



# County Drought Resilience Planning Assistance Program: Frequently Asked Questions

In September 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law Senate Bill (SB) 552 (Hertzberg), which assigned new responsibilities and requirements at the State of California (State) and local levels to help small water suppliers and rural communities reduce their risks of inadequate water supply amid a water shortage event. A water shortage event could be caused by droughts or other emergencies such as wildfires, earthquakes, floods, and other local emergencies. Among other things, SB 552 requires all counties to establish a standing Drought and Water Shortage Task Force (Task Force) by January 1, 2022, and improve drought and water shortage preparedness for state small water systems and domestic wells within their county through the development and implementation of a County Drought Resilience Plan (County DRP).

In 2023, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) launched the County Drought Resilience Planning Assistance Program (Program) to help counties comply with SB 552 requirements. Each county can request up to \$125,000 in financial assistance or direct technical assistance to support their planning efforts. All counties in the State, and only counties, are eligible for assistance under this Program.

The following frequently asked questions (FAQ) and associated responses are maintained to provide clarifications on DWR Program and relevant SB 552 requirements associated with the Task Force and County DRP. This FAQ is subject to updates and revisions as the Program progresses. Please refer to DWR Program Website for the latest.

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**SB 552 Requirements**

## **1. What is a County Drought and Water Shortage Task Force?**

SB 552 requires all counties to establish a standing Drought and Water Shortage Task Force (Task Force) by January 1, 2022. A County task force could include, but is not limited to, representatives from the state and other local governments, including groundwater sustainability agencies, and community-based organizations, local water suppliers, and local residents. These representatives are invited and selected by the county. A task force would facilitate drought and water shortage preparedness for state small water systems and domestic wells within the county's jurisdiction.

## **2. What is a County Drought Resilience Plan?**

A stand-alone plan or a compilation of plans and their specific components that. At a minimum, includes a vulnerability assessment of potential drought and water shortage risks for state small water systems and domestic wells within a county, and short-term response actions and long-term mitigation actions to alleviate the identified vulnerabilities and water shortage risks. The county may include implementation strategies and funding opportunities in its County DRP.

Please refer to the DWR [County Drought Resilience Plan Guidebook](#) for recommended contents for a County DRP.

## **3. What is the minimum coverage of a County Drought Resilience Plan?**

SB 552 requires the County DRP to cover the drought and water shortage preparedness for state small water systems and domestic wells. It is County's discretion to expand the coverage to include considerations and practices for other small water systems and coordination with urban water suppliers. Please refer to DWR's [County Drought Resilience Plan Guidebook](#) for additional recommendations and suggestions.

## **4. How should the state small water systems and domestic wells within incorporated areas be considered in the County Drought Resilience Plan?**

SB 552 does not provide any distinction between small water systems and domestic wells within incorporated areas and those in unincorporated areas, or their needs of protection against droughts or other conditions of significant water shortage. DWR recommends counties consult with their legal counsel for potential options to comply with SB 552 requirements if this question arises. DWR also recommends counties consider collaboration with the incorporated area(s) within their geographic boundaries, along with other partners as suggested in DWR's [County Drought Resilience Plan Guidebook](#), for consistent regional planning and implementation, and potential leverage of cross-jurisdiction functions or services in order to streamline the counties' compliance actions.

## **5. Should the County Drought Resilience Plan include considerations for water shortage resulting from conditions other than droughts?**

SB 552 requires counties to help state small water systems and domestic wells prepare for drought and water shortage. As described in DWR's [County Drought Resilience Plan Guidebook](#), counties are recommended to consider all conditions that may result in water shortage for state small water systems and domestic wells, including but not limited by wildfires, Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS), significant water quality concerns, and others.

## **6. Is there a due date for the County Drought Resilience Plan?**

SB 552 did not set a due date for counties to complete their County DRP. However, as described in a separate question regarding DWR's Program, counties receiving either financial or direct technical assistance are required to complete their County DRP within one year of the assistance's starting date.

## **7. Who needs to approve the County Drought Resilience Plan?**

County DRP is a local plan, and the approval requirements are subject to county's discretion. State agencies such as DWR and State Water Resources Control Board are not tasked by the Legislature for approving County DRPs.

## **8. Where can I find more information about the Task Force and County DRP development?**

DWR has developed a [County Drought Resilience Plan Guidebook](#) to assist counties in complying with SB 552 requirements. Please refer to the Guidebook for recommendations and suggestions on Task Force formation and contents for a County DRP.

