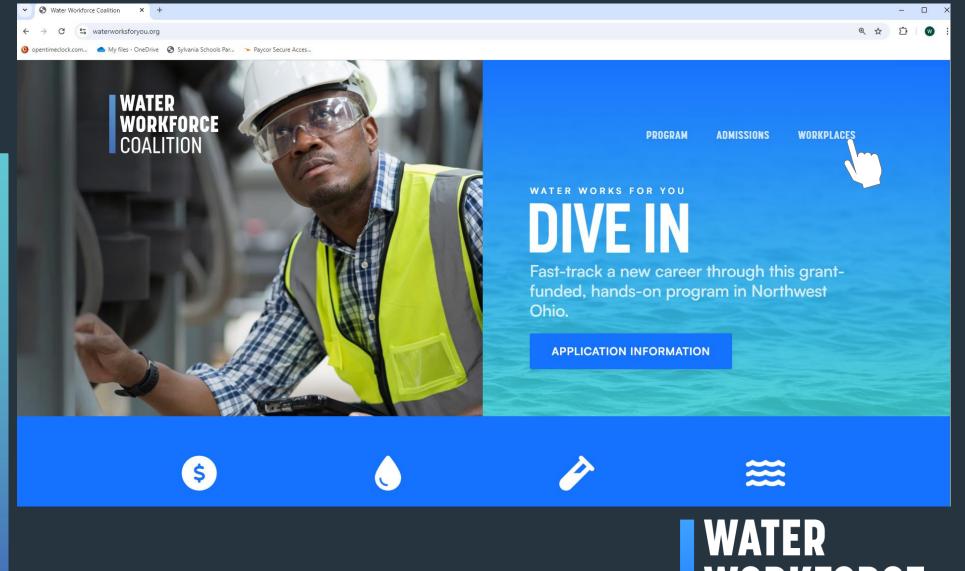




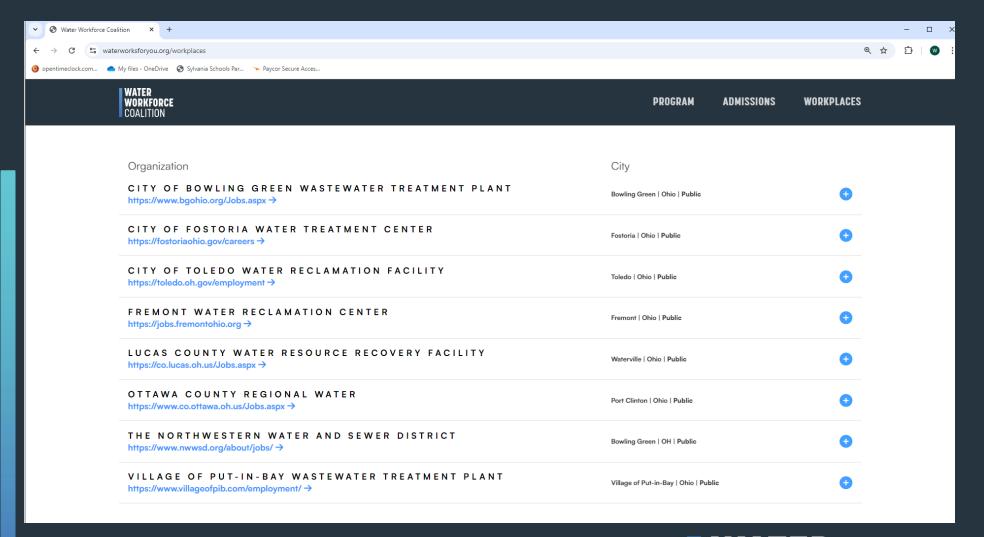


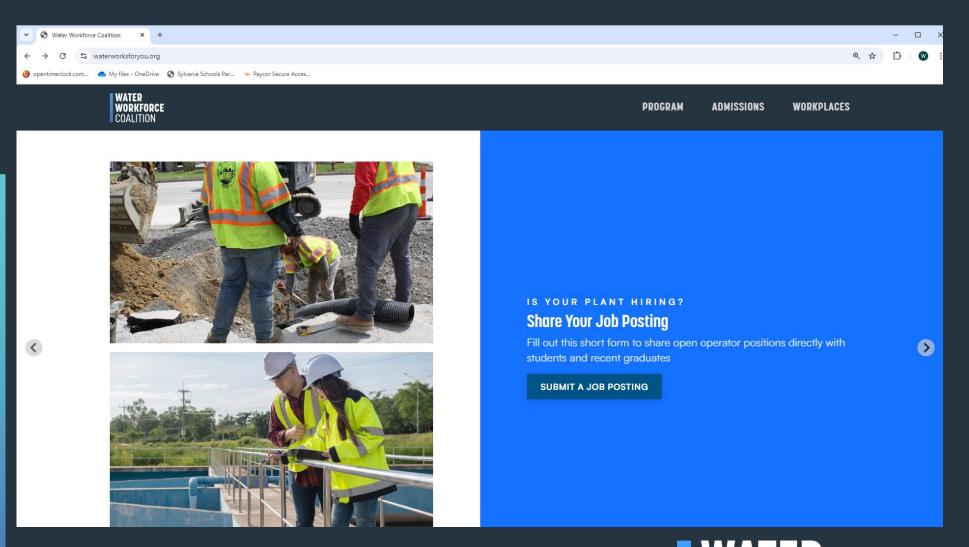


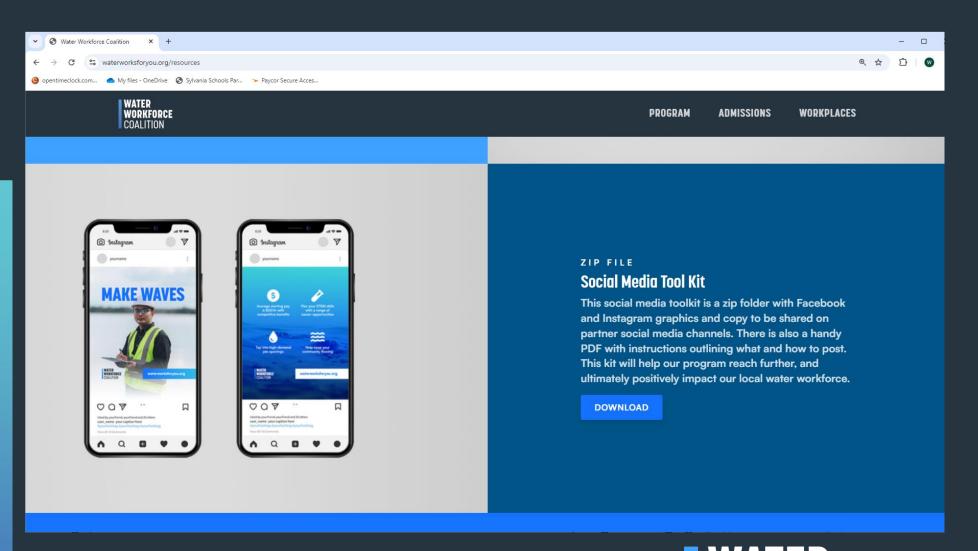




**WORKFORCE** COALITION







# New training program

Goal – Prepare students to take OEPA Class 1 Exams

Classroom Instruction

Labs

On-the-job Learning Water Treatment Professions Certificate Program

- -Full-time 16 weeks
- -Tailored to Ohio EPA's "need to know" criteria
- -Reinforce classroom learning in labs and facilities
- -Exam prep integrated into the program

Operators feedback through Training Committee





## Curriculum

Goal – Meet Ohio EPA
Water Class 1 Content Area
Objectives

**Treatment Process** 

**Laboratory Analysis** 

Equipment Operation and Maintenance

Source Water Characteristics

Security, Safety, Compliance, and Administrative Procedures Goal – Meet Ohio EPA
Wastewater Class 1 Content
Area Objectives

