

Study: Involving the public in water policies is key to successful municipal water systems

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Informing residents about local water issues and involving them in local water policies are the keys to building healthy and resilient city water systems, according to a Portland State University study.

Melissa Haeffner, a PSU environmental science professor and the study's principal investigator, said that residents who received communications from their local water bureaus or served on a [city](#) water system advisory board or committee had perspectives and concerns that were more aligned with those of political leaders and professional water managers.

There is a gap that exists between residents, who are concerned about costs and water shortages, and water managers, who are concerned about aging [water infrastructure](#), according to the PSU study published in the February 2018 issue of *Water Resources Research*.

Haeffner, who collaborated with researchers from The Ohio State University and Utah State University, concluded that bridging this gap between residents and policymakers over water issues helped create municipal water systems that were effective and sustainable.

Using interviews and surveys with mayors, city council members, public utilities staff and residents in northern Utah, Haeffner and her collaborators examined how these different participants have varying perceptions and levels of knowledge about the key issues facing city water systems.

"I believe it's just as important to study how human factors influence local water policy as it is to study the science of water quality or the costs of upgrading water infrastructure," said Haeffner. "Today most research on city water systems focuses on these engineering or economic factors. My research examines how human behaviors impact local water policy."

Haeffner hopes to bring the process she developed for this study to examinations of [water](#) systems in other cities in Oregon and ultimately around the world.

More information: Melissa Haeffner et al, Social Position Influencing the Water Perception Gap Between Local Leaders and Constituents in a Socio-Hydrological System, *Water Resources Research* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/2017WR021456](#)

Provided by Portland State University

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