



## 2026 YP Summit Program

### Tuesday, March 24, 2026

### The Next Wave: Navigating Water Sector Currents

The “Next Wave” refers to young professionals as a growing force in the water sector, as well as the next big steps for each of us on our respective career journeys. It is also a nod to the next iterations of rapid change being experienced throughout the wider industry.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

During the 2026 YP Summit, participants will:

- **Discuss and anticipate emerging challenges** in different areas of the water industry. Identify how these may impact their goals in the water sector and recognize the skills they have and the ones they might need to develop further as future leaders.
- **Explore trending workforce issues**, how those offer opportunities for growth, and learn from peers and current water leaders about the value of their perspectives as young professionals.
- **Engage with a broad variety of hands-on water and wastewater tools and approaches** in a team setting to expand practical knowledge and build lasting peer-to-peer support networks.

### Agenda

7:45 – 8:00 AM	Morning Coffee
8:00 – 8:15 AM	Learning Cohort Meet and Greet
8:20 AM	Welcome & Opening Remarks

8:40 AM

## The Next Wave: Perspectives from WEF and AWWA Senior Leadership

Professional associations play a large role in water sector culture, norms, and even regulation. AWWA and WEF are the two most prominent water sector associations in the country, and represent sector professionals in all areas of the industry as they develop training, certifications, conferences like this one, and even lobby on behalf of both the professionals in the sector, but also the communities and rate payers we serve. These associations are fundamental in setting up a course for the sector and offering concrete support for getting there together. This session brings together executive and operational leadership from both professional organizations to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the water sector broadly, and young professionals growing into their careers more specifically. It is designed to provide insight and access to some of the most well-known and well-connected leaders in the industry for candid discussion through panel questions and a Q&A.

**Moderator: Dane Elliott, Ohio State University**

**Speakers:**

**AWWA Deputy CEO - John Albert, AWWA**

John Albert is the Deputy CEO of the American Water Works Association (AWWA). Prior to joining AWWA, he served as Chief Research Officer at the Water Research Foundation (WRF). John has more than 25 years of experience in the water sector advancing water science, utility performance, and informed water policy. He is especially proud of the strong network of water professionals he is part of across the United States, Canada, and internationally. Through these relationships, he has engaged on a wide range of topics including source water protection, asset management, water and wastewater treatment, rate setting, and customer perception. John holds a Master of Environmental Science and Engineering from the Colorado School of Mines, a Master of Public Administration from the University of Colorado Denver, and a B.A. in Biology from Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire.

**WEF Immediate Past President - Howard Carter, City of Saco**

Howard Carter is the Immediate Past President and a member of the 2025-26 Board of Trustees for the Water Environment Federation (WEF), an international organization of water quality professionals headquartered in Alexandria, VA. Howard is also the director of the Water Resource Recovery Department for the City of Saco, Maine. A WEF member since 1998, Howard spent five years in the House of Delegates as a representative of the

New England Water Environment Association (NEWEA) and his last year as the speaker of the House. Additionally, he was a founding member of the New England Operations Challenge team "Pump Fiction" that went on to compete nationally in both Division 1 and 2 for a number of years. Howard is also an active member of NEWEA, where he served as president in 2010. He is also a past president of the Maine Water Environment Association in 2002. In addition to receiving numerous WEF Operations Challenge team awards over the years Howard is also a recipient of the William D. Hatfield Award, the Arthur Sidney Bedell Award, A WEF Fellow, a WEF Service Pin Recipient, and a member of the Select Society of Sanitary Shovelers. Howard is a graduate of both the U.S. Naval Nuclear Piping/Mechanical Apprenticeship program and the Southern Maine Technical College Wastewater Treatment/Environmental program.

**AWWA President - Heather Collins, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California**

Heather Collins serves as the Chief of Water Treatment Operations for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. She oversees five large conventional treatment plants, each with capacities ranging from 250 to 750 million gallons per day (MGD). Leading a team of 300 employees, Heather manages a \$100 million budget, ensuring the safe operation, maintenance, and compliance of the water provided to over 19 million people. Heather's prior experience includes regulatory oversight for California's public water systems, where she managed drinking water regulations and promoted water reuse initiatives. Currently, Heather leads the regulatory and permitting efforts for Metropolitan's Pure Water Southern California program, a planned 150-MGD water purification initiative aimed at beneficially reusing water for groundwater recharge and potential raw water augmentation, thereby enhancing the resilience of Metropolitan's water supply portfolio. Heather is a Registered Civil Engineer and a licensed Water Treatment Operator. She is an active member of the American Water Works Association (AWWA), currently serving as President.

