

Closing the Water Gap Working Group

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Project Description

- The project expands ongoing research on water equity to broader aspects of water governance and their operationalization in the 36 water authorities in Allegheny County.

Context and Background

- The United Nations recognizes **access to water and sanitation as a human right**. It is based on the following normative criteria and implementation principles:
 - Sufficient availability, accessibility, quality and safety, affordability, and acceptability.
 - Equality and non-discrimination, access to information and transparency, participation, accountability, sustainability, progressive realization, and non-retrogression.
 - But frameworks are not prescriptive of models of implementation.**

Research Question and Methods

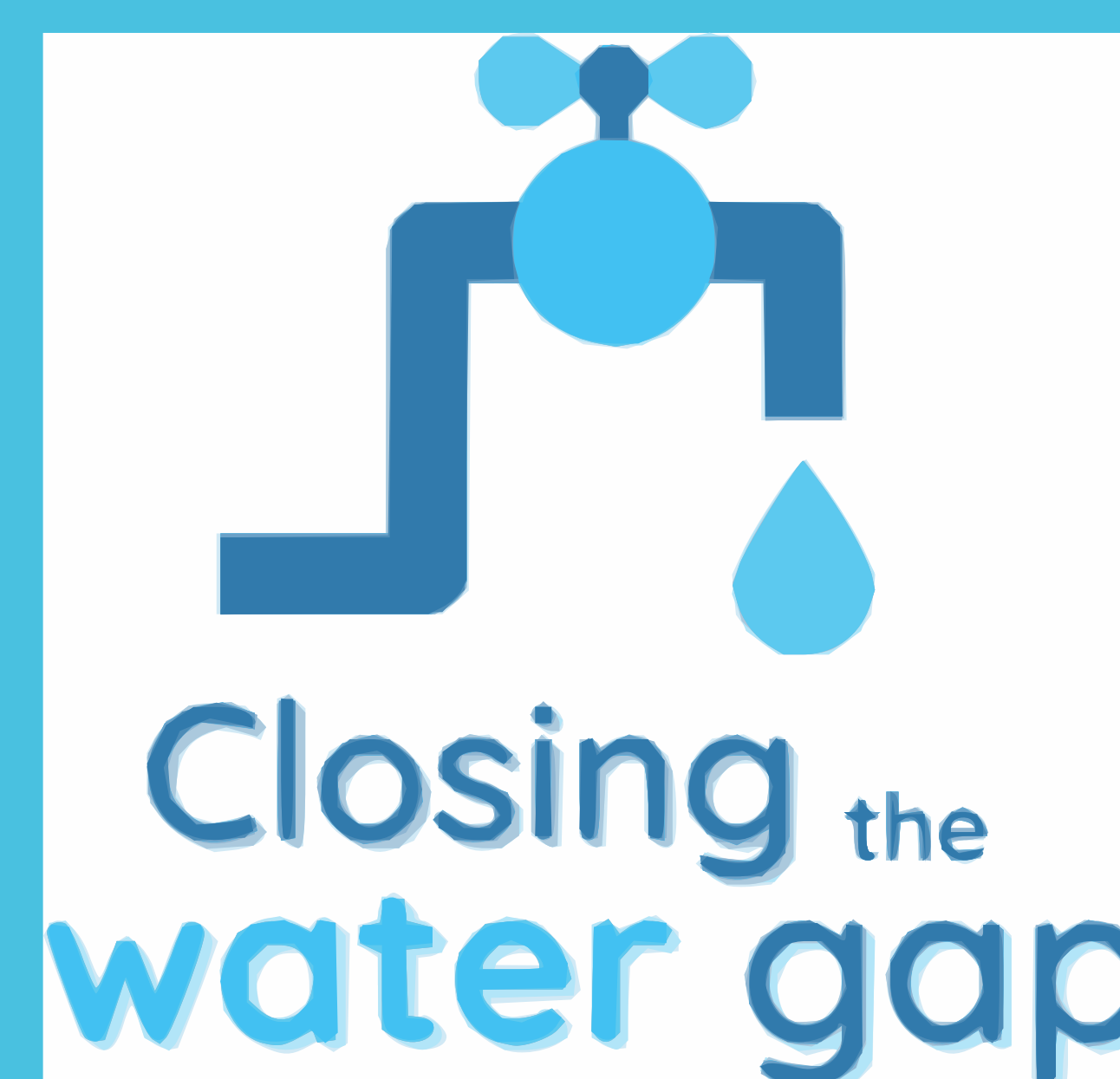
- To what extent are the HRTW+S principles implemented in the 36 water systems of the Pittsburgh region?

