



## Empowering Residents, One Leak Alert at a Time

**Water affordability is a growing concern across the country, and it can impact community members and the municipality as a whole. Learn how the Village of Phoenix is using smart alerts to help residents detect leaks early and save money.**

The Village of Phoenix, located in Chicago's south suburbs, purchases treated Lake Michigan water from the neighboring Village of South Holland. When residents fall behind on water bills, Phoenix may also have difficulty paying its bill to South Holland and need to divert resources away from other municipal priorities.

Phoenix's investment in modern metering technology can help identify residential leaks and prevent the high water bills that can result. Elevate partnered with the Village to develop a communications strategy to encourage residents to sign up for leak alerts—and find and fix leaks fast!

### Changes in Meter Reading Technology

Spikes in consumption associated with even a small leak can cause water bills to skyrocket if not addressed in a timely manner. For households already struggling to pay their bills, such leaks can further exacerbate affordability challenges, possibly resulting in late fees and service disconnections.

Phoenix upgraded to an Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system that collects water meter data at regular intervals. Compared to traditional meter readings that required staff to physically visit each address, AMI meters are much more efficient—automatically transmitting water consumption data using cellular infrastructure several times per day.

This increase in data availability means AMI systems can detect changes in consumption that may indicate a leak.

### Developing a Plan for Resident Communications

When Elevate began our engagement with Phoenix, Clerk Patricia Harris manually pulled water consumption reports and called residents who may have a leak. This time-consuming task can be handled by the automated leak alert notifications included with their AMI system. However, residents need to sign up for alert emails and text messages, and Phoenix had zero leak alert subscribers.

During conversations with the Village's meter vendor, Elevate learned that low subscription rates are very common, often resulting from residents simply not being aware of the product. To increase awareness of the leak alert system, Elevate collaborated with Village officials and staff to develop an outreach strategy and communications materials, including a flyer, website content, a refrigerator magnet, and a press release.

Elevate partnered with the Village as part of our ongoing work to support water utilities address water affordability. Keep reading for lessons learned and free-to-use communications templates based on this project.

## Takeaways from Phoenix

Elevate is grateful to the officials and staff of Phoenix for letting us learn alongside them as they work to increase engagement with their leak alert system. Key considerations and lessons learned from the project include the following.

**Get Creative:** Phoenix considered a range of resources before arriving at a strategy that was right for their community. They utilized standard forms of communication, including flyers and the municipal website. They also chose to use refrigerator magnets, assuming those would be used by residents and serve as longer lasting reminders to sign up for leak alerts.

**Consider Your Audience:** Because of the Village's high percentage of older residents, they collaborated with Elevate on a press release to make people aware of the leak alert system and encourage younger residents to assist their older neighbors and family. The press release was picked up by a local newspaper—[check out the Harvey World Herald article here](#).

**Balance Your Needs:** The suite of communications materials— flyer, website content, refrigerator magnet, and press release—reflected the needs of their community while balancing cost, effectiveness, and ease of implementation. The Village also explored sponsorship opportunities to help cover a portion of the costs.

## Want to Learn More?

For free-to-use communications templates based on this project, visit [CookCountyTAP.org](https://CookCountyTAP.org).

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