

2025 - 2029

Five-Year Strategic Plan





In September 2024, the ACWA Board of Directors approved the 2025 Strategic Plan – including an updated mission statement, vision statement and core values – to provide a clear roadmap for the association's future.

The plan was developed with goals, strategies and measurable objectives to strengthen ACWA's focus, clarify priorities, build alignment and allocate resources. Alongside the plan, the Board also approved key performance indicators to help measure successful execution of objectives.

The plan was developed through a collaborative and thoughtful process under the leadership of ACWA Vice President Ernie Avila and a board-level task force representing each of the 10 regions, with input from staff and guidance from an outside consultant.

Our Mission

ACWA provides comprehensive leadership, advocacy and education to serve California public water agencies' infrastructure and other water management needs to ensure high quality, sustainable and reliable water supplies in an environmentally, socially and fiscally responsible manner.

Our Vision

ACWA envisions a California that values and invests in water as an essential and plentiful resource that is managed efficiently and sustainably from headwaters to the ocean to meet all of California's present and future needs.

Our Values

Essential Public Service

We are dedicated to the people of California, providing essential water services for our communities, agriculture, the environment and the economy.

Community

We work to create a diverse community that serves our members and their customers to secure a sustainable water future for California and foster relationships beyond the state.

Culture

We promote a collaborative culture of respect, teamwork, engagement, inclusivity and belonging that includes effective organizational communication.

Collaboration

We share a collective willingness to work with a diverse set of interested parties on water policy, education and engagement.

Resource Stewardship

We work with our members to continue to be good stewards of our most precious resources, water and the environment.

Integrity

We commit to working together honestly, respectfully and inclusively.

Solutions

We solve problems proactively, consistently seeking better outcomes that effectively turn challenges into opportunities.

Goals





STRATEGY 1

Lead in development and advocacy on legislative and administrative matters associated with water policy and investments in support of ACWA members' interests.

Objectives

- Advance solutions proactively for the future of California water to help secure water supply reliability in a changing climate.
- Advocate for state and federal investments in water infrastructure.
- Advocate for policy on safe drinking water for all that balances affordability and is based on the best available science.
- Promote strategies for ecosystem protection and health that are holistic, adaptive and streamlined.

Key Performance Indicators

- ACWA policy standing committees shall develop specific and actionable Strategic Plan-related policy initiatives in their respective work plans in the initial year of their formation starting in January 2026. These shall include, for example, the ACWA Climate Change Policy and Groundwater Management Principles and others. These committees shall report on their progress to the ACWA Board every six months.
- Assess and recommend process improvements to ACWA policy committees' review and approval of water policy initiatives and their implementation to the ACWA Board of Directors by November 2025.
- Continue to provide information and alerts to ACWA members associated with legislative, regulatory and administrative matters of interest and rally support and action by ACWA members within 10 days of the assessment of their potential impact to members.

STRATEGY 2

Build upon ACWA's reputation as the trusted and knowledgeable resource for water policy development and implementation with current and future policy leaders in Sacramento and Washington D.C.

Objectives

- Represent the ACWA brand with integrity.
- Meet proactively with policy makers on ACWA priorities.
- Serve as a reliable resource to policy makers on California water.

Key Performance Indicators

- Reach out to all new legislators proactively within the first quarter of each new legislative session and provide a summary report on key issues raised to the ACWA Board within the following Board packet. Provide updates on these key issues to the Board at its subsequent meetings as they progress or change significantly.
- Reach out proactively to new administrative officials/staff of key state and federal agencies within their first quarter in office and report to the ACWA Board key issues raised within the following Board packet. Provide updates on these key issues to the Board at its subsequent meetings as they progress or change significantly.
- Advocate ACWA's key policy priorities strategically with legislators and officials/staff of key state and federal agencies and report on the progress of these discussions to the Board on a quarterly basis and/or sooner, if necessary.

