

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9 Fact Sheet for Drinking Water & Wastewater activities under General Assistance Program (GAP) program

The purpose of the General Assistance Program (GAP) is to assist tribes to plan, develop, and establish tribal environmental programs.

EPA has been working to establish a list of EPA water infrastructure asset protection resources for tribes. The following information establishes what activities are considered eligible for funding through the GAP program. The following information and examples are provided as a guide; tribes have the flexibility to create work plans that suit their individual needs. Each proposed drinking water and wastewater activity will be looked at on a case-by-case basis.

As a tribe is establishing their environmental program, they can use GAP funds to “test drive” a program. The “test drive” period can take one or up to several years to complete, though may not exceed three years. At the end of the “test drive” period, a tribe must establish a sustainable asset protection program with the technical, financial and managerial capacity to properly operate and maintain the water system. For example, interim results might include:

Year 1

Hire and train an operator (including the training and certification for drinking water operators), conduct community education and outreach, collect and/or create as-built drawing of existing infrastructure, develop annual budget for drinking water system, develop standard operating procedures, etc.

Year 2

Create a five year operating plan, develop on-site wastewater management plan, create preventative maintenance plan, develop asset management plan and asset inventory, create a rate structure, conduct outreach to elected officials about the need to adequately fund asset protection, etc.

Year 3

Collect user charges, adopt operation and maintenance rules and regulations (this can be in the form of a tribal ordinance), conduct sampling and analysis as part of “test driving” the asset protection development program, etc. At the end of the project period, the tribe must establish a sustainable asset protection program with the technical, financial and managerial capacity to properly operate and maintain the water system.

How tribes can work together

Tribes who are closely geographically located may consider collaboratively sharing a certified operator to conduct drinking water and wastewater activities for all participating tribes. EPA encourages these arrangements when feasible, and will make every effort to fund collaborative projects.

Drinking water and wastewater capacity building activities under GAP

A description of drinking water and wastewater asset protection activities is listed below:

- **Training** – Drinking water training that builds tribal capacity in the technical, managerial and financial components of running a public water system, source water protection training, operator training for wastewater facilities, on-site training, semester courses for operator certification, groundwater and surface water protection, and limited funding for training on non-point source pollution control and prevention.
- **5 year operating plan** - An operating plan assists the tribe in capacity building and describes the physical necessities of the systems operation and its associated cost. It also includes a discussion of items such as the physical facility, equipment, assets, special requirements, inventory, costs and budget. This task can also include the completion of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPS).
- **As-built drawings** – Creation of water and waste water system as-builts for existing infrastructure.
- **Reserve Fund** – Development of a budget for drinking water system. No actual GAP funding may be set-aside for the creation of a reserve fund.
- **Development of on-site wastewater management plan** – For septic and other wastewater systems that are potential sources of contamination under source water assessment plan.
- **Preventative maintenance plan** – Develop a preventative maintenance plan for the system. Preventative maintenance may be fundable as part of “test driving” an asset protection development program.
- **Community outreach/education** - Provide information on drinking water and wastewater asset protection and management issues to the local community and tribal government through presentations, brochures, etc.
- **Asset management plan** – Develop a plan for asset management.
- **Asset inventory**- Creation of asset inventory.
- **Annual budget of capital costs and expenses**- Develop budget, outreach to tribal elected officials about the need to adequately fund asset protection.
- **Rules and regulations** – Create tribal operation and maintenance rules and regulations. This can be in the form of a tribal ordinance.
- **Hire a certified operator**- Fund drinking water or wastewater staff for a limited period of time (3 years) consistent with an EPA approved plan to develop and “test drive” a program for tribal systems lacking O&M capacity.
- **Sampling and analysis**- Fund sampling and analysis if part of “test driving” an asset protection development program.
- **Develop a rate structure**- Educating elected officials about the need to adequately fund asset protection, and the actual calculation and development of a community wide rate structure that could sustain a drinking water and wastewater program.

Note: GAP funds cannot be used to fund **drinking water and wastewater activities** on a long term basis, as that would be considered “program implementation,” which is not the focus of GAP funding.