

Our Kuleana: Leveling Up Our Water Advocacy

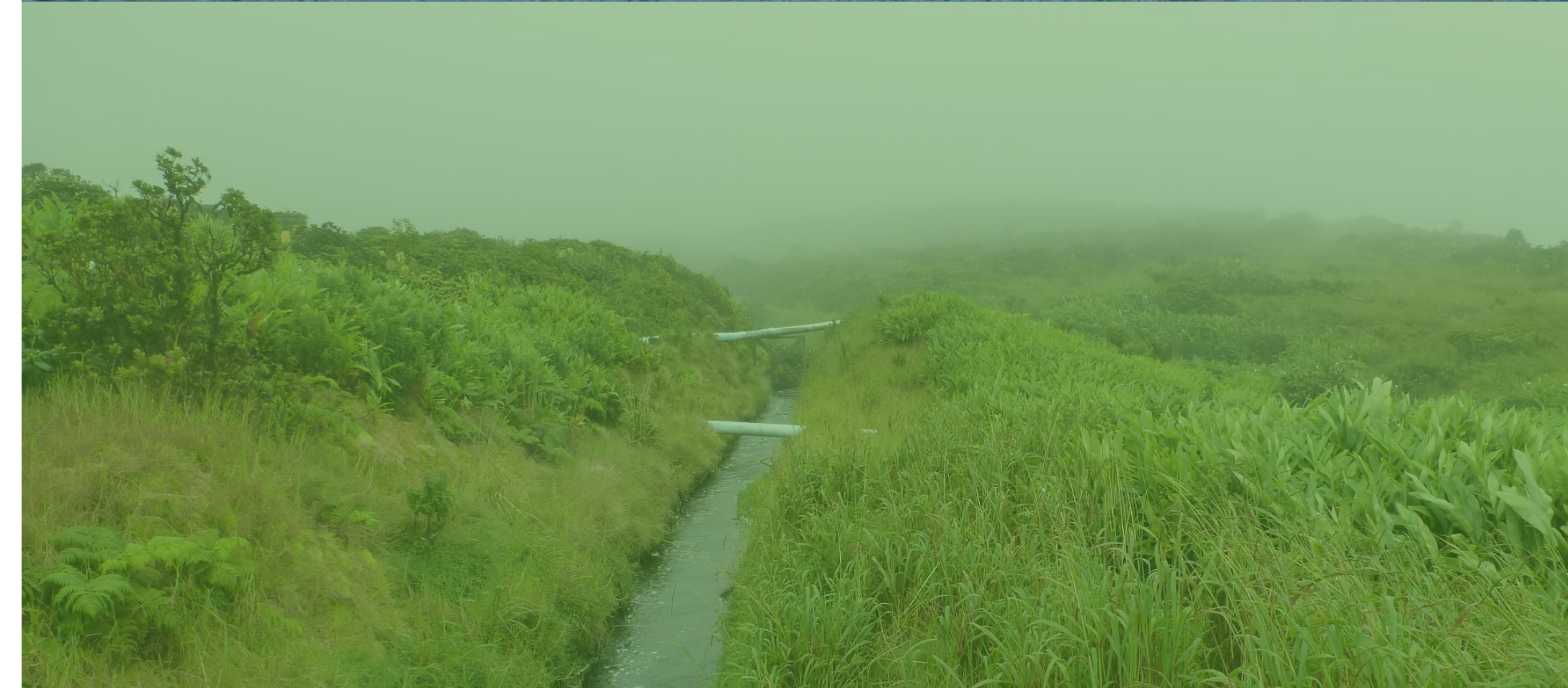
HWWA 2025

HONOLULU, HI

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Harris & Associates



Agenda

- 1. What is Water Advocacy? Why do we need more Water Advocacy?**
 - Financial Sustainability = Water System Sustainability
 - Workforce Challenges
- 2. Ideas to Level Up in Water Advocacy**
- 3. Call to Action**
- 4. Q&A**