STRATEGY 3

Utilize ACWA committees to achieve ACWA's state and federal policy goals.

Objectives

- Encourage committees to collaborate to provide support and expertise on policy issues.
- Establish working groups and subcommittees as needed to address emerging policy issues.
- Act on requests for assistance on legal matters of significance to ACWA member agencies associated with state and federal laws.

Key Performance Indicators

- Develop and implement bi-annual work plans for ACWA standing committees to help advance the goals of the Strategic Plan and related ACWA policies by June 2026.
- Create and maintain a matrix of all ACWA standing committee work plan objectives related to the Strategic Plan by November in the initial year of the formation of the standing committees and provide a semi-annual progress report to the ACWA Board.
- Conduct ACWA standing committee meetings in accordance with ACWA's bylaws and prepare a conference program for ACWA conferences every 1-2 years to share committee findings and key insights to the ACWA membership.

STRATEGY 4

Support ACWA members' advocacy on behalf of the communities they serve on key water issues, policies, laws and regulations.

Objectives

- Provide members with the information, tools, and resources to support ACWA's advocacy agenda.
- Highlight member agencies' innovative solutions for meeting the needs of California and to further advocacy goals.
- Provide opportunities for member agencies to join ACWA-led coalitions on policy issues of broad interest and consensus when appropriate.

Key Performance Indicators

- Issue timely advisories on key water issues to educate members of new key policy developments.
- Develop education and outreach tools for members on the policy making process and how to engage with their policymakers and activate communities effectively, when necessary and in compliance with existing laws.
- Continue to provide regular updates on key regulatory matters and legislative priorities and positions to ACWA standing committees and activate their support to evaluate and/or respond to these issues, when necessary.





STRATEGY 1

Serve as a center of knowledge that cultivates beneficial relationships among ACWA members.

Objectives

- Inform and connect members through educational conferences and events.
- Connect members with common interests through participation in ACWA committees.
- Connect members with common geographic priorities through participation in region meetings and activities to find common ground on issues and interests.

Key Performance Indicators

- Promote and foster policy and technical sessions of keen interest to ACWA members at the annual spring and fall conferences. Engage the ACWA region boards and standing committees to support this effort.
- Develop ACWA regional events that highlight the local perspective on ACWA's Strategic Plan goals and priorities. Organize and facilitate one regional event by each ACWA region every two years.
- Prepare impactful webinars and training opportunities for all ACWA members that will facilitate inter-regional participation, communication and coordination on issues of common interest or benefit. Prioritize having on-site events that are readily accessible to major airports to encourage member participation and reduce attendance costs.
- Review the ACWA website for member accessibility, usefulness and ease of navigation, and recommend changes to the Board by January 2026. Upon approval, implement changes and inform ACWA members of these improvements by March 2026.

STRATEGY 2

Foster relationships with federal, state, local and international officials, key non-governmental organizations, and others in the water community that benefit ACWA members.

Objectives

- Invite policy makers and key organizations to participate in and attend ACWA activities.
- Engage in partnering organization's programs and activities.
- Collaborate with a diverse set of interested parties in support of shared goals and policies.

Key Performance Indicators

- Enhance strategic planning and coordination of ACWA's water policy initiatives or proposals with other water, governmental associations and key partners (i.e., AMWA, CMUA, CUWA, CASA, WaterReuse, CSAC, League of Cities, and Water Research Foundation, etc.) by coordinating on these efforts with their senior and/or executive management annually.
- Foster multi-state (e.g., Southwestern states) and international relationships with water agencies and organizations to encourage their participation in ACWA conferences and allow their dissemination of best management practices, policies or technology that may be beneficial to ACWA members. Increase international and Southwestern United States water agency participation to 5% of conference attendees by 2030.
- Develop joint conferences and/or training between ACWA and other water industry organizations every two years to leverage ACWA expertise and standing, foster relationship building with key California partners and reduce costs to members.

