

# SAFER Drinking Water Program Advisory Group Onboarding Meeting

Meeting Notes | February 12, 2026

## Overview

The Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Advisory Group participated in an onboarding meeting for the newly and re-appointed SAFER Advisory Group members. The agenda included an overview of the Water Boards and the SAFER Drinking Water Program, which included topics such as the annual needs assessment and the fund expenditure plan. A brief overview of the SAFER Advisory Group member roles and responsibilities was also provided.

## Water Boards Overview

Water Board staff provided an overview of the California Water Boards. Links to the following videos were shared with Advisory Group members.

- [History of the Water Boards](#)
- [Water Boards Structure](#)

## SAFER Drinking Water Program Overview

Water Board staff presented an overview of the SAFER program. SAFER was established in 2019 with the passing of Senate Bill (SB) 200, in response to the complex water issues that have created historical inequities amongst small, disadvantaged communities. In addition to providing funding for safe drinking water solutions, the SAFER program includes an annual needs assessment, which informs the SAFER Advisory Group and State Water Board; the SAFER Fund Expenditure Plan, which the SAFER Advisory Group advises on; and community engagement between Water Boards staff and communities who lack safe drinking water.

## CA Drinking Water Needs Assessment Overview

- The annual CA Drinking Water Needs Assessment assesses water systems that fail to provide safe drinking water. Failing criteria includes primary and secondary maximum contaminant level exceedances, E. coli detections, treatment technique violations, monitoring and reporting violations, and storage capacity and water outage violations.
- Staff explained the methodology and scoring system used when doing risk assessments each year for public water systems, state small systems and domestic wells, and discussed how cost assessments directed by SB 200 help inform where SAFER funding should be directed. Links to [prior Needs Assessments](#) can be found on the SAFER website.
- Advisory Group members inquired into how criteria for the risk assessments have changed over time, and whether affordability is taken into account. Staff explained how some data sources used in the initial years of SAFER are no longer available, but whenever risk indicators are added or removed, Division of Drinking Water goes through the public process to finalize those changes. There is not currently a regulatory standard on affordability, but standards are in development.

## Annual Fund Expenditure Plan Overview

- Staff provided an overview of how the Annual Fund Expenditure Plan is developed. The SAFER program is funded from multiple sources, including the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund (SADWF).
- Because the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund is very flexible, it can address a number of needs within SAFER, including bottled water, technical assistance, construction projects, and operation and maintenance costs. The Annual Fund Expenditure Plan is created each year with input from the SAFER Advisory Group, results from the Needs Assessment, as well as SAFER programmatic goals, commitments, and the projected funding demand. The Fund Expenditure Plan (FEP) in turn informs SAFER funding priorities and other funding targets for the upcoming fiscal year.
- The Advisory Group engaged in a question-and-answer session with staff, where they sought clarification on timelines, percentages of different funding sources, and funding caps. As the State fiscal year runs from July 1 – June 30 each year, it was explained that the Fund Expenditure Plan currently in use is the [FY 2025-26 Fund Expenditure Plan](#), and the Fund Expenditure Plan currently in development is the FY 2026-2027 Fund Expenditure Plan, which is expected to be adopted in July or August of this year.
- The discussion highlighted the ways that different funding sources can shift year to year, and it was emphasized that while the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund is consistently at \$130 million each year, which averages about 15-20% of the total SAFER funding portfolio, other state and federal funds can come and go.
- The intended use plan sets a maximum funding cap for each community project and amendments may be possible if material costs are more than expected. The Division of Financial Assistance has also changed the methodology for determining the funding cap per project. Technical Assistance or planning costs are no longer included in determining the funding cap.

## SAFER Advisory Group Overview

Board Resolution No. 2019-0060 established the Advisory Group, which is composed of 19 representatives that serve 2-year terms and is governed by a [charter](#). The Advisory Group advises the Board on the priorities of the Fund Expenditure Plan, helps advance the Human Right to Water, and supports the Board’s commitment to racial equity. The Advisory Group does not approve plans or documents, evaluate individual applications for funding, or make consensus decisions.

## Legal Considerations

- Staff provided an overview for the legal context of the SAFER Advisory Group. As per Health and Safety Code 116768.5, the State Board is required by law to have an Advisory Group that is distinct from decision making bodies.
- To promote governmental transparency, the Advisory Group is a state body that is subject to the [Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act](#), which requires that all meetings consisting of a quorum (majority) of Advisory Group members must be publicly noted and open to the public. Advisory Group members sought clarification on the expectations of the position. Members were reminded that this is not a funded position, but reimbursements are available from the State

Water Board if members travel for in-person Advisory Group meetings. Advisory Group meetings are held both virtually and in-person.

## Public Comment

- No public comments

## Advisory Group Member Announcements & Water Board Next Steps

- Advisory Group member Adam Rausch provided an update on a project in Pescadero. In 2017, Pescadero Middle/High School was notified that their drinking water was unsafe and was provided bottled water. As of this year, that project has been completed, and the school now has safe drinking water.

## Advisory Group Attendance (P= present, A= absent)

Norma I. Amezcua (P)	Angela Islas (P)	Adam J. Rausch (P)
Irene Cacho (A)	Michael Knight (A)	Destiny Rodriguez (A)
Juan Cano (A)	Shannon Murphy (A)	Angela Ruiz-Alvarez (P)
Rosa Carrillo (P)	Soren Nelson (A)	James Sullivan (P)
Kristen Dobbin (A)	Wajiha Noor (P)	Maureen Thompson (P)
Tequita Jefferson (A)	Erick Orellana (A)	
Bruce Houdesheldt (P)	Timoteo Prado (P)	

## State Water Board Attendance

**Board Member:** Laurel Firestone

**Division of Drinking Water:** Dan Wang, Andrew Altevogt, Maritza Flores Marquez, Lawrence Sanchez

**Office of Financial Assistance:** Jeff Wetzel

**Office of Public Engagement, Equity and Tribal Affairs:** Amelia Nishimura, Mandy Roman, Lacey Carlson, Alma López, Christopher Marquis, Zohra Mir, Icelyn Yepez

**Office of Chief Counsel:** Lauren Marshall