

# Our Kuleana: Leveling Up Our Water Advocacy

HWWA 2025

HONOLULU, HI

OCTOBER 17, 2025



# Agenda

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- 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

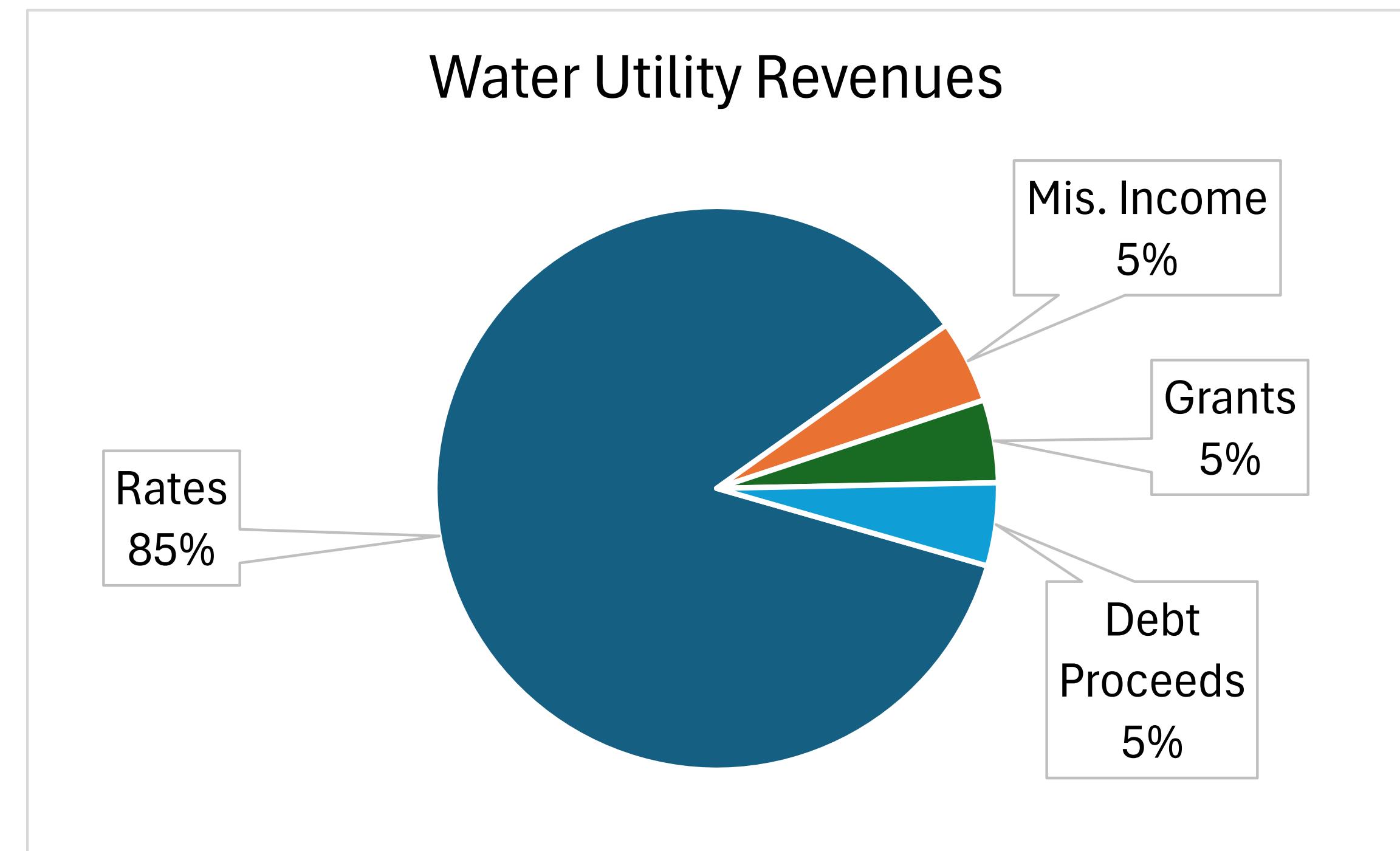
# Financial Sustainability – What Does This Mean?

