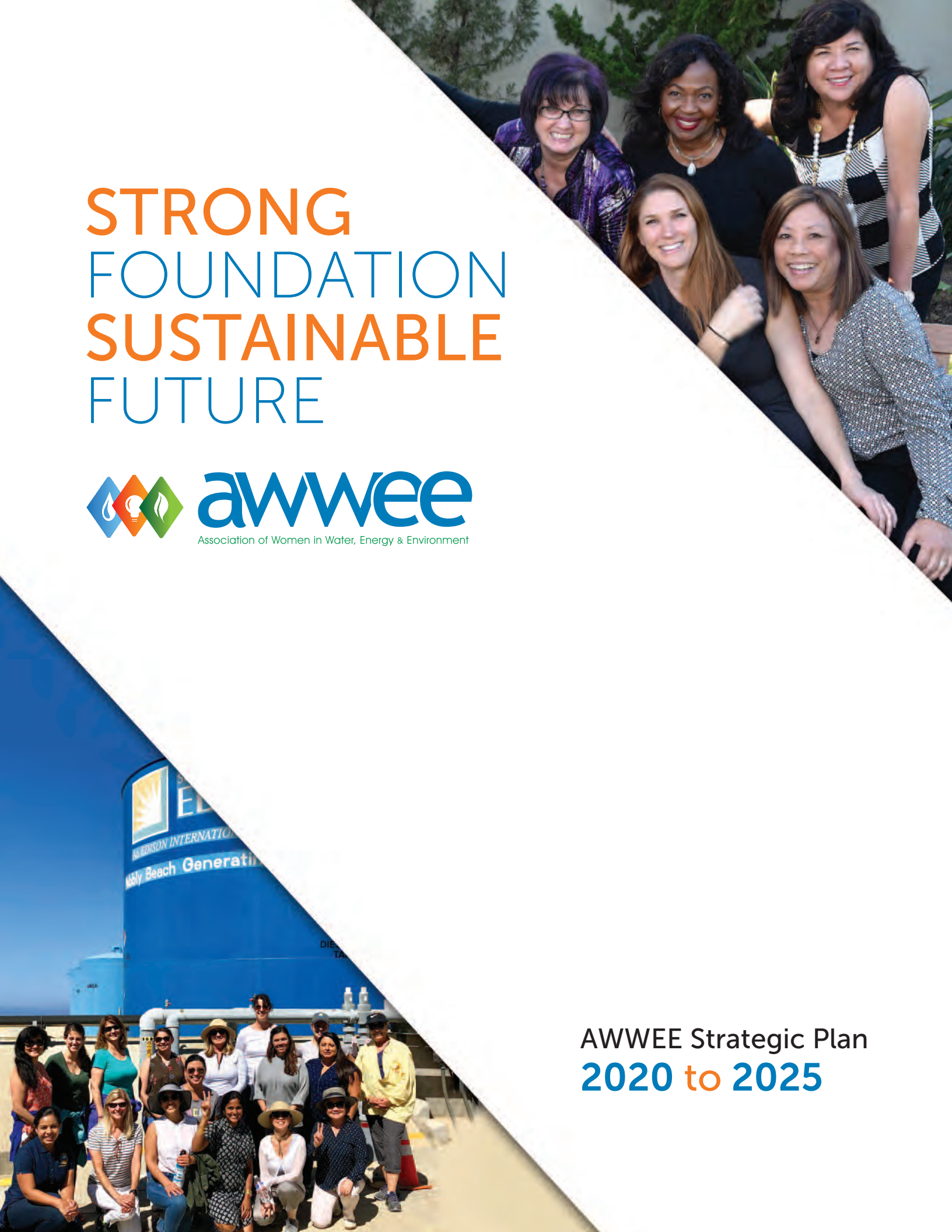


# STRONG FOUNDATION SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



**awwee**

Association of Women in Water, Energy & Environment



EDISON INTERNATIONAL  
Abby Beach Generation

AWWEE Strategic Plan  
**2020 to 2025**







Greetings Association of Women in Water, Energy and Environment Members,

For the last year, the Board of Directors has been engaged in a strategic planning process designed to carefully examine where AWWEE is now and determine the organization's strategic focus and path for the future.

Today, we are excited to share the outcome of that process.

This year marks 10 years since the first AWWEE conference. As a Founding Member of AWWEE, I can still remember that first conference and the excitement in the air as we considered the organization's potential. Since that time, AWWEE has grown remarkably. We have expanded our membership, evolved our leadership, and are offering new programs and more events on a broader range of topics than we ever imagined back in 2009. We have developed a community where women feel supported, empowered and share dynamic ideas about critical issues in our industries.

