



# WATER HUB THEORY OF CHANGE

## ACKNOWLEDGING OUR PRIVILEGE

As a program of Climate Nexus, the Water Hub benefits from a system that invests disproportionately in white-led and wealthy nonprofits. Since the Hub was created to add communications capacity to the water field, we must first acknowledge the inequality that currently exists. Groups closest to water challenges often have the fewest resources to frame the conversation, so water narratives center the views of an affluent minority. We will use our position to lift up historically marginalized voices and support the leadership of frontline groups so they can create change on their terms.

The Water Hub works across the West, a region that encompasses the unceded territories of dozens of Native American nations.

## OUR VISION

We envision a world where all people have equitable access to safe water and sanitation, as well as a voice in the management of this shared and sacred resource. We envision living rivers, thriving communities, and water systems that work with nature.

## OUR MISSION

We use story-based strategies to advance water justice and resilience. We work to make water communications more accessible, and activism more effective, so the people most impacted by water challenges have greater agency to determine the solutions.

## GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

The Water Hub will focus initially on the Western United States, working to build power and advance water progress at the local and state level.

## THE PROBLEM

The West is facing widespread water pollution, periodic shortages, access gaps, and infrastructure failures. These problems are as much social and political as they are structural. They come from treating water as a commodity and rivers as plumbing systems.

In order to bring basins into balance and meet community needs, we have to change the way we relate to rivers and each other. It starts with bringing more people into the water movement and honoring their expertise.

Limited communications capacity can be a barrier, because it results in water news that is dry and technical. People tune out content that doesn't reflect their voices or values. Without public pressure, decisionmakers tend to defer costly or controversial investments.

## WE BELIEVE

- The West's water problems are fixable if we can build the political will.
- People care about water, but could benefit from clearer communications.
- Public awareness and engagement will lead to better water management.
- A more equitable and inclusive water movement will be more effective.
- Stories shape systems. We have to shift the narrative and power map to change policies.
- Narrative change is a long-term undertaking that requires organizing, strategic communications, and arts and cultural work.



## OUR VALUES

We are co-creative and collectivist.

We prioritize relationships.

We engage hearts and heads.

We take time to listen and reflect.

We move at the speed of trust.

We challenge industry norms.

## CORE STRATEGIES

- Center the leadership of impacted communities.
  - Mainstream stories and solutions shared by the groups closest to water challenges.
- Help advocates build a broad and durable power base.
  - Provide research, training, strategy and hands-on help to partner organizations.
  - Facilitate coordination across campaigns and coalitions, emphasizing shared values.
  - Break out of the environmental silo: connect to housing, health, labor, climate, and other movements.
- Shift from a narrative of scarcity and sacrifice to one of progress and possibility.
  - Celebrate incremental wins, without losing sight of the work ahead.
  - Pitch solution stories that show the multiple benefits of smart water management.
- Communicate a vision for water progress that supports individual policy and project wins.
  - Develop simple materials that show what just and resilient water management looks like; highlight real world examples via the press and social media.
  - Promote win-win strategies like water efficiency, on-site reuse and groundwater replenishment.
- Generate media that builds water literacy and emotional engagement.
  - Cultivate relationships with journalists by flagging and contextualizing breaking news, connecting them with new spokespeople, and packaging stories for easy reporting.
  - Work with artists, organizers, and cultural workers to create and share creative content.
- Tap into the deeply personal relationship people have with water.
  - Use imagery and stories that help people connect our issues to their daily lives.

## KEY PARTNERS

- Nonprofit and community-based organizations
- Sustainable agriculture groups
- Tribes and Indigenous rights organizations
- Scientists and traditional knowledge holders
- Utility managers, water agencies, and policymakers
- Journalists, artists, and other media producers

## 2020 PRIORITIES

- Expanding access to safe and affordable drinking water
- Highlighting climate-related water risks and opportunities
- Recognizing the cultural significance of waterways

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