**WEF Executive Director - Ralph Erik Exton, WEF**

Ralph Exton is the Executive Director at the Water Environment Federation (WEF), a WEF Fellow, and has been serving in this role since July 2024. Prior to joining WEF, Ralph held various senior executive positions at GE Water, SUEZ, Veolia, and Grundfos. He has extensive experience in strategic marketing, business development, M&A, Digital IOT, and Board-level leadership within the water and environmental sectors, including 5 years on the Board of WEF, 3 of those years as treasurer. With over 38 years of experience, he has dedicated his career to protecting the environment and ensuring the sustainability of water, our most precious natural resource.

9:20 AM

# Smarter Water: The AI and Digital Landscape in the Water Sector

AI, IOT, digital tools, machine learning, smartwater, transformational, water-intensive.... There is a LOT of buzz around AI and digital tools within the water sector. The advice from even 5 years ago on how to get ahead of digital transformation as a young professional is already outdated. So how can we prepare now to truly be equipped for the next 5 years? This 40-minute workshop brings together experts in digital water from across the industry to take on myths and truths on AI and digital tools, and how these things interact with water. Guiding the discussion and hands-on activities, the session facilitators have diverse backgrounds, representing experience from the utility, technology provider, and consulting engineer perspectives to offer a truly holistic look at how digital tools like AI are being integrated into water work now, as well as trends and challenges that YPs will be facing in these next few years.

Moderator: Alex Webb, Optimatics

## Speakers:

## **Marie Hilliard, SUEZ**

As the Vice President of the Strategic Support Team, Marie leads Optimatics' technical support for clients using Optimizer™ and AssetAdvanced™ software to complete planning, design, and operational optimization projects. In addition to supporting traditional Optimizer projects in clean water and wastewater optimizations, Marie specializes in working with clients and the Optimatics development team to adapt Optimatics software to address new use cases. Before joining the Optimatics team, Marie started as an IIC fellow on a data-based consulting project for an arm of the Department of Health and Family Welfare in Karnataka, India. She then spent two years as a Market Strategist for the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), evaluating how optimization and market regulations impacted daily and long-term operations of the electricity grid. Marie completed her degree in Economics from the University of Chicago.

**Lance Holt, Black & Veatch**

Lance Holt, PE, MBA, is a Technical Director at Black & Veatch with more than a decade of experience spanning utilities, consulting, and public-sector regulation. He previously served as Director of Engineering for the South Carolina Public Service Commission and in municipal and industrial wastewater leadership roles. Lance is a licensed Professional

Engineer and Certified Public Manager with expertise in aligning technical innovation and operational excellence.

### **Navneet Prasad, Central Valley Water Reclamation Facility**

Navneet Prasad, PE, is a Project Manager and Electrical Controls Engineer with over 15 years of experience delivering and commissioning complex industrial and municipal systems across North America and India. His expertise includes system integration, controls programming, and on-site startup and commissioning. He holds degrees in electronics engineering, electrical engineering, and business administration and serves as a Director of the Water Environment Association of Utah.

### **Corey Williams, SmartCover**

Corey is a distinguished leader in the water sector, bringing more than three decades of experience in advancing water and infrastructure technology. Most recently Corey served as President and CEO of SmartCover until its acquisition by Badger Meter in 2025. He now leads Corporate Business Development for Badger Meter, where he oversees the company's merger and acquisition strategy. A licensed Civil Engineer, Corey has served as President and CEO of multiple organizations, where he drove record performance, global expansion, and successful acquisitions. Earlier in his career, he scaled a fast-growing consulting and software firm and led a large technology department within a national engineering organization. In addition to his corporate leadership, Corey also serves as Vice President of the Water Environment Federation, reflecting his deep commitment to advancing the industry.

10:00 AM              Tap into Trivia

Trivia activity facilitated by the 2026 YP Summit Platinum Sponsor: McWane WaterWorks.

### **McWane WaterWorks**

As a comprehensive leader in water infrastructure solutions, McWane Waterworks brings together trusted brands: McWane Ductile (ductile iron pipe), Tyler Union (fittings), M&H, Clow, and Kennedy (valves and hydrants), and MPI – McWane Plant Industrial (full plant project materials). Together, these brands deliver quality, reliability, and innovation to communities across the United States and Canada, ensuring safe and sustainable water systems for generations to come.

