



How we helped One Water create a vision for water affordability

Render facilitated a custom-designed Vision Sprint for Louisville Water and MSD stakeholders to provide a framework for moving their partnership on water affordability forward.

Services

Design Sprint
Process Development
Organizational Mediation/Facilitation

Clients

Louisville Water
MSD





The pandemic created unprecedented job losses, and many Louisvillians struggled to pay for basic necessities, including their utility bills. Through an innovative strategic partnership called One Water, Louisville Water Company (Louisville Water) and the Louisville Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD) used the pandemic to evaluate the payment assistance they provided customers and realized the customer experience in asking and receiving help wasn't easy.

During the pandemic, Louisville Water and MSD redefined customer assistance, putting all the affordability options under one brand, Drops of Kindness. During the pandemic, Drops of Kindness provided assistance for those unable to pay - there were no shut-offs due to lack of payment for water users in Louisville. Amazing, yes, but is it sustainable? Louisville Water, Louisville MSD, and other community stakeholders realize that water is a necessity, and it shouldn't only be during a worldwide pandemic that we extend support to people who need it.

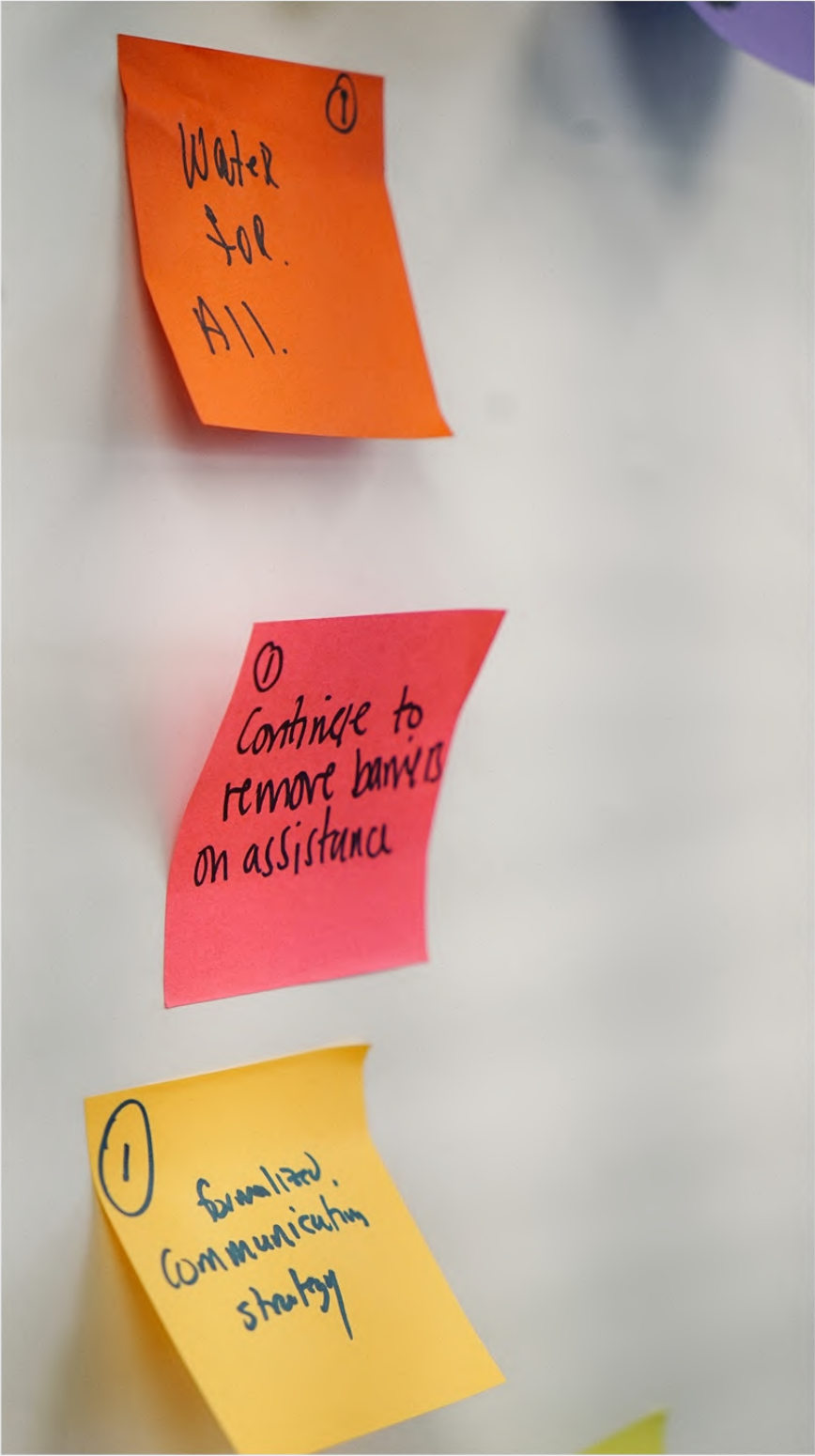




Louisville Water and MSD stakeholders identified several challenges and unknowns in moving the water affordability conversation forward, including:

- Lack of a comprehensive assessment of ongoing programs. How are these performing now? A clear understanding and evaluation of current activities is critical for building a strategy as Louisville Water and MSD tackles new challenges through their One Water Partnership.
