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and worked to add projects to his 2024 fiscal year Community Project Funding list. A separate tour also demonstrated the value of these projects to Marie Alvarado-Gil during her race for the state Senate in 2022. The tour helped, now Senator Alvarado-Gil (D-Jackson), further cement her ongoing support for more state funding related to wildfire protection, already strong through her home community's experience with the Caldor Fire in 2021.

"Seeing what can happen, what did happen with the Caldor Fire, then seeing a community facing the same risk, I think that really connected with her," said Kim Boyd, TCPUD Director of Strategic Affairs and one-person public affairs team.

Boyd and other ACWA member agency communication professionals recently shared their experience and advice using tours to educate elected officials about critical issues. While larger agencies are at an advantage with larger staffs, smaller

districts can also successfully incorporate tours for lawmakers into their outreach.

In the Central Valley, the McMullin Area Groundwater Sustainability Agency (MAGSA) invited Rep. John Duarte (R-13) for a visit to the McMullin On-Farm Flood Capture Expansion Project. The tour tied together how the agency is engaged to bring its area into groundwater sustainability.

"Tours take your projects out of the abstract giving elected officials an on-the-ground insight into the work you are doing," said MAGSA Deputy General Manager Cristel Tufenkjian. "You can visualize a giant sequoia tree from a picture, but physically standing in front of one brings a whole new perspective to the word 'giant.' Tours are an invaluable tool for MAGSA and worth the time and effort."

Prepare for Persistence

Eastern Municipal Water District (EMWD) in Riverside County maintains a robust legislative outreach program that

has included about a dozen facility tours during the past five years.

EMWD hosted a tour last year tied to its plans to build an indirect potable reuse facility. Local congressman U.S. Rep. Mark Takano attended along with U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland. The facility is scheduled to break ground later this year.

However, organizing a successful tour can require persistence.

"There have been times, especially when we have newly elected legislators, that it has taken a while," said EMWD Director of Policy and Governmental Affairs Jolene Walsh, about sending invites for other tours and not hearing back. "But we don't give up and assume they're not interested. We continue to engage and attract their attention."

Personalize Materials

Elected officials understand the connection between what they see during a tour and what it means to their

Opposite page: McMullin Area Groundwater Sustainability Agency General Manager Matt Hurley hosts U.S. Rep. John Duarte on a recent tour of the agency's On-Farm Flood Capture Project. Photo courtesy of MAGSA

Right: Rep. Kevin Kiley, center with white shirt, visits the Tahoe City Public Utility District service area for a tour that focused on the need for upgrading water infrastructure with upsized waterlines and better fire hydrant spacing. Photo courtesy of TCPUD



constituents' quality of life. However, finding ways to further amplify that connection can heighten a tour's ultimate value. EMWD emphasizes this link through personalized materials, such as personalized Capital Improvement Program booklets. These include a cover with an elected official's photo and copy that highlights specific infrastructure and exactly how it benefits a given district.

"They really appreciate having the summary of projects in their area," EMWD's Walsh said. "It draws a direct line between the value of a project and the quality of life for their constituents."

Find Partners

A common thread running through advice on legislative tours from agencies contacted focuses on forging partnerships. The resulting teamwork can result in a highly effective, and compelling, tour for elected officials and decision makers. This can include teaming up with neighboring districts, cities and regional alliances.

For example, TCPUD worked through its membership in the Tahoe Fire for Water Partnership in organizing the tours for U.S. Rep. Kiley and Senator Alvarado-Gil.

"Leveraging partnerships is a must," said TCPUD's Boyd, adding that tours have

become part of a ramped-up outreach program for the district during the past four years.

The Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District (Upper District) regularly offers a tour for local partners and elected officials. Familiar with the Upper District's tours, Assemblymember Blanca Rubio (D-Baldwin) requested one on a couple of occasions to educate her staff on local water issues and for her agriculture contacts in the Central Valley.

With Assemblymember Diane Papan (D-San Mateo) becoming the new chair of the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife committee, Upper District staff worked with Rubio's office to offer a February tour and acquaint her with its region and local water supply. In addition to state Senator Maria Elena Durazo (D-Los Angeles), two board members from the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Board also joined.

"What was unique about this tour is that we worked collaboratively with the other agencies in our region such as Three Valleys, San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District and Rowland Water District to help highlight their infrastructure needs and present a unified message on our water supply needs," said Patty Cortez, Upper

District's Assistant General Manager for External Affairs. ♦

For more information about engaging legislators and regulators, including through educational tours, download ACWA's "Outreach Handbook" using the accompanying QR code, or reach out to these ACWA members:



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