

ASU program is taking water education to the streets

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News
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Community-based action can often lead to big impacts.

This is especially applicable in addressing the state's water issues, which is why Arizona State University is rolling out four new community-driven projects to advance water resilience in unique and meaningful ways.

Since its inception in 2022, the [Arizona Water Innovation Initiative](#) has actively engaged in assisting both the state and the broader Southwest region in tackling water-related issues and ensuring a sustainable water supply in the face of climate change challenges.

Spearheaded by ASU's [Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory](#), in partnership with the [Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering](#), one of the key pillars of the initiative is [Impact Water – Arizona](#), a program that connects ASU's expertise and resources with on-the-ground community needs.

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It recently awarded funding to the four new community-driven water projects.

"We're excited to support these new projects through Impact Water – Arizona. This was a competitive application cycle, and we ultimately selected four strong proposals that align closely with the program's goals — to support actionable, collaborative work that addresses statewide water priorities and delivers real, on-the-ground impact," said [Susan Craig](#), director of Impact Water – Arizona.

A video is worth a million words

With Colorado River shortages and depleted aquifers in the news, there is strong and growing interest among decision-makers and members of the public in Arizona water issues. The [Kyl Center for Water Policy](#) is hoping to meet this interest by creating a series of new videos.

"The Arizona Water Files" is a collection of five-minute video explainers on Arizona water resources and policy, which will be released later this year on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and the

Kyl Center's award-winning [Arizona Water Blueprint](#) website.

"People are getting so much of their information and news from video these days, and this is an effort to give them what they want in a format that is very accessible for them," said Sarah Porter, director of the Kyl Center for Water Policy. "Whenever a big topic emerges, we can point people to a five-minute video that someone can consume quicker than a 6,000-word article and explain all the basics they need to comprehend a complex emerging issue."

The project will be developed in collaboration with ASU experts in engineering, hydrology, sustainability and law to ensure accuracy and depth across all topics. As each video is released, the Kyl Center will host a public webinar screening featuring expert commentary and a Q&A session to engage viewers and deepen understanding of Arizona's complex water issues.

Reducing our turf

Professors [Kelli Larson](#) and [Daogin Tong](#), from the [School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning](#), are working on a tool to identify grassy regions that can be replaced with sustainable landscaping.

"We are hoping to scale up water savings for the entire Central Arizona Project region with different kinds of landscape alternatives for conservation as well as heat mitigation," said Larson, who has served as an investigator on several National Science Foundation projects and holds a joint appointment in ASU's School of Sustainability.

"We know there are trade-offs, and we'd like to find a way to provide a combination of environmental, recreational and aesthetic functions to communities and get them to use water more efficiently."

Water managers will be involved in deciding what types of "nonfunctional" turfgrass — basically grassy areas that serve as decoration with no other purpose or function — could be replaced by different types of vegetation, shade structures or other landscaping.

The team will use spatial analysis to identify where those patches are located, and quantitative modeling will then be used to estimate how much water will be saved through different landscape changes.

The results of different scenarios will be discussed, and a user-friendly online dashboard will be designed with stakeholders so that people can explore their own landscape replacement options and associated outcomes for saving water, lowering heat stress and more.

Keeping it real

Arizona real estate agents need to understand local water resources when assisting people who are buying, selling or managing property.

To help them navigate this process, a new initiative has leveraged a strategic partnership with the Arizona Department of Real Estate to enhance the quality and effectiveness of water-related continuing education for licensed real estate professionals.

[Danielle Storey](#), associate user experience researcher at the Arizona Water Initiative, and [Harry Cooper](#), the director of water conservation innovation at the Arizona Water Initiative and Storey's co-principal investigator, have created a new program called REAL Water Arizona — Improving Water Education for Real Estate Professionals, which aims to improve the accuracy and usefulness of training on water governance, scarcity and sustainable solutions.

“We want to know if Arizona real estate agents are actually understanding the water topics being taught to them and how they apply this knowledge to advising clients,” Storey said. “Our project is focused on empowering the instructors of these continuing education courses by integrating their needs for quality, reputable resources into the REAL water educational experience.”

A digital learning platform will serve as a comprehensive resource tailored to real estate professionals and instructors who educate licensees.

Offering on-demand access to updated, credible water education tools is increasingly important as drought conditions persist and water challenges are felt across Arizona, Storey said.

Storey and Cooper believe the program will benefit approximately 83,000 real estate professionals who in turn will educate their clients — often first-time home buyers — on water issues, leading to a more informed electorate and general population.

Motivation, conservation and installation

Grass-removal incentives are usually a win-win for residents and the Arizona municipalities in which they reside. But one city wants to dig a little deeper to understand what motivates someone to make the swap.

The city of Scottsdale is partnering on the project, providing community-based behavioral insights into the motivations for why a household would trade their beloved grass for a more sustainable landscape.

“We have multiple goals with this program, but what we really want to do is understand the psychological and societal factors that motivate participation in municipal grass-removal programs,” said [Stylianos Syropoulos](#), an assistant professor in the School of Sustainability. “These findings will go a long way regarding support of long-term community resilience in the face of growing water scarcity.”

The project will be implemented through research questions, surveys and other factors that identify voluntary participation and impact of municipal water conservation incentives in Arizona.

Key insights from these findings will be issued in press releases with the support of the Kyl Center for Water Policy and the [College of Global Futures](#), published in [The Water Report](#) and at least two peer-reviewed publications, and presented at academic conferences.

Craig believes these program investments will pay dividends in the short and long term.

“These projects reflect the heart of Impact Water – Arizona: empowering communities with the knowledge and tools they need to navigate water challenges,” Craig said. “By expanding access to water education, supporting community-driven solutions and strengthening local capacity, we’re

laying the groundwork for a more resilient and informed water future across the state.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



A view of the Arizona Grand Canal, which moves water around the greater Phoenix metro area, near 10th Street and Campbell Avenue. Photo by Deanna Dent/Arizona State University

Text image(s)



An example of nonfunctional turf at Creamery Park in Tempe, Arizona. Photo courtesy city of Tempe