10:15 – 10:35 AM Break

10:35 AM                   **Going Rogue: Presentation Skills That Captivate**

What makes some presentations unforgettable — while others fade from memory before the applause even ends? In this interactive session, Rogue Water Lab Executive Director Chelsea Boozer reveals the storytelling secrets behind the world's most captivating communicators, drawing from Talk Like TED, behavioral science, and her own experience coaching speakers across the water sector.

During this workshop, participants will learn how to design presentations that don't just inform but inspire — by combining emotion, novelty, and credibility. Using the "TED trifecta" (emotional connection, story-driven structure, and concise clarity), we'll break down what makes a message stick in the brain and move people to action.

**Speaker:**

**Chelsea Boozer, Rogue Water Lab**

Chelsea Boozer is Executive Director of Rogue Water, a nonprofit equipping and inspiring the water sector to strengthen public trust through authentic engagement and strategic communications. She believes that improving people's relationship with water – and with those who deliver, clean, and steward it – starts with breaking away from the status quo. To Rogue, engagement isn't just communications or public relations; it's the hard work of exploring complex human dynamics, listening deeply, and responding with clarity and empathy to create true connection. With a former career in investigative journalism, she's wired to ask questions. And with a prior role leading utility government affairs and regionalism across 18 communities at Arkansas' largest drinking water utility, she's inspired to collaborate and facilitate shared visioning. Chelsea serves on the American Water Works Association's Executive Committee and Board of Directors. She holds a Master of Public Administration from Syracuse University and a bachelor's in journalism from the University of Memphis.

11:30 AM                   **Leading through Change: A Visionary Utility Leader's Approach**

The water sector is notorious for being hungry for new technology, but hesitant to take risks or adopt these new approaches despite the increasing pressure from new demands on treatment, distribution, collection, and stormwater management. With over 25 years' experience in the water sector and a decade in senior leadership roles as some of the largest, most well-known public utilities in the country, Kishia L. Powell is an undisputed expert in leading organizations through change. She currently serves as GM and CEO of WSSC, one of the largest water utilities in the country, and widely regarded as one of the

most innovative as well. In this session, Ms. Powell will share her approach for bringing vision to leadership, and creating an impact within an organization – even in the face of uncertainty and change.

**Speaker:**

**Kishia Powell, WSSC Water**

Kishia L. Powell is a nationally recognized water utility executive with 27 years of experience across public and private sectors in the U.S. and London. She serves as General Manager and CEO of WSSC Water, leading the largest water utility in Maryland and the eighth largest in the United States. She manages a workforce of nearly 1,800 and a combined operating and capital budget of \$1.8 billion. Kishia has served as President of the National Association of Clean Water Agencies and on President Biden's National Infrastructure Advisory Council workforce subcommittee.

12:15 – 1:15 PM    Lunch

1:15 PM            Resilience through Inclusivity: Building the Future of Work in Water

The future of work in water and the water workforce is facing rapidly changing demands and relationships with and expectations from their communities. This panel discussion brings together prominent water professionals from across the industry who have applied and lived experiences in advancing inclusion and belonging at local, regional, and national levels. The panel will explore this topic in the context of the water sector, the current state of the industry, relevancy to the workforce, as well as the impact to communities as providers of an essential service. The session will include Q&A and table discussions so attendees can engage directly with panelists and with each other on this critical topic.

**Moderator: Lindsey Holt, SCE**

**Speakers:**

**Mariana Anguiano, TRA**

Mariana Anguiano, PE is a Manager of Northern Region Engineering for the Trinity River Authority of Texas, supporting operations and maintenance at the Northern Region Facilities. She has almost 10 years of experience in the water and wastewater industry. Previously, she worked as a consultant on planning, design, and construction of drinking water facilities. Her expertise includes treatment facility design, regulatory compliance,

and master planning for water production. Mariana holds a BS and MEng in Civil Engineering from Texas A&M University and is a licensed PE in Texas.

### **Nicole Brown, GFT**

Nicole Brown is a nationally recognized leader in sustainable and equitable water infrastructure with over 27 years of experience advancing community-centered projects. As Area Growth Lead for the Water Sector at GFT, she helps utilities achieve strategic goals by aligning innovation with inclusive public engagement and forward-thinking leadership. She is the founding Vice President of the Black Water Professionals Alliance and has served in leadership roles with AWWA, WEF Water 2050, the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, Jersey Water Works, and the Emerging Water Leaders of Color Leadership Circle. A recipient of the 2024 WEF Mentorship Award, Nicole is passionate about workforce equity, leadership development, and authentic collaboration.

