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Media Contact: Travis Loop, 703.684.2465, tloop@wef.org

Report on Water Workforce Provides New Data on Challenges, Opportunities

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – A new report from the Brookings Institution provides a detailed and data-driven look at careers in the water sector, finding that while there are looming shortages and a need for diversity in the workforce, water jobs are a tremendous economic opportunity for the American worker.

The Water Environment Federation encourages its members to closely review [*Renewing the Water Workforce: Improving water infrastructure and creating a pipeline to opportunity*](#), which was released June 14.

“The report reveals the sizable economic opportunity offered by water jobs, including the variety of occupations found across the country, the equitable wages paid, the lower educational barriers to entry, and the need for more diverse, young talent,” write authors Joe Kane and Adie Tomer of the Brookings Institution.

Kane and Tomer examined occupational employment data and made several key findings:

- In 2016, nearly 1.7 million workers were directly involved in designing, constructing, operating, and governing U.S. water infrastructure, spanning a variety of industries and regions.
- Water occupations not only tend to pay more on average compared to all occupations nationally, but also pay up to 50 percent more to workers at lower ends of the income scale.
- Most water workers have less formal education, including 53 percent having a high school diploma or less. Instead, they require more extensive on-the-job training and familiarity with a variety of tools and technologies.
- Water workers tend to be older and lack gender and racial diversity in certain occupations; in 2016, nearly 85 percent of them were male and two-thirds were white, pointing to a need for younger, more diverse talent.

“While the Water Environment Federation and our colleagues across the water sector have long been aware of the challenges and opportunities of our workforce, we are grateful that the Brookings Institution produced this timely, detailed report that contains fresh data,” said Eileen O’Neill, WEF Executive Director. “It is imperative on all of us to examine the findings and accelerate our efforts to ensure a sustainable and talented water workforce.”

This spring WEF nationally launched a jobs program that provides training and certification in the field of green infrastructure. The [National Green Infrastructure Certification Program](#) (NGICP) establishes national requirements for working on green infrastructure projects, promotes a skilled green workforce, streamlines the process of connecting qualified talent to in-demand jobs, and supports community-based job creation in U.S. cities. NGICP is working with local organizations to expand the program nationally, including partnering with community colleges and STEM high schools to incorporate the curriculum into educational institutions and member associations to engage existing infrastructure workers. NGICP is also partnering with workforce development organizations to engage many of the chronically un- and under-employed in urban areas across the country.

WEF also maintains the Job Bank, continually updated site with new employment listings for careers in wastewater, including water and wastewater management, operations, consulting engineering, and other career paths in water quality. [Visit the Job Bank](#).

To read the Brookings report visit: <https://brook.gs/2HCBFdj>

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About WEF

The Water Environment Federation (WEF) is a not-for-profit technical and educational organization of 34,000 individual members and 75 affiliated Member Associations representing water quality professionals around the world. Since 1928, WEF and its members have protected public health and the environment. As a global water sector leader, our mission is to connect water professionals; enrich the expertise of water professionals; increase the awareness of the impact and value of water; and provide a platform for water sector innovation. To learn more, visit www.wef.org.