- Conversations about water are complicated. We need water to live, but maintaining water infrastructure is expensive. Water's necessity does not make it a valueless commodity, and bill-payers often prioritize water below cable and cell phone bills. Stakeholders desired a shift in the broader conversation so that water is "at the table" with housing and healthcare.
- Related but distinct from the above, stakeholders felt that success stories from the One Water partnership needed to be told more frequently and told "louder" to gain community support and understanding.
- What is the long-term vision for affordability and what is its strategy for sustainability?
- What is the organizational model that best achieves this strategy? Should Louisville Water and Louisville MSD hire someone who will be dedicated to water affordability full-time? How do these two utilities organize themselves to be most effective when there are competing priorities at play?





"The opportunity to bring together different stakeholders, from CEOs to service personnel, to create a path towards water affordability that we all agree on, is a huge step forward for our community," said Marita Willis, sprint participant. Willis is Chair of the Water Foundation Board, current member of the MSD Board, former member of the Board of Water Works, and a Community Leader.

Location, location, location: since the sprint required voices from both Louisville Water and MSD as well as external contributors, we chose to conduct the sprint at the Render offices. “We were in a safe new place,” said one participant afterward, and that was intentional; psychological safety encourages participants to voice potentially unpopular opinions, and it is vital in achieving the best sprint outcome possible.

