We shouldn’t have to wonder “Who is responsible for my water?”

We should know.

EPIC is recruiting interns to improve a national map of water service area boundaries, with a focus on outreach to tribes and other marginalized communities.

“We have to be able to answer the fundamental question: who is responsible for my water? That is a scary thought - to not know where your water comes from - not only in a historical sense but also in the sense of thinking about future generations for tribal nations and the state of our water systems as a whole. If we live here and we don’t know, who does?”

- Mariah Black Bird-Perry

The Environmental Policy Innovation Center (EPIC) and Oregon Water Futures (OWF) is recruiting an intern to assist in the refinement of a national map of drinking water system service area boundaries to make sure that communities are accurately represented in local, state, and national water maps. The internship will pay $20/hour and run for six months, January through June, either part-time or full-time. If you have skills or experience with drinking water, outreach and engagement, coding, or GIS, please apply by sending your resume to jessie@policyinnovation.org and gabe@policyinnovation.org midnight eastern standard time by Friday December 1st, 2023. We will be reviewing applications on a rolling basis.

ABOUT THE PROJECT
Drinking water service area boundaries can show who does and does not get water from a drinking water utility. Boundary maps are important for understanding which communities suffer from poor drinking water quality, for ensuring state and federal funding for water infrastructure helps these communities, and for emergency and resilience planning. There are nearly 50,000 community water systems in the United States that serve 90 percent of the population. And 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.

In May, 2022, EPIC, the Internet of Water Coalition, and SimpleLab released a provisional national map of drinking water service area boundaries to support the design and implementation of environmental justice, water and climate programs at the federal, state, and community levels.
Why provisional? The boundaries are more accurate in some places than others - and the data need to be improved - especially for marginalized communities. For example, sometimes the data will show a certain water system serves a tribe, but when you speak to tribal personnel, they share that they don’t in fact receive water from that system. This inaccurate data at the local level is then added to state-managed databases and then comprises analyses of states, policymakers, and researchers that influence the design and implementation of water policy and programs. We need to get this data right.

ABOUT THE INTERNSHIP

In the summer of 2022, EPIC interns led targeted outreach to water systems that served over 100,000 people and were not included in the provisional map - as a result of this outreach, EPIC was able to add boundaries for 50 large water systems which results in a more precise understanding of water service for ~17 million people!

EPIC wants to continue this successful program in the spring, this time focusing on outreach to underserved communities and in priority regions; federally and non-federally recognized tribal areas, service areas serving high proportions of Native American, People of Color, and lower income communities. EPIC is working in collaboration with Oregon Water Futures and expects the intern to be based in Oregon, though they will closely collaborate with EPIC’s remote technology team.

Priority will be given to candidates with a background working with or living in underserved and tribal communities.

Depending on skills and interest, interns on the service area boundaries project will:

- Conduct outreach to communities to confirm water service area boundaries and improve quality of raw data for estimating service area boundaries
- Digitize service area boundary data using QGIS software
- Add data layers to national map
- Assist utilities, community groups, or other partners that would like to directly add data to the national map
- Assist with communications - blogs, etc.
- Participate in cohort activities (lunch and learns, etc.)
- As necessary, join in EPIC Technology team strategy meetings as well as Oregon Water Futures coordination and networking meetings, and and participate in meetings with federal, state, and local government partners
- Minimal in person work and travel is expected on an as-needed basis, and time will be reimbursed.

Relevant Skills:

- Coursework or professional experience with GIS software; ArcMap, QGIS, or spatial work in R/Python
- Education: obtaining or completed undergraduate degree or equivalent professional experience related to the focus areas below
  - Relevant majors or minors include: Urban Studies, Environmental Science, Political Science, Geology, Geospatial Sciences, Economics, Computer Science
- Passionate about drinking water, data, and environmental justice, and tribal representation
- Detail oriented, professional, and ability to interface with a variety of stakeholders including tribal members, community organizers, water utilities, and non-profit organizers.