



JANUARY 2026

A Path Forward for Licensing Landscape & Irrigation Contractors in Colorado



COLORADO
Colorado Water
Conservation Board
Department of Natural Resources

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Acknowledgements

This research was generously funded by a Colorado Water Conservation Board Water Plan Grant. We are grateful for the support.

We would also like to thank the members of the **Landscape Professional Certification Steering Committee** who contributed their time to Steering Committee meetings, provided feedback on this project, and reviewed this report.

Bob Howey – Irrigation Analysis
Bree Wagner – City of Thornton
Donovan Ryan – Environmental Designs LLC
Eric Olson – City of Fort Collins
Jake Robinson – City of Greeley
Jason Naughtin – Norris Designs
John Fugatt – Longleaf Irrigation
Josh Pool – Timberline Landscaping
Kevin Hartley – City of Windsor
Kevin Reidy – Colorado Water Conservation Board
LeeAnn Roessler – Norris Designs
Lisa Pace – Colorado Springs Utilities
Melissa Emdin – Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado
Michelle Peterson – MPi Designs Irrigation
Nate Fetig – Alpine Gardens
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Executive Summary

With climate change and drought continuing to strain our limited water resources, Colorado is undergoing a major transition away from cool-season turfgrass toward water-wise, drought-tolerant landscapes and irrigation systems. As state and local governments expand programs that incentivize and require low-water landscaping and efficient irrigation, the need for a well-trained landscape and irrigation workforce has become increasingly urgent to ensure water savings and to reduce water waste. A Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) Water Plan Grant supported a comprehensive evaluation of whether a statewide landscape and irrigation professional license is viable, appropriate, and supported by the industry, and how such a policy could help advance Colorado's water conservation goals while supporting professionals across the state.

Building on Western Resource Advocates' (WRA's) prior research into expanding landscape and irrigation professional education in Colorado, WRA, the Colorado Water Center, and Colorado State University Extension (referred to as "the project team") conducted new research and extensive stakeholder engagement to address key research gaps identified by a Steering Committee of landscape and water utility professionals. Over the past year, the project team conducted an analysis of state licenses across the country, existing Colorado licensing models and certification programs, industry needs, potential barriers, and important considerations for how to create an effective license for the industry.

Research Findings

The project team interviewed landscape and irrigation licensing program representatives in eight states — California, Florida, Mississippi, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah — and reviewed other professional licenses and certification programs in Colorado. These discussions explored why states pursued licensure, how programs were developed, and how their lessons learned may inform a Colorado approach. Key insights included the importance of industry leadership in establishing the license, providing language access to all materials, recognition of prior experience, providing multiple training pathways to prepare for an exam, integration of water efficiency standards, sustainable funding structures, clarity on who is licensed, and creating effective enforcement mechanisms.

Stakeholder Engagement Findings

Through industry events, surveying, and one-on-one interviews, stakeholders emphasized a need for standardized, accessible, water efficiency-focused training that supports the full life cycle of Colorado landscapes, including interpreting landscape plans, efficient irrigation, installation, long-term maintenance, and overall adaptation to regional climate conditions. Survey responses indicated majority (57%) support for a required statewide license for landscape and irrigation professionals in Colorado, with 33% of respondents needing additional information to form an opinion, and 11% opposed. Stakeholders emphasized that any regulatory model would need to be carefully designed to include, among other things, accessible, hands-on training; clear exam preparation and multiple testing

opportunities; and program design that won't exacerbate existing workforce shortages or create a barrier to entry for those new to the industry.

Recommended Next Steps

Findings from this project indicate that state licensing is a viable option for advancing training and expertise in water-wise landscaping and irrigation practices in Colorado. If state licensing is pursued in Colorado, the process should begin with industry leadership and the submission of a Colorado Department of Regulatory Affairs (DORA) **Sunrise Review** application to DORA's Colorado Office of Policy, Research, and Regulatory Reform (COPRRR). Among other requirements, applicants must provide documented examples of public harm from unregulated practice, justification for which roles should be regulated, proposed licensure requirements, and supporting evidence. If continuing education will be required, a **continuing education** application also needs to be submitted at the same time as the Sunrise Review application. After a six-month review period, DORA issues a decision on whether or not it recommends regulating the industry based on the information provided. Following that decision, state legislation must be pursued to establish the new license within 24 months, which is the period for which the DORA findings are valid.¹

Specific next steps include convening industry partners to decide whether to submit a Sunrise Review application; determining who in the industry should be licensed; evaluating the need for business licensing; determining what prerequisites should be required; aligning a licensure exam and requirements with water-efficiency competencies identified by **Colorado Springs Utilities' Colorado Landscape Industry Education for Water Conservation** project; developing accessible training pathways, including Spanish-language and hands-on options; establishing a strategy for grandfathering in experienced professionals; refining cost models that balance affordability with revenue-neutral program administration; and determining what renewal and continuing education requirements are appropriate.