While AWWEE looks slightly different today than in our early years, one thing hasn't changed. I can always count on the community of AWWEE members, all focused on how to best empower and support women in the fields of water, energy and environment—to make me feel full of hope. I know many of you feel the same.

The work of AWWEE has never been more important than it is today. We are seeing a shift in culture and more women "at the table" in our organizations. We know there is still a lot of work to do. With every event we hold and conference we host, we are rising to meet the world's challenges and taking another step towards equity and equality for women.

I could not be more proud of where we are today and where we are headed in the future. This plan illustrates AWWEE's commitment to enhancing your experience as a member and stabilizing our operations in the wake of tremendous growth and change.

As a member of AWWEE, you are our most important partner. Through your membership, active participation at events, and your effort to spread the word about AWWEE within your network, you are helping to advance the mission of the organization. The entire AWWEE Board thanks you for this investment and looks forward to working with each of you as we bring this ambitious plan to life.

Sincerely,

Gwenneth O'Hara  
Board President and Founding Member



# ABOUT AWWEE

## WHO WE ARE

The Association of Women in Water, Energy and Environment (AWWEE) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization established in 2009 by a visionary group of women who recognized the need for an organization to support all women in the water, energy and environment fields to advance in their careers through education and networking.

As such, AWWEE's mission is to foster a community dedicated to the advancement of all women in the fields of water, energy and environment through education, networking and mentorship.

The organization's first decade has brought tremendous growth and expansion. In 2009, AWWEE's membership consisted of 60 women - mostly employees representing large water and energy utilities. Today, AWWEE has over 1,800 members with very diverse backgrounds, including individual professionals and students, employees from small businesses to state agencies, and AWWEE continues to have the support of many of California's largest water, energy and environmental organizations as corporate members.

## WHAT WE DO

Since its inception, AWWEE has provided over 200 educational opportunities to its members. These events expand knowledge, build leadership skills and showcase the success of women in the water, energy and environment fields. Most importantly, these events serve as touch points for members to make valuable new connections, creating a sense of community within the organization.

AWWEE events range from in-person and web-based presentations by subject matter experts, behind-the-scenes tours, hands-on learning and volunteer opportunities, professional development workshops, and networking events. The Board of Directors also organizes and hosts an annual conference.

In addition, AWWEE members have the option to participate in an annual mentoring program, called The Exchange, designed to facilitate partnerships for two-way learning between a mentor and mentee.

## HOW WE DO IT

A 15-member Board of Directors, comprised of distinguished leaders in the water, energy and environment fields throughout California, provide strategic oversight for the organization. Day-to-day operations are managed by an executive director and one part-time administrative support staff member.

Eight regional teams of volunteers serve as the organization's "boots on the ground" across California, each team organizing five to ten educational events in their region each year.

# PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

**Within the last five years, AWWEE has experienced dramatic change and rapid growth.**

**Changes in leadership:** In 2016, AWWEE hired its first full-time executive director. The composition and size of the Board of Directors has also changed.

**Membership:** Membership has grown exponentially from 60 members in 2009 to over 1,800 members in 2019.

**Education and Networking:** The number of AWWEE events has also grown dramatically, from just seven events in 2009 to over 40 events in 2019. In addition to offering more events, event attendance also continues to grow.

**Annual Conferences:** Originally held bi-annually, AWWEE now hosts annual conference events.

**Expanded Regional Team Activity:** In 2019, AWWEE expanded event offerings to the Central Coast, Central Valley and Silicon Valley with the launch of three new regional teams. AWWEE continues to work to ensure that women in all parts of the state can more readily engage.

**New Programs:** The Exchange, AWWEE's annual mentorship program launched in 2017 and has since facilitated partnerships for over 147 members. In 2019, AWWEE added a webinar training series and offered its first trainings certified for continuing education credits.

This exciting growth has added tremendous value for AWWEE members. Yet, due to limited resources, both in staffing and finances, the association finds itself straining under the pressures of its success.

Long-term organizational sustainability requires strategy. To fulfill their duty to provide strategic oversight and direction, the AWWEE Board of Directors initiated a planning process for the organization. The three goals of this strategic planning process were:

1. To analyze where the organization is now.
2. Evaluate where it should be heading in the future.
3. Identify what changes are needed to support the continued success and growth.

# APPROACH

**The Board approved a comprehensive approach for the development of the strategic plan which included the following actions and research methods:**

## **Retention of a Consultant:**

To support AWWEE Board and staff, the Board selected JPW Communications, a woman-owned and operated communications firm based in San Diego, as the consultant for this project.

## **Member Survey:**

A 17-question online survey was distributed to AWWEE membership. Survey questions covered members' perceptions of the organization's current position, as well as future aspirations. A total of 137 members completed the survey.

## **Interviews:**

Interviews were conducted by phone with key stakeholders, including management, founding and longtime members, and focus groups of members, including regional team leaders. Interview questions were similar to those asked in the member survey, but the interview format allowed for more detailed responses.

