

## Partnerships, Patience, and Participation

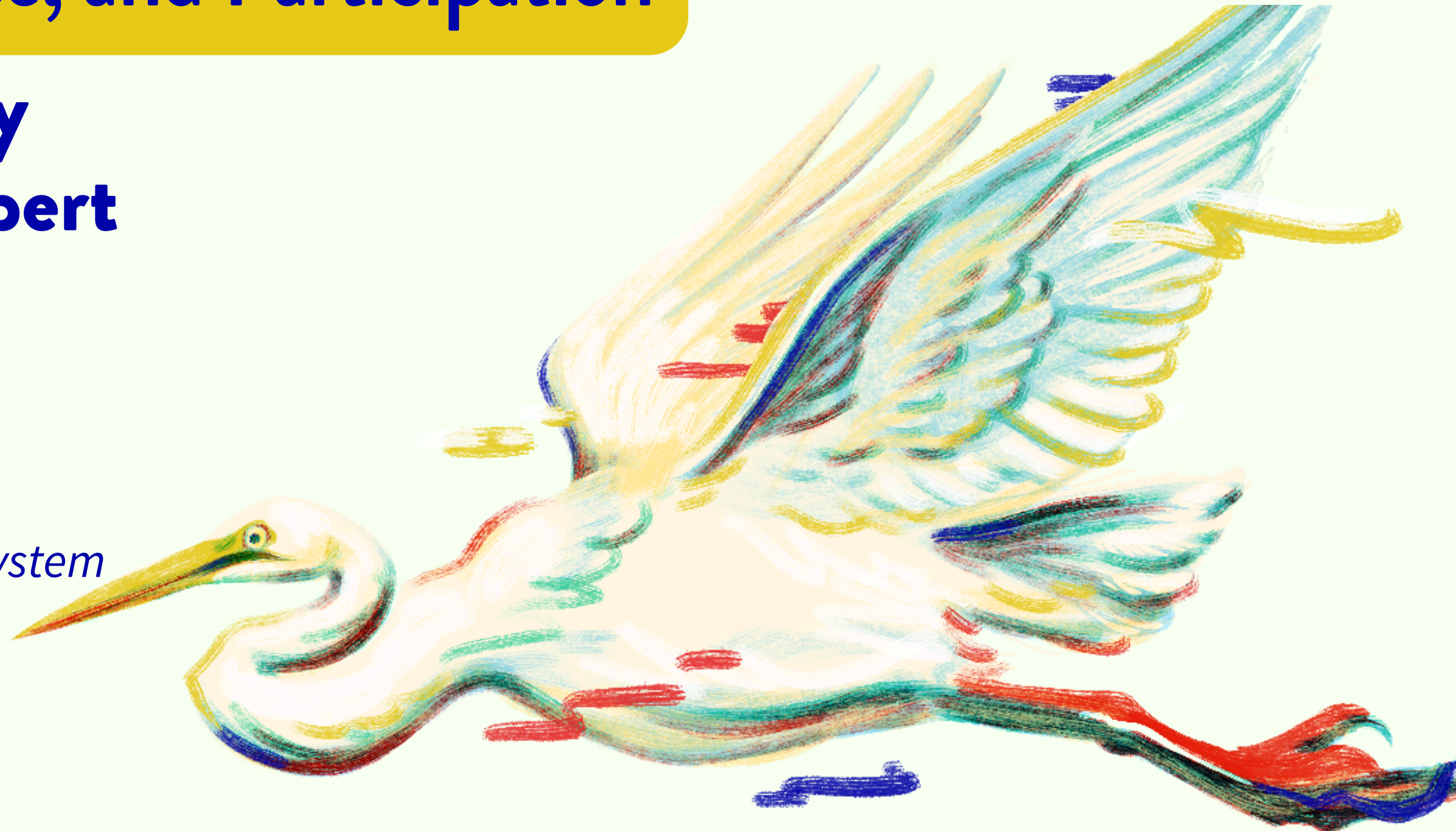
# A Water Affordability Panel from Three Expert Perspectives

### Speakers

David Wheaton, *Legal Defense Fund*

Anna-Lisa Gonzales Castle, *Elevate*

Greg Wukasch, *San Antonio Water System*



# BEST PRACTICES FOR AVOIDING WATER SHUTOFFS

## ArcGIS StoryMap

**Introduction**



*"The practice of shutting off water is a very clear disruption of water access, with really significant impacts for people and questionable value to utilities."*  
- Anna-Lisa Gonzales Castle, Elevate

The benefits of keeping the tap on go far beyond drinking water. Think about how you use your water each day: washing your hands, cooking dinner, flushing the toilet, washing your clothes, watering your garden, and so much more. At-home water supply impacts sanitation: water access decreases the spread of disease and strengthens the economy. When [water access is expanded](#), it can lead to increased economic productivity and reduced healthcare costs.<sup>2</sup>

**Imagine a Future Where Everyone Can Access Water**

Water is a human right. But access to clean, safe, and affordable drinking water is not guaranteed in the United States. River Network envisions a future where everyone can afford to pay for the clean, safe, and reliable water coming out of their taps, where no one's water is shutoff because of their inability to pay, where communities have adequate resources for water infrastructure maintenance, and where drinking water contaminants do not threaten public health. This vision can only become reality if community advocates and utility leaders feel equipped with the knowledge, capacity, and confidence to advocate and implement equitable access to clean drinking water and influence decision makers at the federal, state, and local levels.

