



ELEVATE

# Tapping into Success

Strategies for Effective Lead Service Line Replacement Communication



*This is a report brief – to read the full report, visit [ElevateNP.org/Publications/Tapping-Into-Success](https://ElevateNP.org/Publications/Tapping-Into-Success)*

“Tapping Into Success” focuses on lead service line replacement (LSLR) program communication, education, and outreach.

For this project, Elevate spoke with staff, elected officials, and consultants for municipalities nationwide where LSLR programs are underway to learn about what has worked well and what hasn't. We also talked to residents and other stakeholders about their experiences on the receiving end of those communications.

Wherever your municipality is in the process, this report is designed to share lessons learned and key considerations for successful LSLR program communications – to help us all remove lead service lines (LSLs) as safely and efficiently as possible while keeping communities engaged.

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## Communications Best Practices for Water Utilities Working on LSLR

- 1. Communicate a sense of urgency, not emergency:** Work to foster a healthy level of concern so that residents take steps to mitigate their risk of lead exposure (like using utility provided water filters) while they wait for their LSL to be replaced, and readily grant access when that time comes.
- 2. Center the customer in your communications:** Outreach to residents should address their concerns about the lead service line replacement process, accurately inform them about the risks of lead exposure, and be easily understood by the general public.
- 3. Diversify communication channels:** There's no one outreach method that will work for everyone, so layer a variety of different strategies to reach a diverse audience and ensure your messages are translated into multiple languages that meet the needs of your community.
- 4. Build community trust:** Utilities who focus on creating open, transparent channels of communication with the broader community have the most success in customer education and engagement.
- 5. Be visible beyond times of crisis:** Consider how water – its treatment and delivery – is seen and valued by your community. Simply increasing visibility can garner the political and financial support needed to replace lead service lines.
- 6. Make it personal, go door to door:** While time consuming and resource intensive, doing outreach on a one-on-one basis – particularly with community partners – may be necessary to get residents to sign up for lead service line replacement.
- 7. Keep it simple:** Learn how other communities have creatively kept outreach costs down. Take advantage of free or low-cost tools to manage your LSLR program.
- 8. Find the right person for the job:** Whether it's finding a “trusted messenger”, someone skilled at one-on-one outreach, or that one person in public works who has just been around forever, utilities should take a thoughtful approach to who interacts with residents on their behalf.
- 9. Involve residents in the process, from planning through restoration:** Resident voices should be included in the development of LSLR projects. They should also be given ample notice about what will happen, what the timeline is, and who is responsible for what throughout the entire LSLR process.
- 10. Consider ordinances and other legal tools:** Know that, despite all your outreach, some property owners may still prefer to opt out, and a mandate may be needed to achieve 100% LSL removal. Depending on community and political support, ordinances have been successful in some communities where utilities are given tools to enforce LSLR.

## Authors

Elevate is a nonprofit organization that works nationally and is headquartered in Chicago. Elevate designs and implements programs to ensure that everyone has clean and affordable heat, power, and water in their homes and communities – no matter who they are or where they live. For more information, visit [ElevateNP.org](https://www.elevatenp.org).