Treatment Process Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment

**Laboratory Analysis** 

Equipment Evaluation and Maintenance

**Equipment Operation** 

Security, Safety, Compliance, and Administrative Procedures



## **Connect Trainees & Utilities**

Goal – Provide opportunities for meaningful career connections and mentorship

Recruitment

Training

Job seeking

Employment

Connections with Local Utilities and Operators

Plant tours and talks with operators before enrolling in program

Guest Speakers in the Classroom

Small group and individual on-thejob (OTJ) learning every Friday

Lunchtime Career Talks throughout semester

Access to Job Postings





# **Participating Utilities**

City of Bowling Green Wastewater

Village of Putin-Bay Wastewater

Harbor

City of Toledo Wastewater

City of Bowling **Green Water** 

City of Fremont **Drinking Water** 

City of Fremont Wastewater

City of Toledo

**Ottawa County Drinking Water** 

**Lucas County** Wastewater

**Drinking Water** 

City of Findlay

**Drinking Water** 

City of Oregon **Drinking Water** 

Perrysburg Wastewater City of Fostoria **Drinking Water** Village of Oak

Northwestern Water and Sewer District

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waterworksforyou.org

# Scaling-up

Goal – Make program materials available to other parts of Ohio and the US

#### Provide Resources on Program Website

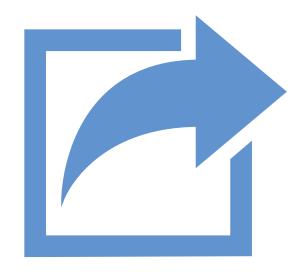
Marketing Toolkit

Curriculum and program Materials

Lists of resources

Summary of Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Ability to expand website to include evolving partnerships and initiatives









# Water Treatment Professions Certificate

Mary Kaczinski Professor, Environmental Science Owens Community College

# **Goals for Students**

- Earn the Water Workforce Professions technical certificate
  - Includes OSHA 30-hour certificate
- Succeed on the Class 1 Ohio Operator Certification Exam in *Water Treatment* or *Wastewater Treatment*
- Gain employment at a treatment facility
- Become a Certified Class 1 Operator
  - After 12 months plant experience
  - Includes hours spent in this program
- Progress in an *important, meaningful* career



### The Water Workforce Professions Technical Certificate



Approved by Ohio Dept of Higher Education as a short-term technical certificate

Students are eligible for financial aid to cover expenses not covered by grant funds (e.g. living expenses, computer)





Courses are applicable to the Owens
Associate of Science, Environmental Science
Concentration

Provide a start towards higher degrees if that is their ambition





#### Curriculum

- Developed to meet objectives for Ohio Class 1 Certification Exam
  - Need to Know Criteria for the WPI Water or Wastewater Exams
    - Equipment Operation, Evaluation and Maintenance
    - Process Monitoring and Adjustment
    - Laboratory Analysis
    - Safety, Security, Compliance and Administrative Procedures

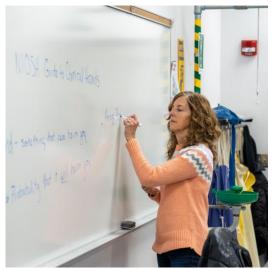


### WATER WORKFORCE COALITION

### Curriculum

- Emphasis on understanding of concepts and WHY they are important
- How does this career fit into the larger water treatment profession?
- How does this career fit into society and the environment as a whole?
- Focus on problem solving and 'figuring it out'









## Mondays – Thursdays In the Classroom and Lab

- Instructors with teaching and professional experience
  - Owens Faculty
  - Former County Sanitary Engineer
  - Dual Class IV Statewide Trainer
  - OSHA Authorized Instructors
- Classroom, laboratory, and field trips
- Tutoring available
- Practice testing



#### Courses

# 1<sup>st</sup> Eight Weeks (3 classes)

- ENV101 Intro to Environmental Science
- ENV103 Intro to the Water Treatment Profession
- ENV124 Environmental Sampling Methods

