



# Small Towns Environment Program

*Self-help Washington*



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# What is STEP?

**The Small Towns Environment Program (STEP) or Self-help**, helps small communities recognize that the resources to solve their wastewater problem often lie largely within their own community and they draw first on these local resources. Self-help is a collective effort, a community working together to solve their wastewater problem.

Back in the old days, when a barn burned down, the community came together to build a new one. In many small communities in Washington, the barn has burned down with respects to their wastewater treatment. With Self-help, the community comes together to rebuild.

## How does it work?

STEP has a different starting place than traditional approaches to project funding and management. Instead of asking, "What will it cost?" STEP communities ask, "What can we afford?" STEP starts with the idea that the best way to get money is to need less of it!

# Will it help my community?

- 💧 **Save money.** Self-help projects typically cost far less than traditionally funded wastewater projects, allowing both the community and the state to do more with available funding.
- 💧 **Community participation.** Self-help is a holistic process that promotes community participation and buy-in throughout the entire community project, from planning to construction to operation and maintenance. Community participation is not only crucial to the project, but in some respects is the most important outcome.
- 💧 **Community pride.** Residents are involved in the decision-making process and feel a strong sense of ownership. As a result, the community has a wastewater system they feel is theirs and into which they have invested sweat equity. With this sense of ownership, communities take great pride in their systems and naturally take better care of them.

# What is Ecology's interest?

Participation in the Self-help program provides an opportunity for small communities and Ecology to develop a partnership to address the community's human health and environmental needs. It is Ecology's wish to make this a rewarding experience for the communities involved. Project success is contingent upon the ongoing desire of the community to pursue wastewater improvements to safeguard their community health, to protect water quality, and to preserve the small community quality of life for future generations.

Together we can:

- 💧 Identify resources from both inside and outside the community that can assist in specific ways.
- 💧 Evaluate alternative wastewater treatment systems.
- 💧 Assist community leaders throughout the project.
- 💧 Find answers to questions on project management, requirements, and technical issues.

- 💧 Learn from the experience of other communities that have been successful in saving \$\$\$ through Self-help.

## Who can apply?

Self-help is not the answer for every community. There are several indicators that Ecology looks for in a community to determine whether Self-help is a good fit.

The following questions may help you determine whether your community can benefit with Self-help:

- 💧 Is there a community leader (or leaders) who can organize and rally residents and keep a project on track?
- 💧 Do community residents have a strong awareness of the problem and support the need to correct it?
- 💧 Are community members willing to get involved to help reduce project cost?
- 💧 Does the community have local resources that can be used on the project?

If your community can answer “yes” to all of the above, then you may be a good candidate for the Self-help approach.

# Whom should I contact?

If you think your community can benefit from participation in Self-help, please contact:

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