STRATEGY 3

Partner with the ACWA JPIA and the ACWA Foundation in support of ACWA's mission.

Objectives

- Provide opportunities for ACWA JPIA and ACWA Foundation to highlight their work at ACWA conferences and events.
- Continue to engage in each organization to help support each other's mission.

Key Performance Indicators

- Collaborate with ACWA JPIA on training programs and/or ACWA conference sessions every two years to allow members to benefit from best management practices that reduce the risk of claims associated with water operations and practices.
- Work with the ACWA Foundation to encourage more students to join the water industry workforce and support research of current and future California water industry workforce demographics and trends to enhance recruitment, retention and succession planning strategies for our members.
- Allow ACWA JPIA and the ACWA Foundation to provide regular updates at the annual ACWA spring and fall conferences and regional meetings.



CONNECTIONS



STRATEGY 1

Provide timely and trusted information to ACWA members, policy leaders and the public on key California water issues and policies.

Objectives

- Utilize statewide public education initiatives, strategies and partnerships with others industry leaders to expand the reach of ACWA's messaging.
- Initiate new ways to leverage the website and digital and social media channels to enhance communication with key audiences.
- Strengthen relationships with key news media and leverage earned media opportunities when appropriate.
- Proactively share information with policymakers on key ACWA priorities and follow up in a timely manner with any requested information.

Key Performance Indicators

- Integrate the collective expertise of ACWA member agency experience and technical prowess in the development of ACWA water initiatives, proposals or policies. Create a matrix of all standing policy working groups and their efforts, which will be made available to members by September 2025, to encourage member input and participation. Distribute the matrix and updates to members to better inform and engage them in developing and implementing these objectives (e.g. region boards, standing committee chairs, etc.).
- Evaluate our method for determining the effectiveness of ACWA's educational campaigns and policy outreach efforts and tailoring these programs based on these findings by January 2026. Additionally, this effort shall include the development of a standard ACWA policy for funding future educational campaigns for ACWA Board consideration.
- Develop an ACWA member suite of tools by March 2026 that will facilitate and/or enhance ACWA member agency engagement with their communities and encourage their actionable support of ACWA water initiatives, proposals or policies with the state and federal legislators and/or agencies in compliance with the law.
- Establish a task force to evaluate an annual ACWA California Water Progress Report by July 2026 that reflects our assessment of the state of relevant water legislation, policies, regulations and infrastructure funding in California.

STRATEGY 2

Promote and showcase water industry innovation and best practices.

Objectives

- Utilize ACWA's awards program and a number of communications channels to highlight industry and member agency innovations and best practices.
- Utilize ACWA's conferences, region events and webinars to highlight industry and member agency innovations and best practices.
- Promote California water industry innovations locally, statewide, nationally and internationally.

Key Performance Indicators

- Launch an ACWA YouTube channel by November 2025 that demonstrates ACWA member agency innovation and best practices on issues of keen concern to ACWA members. Incorporate featured recordings of significant and timely ACWA conference presentations that promote the value of member attendance at these conferences.
- Update and expand the ACWA website page by January 2026 which focuses on innovation and best practices by members, regional, national and/or international water agencies. Incorporate means and methods used by these agencies or organizations that address the current challenges and key issues faced by ACWA member agencies.

STRATEGY 3

Build upon, innovate and enhance ACWA educational offerings and events for its members.

Objectives

- Increase member value and experiences by producing industry-leading conferences and events.
- Develop new opportunities to present program content and continuing education for the water industry.
- Incorporate innovative tools to connect members with program content and networking opportunities.

Key Performance Indicators

- Study best management practices used by regional, state and federal organizations or associations that could be used to facilitate more ACWA member virtual participation at ACWA regional and educational events. Present these findings to the ACWA Board by March 2026.
- Review the current spring and fall ACWA conferences to understand and assess member satisfaction regarding conference length, logistics and programming. Present these findings and/or recommended changes or improvements to the Board by July 2025.