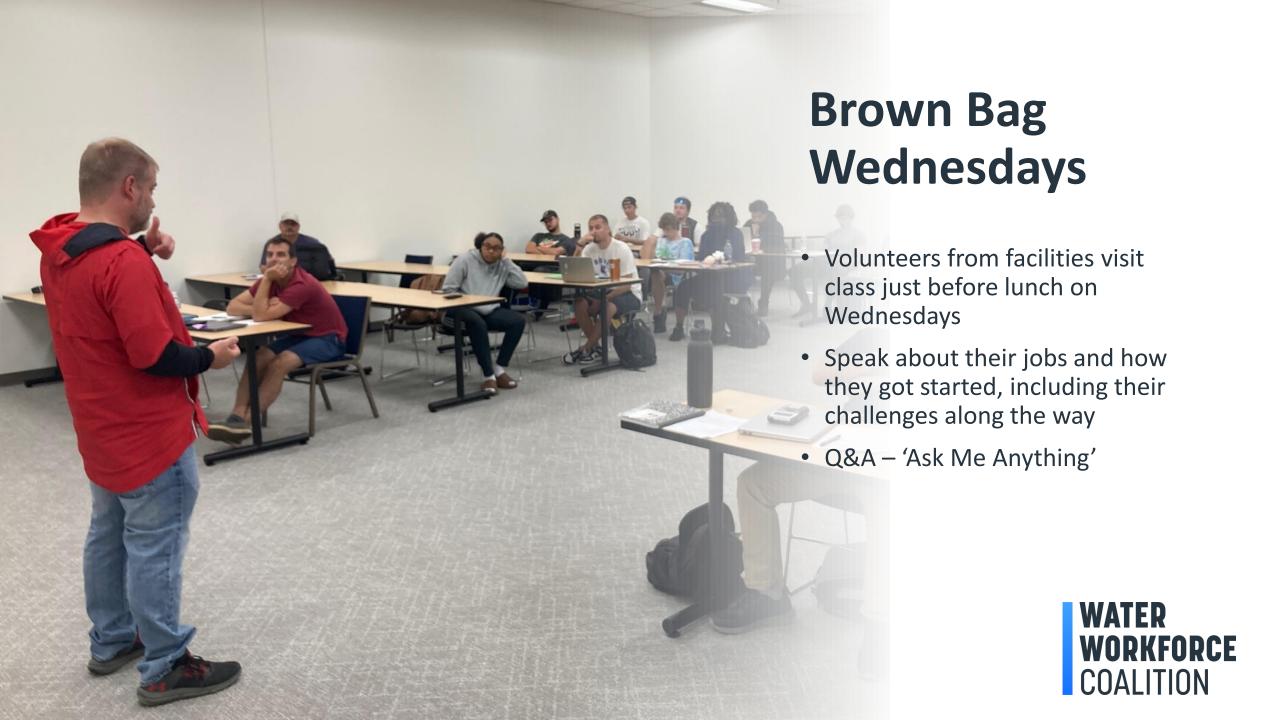
# 2<sup>nd</sup> Eight Weeks (2 classes)

ENV110 OSHA General Safety

#### Students Choose:

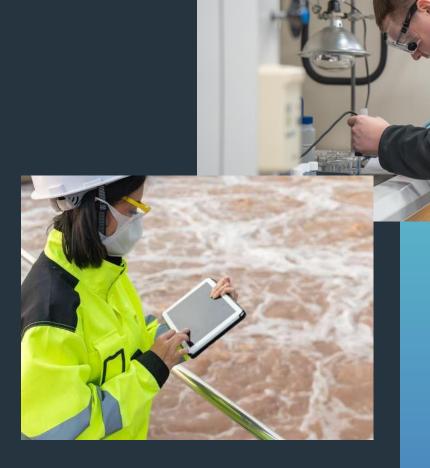
- ENV230 Wastewater Treatment
- ENV235 Water Treatment





## **OTJ Fridays**

- On Fridays, students go beyond the classroom and visit various treatment facilities.
  - First half of program rotation around area water and wastewater facilities
  - Second half assigned to one facility for multiple weeks
- Reinforce classroom
- Learn via hands on experience
- Build network and mentor relationships



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#### **Foundations**

#### **ENV101**

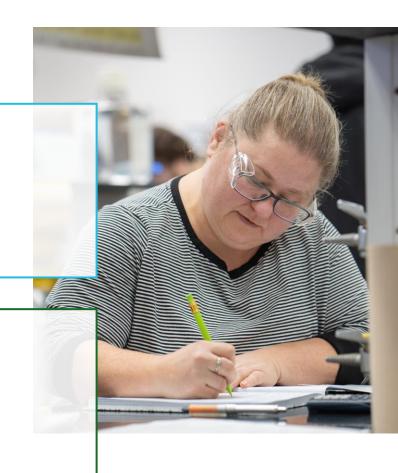
Intro to Environmental Science

- Why is water treatment so important?
- How does the environment work, and how do humans affect it?

#### **ENV103**

Intro to the Water Treatment Profession

- How does the water profession work to protect our environment?
- Overview of both treatment processes
- Basic water math
- Students reflect on goals and choose their preferred path



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## **Principle to Practice**

#### **ENV124**

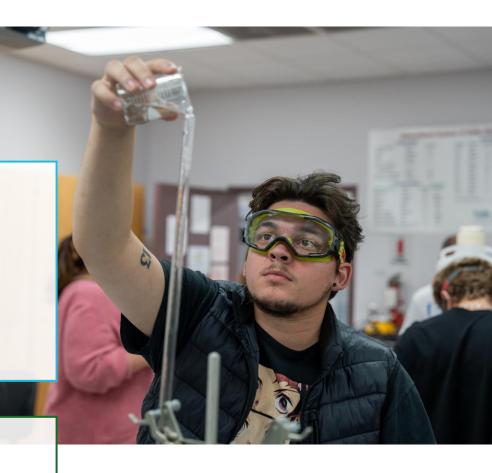
**Environmental Sampling Methods** 

- How do we know our treatment is successful?
- Learn how samples are collected and analyzed, and how that information is used in the treatment process

#### **ENV110**

**OSHA** General Safety

- What hazards exist at facilities?
- What procedures are in place to protect employees?