- 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



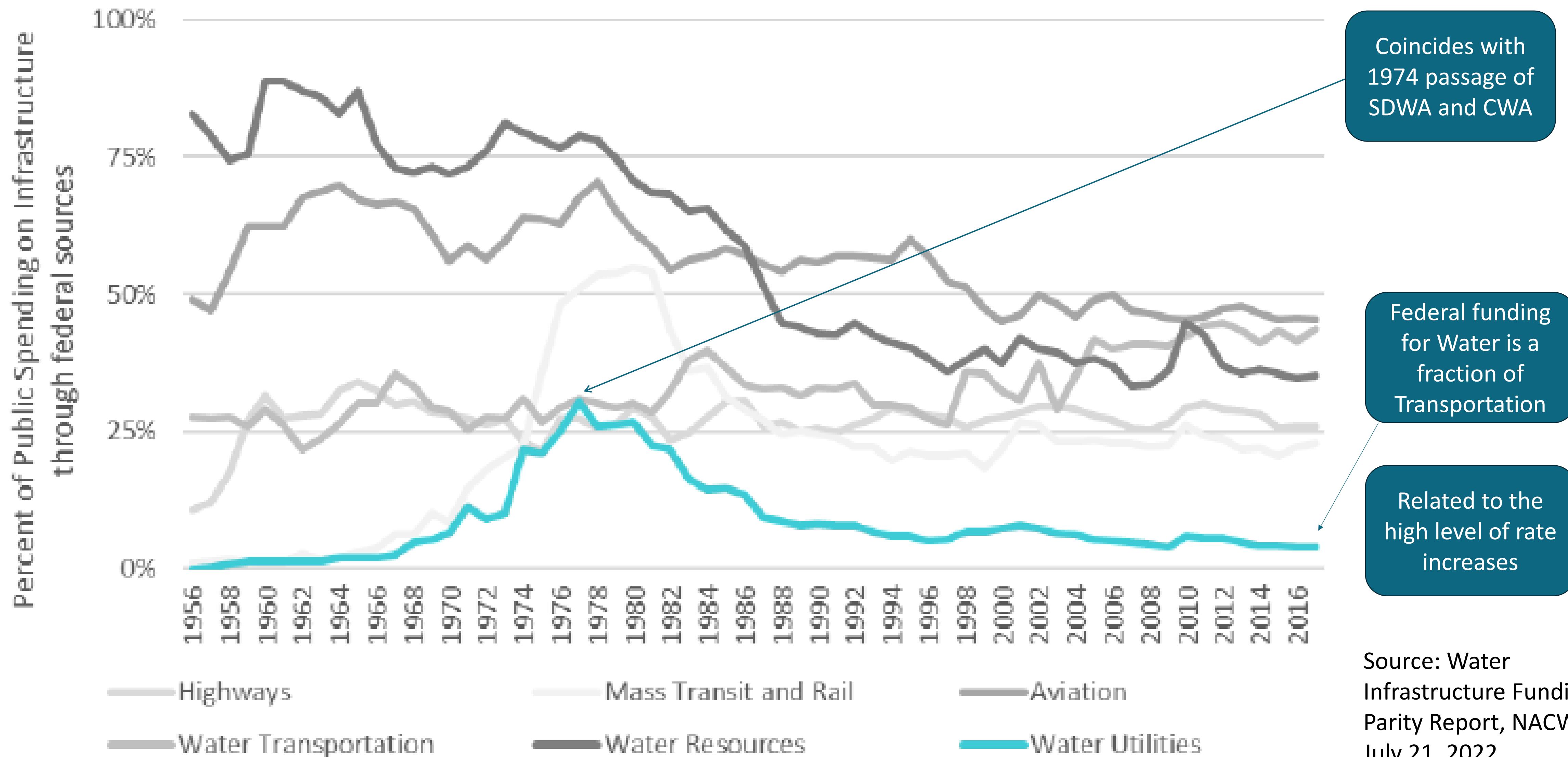
# Financial Sustainability – Why Are My Rates Increasing?