STRATEGY 4

Promote leadership, water industry education and workforce development through scholarships, internships and other related opportunities.

Objectives

- Evaluate and update ACWA's existing scholarship program.
- Develop programs and resources that advance the leadership and management skills of California's current and future water leaders.
- Build relationships with key programs and faculty at California universities to explore opportunities for synergy and partnerships.

Key Performance Indicators

- Continue to showcase ACWA student scholarship winners at the ACWA conferences and encourage other ACWA associate members to help sponsor additional scholarships by November 2025.
- Conduct an annual survey of ACWA member agencies to determine the quantity of internships provided to California students by ACWA members and showcase this information on the ACWA website by January 2026. Utilize this information to enhance public awareness of the leadership demonstrated by our members regarding workforce development in the communities they serve.
- Evaluate ACWA's scholarship program, including number of scholarships, the award amounts, application and judging processes. Make recommended changes, if any, to the Board by January 2026.

EDUCATION



STRATEGY 1

Uphold ACWA's standing as an organization that attracts, develops, retains and empowers a highly qualified and effective staff.

Objectives

- Continuously invest in the professional development and career growth of ACWA's talented workforce.
- Cultivate a work environment that empowers the creativity and innovation of each employee through collaboration, teaming and a managerial commitment to servant leadership.
- Provide a level of compensation and comprehensive benefits that help attract and retain exceptional staff.
- Develop and implement a program to recruit future outstanding ACWA staff that allows ACWA to support its members in a sustainable manner.

Key Performance Indicators

- Develop performance and career development planning for each staff member by March 2025.
- Develop and maintain guidelines on empowerment/ staff retention and promotion/ staff recognition by July 2025.
- Conduct Gallup Survey every two years to assess the level of satisfaction and performance by ACWA staff.
- Prepare a total reward strategy (comp studies, benefits, etc.) for all staff by January 2026.
- Develop an ACWA internship program with colleges and universities in the Sacramento area by November 2025 that will generate a potential staff recruitment pool and encourage the next generation of leaders to join ACWA.

STRATEGY 2

Empower the ACWA regions and standing committees to successfully achieve ACWA's strategic goals.

Objectives

- Attract, recruit and develop a diverse member volunteer base equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to execute ACWA's strategic goals.
- Manage and administer ACWA's regional and committee governance.
- Develop region and committee work plans that directly align with ACWA's Strategic Plan.
- Create a collaborative structure within the committees to support and advance each committee's goals and priorities.

Key Performance Indicators

- Review ACWA's standing committees by September 2025 and encourage their members to integrate their technical staff in support of developing specific and actionable ACWA policies and positions in support of ACWA's Strategic Plan, Climate Change Policy Principles and other related ACWA policies.
- Develop ACWA standing committee and region work plans to implement the Strategic Plan for Board adoption by June 2026. Use these data to encourage participation by non-committee members in the implementation of these work plans.
- Maintain roster of active, standing working groups and subcommittees by July 2025.
- Attract, recruit and develop a diverse member volunteer base to maintain committee and region board rosters that are at least 90% full and equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to execute ACWA's strategic goals.

STRATEGY 3

Evaluate ACWA's organizational effectiveness and adapt as necessary to further our standing as the leading voice in California water for ACWA members.

Objectives

- Implement opportunities for member engagement at all levels of the organization.
- Grow membership to ensure ACWA is the leading and most reflective voice in California Water.
- Evolve and adapt advocacy strategies to maintain effective communication on ACWA priorities with policymakers.
- Evaluate ACWA's organizational structure to enhance communication and adopt association best practices.

Key Performance Indicators

- Maintain an ACWA member retention rate that is net positive on an annual basis.
- Develop a dashboard by September 2025 to track ACWA Strategic Plan implementation progress.
- Evaluate ACWA's current reporting mechanisms to the membership and ACWA Board and make recommendations to the ACWA Board on revisions.
- Provide a professional development budget for enhanced training of ACWA staff by July 2025.