## **Board of Directors Strategic Planning Session:**

In March 2019, the AWWEE Board, its Executive Director and JPW held an in-person strategic planning session. A detailed analysis of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats was conducted and the Board was engaged in a thoughtful discussion about where the organization is now, where it is headed in the immediate future, and high-level aspirations for long-term growth.

## **Validation with Key Stakeholders and Adoption by the Board of Directors:**

This plan was drafted in collaboration with a working group of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director. The full Board of Directors, as well as the members originally included in the interview process, were invited to share their feedback on the draft plan. In October 2019, the final plan was adopted by the Board of Directors.



## SUMMARY OF TOP FINDINGS

### AWWEE Has **ONE** Full-time Employee

- For Now? **EFFICIENT.**
- For Future Operations and Growth? **RISKY.**



### Members **LOVE** AWWEE

- Enjoy **ACTIVITIES**
- Value **COMMUNITY**
- Appreciate **SUPPORT**
- Excited for **EVOLUTION**



### Revenue is **FLAT**

- Fees **UNCHANGED** Since 2009
- **UNSUSTAINABLE**



### We Did the **MATH**

More Value for Members  
+ One FTE  
Flat Dues/Fees



**LIMITED GROWTH/  
INCREASED RISK**

# WHAT WE HEARD

In order for AWWEE to sustain its current operations, continue growing and bring value to members, it is critical to stabilize three areas - membership, leadership and operations.



## WHAT WE HEARD: Membership



### Strengths

- Members are very satisfied.
- Members derive the most value from the AWWEE community through networking and relationship building with fellow members. They would like more opportunities to engage and connect with one another.

### Opportunities

- Members would like more support for their professional growth, such as leadership coaching, mentorship and continuing education programs.
- Members are interested in a broader variety of educational formats, such as live event streaming and podcasts.
- By cultivating stronger relationships with academic institutions and local organizations, AWWEE could create more diversity among membership.
- Forming partnerships with similar member-based organizations could mitigate the concern about competition for limited membership funds.
- The organization has evolved tremendously, but membership rates have stayed the same and are no longer sufficient to sustain current operations, much less grow the organization.
- Both the Board of Directors and members would like more resources for marketing AWWEE membership to new organizations, with an emphasis on creating a more diverse and inclusive membership.
- There is a need to create more awareness of the benefits of AWWEE membership within existing member organizations.





## WHAT WE HEARD: Leadership



### Strengths

- Members are highly satisfied with Board and Executive Director leadership.
- Members are also happy with the overall structure of regional teams.

### Opportunities

- The Board of Directors identified the need to establish a more formal operating structure including:
  - Clearly established roles and responsibilities: time commitment, work flow, member recruitment expectations
  - Working committees
  - Emeritus or advisory director level
  - Regional team liaison to the Board
- There is a gap in understanding between the Board of Directors and the regional teams in terms of how each group is serving the organization.
- Succession planning is needed to develop new leaders for the organization.
- There is an opportunity to create a more diverse and inclusive Board. Doing so sends a message throughout the organization—to leadership, members and prospective members alike—that AWWEE is committed to inclusion and diversity.



## WHAT WE HEARD: Operations



### Strengths

- Members and leadership are highly satisfied with the performance of the AWWEE Executive Director.
- The entire organization strongly appreciates the value of the regional team structure. Team members volunteer their time to design events on compelling topics that are important to members in their region. They also serve as ambassadors within their organizations and their personal networks to spread the word about AWWEE and bring in attendees and sponsors to offset costs for events.
- Implementation of operating guidelines for the AWWEE Board of Directors and regional teams has set clearer expectations of roles and responsibilities. The guidelines have also allowed the organization to consistently deliver high quality events AWWEE members have grown to expect.
- AWWEE is known for its creative and innovative programming. Members and leaders would like to see this expanded in the future.
- The organization is resourceful, accomplishing a lot with a little by exploring creative ways to deliver quality events and programs with limited time and budget.

### Opportunities

- Current revenue streams are insufficient to support the expansion of member benefits, growth to new regions, or additional operational activities.
- Raising the organization's profile by expanding offerings, elevating the quality of events, and hiring the necessary staff to maintain operations is costly and has resulted in some years of financial loss.
- Existing staff are spread too thin and present a risk to sustainable operations.
- Having only one full-time employee is a tremendous risk to sustained operations and limits the organization's ability to grow.
- Regional team leaders are volunteers with a two-year term and the teams themselves are comprised of volunteers. It is important to promote the regional team volunteer opportunity with members, encourage team members to actively participate, and have a plan in place to ensure smooth transitions when there is turnover.





