



2025 Strategic Communications: H2O Workshop

June 10 - 11 | DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Detroit Downtown | Detroit, MI

As of April 7, 2025

Monday, June 9

2:30 – 5:00

Optional - Detroit River Cleanup at Belle Isle

Transportation will be provided to and from the Workshop hotel by Great Lakes Water Authority. Participation in this event is limited to the first 20 people who register.

Tuesday, June 10

8:30 – 11:30

Pre-Function

Registration

9:00 – 12:00

Crystal Ballroom

Plenary Session I

Opening Remarks

Welcoming Remarks

Melia Howard, Deputy Mayor of Detroit
City of Detroit | Detroit, MI

9:10 – 10:00

Local Perspectives

Navid Mehram, Chief Operating Officer, Wastewater Operating Services
Great Lakes Water Authority | Detroit, MI

Kierra Smith, Public Affairs Specialist
Detroit Water and Sewerage Department | Detroit, MI

Aubrey Ziems, Public Affairs Specialist
Detroit Water and Sewerage Department | Detroit, MI

10:00 – 10:30

Networking Break + Technology Cafe

10:30 – 11:45

The Power of Rebranding in Infrastructure and Public Utilities

AJ Axtell, Director of Community Relations
Western Lake Superior Sanitary District | Duluth, MN

Holly Bomba, Education & Outreach Associate
Pittsburgh Water | Pittsburgh, PA

David Kennedy, Marketing Manager
Pittsburgh Water | Pittsburgh, PA

12:15 – 1:45

Terrace Room

Keynote Address & Luncheon

Keynote Speaker

Mack Bradley, President
StandPoint Public Affairs | St. Louis, MO

1:45 – 4:30

Pre-Function

2:00 – 3:15

Fort Wilkens

Registration

Choose Your Own Adventure – Breakout & Workshop Sessions I

Option 1

Using Communication to Attract the Next Generation of Talent to the Water Section

In today's competitive market, attracting top talent is more challenging than ever. Delve into communications strategies for enhancing workforce development at multiple levels.

Courtney Kubu, Strategic Communications Specialist
AECOM | Virginia Beach, VA

Katie Shea, Communications Specialist
Springfield Water and Sewer Commission | Springfield, MA

Fort Brady

Option 2

Engaging Your Workforce: Strategies for Building Trust, Alignment and Advocacy through Internal Communications

This session will explore how clear internal communication builds trust, boosts morale, and drives employee engagement. Attendees will learn strategies to recruit, train, and mobilize non-communications staff to support their organization's education and outreach efforts, improving performance, creativity, and innovation in the process.

Kenetta Ridgell, Director of Communications and Community Engagement
Little Rock Water Reclamation Authority | Little Rock, AR

Brantley Bissette, Community Education and Outreach Specialist
Hampton Roads Sanitation District | Virginia Beach, VA

Fort Lernoult

Option 3

Making Quality Content Easy

Learn how to tell meaningful stories with high-quality visuals without massive budgets and fancy gear. Arm yourself with the tools to elevate their storytelling and increase execution speed.

Jason Matthews, Public Affairs Specialist
Great Lakes Water Authority | Detroit, MI

Brett McDonald, Public Affairs Specialist
Great Lakes Water Authority | Detroit, MI

3:15 – 3:45

Networking Break + Technology Cafe

3:45 – 5:00

Choose Your Own Adventure – Breakout & Workshop Sessions II

Fort Wilkens

Option 1

From Data to Decisions: How to Use Customer Insights to Improve Communication and Influence Leadership

In this hands-on session, explore various tools to gather customer feedback and opinions to shape messaging, influence decision-making, and position communication as a strategic function within their organization. Learn best practices for public opinion surveys, how to align research goals with strategic outcomes, and communicate results to earn buy-in from leadership.