Mixed methods:

- Secondary sources for data collection: Official reports, newspaper articles, website scraping, etc. and semi-structured interviews with utility officials, May-July 2022, in the Pittsburgh region.

36 Water Departments and Authorities in the Pittsburgh Area		
Main guiding principles	24/36	Main goal is meeting environmental regulations, federal and state requirements Principles safe, clean, affordable, reliable and high quality water are explicit in systems' websites
Affordability	14/36	Water shut off in place for unpaid bills: Past due 30-60 days, water shut off, extra charges (fines)
	15/36	Customer assistance programs
Quality & Safety	36/36	Include water quality report
	20/36	Chemical or lead contamination from the local news
Transparency	0/36	Information of board members, such as contact information, etc.
	9/36	Information about board meetings

Understanding what principles guide current water practices is key to determining effective allocation of funds for improving water governance and ensuring access to clean, safe, and affordable water for all.



Project Outputs

- Synthesis analysis of “good water governance” based on HRTW+S framework and their operationalization and comparative analysis of current local water practices.

HRTW+S criteria	Description	Examples of Implementation in US
Sufficient	Water supply for each person must be sufficient and continuous for personal and domestic use; WHO recommends 50 to 100 liters per person per day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DC Water CAP discounts 3,000 gallons a month
Safe	Free of micro-organisms, chemical substances, and radiological hazards that constitute a threat to a person's health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Hampshire tracking of PFAs Maine's use of ARPA funds for home water testing
Acceptable	Acceptable color, odor, and taste; facilities and services must be culturally appropriate and sensitive to needs depending on gender, lifecycle, and privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duluth, Minnesota
Physically Accessible	Water and sanitation sites must be physically accessible within or nearby their home, school, place of work; must be within 1km of home, collection time should take less than 30 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DigDeep Navajo Water Project Appalachia Water Project
Affordable	Water, facilities, and services must be affordable. Water costs should not exceed 3% of monthly household income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philadelphia TAP Baltimore Water4All Pima County, Arizona
Access to Information and Transparency	Utilities must ensure that everyone has access to information pertaining to water and sanitation services in various languages and formats that are accessible to customers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Websites and pages detailing water quality, financials, etc. Frequent newsletters/ emails about future plans and policies Materials available in a variety of languages
Participation	Utilities must provide spaces for public participation in decision-making processes so that customer needs and concerns are addressed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atlanta's Water Equity Taskforce Baltimore's Water Equity and Accountability Act Philadelphia's Public Advocate
Accountability	Systems must be in place to ensure that providers follow all protocols and monitor the quality and effectiveness of services provided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Columbus Water Works monthly customer satisfaction index and surveys
Sustainability	Utilities must operate in a way that safeguards future financial, social, environmental, and water resource health and longevity for themselves, their customers, and their regions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Camden's SMART green infrastructure and sustainability initiative Boston Water and Sewer Commission hourly water monitoring and customer leak alerts California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

DEI Values and Impact

- Water is essential to human health, but the accessibility gap falls along **racial, economic, and geographic** lines.
- Determining “good water governance” is the **first step to implementing strategies that improve water access, quality, and good governance for everyone.**

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