WATER ADVOCACY





Water Industry Complexities Require us to “Level Up” our Water Advocacy

- Financial Sustainability = Water Utility Sustainability
- Workforce Challenges

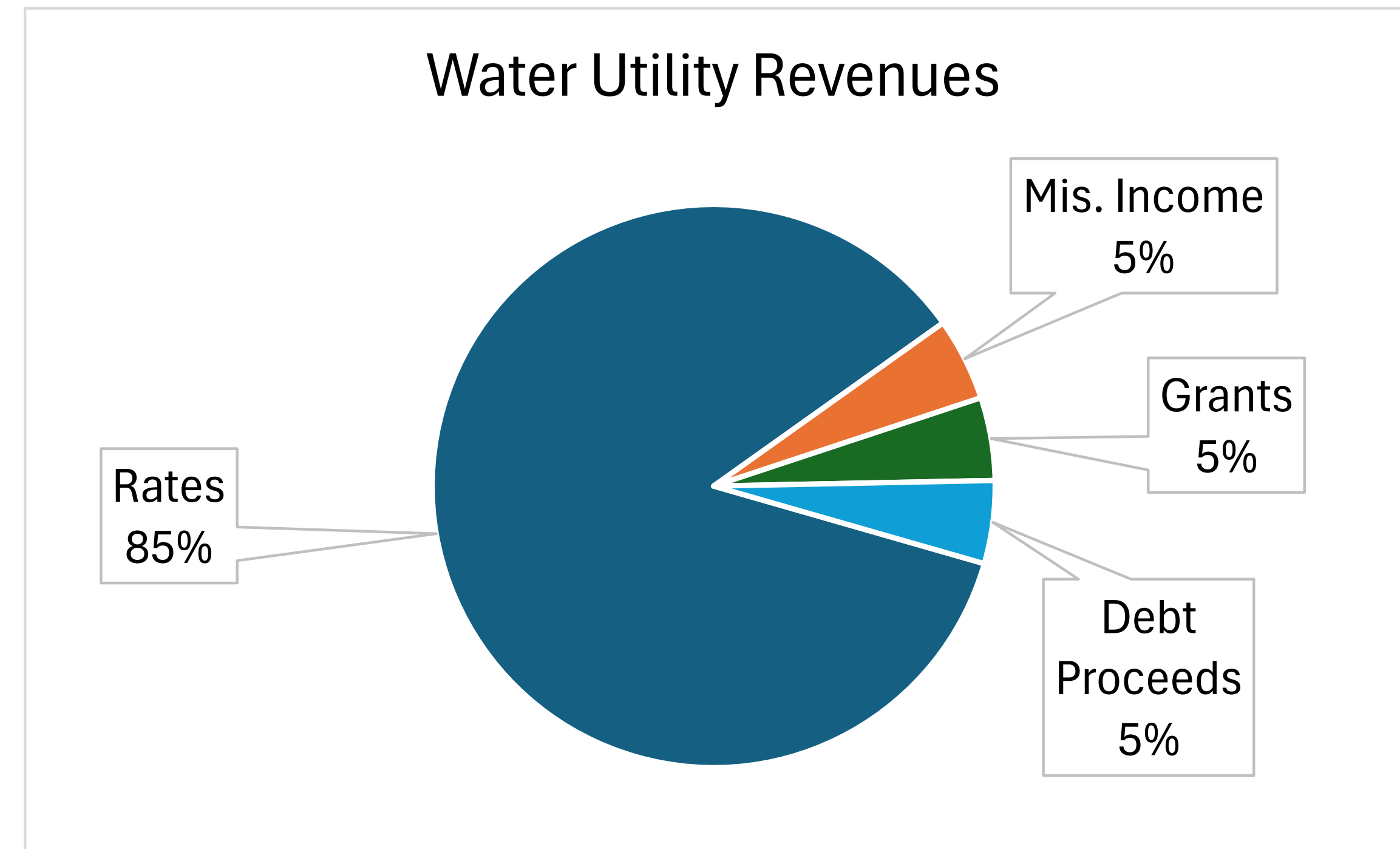
Financial Sustainability – What Does This Mean?

