

Taking Action: A Guide for Cities + Towns



In RainReadySM communities, better water management means that homes, schools, and businesses are prepared for rain—whether too much or too little. RainReady programs keep residences secure and dry, services running, and rivers and lakes clean.

RainReady offers a suite of policies and practices to help communities prepare for weather events associated with global climate change, such as flooding and water scarcity. Preparing a RainReady plan can help your community summarize local problems, identify key actors, and pinpoint some helpful actions.

If your local officials or city councils aren't yet ready for a comprehensive plan, focus on a few individual actions. Early, small-scale successes will encourage the examination of broader solutions.

Here are ten key actions for improving water management in your community. For more details, visit www.rainready.org/for-cities-and-towns.

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✓ COMPLETE A COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Reach out to the people and businesses most impacted by water issues, as they may be the best experts around. Write letters to residents, host events, and bring in knowledgeable speakers to help prompt awareness and encourage dialogue. Involve relevant agencies and nonprofit organizations to gain even more expertise and knowledge about local problems. Try to fill information gaps by setting up Facebook pages and encouraging people to post photos of their flooded properties, parched yards, or polluted streams. Conduct property surveys and hold public meetings for residents to describe and map out problem areas. Your final report should include a statement of the main problems, a map of the affected areas, a description of the problems and solutions proposed by residents and experts, and areas for further exploration by the community.



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✓ HELP RESIDENTS AND OTHER OWNERS MAKE PROPERTY IMPROVEMENTS

Because RainReady improvements can reduce the need for public expenditure on large-scale municipal water infrastructure, an increasing number of towns and cities are setting up dedicated budgets for RainReady improvements. Many are taking this a step further and offering property assessments, coordinating contractors, and providing grants for the installation of water management solutions. Other assistance may include helping property owners redesign their lawn, drainage and irrigation systems; discounting their purchase of water- and energy-efficient appliances; and subsidizing the repair or replacement of on-site sewer lines. These programs are typically carried out in partnership with utilities and nonprofits.



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✓ IMPROVE PUBLIC RIGHTS-OF-WAY

Ponds and wetlands, forests and prairies, and permeable sand and soils allow water to be dispersed, saved, and cleansed. Innovative water managers can learn from natural processes and devise cost-effective solutions to flooding and water scarcity in neighborhoods, parks, rights-of-way, and other public lands. In order to better absorb stormwater runoff, local governments can encourage or incentivize property owners to convert the spaces



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between the sidewalk and street into swales or to plant them with trees. Cities can also combine water management with the development of new and improved recreational spaces such as parks, nature reserves, and hiking or bike trails. The most cost-effective way to accomplish this is incorporating RainReady improvements into public works plans and establishing a dedicated budget to support them.

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✓ AUDIT WATER LOSS AND INCENTIVIZE WATER REUSE

Much of the infrastructure within our water systems is old and crumbling. Careful auditing and regular repair of these critical systems are important to protect economic viability and reduce unnecessary water waste in our communities. By performing regular water loss audits, utilities and municipalities can implement cost-effective improvements to water infrastructure. Some municipalities are reusing water. Graywater—which comes from bathroom sinks, bath tubs, shower drains, and clothes washing equipment drains—can be treated and reused for landscape irrigation, agricultural irrigation, industrial processes, or recharging aquifers. To allow and encourage graywater reuse, community leaders can update codes and ordinances and also provide incentives for residents to install systems in their homes.

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✓ INTRODUCE DEDICATED REVENUE STREAMS

Establish dedicated revenues streams and budgets that fund improvements in a fair and effective manner. RainReady plans can reduce water management costs for the whole community by providing swift and affordable improvements that reduce future risks, target those most in need first, reduce the need for large capital investments, and increase property values. Dedicated revenue streams, linked to residents' water rates, can help cover the costs of these improvements. These improvements, in turn, help the entire community ultimately pay less.



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✓ INCENTIVIZE DEVELOPERS TO IMPLEMENT RAINREADY PRACTICES

Cities can employ a variety of techniques to promote RainReady practices among developers. Incentives like density bonuses, expedited permitting, and tax credits and abatements can make rain readiness a more attractive option for developers at low or no cost to the municipality. Different incentives can be combined for maximum effectiveness.

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✓ ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS AND OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Developing and implementing a RainReady plan requires wide-ranging skills: communications, media, public engagement, community planning, landscaping, plumbing and building services, nature conservation, weather forecasting, economic analysis, and business development, among others. Partnerships and outreach programs with private, public, academic, and nonprofit organizations will ensure you have the skills and resources to deliver your plan in the most effective way possible. Partnerships can be in the form of advisory panels or in the form of public education and outreach programs spearheaded by private and nonprofit organizations.



Photo credit: Jamie Marley, CNT

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✓ INTRODUCE REGULATIONS AND UPDATE CODES

Since taxpayers and ratepayers often foot the costs of tragedies such as flooding and water scarcity, we need to ensure that public funding is used effectively. Zoning ordinances, incentives, and regulatory requirements can provide clear direction for increasing rain readiness. Examples include restricting or prohibiting certain kinds of water use during times of shortage; requiring impact studies to be carried out prior to development; ensuring that new developments and re-developments are designed to include stormwater collection systems; limiting the amount of outdoor surface area covered with turf and asphalt in new developments; and incentivizing the creation of family-friendly parks, greenways, and wetlands in flood-prone areas.

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✓ TAP INTO GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT

There are several long-term programs designed to help communities improve their water management. State Revolving Funds (SRFs) are administered by states to provide loans for investments in water and sanitation infrastructure. They provide a useful, low-interest source of capital for RainReady improvements on public and private property, which can be repaid over time through charges on residents' water bills. Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plans, which are developed by communities and states and are overseen by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), help communities identify potential risks and take preventive action. The National Flood Insurance Program's (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS) is a national incentive program that recognizes communities for implementing floodplain management practices that exceed the federal minimum requirements of the NFIP to provide protection from flooding. In exchange for a community's proactive efforts, policyholders can receive reduced flood insurance premiums for buildings in their community.



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✓ ESTABLISH MUNICIPAL COORDINATION

Since groundwater depletion, stream erosion, water pollution, and urban flooding are all regional problems, mismanagement in one community can negatively affect communities downstream. By working collaboratively to solve issues, municipalities create a sense of fairness, reduce costs, and amplify the positive impact of a RainReady plan. Regional coordination can take many forms, such as sharing water risk information and data, establishing shared services (e.g., public education, property assessments, installation assistance), agreeing to prioritized RainReady improvement projects, constructing regional water facilities, jointly funding projects and/or grant applications, or committing to adopt common regulations.

DOES YOUR COMMUNITY HAVE A RAINREADY PLAN? LEARN MORE AT WWW.RAINREADY.ORG