## TOP PRIORITIES

This strategic planning process made it clear that AWWEE members are invested in the organization and appreciate the role AWWEE plays in supporting their professional development. Over the next five years, it is anticipated that AWWEE will continue to see increased diversity in membership and competition for funding. To meet the current member needs, enhance organizational stability and continue on a path of steady growth for the next five years, the organization has identified the following key priorities:

### ENHANCE MEMBER EXPERIENCE

### ENSURE FINANCIAL STABILITY

### ENABLE ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

Each of the key strategic priorities addresses opportunities based on the feedback heard in the areas of membership, leadership and operations.



## ENHANCE MEMBER EXPERIENCE

AWWEE members are the driving force of the organization. The research indicated that members desire more opportunities to connect, network and collaborate with each other. To ensure the most fulfilling and enriching experience for members, the organization will:

### Membership

- Balance the number of in-person events across regions.
- Expand operations to new areas of the state.
- Create more diverse in-person learning opportunities, as well as remote learning via live-streaming, podcasts, and webinars.
- Support the professional growth of members by creating more opportunities for them to cultivate their leadership skills.
- Build in additional opportunities for networking at educational events.
- Create an easy way for members to digitally connect with fellow AWWEE members.
- Explore partnerships with like-minded organizations, as well as academic institutions and local organizations.
- Support existing organizational members in spreading the word internally about the benefits of membership.

### Leadership

- Develop more touchpoints between the Board of Directors and the regional teams organizing events.

### Operations

- Establish a transition plan for the regional team leader and volunteer roles to ensure continued regional event activity during periods of transition.





## ENSURE FINANCIAL STABILITY

AWWEE's fiscal stability has fluctuated over the past five years. For the long-term health of the organization, increased revenue is needed to stabilize the organization financially and support increased offerings to members. To ensure financial stability for AWWEE to best serve members, the organization will:

### Membership

- Update the existing fee structure to ensure the cost of membership, events and sponsorship is aligned with the value offered to members. This update will contribute to expanded member programming and the long-term health of AWWEE in the future.

### Leadership

- Develop a forward-looking, long-range budget to ensure the allocation of increased revenues is aligned with member needs.
- Establish clear expectations for Directors with emphasis on fundraising and member recruitment.
- Support member retention and recruitment efforts by providing materials that demonstrate the value AWWEE provides.

### Operations

- Analyze and adjust the approach to revenue generated by membership dues and event registration fees.
- Grow revenue streams through expansion of existing programs, creation of new programs, and additional sponsorship opportunities



## ENABLE ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

AWWEE has benefitted greatly from the contributions of its founders, longtime Board of Directors and regional teams. The organization needs to shift now to planning for future growth and the next generation of diverse leaders who will take an inclusive AWWEE to new levels.

### Membership

- Create pathways for AWWEE members to take on leadership roles within the organization.
- Identify ways to expand the conversation and broaden engagement and support by men in the water, energy and environment fields.
- Intentionally pursue opportunities to increase diversity within membership.

### Leadership

- Continue to refresh and refine the AWWEE mission, vision and values.
- Evaluate existing board capabilities to ensure the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to sustain and grow the organization are present.
- Create formal, effective committees of the Board of Directors to ensure organizational activities are coordinated and consistent.
- Evaluate the opportunities, resources needed and benefits of expansion beyond California.
- Encourage more diversity among AWWEE Board of Directors and within the regional teams.

### Operations

- Develop succession plans for existing Directors.
- Increase staff to support growth in membership and expanded offerings.





# STRONG FOUNDATION SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

This organization changed from a dream to reality when a group of 60 women, inspired by the vision of AWWEE's founders, formed a community to support women in fields traditionally dominated by men. Those women signed on not knowing exactly what that meant or what type of return they would get for their investment. Since then, AWWEE has become a "must-join" group among women in the fields of water, energy and environment throughout California. The AWWEE Board of Directors and executive director have every intention to build upon that reputation.

**Addressing the priorities identified in this strategic plan over the next five years will enable the exciting vision of AWWEE's founders to grow to new heights.**

At the heart of this plan stands AWWEE's ongoing commitment to its members and focus on providing enhanced benefit and value. At the same time, it is clear that for AWWEE to continue growing, serving and building its community, significant changes are needed to keep the foundation solid and the organization resilient and nimble. Simply put, AWWEE must adapt its organizational structures, finances and operations to continue to serve as the trusted partner and community for women that it is today.

As the elements of this strategic plan are implemented, AWWEE members at all stages of their careers will benefit. New programs will develop and existing services will evolve. Members will grow into stronger leaders and be prepared to meet the opportunities and challenges facing the water, energy and environment fields, now and in the future.

Thank you for being a member of the AWWEE community and putting your trust in this organization the same way those 60 women did in 2009. It's only going to get better from here.



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