- Multiple year outlook provides stability not only to water utilities, but also to their customers
- Full cost recovery, i.e. depreciation, reserves
- Reflects the values and priorities of the organization
- Need to “stay within our means”
- Need to plan for short term and long term goals
- Need to plan for uncertainty and unanticipated events/impacts
- Resources for understanding your utility’s efforts at financial sustainability
 - Budgets, Planning Studies, Rate Studies



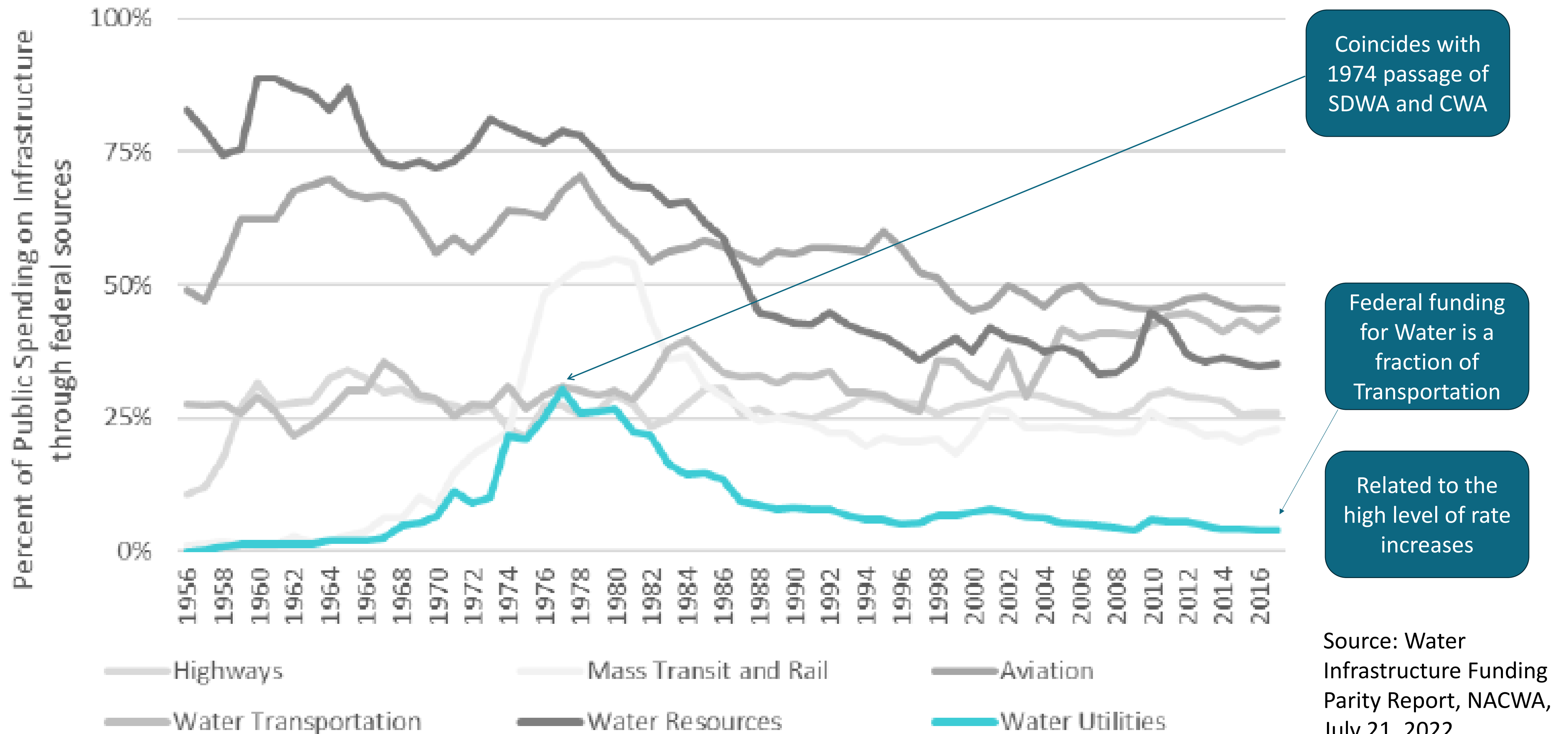
Financial Sustainability – Why Are My Rates Increasing?