STRATEGY 4

Enhance the financial and operational strength of ACWA in support of its mission and related goals and strategies.

Objectives

- Continue to monitor the financial outlook through controlling costs and growing non-dues revenue to ensure long-term stability and to minimize member dues increases.
- Address long-term unfunded pension liability with board-approved strategy.
- Deploy technology solutions to safeguard ACWA's infrastructure and information systems.
- Provide state-of-the-art technology to enhance member experience, enable staff to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently and to improve operational effectiveness.

Key Performance Indicators

- Grow non-dues ACWA revenue by 5% each year.
- Continue Board paying off long-term remaining liability in accordance with Board policy and report on progress annually during the ACWA budget approval process.
- Benchmark processes that are in line with ACWA best practices by November 2025, including a review of national benchmarking studies used by other associations.
- Implement best practices (e.g., "co-pilot," penetration testing) to protect against cyber-attacks by October 2025.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS



Strategic Plan Task Force

Ernie Avila

Jennifer Burke

Dana Frieauf

Carol Lee Gonzales-Brady

Sargeant Green

Sheridan Nicholas

Sarah Palmer

David Pedersen

Michael Saunders

Josh Watkins

John Woodling

ACWA Board of Directors 2024 – 2025

Cathy Green

ACWA President
Orange County Water District (Reg. 10)

Ernie Avila

ACWA Vice President
Contra Costa Water District (Reg. 5)

Pamela Tobin

ACWA Immediate Past President
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Duane Cave

Energy Committee Chair
Moulton Niguel Water District (Reg. 10)

Bill Cooper

Region 8 Vice Chair
Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency

Jessica Diaz

Legal Affairs Committee Chair
Central Coast Water Authority (Reg. 5)

David Drake

ACWA JPIA Vice President
Rincon del Diablo Municipal Water District (Reg. 10)

Edgar Dymally

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Sargeant Green

Region 6 Vice Chair
Fresno Metropolitan Flood Control District

Deanna Jackson

Region 6 Chair
Tri-County Water Authority

Cary Keaten

Region 4 Vice Chair
Solano Irrigation District

Marwan Khalifa

Finance Committee Chair
Mesa Water District (Reg. 10)

Eric Larrabee

Region 2 Chair
Western Canal Water District

Lauren Layne

State Legislative Committee Chair
Alta Irrigation District (Reg. 6)

Joone Lopez

Membership Committee Chair
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Larry McKenney

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Amador Water Agency

George Murdoch

Region 10 Vice Chair
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Sheridan Nicholas

Region 7 Chair
Wheeler Ridge-Maricopa Water Storage District

G. Patrick O'Dowd

Region 9 Chair
Salton Sea Authority

Sarah Palmer

Region 5 Vice Chair
Zone 7 Water Agency

David Pedersen

Water Management Committee Chair
Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (Reg. 8)

Elizabeth Salomone

Region 1 Chair
Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control & WCID

Brian Sanders

Region 4 Chair
City of Sacramento, Dept. of Utilities

Michael Saunders

Region 3 Vice Chair
Georgetown Divide Public Utility District

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Western Canal Water District (Reg. 2)

Stacy Taylor

Business Development Committee Chair
Mesa Water District (Reg. 10)

John L. Varela

Region 5 Chair
Valley Water

Jolene Walsh

Federal Affairs Committee Chair
Eastern Municipal Water District (Reg. 9)

Josh Watkins

Region 2 Vice Chair
City of Redding

Melissa Williams

Communications Committee Chair
Modesto Irrigation District (Reg. 4)

John Woodling

Groundwater Committee Chair
Elk Grove Water District, FRCD (Reg. 4)

Greg Zlotnick

Local Government Committee Chair
San Juan Water District (Reg. 4)