Bess McCoy, *Co-Chair, Communications and Public Affairs Committee*
Public Affairs Manager
Metropolitan St. Louis Regional Sewer District | St. Louis, MO

Braxton Payne, Senior Strategist, Director of Research & Digital Communications
The Kelley Group | St. Louis, MO

Fort Brady

Option 2

Making an Impact with Visual Communication

Bebe Schaefer, Consultant
EMA, Inc. | Washington, DC

Leneyde Chavez, Engagement and Public Affairs Manager
Carollo Engineers, Inc. | Los Angeles, CA

Fort Lernoult

Option 3

Learning from Failure: Post-Mortem Lessons in Proactive Communications

In this interactive session, learn how to better frame communications for capital projects and identify some of the less visible symptoms of communications challenges before they cause greater damage. Sharpen skills for best practices for keeping customers and stakeholders engaged before, during and after critical projects.

Mack Bradley, President
StandPoint Public Affairs | St. Louis, MO

5:30 – 6:30

Networking Reception

Motor City Kitchen

Wednesday, June 11

8:30 – 10:30

Registration

Pre-Function

9:00 – 12:00

Plenary Session II & Breakouts

Crystal Ballroom

9:00 – 9:05

Opening Remarks

Bess McCoy, *Co-Chair, Communications and Public Affairs Committee*

9:05 – 10:15

Harnessing the Power of Community Collaboration

Daniel Gold, Management Professional – Watershed & Systems Planning
Great Lakes Water Authority | Detroit, MI

Melissa Reeves, Community Relations Manager
Johnson County Wastewater | Johnson County, KS

Chantel Dominguez, Community Campaigns and Engagement Director
American Rivers | Reno, NV

10:15 – 10:45

Networking Break + Technology Cafe

10:45 – 12:00

Choose Your Own Adventure – Breakout & Workshop Sessions III

Fort Wilkens

Option 1

Addressing PFAS Communication with Clarity and Transparency

Emily Barnett, Communications and Government Relations Manager
Central Contra Costa Sanitary District | Martinez, CA

Alyssa Downs, Manager of Communications
California Association of Sanitation Agencies | Sacramento, CA

Mike McGill, President
WaterPIO | Hamptstead, NC

Fort Brady

Option 2

Letters and Columns: An Overlooked Way of Touting Your Utility Success

Utility communicators don't have to rely solely on reporters to secure coverage in local and regional newspapers. Find out how to use letters to the editor, columns and other tactics to spotlight utility achievements.

Vince Morris, Senior Vice President
KGL Communications | Washington, DC

Fort Lernoult

Option 3

Pipes, Pavement and People: Keeping Communities in the Construction Loop

Construction is disruptive, but smart communications can transform chaos into community buy-in. Drawing from real-world successes learn key public engagement strategies at every project stage. Expect practical exercises and real-world application, helping turn projects into proof points, not pain points.

Matt Wittern, Senior Consultant
Raftelis | Denver, CO

12:00 – 1:45

Lunch on Your Own

Pre-Function

12:00 – 1:45

Women's Water Network Lunch + Community Service Project (Optional)

Terrace Room

1:30 – 2:30

Pre-Function

Registration

1:45 – 4:00

Crystal Ballroom

Plenary Session II

Opening Remarks

Bess McCoy, *Co-Chair, Communications and Public Affairs Committee*

1:45 – 2:45

Building Customer Trust Amid Rate Increases

Tricia Garrison, Public Affairs & Education Manager
NEW Water | Green Bay, WI

Erin Collar, Public Affairs & Education Specialist
NEW Water | Green Bay, WI

Matt Wittern, Senior Consultant
Raftelis | Denver, CO

Karen Thomas, Marketing Manager
City of Dayton Department of Water | Dayton, OH

2:45 – 3:00

Networking Break + Technology Cafe

3:00 – 4:00

Campaigns in a Box: Plug and Play Success Stories

Josh Weinstein, President & Creative Director
Creative Co-op | Exeter, NH

Lara Wyss, President
Responsible Flushing Alliance | Seattle, WA

4:00

Crystal Ballroom

Closing Remarks

Bess McCoy, *Co-Chair, Communications and Public Affairs Committee*