*We're not alone in this vision. According to a 2023 Water Hub poll, 74% of voters support banning water shutoffs so that lower-income families can maintain water access even when they fall behind on their water bills.<sup>1</sup>*

River Network

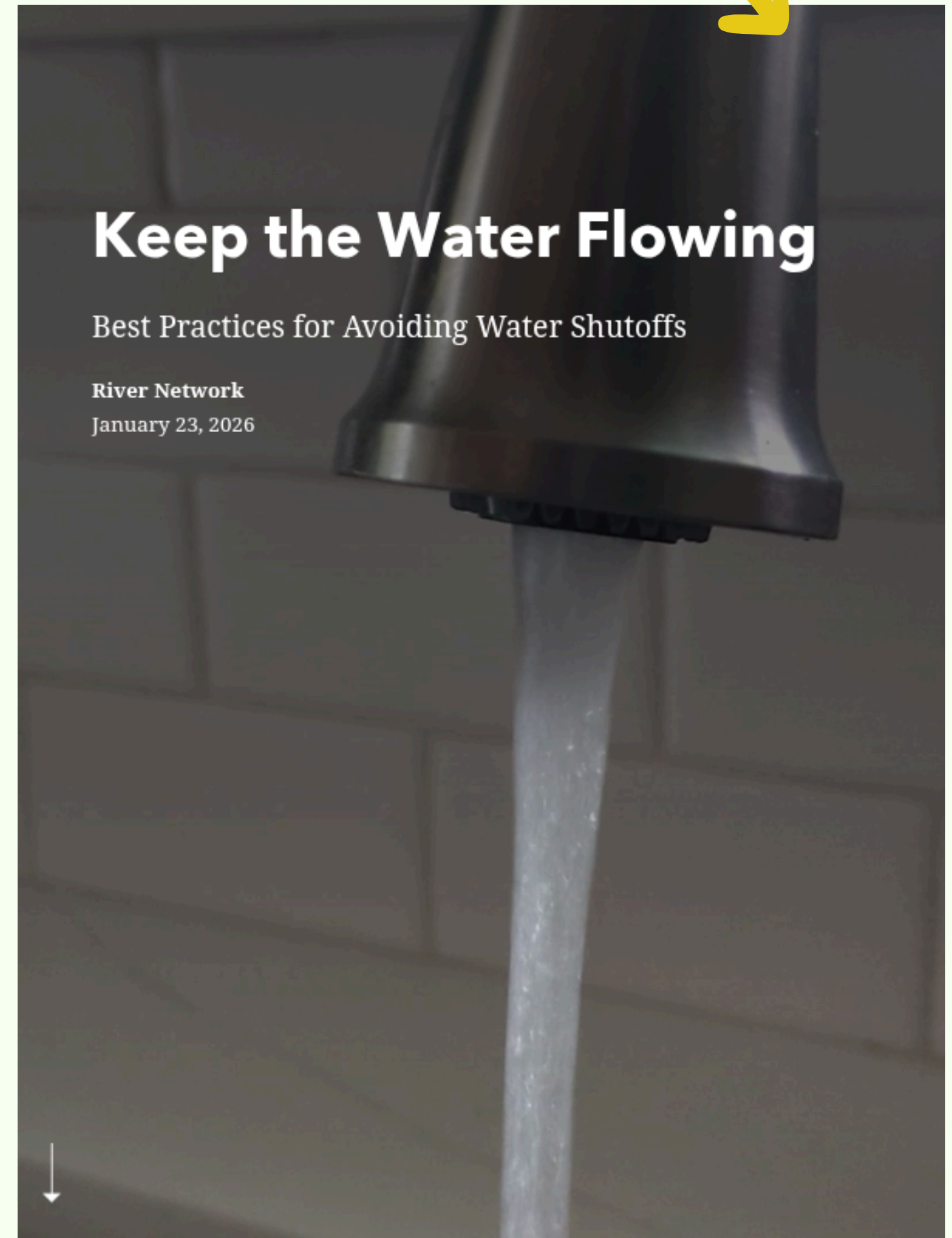
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## Two Formats

PDF



Scan the QR code to access both versions



# Keep the Water Flowing

## Best Practices for Avoiding Water Shutoffs

River Network  
January 23, 2026

# 3 CASE STUDIES, 10 BEST PRACTICES



**Chicago, IL**



**DeKalb County, GA**



**San Antonio, TX**

## Reducing or Eliminating the Practice of Water Shutoffs: Recommendations at the Local Level

Easier to  
Implement

1. Be proactive & communicate early and often
2. Shift shutoff notification and disconnection timelines
3. Establish consumer protection policies
4. Create or improve assistance programs that work for the most vulnerable customers
5. Collect data consistently & transparently to understand your community's water affordability needs
6. Establish debt forgiveness or repayment plans
7. Establish rate structures that enable all to afford their water bills
8. Advocate for local ordinances that prohibit the use of water shutoffs due to customer's inability to pay
9. Centralize utilities' administrative needs & pursue regional collaborative structures
10. Tap into state and federal funding for affordability planning & critical infrastructure upgrades

More  
Effort to  
Implement

*Plus: Advocate for state and federal solutions (see Appendix A)*

# ***THANK YOU!***

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