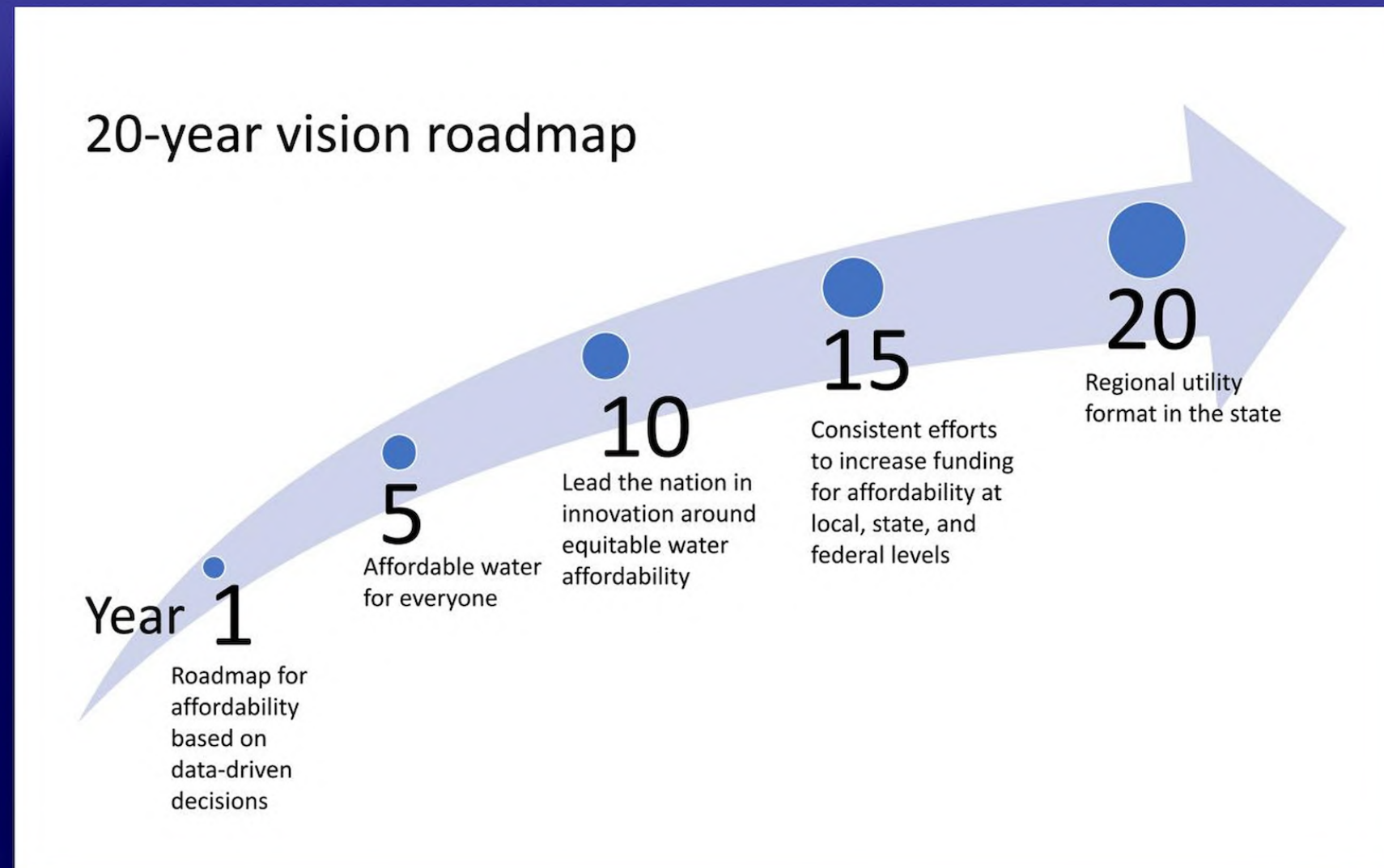




Key outcomes from the sprint included:

- An “After Action Review” to examine the success of current programs, ensure participants shared a vocabulary, and bring everyone up to speed quickly on key information.
- 5-, 10- and 20-year visions of the future
- Identification of 3 high priority audiences for storytelling
- A challenge roadmap that outlines a path forward for deeper alignment between Louisville Water and Louisville MSD through their One Water Partnership, including mapping out Objectives and Key Results.





Here's a snapshot of a 20-year vision for One Water: We caught up with the Louisville Water and Louisville MSD teams a few months after the sprint session to see how the results have fueled their next steps. Participants told us the sprint was valuable in that “it set the foundation for our **why**” — a key ingredient in consensus-building around a strategy. The partnership’s “why” is that no one should have to worry about access to water so that they can experience their full human potential. One valuable change after the sprint was that both organizations started talking about water affordability as an issue more frequently—it increased awareness, brought those conversations to the forefront, and galvanized the need for the program. Participants also found that mapping the key next steps was important for maintaining momentum. “We’ve learned a lot and outlined how to get started,” one stakeholder said.



In general, stakeholders found the sprint to be a useful tool to generate organizational alignment, and although the roadmap generated during the sprint will need refining and adjusting as the One Water partnership between Louisville Water and MSD learns and grows, the sprint achieved some valuable political and leadership buy-in and created a focal point for continued conversations and wayfinding.

We are excited to partner with Louisville Water and Louisville MSD as they continue to support the needs of our community to maximize positive impact for Louisvillians.

Affordable water for all? *Yes, please.*



**Work
with us**

Website

workwithrender.com

Phone

502 286 9191

Email

info@workwithrender.com