- Water utilities are Enterprise Funds:
 - + Rates are the primary source of revenues
 - + Miscellaneous Income – rental income, interest income, sale of assets other non-rate related revenues
 - + Grants – federal, state and local sources
 - + Debt proceeds – paid back via rate revenues
- No support from the General Fund
- = Self-sufficient
- Need to finance O&M, Capital, Debt Service, Reserves – “live within our means”
 - **Capital funding has changed significantly over the last 50 years**



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

Figure ES-2. Federal Spending as a Percentage of Total Spending, by Sector



Workforce Challenges

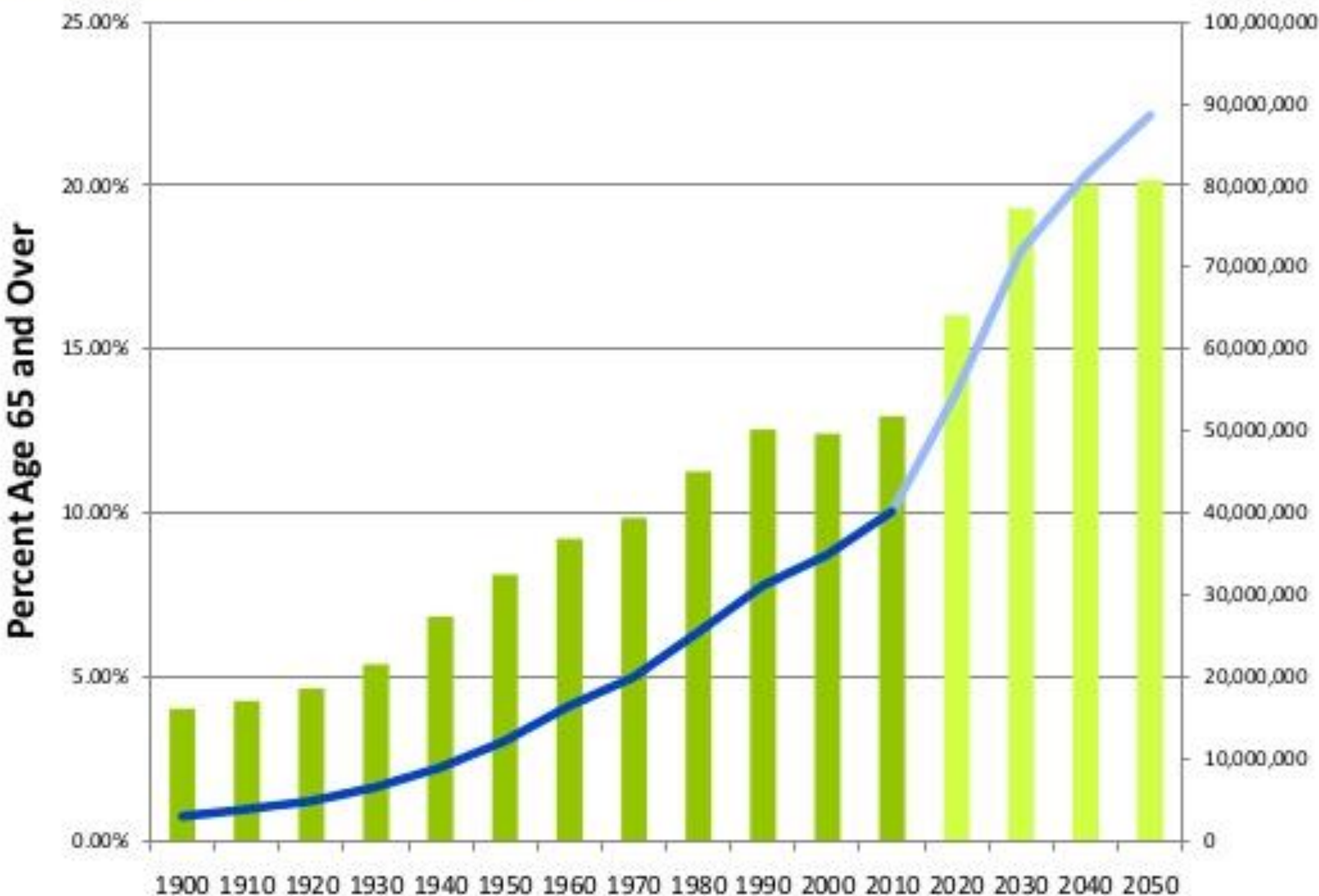
- Demographics
- Awareness of Water Utility Careers
- Technology Transitions