### **Donnell Duncan, Arcadis**

Donnell Duncan, PE, SE, is a speaker and author of 10 books including his latest, 'A New Mindskin Leadership Superpowers: 100 Governance Proverbs for the Marketplace.' He is a structural engineer, project manager, and business development professional in the water/wastewater industry. At the Water Environment Federation (WEF), he is a Past Speaker of the House of Delegates (HOD) and current Outreach Community of Practice Director of the Community Leadership Council (CLC). He is also past co-chair and a current member of the Board of Trustees DE&I Committee, past chair of the HOD DE&I Workgroup, and past member of the Workforce D&I Task Force. At the American Water Works Association (AWWA), he is chair of the Diversity and Member Inclusion Committee and serves on the Water 2050 Equity, Access & Community Engagement Strategic Implementation Team, AWWA Standard G415 Committee, and the Steel and Composite Tank Committee. He earned degrees from Morehouse College and Georgia Tech and is licensed as a PE/SE in numerous states. He works out of the Atlanta office of Arcadis and pastors The Body Church in Metro-Atlanta, GA.

### **Brianna Huber, City of East Moline**

Dynamic water industry leader with extensive experience advancing equitable, innovative, and resilient water management practices. Founder and Executive Director of Her2O, a global initiative dedicated to empowering women in water. Brings over a decade of operational experience in drinking water systems, regulatory compliance, emergency management, and utility leadership, supported by advanced training from Duke University's Water Innovation Leadership Development (WILD) Program. Recognized for

championing diversity, equity, and inclusion, building high-performing teams, mentoring emerging professionals, and leading organizations through change.

2:00 PM            **Operations Competitions- A Boots-Up Approach to Water Workforce Engagement**

What are operations competitions, such as WEF Operations Challenge, AWWA Meter Challenge, Pipe Tapping, or Top Ops? How did they develop, and how are they intertwined with workforce development in the water sector? In this short introduction, gain insight into this extremely popular (and growing) initiative - both the history and looking ahead to the future.

**Speaker:**

**Kim Furry, Woodard & Curran**

Ms. Furry has 29 years' experience in the water and wastewater field. She is a Senior Client Manager & Principal at Woodard and Curran. Kim is a Class IV Wastewater Operator and a Class II Laboratory Analyst in Ohio and has served as a wastewater and collections system facility manager for several municipalities as well as Business Development Director for Alloway Laboratories in Ohio. Kim holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Master's in Organizational Management. She is a Past President of the Ohio Water Environment Association (OWEA), a WEF Fellow and is currently the Chair of the WEF Operations Challenge Community. Kim has also served as the curriculum development task force manager for operator certification course development with the OWEA and sits on the OPEA Operator Advisory Council and the Board of Director's for the Midwest Biosolids Association.

2:15 PM            **Water Circuit Challenge**

In this 90-minute session, participants will be introduced to a broad variety of technologies, skills, and knowledge which is extremely relevant to different aspects of the water and wastewater sector as they work through different challenges. With peer participants from a variety of geographic and

career backgrounds they will have the opportunity to discuss and try out these technologies, tools, and ideas as they complete the station tasks.

**Thank you to our Water Circuit Challenge equipment donors:**

- **WEF Operations Challenge**
- **Vaughan Pumps**
- **Victaulic**

- **Union County Water**

4:05 PM            Being... Ready: Lessons Learned from a Career in the Water Sector

It's often claimed that "soft skills" contribute more to one's career advancement than technical skills. But soft skills can be "fuzzy" to define, can mean different things to different people, can be misused in critical relationship situations, and thus, difficult to put into practice. This session considers three critical, practical, and pragmatic soft skill elements that are easy to grasp but require a lifelong commitment to master. We will include an interactive exercise designed to help underpin that commitment.

**Speaker:**

**Art Umble, PhD, Water Sector Expert**

Dr. Art Umble's 40-year professional career includes university teaching in civil engineering, management of a public water and wastewater utility, global consulting for public and private clients, and applied research. He has served on numerous state, national, and international technical and public policy forums addressing wastewater treatment, reuse, renewable energy, circular economy, and climate change.

4:40 PM            Closing Remarks

5:00 PM            Group Picture

6:00 – 8:00 PM    Networking Reception

*Updated February 13, 2026*