## **DWR's County Drought Resilience Planning Assistance Program**

### **9. What is DWR's County Drought Resilience Planning Assistance Program?**

DWR developed the County Drought Resilience Planning Assistance Program specifically to assist counties in meeting SB 552 requirements. Under this program, each county can request up to \$125,000 in financial assistance or direct technical assistance (not both or in combination) to support their planning efforts for SB 552 compliance.

### **10. Who is eligible to apply for assistance under DWR's County Drought Resilience Planning Assistance Program?**

All counties in California, and only counties, are eligible for assistance under this Program.

**11. Is a County eligible for Program assistance even if it has not established a Task Force per SB 552?**

SB 552 requires all counties to establish a standing County Drought and Water Shortage Task Force by January 1, 2022; however, DWR considers that counties are eligible for the Program assistance even if their Task Force has not been established.

**12. How can a county apply for assistance under DWR's County Drought Resilience Planning Assistance Program?**

DWR established a simple and streamlined process for application. Please refer to the [CA DWR website](#) for more information, or contact Sarah Ko at [Sarah.Ko@water.ca.gov](mailto:Sarah.Ko@water.ca.gov).

**13. How are financial assistance and direct technical assistance different?**

Through the financial assistance, a county can obtain a non-competitive planning grant up to \$125,000 for eligible planning expenditures related to Task Force implementation and County DRP development. For the direct technical assistance, DWR will provide technical support up to \$125,000 contracted value to counties for Task Force implementation and County DRP development.

**14. Does DWR's financial assistance require a contract between the county and the State?**

As all other DWR grant programs, DWR will enter into a grant agreement with the county for approved scope with necessary terms and conditions including reimbursement requirements. Counties are responsible to manage the grant for intended use in County DRP development and related Task Force support.

**15. Does DWR's direct technical assistance require a contract between the county and the State?**

There will be no contract between the county and the State for direct technical assistance. DWR will contract with the consultant for needed direct technical assistance. The consultant will work with the county to develop the scope of services and collaborate with the county in County DRP development based on the agreed-upon scope of services and level of efforts. There is no contractual arrangement between the county and DWR, or between the county and the consultant.

**16. What are the limitations and other unique requirements for assistance under DWR's Program?**

The financial assistance and direct technical assistance under DWR's Program are for planning efforts and thus, prohibited for use in project implementation including those projects identified in the County DRP, or hiring of personnel. In addition, Task Force support is allowed for a period of up to one year as ramp-up support for counties.

DWR also requires the counties receiving either financial assistance or direct technical assistance under its Program to complete the County DRP within one year of the assistance starting date. For financial assistance, the starting date is the effective date for DWR's grant agreement with the county. For direct technical assistance, the starting date is the date DWR issued a letter to the county to acknowledge the scope agreed by DWR and the county for consultant services, or the first kick-off meeting with the County, whichever is later.

Lastly, DWR requires the counties receiving either financial assistance or direct technical assistance under its Program to share their County DRP with DWR when completed. DWR will host an online portal for sharing collected County DRPs with the public for information exchange and best practice sharing. Although not mandatory, DWR will encourage those who did not benefit from DWR's Program to share their County DRP as well.

**17. Is a county still eligible for financial assistance or direct technical assistance under DWR's Program if it has completed their County DRP?**

Yes, each county in the State is eligible for either financial assistance or direct technical assistance. A county can use financial assistance or direct technical assistance towards additional planning efforts to further improve their County DRP or development of tools to improve their data analytics and transparency.

**18. Could financial assistance or direct technical assistance be used for developing a well program to serve transient people?**

Counties have discretion for the included scope under their County DRP and the scope to be included in the proposal for financial assistance or the scope for direct technical assistance, as long as the assistance is used for planning purpose only and the primary objectives for the assistance to have a functional Task Force and completion of the County DRP are not compromised.

**19. Can a county utilize financial assistance or direct technical assistance to address drought resilience for wells or small water systems in addition to state small water systems and domestic wells?**

Counties have discretion for the included scope under their County DRP and the scope to be included in the proposal for financial assistance or the scope for direct technical assistance, as long as the assistance is used for planning purpose only and the primary objectives for the assistance to have a functional Task Force and completion of the County DRP are not compromised.

**20. What efforts DWR will take to protect the data and information the county shares for use in direct technical assistance?**

Counties should evaluate their data and information policies and protocols to determine the adequate measures for sharing data and information with DWR's consultant for Task Force support and County DRP development. DWR will not receive any data or information that the county shares and the consultant obtains during the process. The resulting County DRP is a public document; the county is only required to share the final document with DWR as part of the requirements for assistance under DWR's Program.