

Water Utility Service Area Boundaries

WHO GETS DRINKING WATER FROM WHO? WE ARE MUCH CLOSER TO KNOWING THE ANSWER.

THERE ARE OVER 148,000 PUBLIC WATER SYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES THAT SERVE 90 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION. DESPITE THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER TO HEALTH, SAFETY, ECONOMIC MOBILITY, AND OVERALL WELL BEING, WE DO NOT HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE, ACCURATE MAP OF WHO THOSE SYSTEMS SERVE - UNTIL NOW.

Last year, EPIC, SimpleLab and the Internet of Water Coalition released a provisional national map of drinking water service area boundaries to support the design and implementation of water and climate programs at the federal, state, and community levels. In eight months, we built a high quality understanding of where 173 million people – i.e. more than half of the US population – get their water. Since that launch, we have been encouraged by the level of interest in this data - and the commitment from partners across academia, technology providers and the public sector to improve the data. For example:



A new study by researchers at the University of Texas, published in the journal *Environmental Research Letters*, use our water utility service area boundaries data. This allowed them to assess which specific communities lacked access to safe drinking water across the US.

“Our detailed analysis of the linkages of drinking water quality violations to social vulnerability can help inform guidance for effectively distributing infrastructure funding and designing interventions to ensure more equitable drinking water quality nationally.” Bridget Scanlon, Senior Research Scientist for The Bureau of Economic Geology at The University of Texas



120 individuals joined a webinar focused on the role that state’s can play in helping to improve water service area boundary data. That webinar introduced a State Playbook for Creating and Sharing Drinking Water Service Area Boundaries, which includes state case studies, partnership models, and tips for budgeting and methodology. As a result of our work with state agencies, two states published data that was not previously available to the public, increasing our overall understanding of where 173 million people get their drinking water from.



EPIC developed partnerships with community partners to ensure that water service area boundaries do not misrepresent tribal and rural communities. Part of this work included mobilizing funding on behalf of community partners, and EPIC was delighted to be awarded funding from the Earth Science Information Partner Lab and the Water Solutions Fund. That funding will support a collaborative effort between EPIC and community based partners in Oregon and the South to hire fellows that will collate and validate the boundaries for tribes and rural communities. This will ensure more accurate understanding of drinking water access for underrepresented geographies.

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CURRENT AND FUTURE EFFORTS

As we look ahead to this fall and 2024, we are planning a few things:

EPIC plans to continue its partnership with community partners to ensure the accuracy of data and to provide technical assistance and capacity building to coalitions that want to use this data. This will help us understand which communities are benefiting from federal funding and which are not, by tracking funding, demographics, and water quality violations across different regions and comparing available data at the state level and with key state-level partners. [Follow that work here.](#)

EPIC will continue to play a policy and inter-agency support role to improve the accuracy and use of the dataset. We are hosting several regular forums for 1) data scientists to exchange ideas on generating insights from the data, 2) advocates and technical assistance providers to catalyze action from the data insights, and 3) federal and state agencies to coordinate on collating and maintaining the service area boundaries data.

We want to continue to hear ideas from you. How are you using the data? What role would you like federal and state agencies to play? Share your ideas with us through email (jessie@policyinnovation.org) or [LinkedIn](#) - we look forward to hearing from you.

**Explore our
State
Playbook for
Creating and
Sharing
Drinking
Water Service
Area
Boundaries**



State Status



State Case Studies:



Planning & Partnership



Budgeting &
Resources



Methods for Boundary
Development



Data Sharing &
Accessibility