- 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

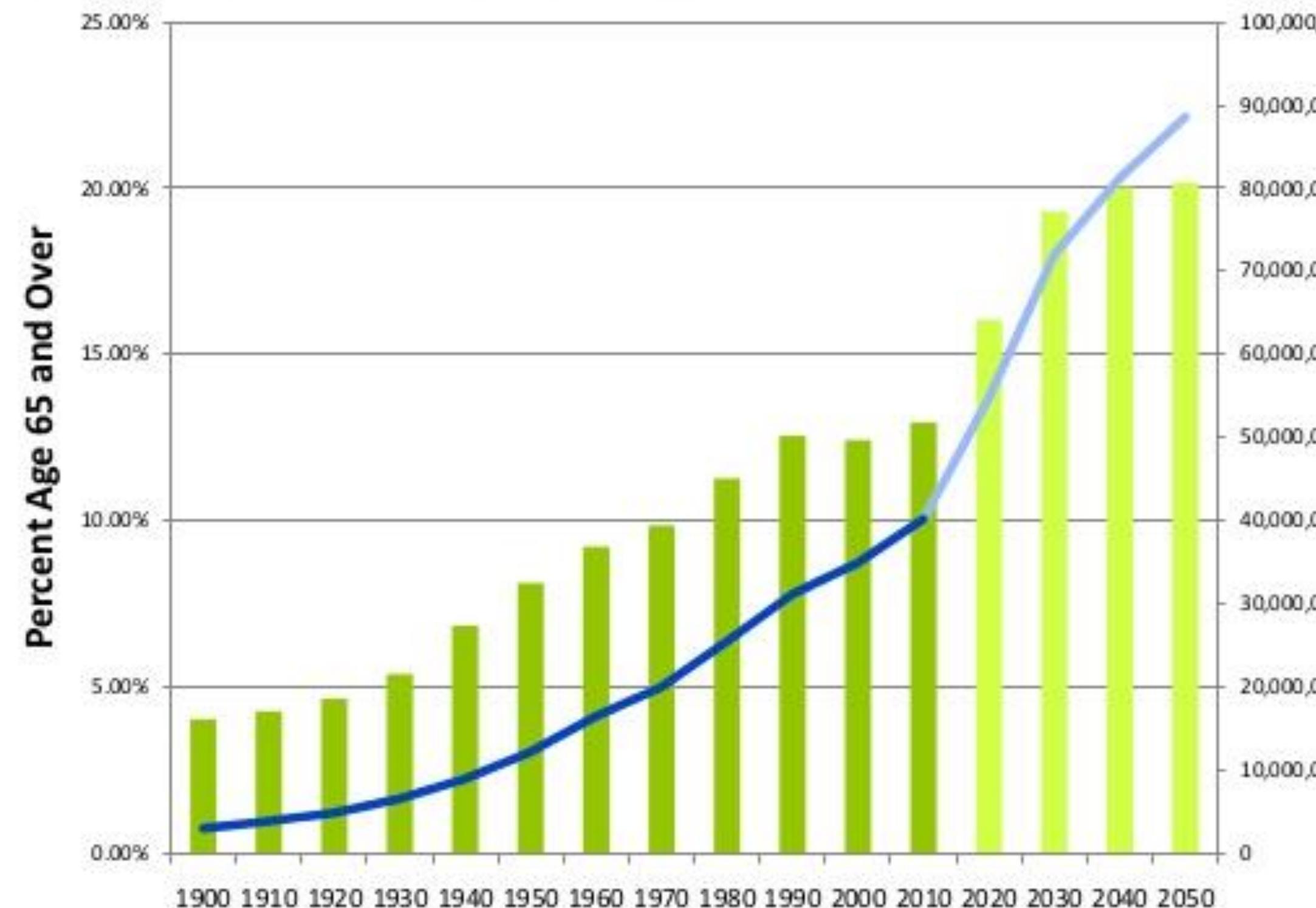
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- Demographics
- Awareness of Water Utility Careers
- Technology Transitions