Workforce Challenges - Demographics

THE WAVE IS COMING

U.S. Senior Population 1900 – 2050*



U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. Projections of the Population by Age and Sex for the United States: 2010 to 2050.

*population projection



RURAL SENIORS AND THEIR HOMES





Workforce Challenges – Awareness of Water Utility Careers

- BAYWORK Program
<https://www.baywork.org/about-us/>
- PNWS-AWWA Utility Management Committee Training Workshop – “Recruit, Train, Retain”

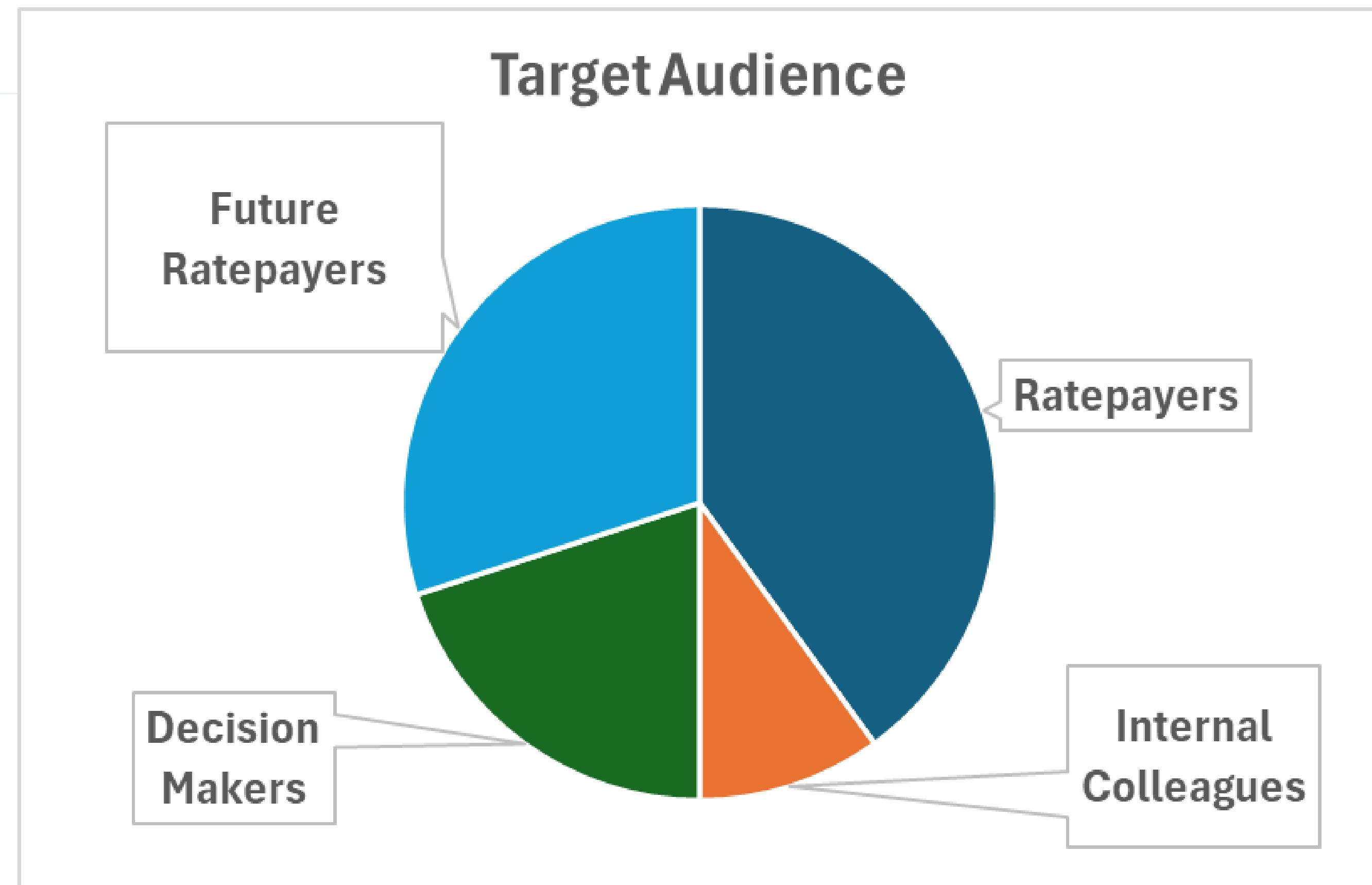
Workforce Challenges – Technology Transitions