#### Water or Wastewater Focus

#### **ENV230**

Wastewater Treatment

- How does each part of the treatment process work?
- What is the operator's role in process control, solving problems, and making adjustments?

#### **ENV235**

Water Treatment

- How does each part of the treatment process work?
- What is the operator's role in process control, solving problems, and making adjustments?





# Cohort 1 January 16 – May 9, 2024

- 21 students successfully completed the certificate program
- 12 Wastewater/9 Water
- OTJ training provided at 12 facilities in NW Ohio
- Cohort style class developed a great rapport and support each other



#### The next two cohorts

- Cohort 2 Fall 2025
  - Currently in Week #5
  - 23 students
    - one medical withdrawal
- Cohort 3 Spring 2025
  - 24 seats available
  - 29 people have applied
  - Owens and TMACOG working with applicants to complete all registration requirements



# Success So Far!

- A huge part of our success is due to the cooperation of our local facilities
  - Hosting prospective students for tours before they sign up
  - Hosting OTJ Fridays for rotating tours and 8week assignments
  - Sending staff to participate in 'Brown Bag Wednesdays, ask me anything' sessions
- Students have been energized and inspired by the passion and enthusiasm of current Water Workforce Employees



## **Changing Lives**



Many expressed that they were seeking a career change for various reasons:

More rewarding – personally and financially
More stability

Pathway for advancement

Meaningful career using science/technical skills



This opportunity gave some the 'push' they needed to try something new

Overcame reservations about their own abilities, especially in math



# Moving Forward

- Having all tuition and fees covered by the grant certainly was a factor in its popularity
- We are now planning for what this program will look like after the final grant-funded cohort finishes (May 2025)



#### This is how it should be!

#### **Our Mission:**

Owens Community College is the conduit to changing lives for the better in northwest Ohio. Through affordable, accessible, high-quality education and training, and connecting with business and industry through relevant programs, we create pathways to a better quality of life and progress for the Region.

We are proud to be participating in this workforce development effort, and thankful to be an active partner with the water treatment industry!

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## My Thoughts

- Traditional training focuses on the 'what' and 'how'
- This program starts out with the 'why'
  - Chemistry and biology
  - Lab tests and how the parameters they measure impact the process
- Problem solving
- Math focus on basics early
  - Area, volume, velocity, flow
  - Stressed importance of organization and units







# Successes, and Challenges to Build Pipeline of New Operators

Chuck Campbell

Project Manager

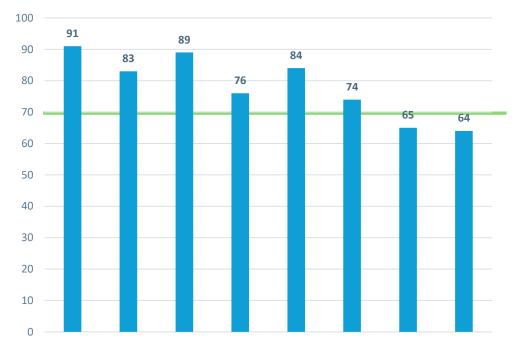
City of Toledo Department of Public Utilities



# **OEPA Class 1 Exam** Results - Water

- Summary
- 9 of 9 Water students took the exam
- 6 of 9 passed exam
- 0 students retook the exam
- 5 students took Class II after passing Class
  - 3 passed
- 1 student passed Class A, but failed Class
- Average score 75.6%





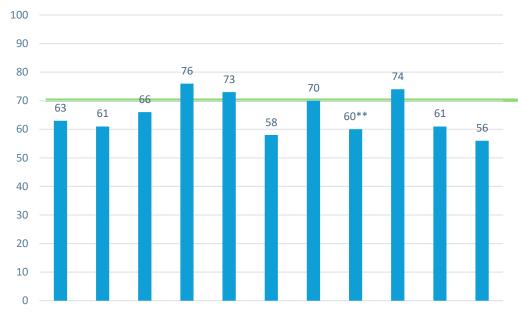


## OEPA Class 1 Exam Results - Wastewater

#### Summary

- 10/12 Wastewater students took the exam
- 4/10 passed exam
- 4 students retook the exam (1 passed)
- 1 student took the Class II after passing Class I, but missed by 1 point
- Average of WW Students 65.8%