# 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

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

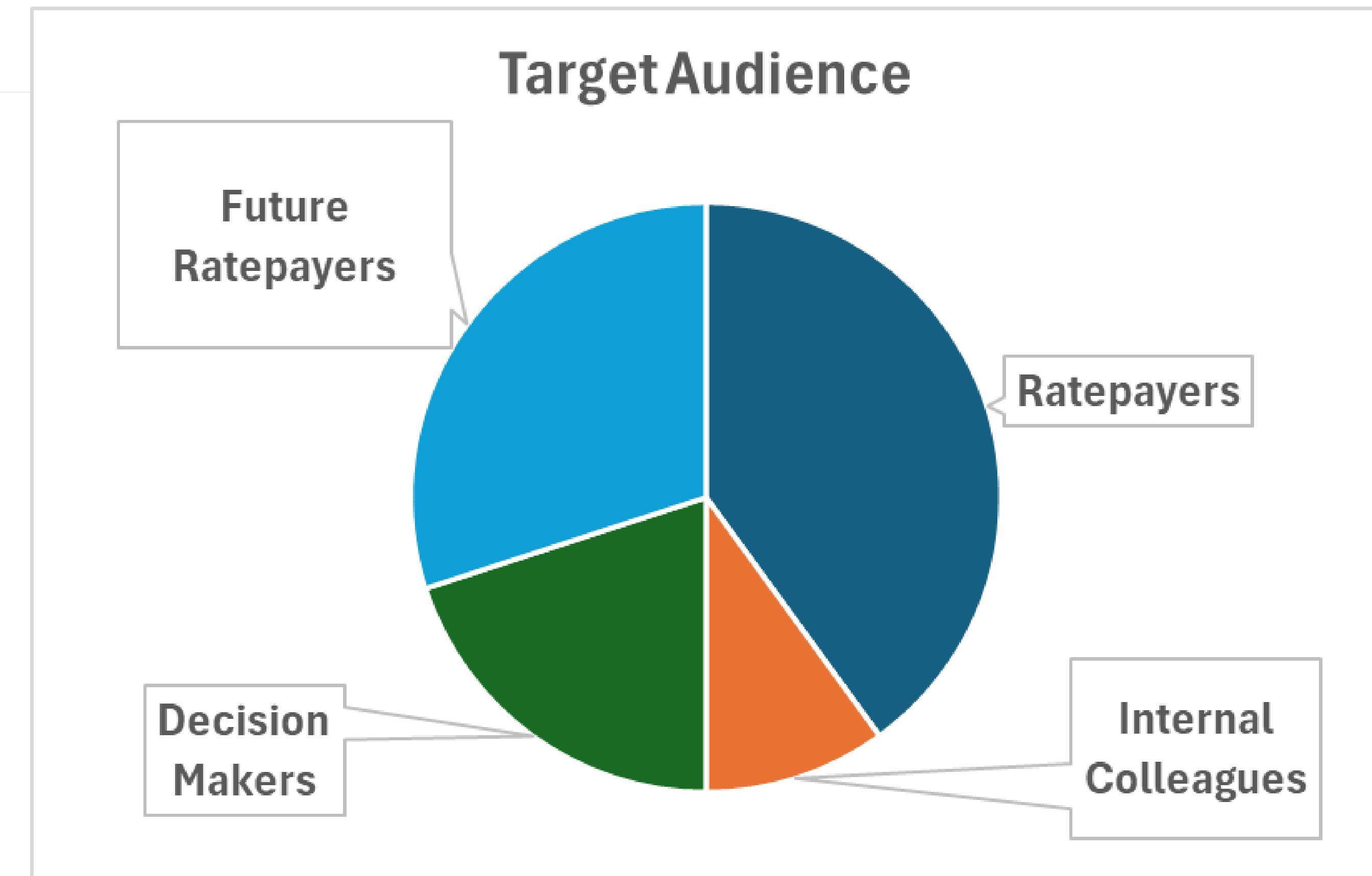
# Workforce Challenges – Technology Transitions