- AI
- Virtual Reality
- AMI/AMR
- Cybersecurity
- How is your workforce adapting to changes in technology?
- Good news – it can be an asset for recruiting
- Bad news – it can be a challenge for entrenched workers



Water Advocacy – Closing the Resource Gap

- Water challenges are significant and increasing in complexity
- Financial sustainability = Water sustainability
- We need more “water warriors” and “water ambassadors”
- Target audience
 - Internal colleagues
 - Ratepayers
 - Decision makers
 - Future Ratepayers (keiki/young adults)
- How do we reach this audience?
- How do we develop our own “water story” to level up our advocacy efforts?



Gray Zone – Finding Additional Resources Internally

- Gray Zone = Value between the “Silos”
- “Silos” exist for a reason, build excellence and expertise
- Working across and in between departments, i.e. in the “gray-zone”, produce opportunities to improve organizational processes and culture, as well as uncovering valuable solutions = new resources!!
- Collaborating in the gray-zone leverages relationships, both internal and external, and creates opportunities for innovation and new ways of “connecting the dots” = untapped resources!!
- Working in the gray zone is challenging but can be rewarding



<https://artpetty.com/2019/07/18/leading-in-the-gray-zone/>

Ideas to “Level Up” in Water Advocacy

- Be the water expert in our community
 - Family/Friends
 - Neighborhood Boards
 - Business Roundtables
 - Volunteer Boards and Commissions
- Engage with politicians/decision makers
 - Describe the challenges and needs
 - Be a part of the solutions
- Look for “gray zone” opportunities internally
 - Support silos
 - Partner, collaborate, innovate....and repeat!
- Make sure you are reaching the target audience






Resources to Tell Your Water Story

- Utility Documents – Strategic Plans, Master Plans, Rate Studies
- American Water Works Association (AWWA) Water 2050 Vision <https://www.awwa.org/water-2050/>
- National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) <https://www.nacwa.org/advocacy-analysis>
- US Water Alliance <https://uswateralliance.org/resources/>
- Bluefield Research <https://www.bluefieldresearch.com/the-future-of-water/>
- Social Media Accounts – are you reaching your target audience?
 - Twitter, X, Instagram, TikTok, Podcasts, Facebook, Nextdoor
 - Hawaii DWS – “Who, What, When, Where, *Wai*” podcast series

“Extraordinary Results Begin with One Small Change”

1. Spend time focusing on your objective
2. Commit for the duration
3. Breakdown effort into small elements
4. Take time to learn/adjust along the journey
5. Celebrate your accomplishment
6. Wash, rinse, repeat.....



Margin of victory over 25 years for all golf majors = less than 3 strokes or less than 1 stroke per round.

MAHALO