#### Wastewater Cohort- Class 1 Exam Scores\*



\*\*Water Student passed the Water exam and later took the WW exam



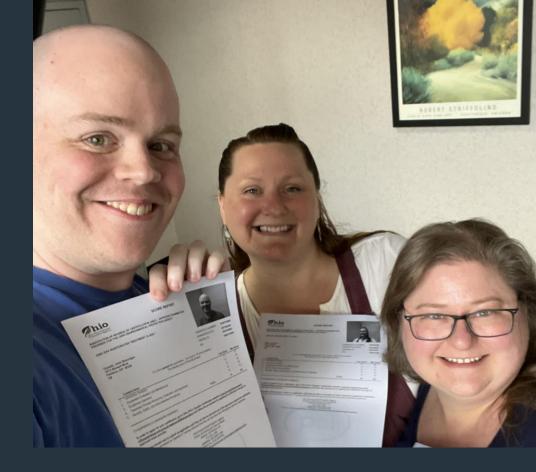
# **Employment Outcomes**

#### **Wastewater Students**

- 1 Apprentice at NW Water and Sewer District
- 3 Employed at Toledo Water Reclamation
- 1 Employed at Bowling Green Wastewater
- 1 Employed by private sector WW Contractor
- 2 Reported employment outside of Water Workforce

#### **Water Students**

- 1 Employed at Toledo Collins Park Drinking Water Plant
- 1 Employed at City of Bowling Green Drinking Water Plant
- 1 Employed by private sector Water contractor
- 2 Hired by City of Fremont Water



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# **Class I Content Area Summary**

Water									
	TREATMENT PROCESS	LABORATORY ANALYSIS	EQUIPMENT OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE	SOURCE WATER CHARACTERISTICS	SECURITY, SAFETY, COMPLIANCE, AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES				
Number of Questions	30	13	27	10	20				
Average Score (%)	78.8	77.9	73.1	77.5	85.0				

Wastewater									
	TREATMENT PROCESS  MONITORING,  EVALUATION, AND  ADJUSTMENT	LABORATORY ANALYSIS	EQUIPMENT EVALUATION AND MAINTENANCE	EQUIPMENT OPERATION	SECURITY, SAFETY, COMPLIANCE, AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES				
Number of Questions	30	15	20	25	10				
Average Score (%)	66.9	69.5	55.4	59.1	76.4				



#### **Program Successes**

Filling operator vacancies through cooperative partnership

• 52% Confirmed Placement in Water Utilities

New partnerships – Ohio Means Jobs, WPI, 360 Water, and many more

#### Successful first cohort

- Impressive results on Water Exams
- Job placement for Wastewater Students

Support and resources for those who failed the OEPA Exam

#### Visibility for water sector careers

- Over 140 people have attended program info sessions
- Around 120 have attended tours of water and wastewater plants
- 7,500 unique website users
- More than 650 People requesting program information



#### Challenges

Challenges for smaller utilities or political subdivisions

• Short staffed but enthusiastic involvement

Identifying and connecting with private sector partners

• Recent partnerships with Kleinfelder and 360 Water a good start!

Difficulty connecting with veterans and current utility employees

Testing challenges for wastewater students

• Revising WW content

Assuring consistency in On-the-Job experiences

Streamlined mechanism to track students after program completion





#### What's next?

- 2 more cohorts funded by EPA grant
  - Fall 2024 in session— 23 students
  - Spring 2025 29 applicants
- Continue to refine program to address testing challenges
- Develop bank of utility trainers, mentors, and speakers
- Further develop partnerships and commitments to ensure long-term program success
- Develop Educational Toolkit to share online
- Explore flexible options for current full-time employees
- Build in flexibility for changing workforce needs



#### Looking beyond the grant



Identify long-term funding mechanisms



Partnerships for expanding program to other areas of Ohio and US



Integrate emerging contaminants, climate, and equity



Integration of water sector jobs into grades 5-12 curriculum



# WATER WORKFORCE COALITION

#### **Thanks to Our Partners!**











































#### **Contact Us**

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Mary Kaczinski@owens.edu

**Chuck Campbell, City of Toledo** 

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www.WaterWorksForYou.org



## WATER WORKFORCE COALITION

# Questions?

# Q&A Session

Webinar slides and recording will be sent to registrants in the next week.



## Closing Poll

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best score and 1 being the worst, how would you rate today's webinar?

# Thank you!