- 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

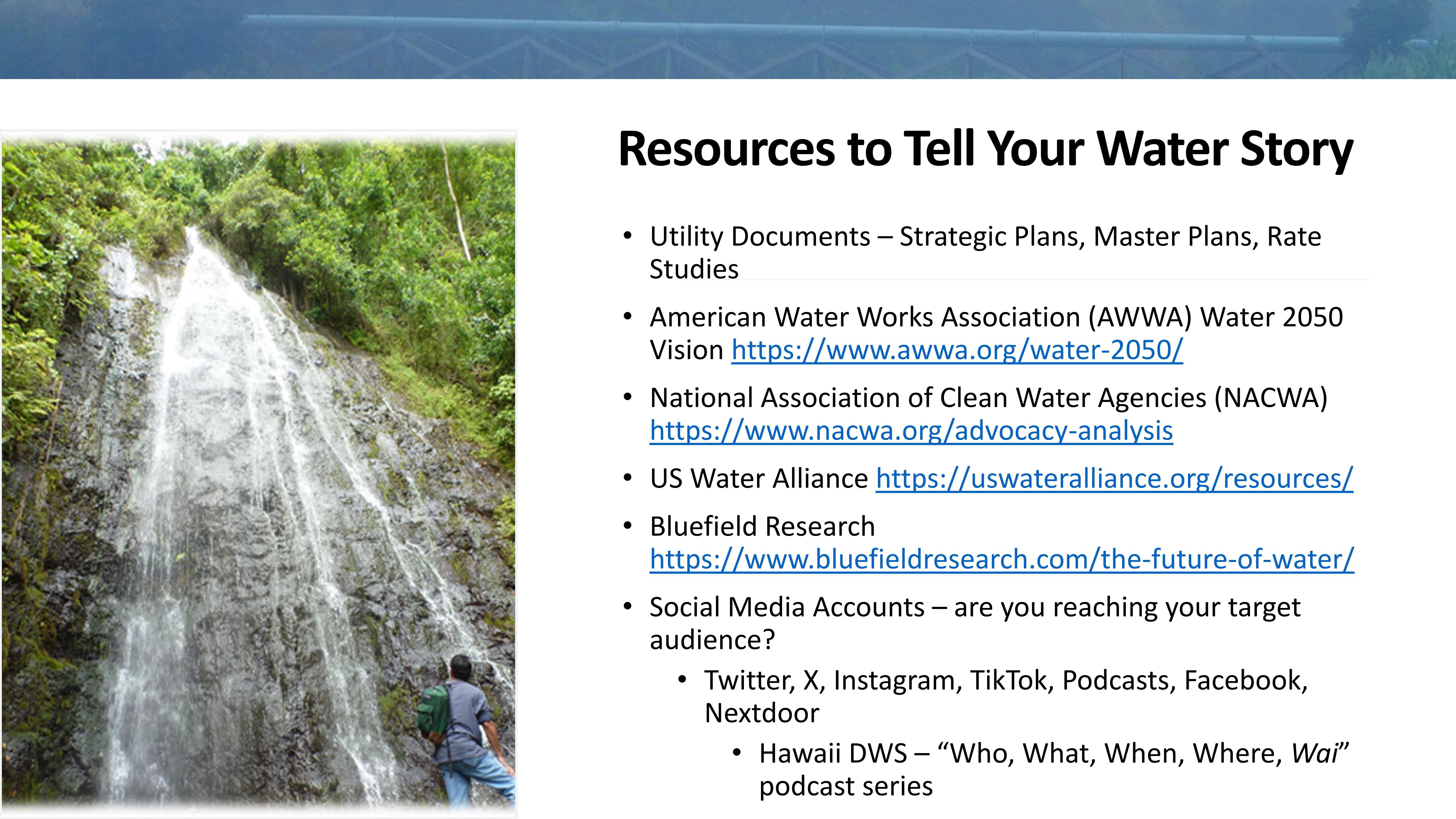
- Gray Zone = Value between the “Silos”
- “Silos” exist for a reason, build excellence and expertise
- Working across and in between departments, i.e. in the “gray-zone”, produce opportunities to improve organizational processes and culture, as well as uncovering valuable solutions = new resources!!
- 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



# 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”

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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**

