



SOUTHWEST  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
FINANCE CENTER

**Seeking Graduate Research Assistant for  
Water Infrastructure Funding Mechanism Analysis Project  
12 August 2021**

The [Southwest Environmental Finance Center](#) (SW EFC) is looking for a graduate student who has an interest in water resources and management to participate in research funded by the Spring Point Partners, a philanthropic organization [See page 2 for more information about the project]. The research would involve gathering documents and data, analyzing data, and conducting case studies related to water infrastructure funding programs throughout the 50 states and U.S. territories.

We are looking for a student with strong research and writing skills, someone who has the capacity to be a part of a professional team, and an individual who is able to contribute to the following tasks:

- Data collection and analysis,
- Case study research, and
- Interviews with staff of state-level agencies focusing on water issues

The research assistant must be able to work independently as well as collaboratively as part of a team and must have intermediate-level experience with Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint).

The research assistant will be expected to work 15- 20 hours/week, which will consist of conducting research, meeting with Spring Point project team leader (Dr. Joni M Palmer) and working with the project team. We are hoping to have someone start Tuesday 7 September.

COMPENSATION: Graduate Research Assistant

The student will be paid hourly for 15-20 hours/week. Hourly wage: \$20

\*There is the possibility of spring semester and/or summer term renewal.

If interested, please submit a resume and cover letter (1-page only, including your interests and skills, see paragraph above) to Joni M Palmer, PhD [[palmerjonim@unm.edu](mailto:palmerjonim@unm.edu)] by **Friday, August 27, 2021 at Noon**. We expect to contact students for an interview and list of references on Monday 30 August.

## Information about the research project

### **Project Problem Statement: Funding Related to Water May Be Restricting the Ability to Achieve Full Cost Efficiency [EXCERPTED FROM PROJECT PROPOSAL]**

There are a great many benefits that have accrued from practicing Asset Management. While we have made great strides, there are two areas where improvement is possible and desirable. One is the area of funding approach that often works counter-productively with asset management.

For clarity, any time the word “water” is used it is meant to refer to the collective of drinking water, wastewater, and storm water.

Infrastructure requires funding – funding for the day-to-day operation and maintenance activities and funding for the larger capital replacements and rehabilitation projects that water utilities would like to undertake. The money for day-to-day operation and maintenance as well as some of the capital projects comes primarily from customers in the form of user fees or taxes. The money for major capital projects can come from outside funding sources such as state or federal agencies. Two of the major entities are the State Revolving Funds (SRFs) and Rural Development (RD). The SRF programs are funded out of capitalization grants from EPA while the RD funds come from USDA. These agencies make a very big distinction that they will not fund “operation and maintenance” only capital. No one would argue strongly that an outside loan is desirable for routine activities of a utility. However, there are a lot of activities between day-to-day operation and new capital and the most efficient operation would say that one should fund the most cost-effective solution, no matter what combination it is.

In both the initial phase of the project and in the beta testing we will reach out to organizations such as the Council of Infrastructure Financing Agencies (CIFA) and the Small Community Water Infrastructure Exchange (SCWIE) to determine ways in which they can provide input or help develop products that would be most useful to state and federal funding agencies. They may also be able to help with the beta testing phase of the project.

The products will include: a compendium of funding best practices that have been or could be used to provide funding that is more in line with asset management principals and that has a greater array of potential long-term financial benefits. It will also include training materials.

The approach will be beta tested by water utilities and/or water funding agencies across the country. In particular, the ability of small to medium sized systems to be able to use this approach for funding future projects is particularly important to test.

We are looking for several benefits, outcomes and outputs from this work. The primary benefit will be the increased cost-efficiency of the overall funding program and the ability of the funding agencies to fund more projects overall if they fund each project more efficiently.