This project provides a critical foundation for assessing whether a statewide landscape and irrigation professional license is feasible, supported, and capable of advancing Colorado's water-efficiency goals. Through detailed research, multi-agency collaboration, and broad stakeholder engagement, the project has clarified the opportunities, challenges, and key design decisions that must guide any next steps. The findings indicate that licensure is possible in Colorado, but will require careful attention to equity, workforce realities, and strong industry leadership to be successful.

¹State legislation may be pursued whether or not DORA recommends the license.

Background

Over the past few years, Colorado has experienced an unprecedented transition away from cool-season turfgrass (turf) and toward water-wise, drought-tolerant landscaping alternatives and irrigation systems. In 2022, the state legislature adopted House Bill 22-1151, which established a statewide turf replacement funding program. In 2024, Senate Bill 24-005 prohibited non-functional cool-season turfgrass on new non-residential properties, and the state expanded those limits to residential properties via House Bill 25-1113 in 2025. As the state and our communities invest more in policies and programming that require or incentivize low-water landscaping and efficient irrigation, it is critical that our landscape and irrigation professionals have the skills and resources they need to successfully design, install, and maintain these landscapes and irrigation systems to ensure water savings and enduring conservation.

In 2021, Western Resource Advocates (WRA) began leading an initiative to explore policy options for expanding landscape and irrigation professional certification in Colorado. This effort included researching and developing **a position paper** on how this issue is addressed in other states and options to expand certification in Colorado, convening a Landscape Professional Certification Steering Committee (“Steering Committee”), and conducting surveys of Colorado water providers and landscape professionals. Over the course of this prior research, the Steering Committee came to a consensus that the most impactful approach to addressing efficient outdoor water use would be to develop a statewide program to incentivize or require landscape and irrigation professional certification or licensure. The Steering Committee proposed additional research and stakeholder engagement to help determine a path forward for expanded landscape and irrigation industry education.

In 2023, the project team — including WRA, the Colorado Water Center, and Colorado State University Extension — applied for and received grant support from the Colorado Water Conservation Board to conduct new research and extensive stakeholder engagement to address key research gaps via a Water Plan Grant. This project included an analysis of state programs across the country, existing Colorado licensing models, industry needs, potential barriers, and considerations for how to create an effective license for the industry. The following report examines key findings from this research and stakeholder engagement, provides recommendations for the design and establishment of a landscape and irrigation industry license, and proposes next steps to advancing a licensure.

Research Findings

Landscaper & Irrigator Licenses in Other States

The project team conducted in-depth interviews with states that have established a landscape and/or irrigation professional state license to better understand the motivations behind why each state created their license, how they decided on the policy mechanism to create the license, and how they determined licensure details. This research built upon a report published by WRA in 2023, ***Exploring Policy Options for Expanding Landscape & Irrigation Professional Certification in Colorado***, which summarizes program details from 10 states across the U.S. that have a statewide license for landscape and/or irrigation professionals.² For this project, the project team interviewed program representatives from California, Florida, Mississippi, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Utah, and received written responses to questions from representatives in Texas. The findings from these interviews and the 2023 WRA report are summarized in the table below.



² The states included in the 2023 report are California, Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, New Jersey, North Carolina, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Texas.

TABLE 1: STATE LANDSCAPE & IRRIGATION LICENSE DETAILS

State	License	Requirements	Enforcement ³	Costs	Notable Elements
CA	<u>C-27 Landscaping Contractor License</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 years' work experience certified by someone familiar with their work • A college degree in a related field can substitute for 3 years of work experience • Pass state exam 	Reporting system, license revocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application fee \$450 • Initial license fee \$250-\$350 • Corporation license \$650 • LLC license \$800 • Fingerprinting \$100 • Contractor's bond required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a city has adopted MWELO,⁴ violations can be issued if a contractor installs an irrigation system without a license • Exams and study guides are offered in Spanish, translators available for exam translation into other languages • Businesses must be licensed
CT	<u>Limited Lawn Sprinkler Journeypers on and Contractor Licenses</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journeyperson must complete an approved apprenticeship program • Contractor must complete at least 2 years as a Journeyperson • Pass state exam 	Reporting system, complaints are investigated by the state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application fee for Journeyperson \$90 • Application fee for Contractor \$150 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Limited Lawn Sprinkler licenses are under the Plumbing and Piping division

³ Enforcement includes both ensuring that license requirements are being followed and investigating poorly completed work by licensed individuals.

⁴ MWELO is an acronym for Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance.

State	License	Requirements	Enforcement³	Costs	Notable Elements
FL	<u>Irrigation Contractor License</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 years of related education and 1 year's work experience • Or 4 years' work experience • Exam prep training course through Florida Irrigation Association • Pass exam 	State doesn't enforce licensing as it is voluntary; if a local jurisdiction requires a license, the local government can enforce it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam fee \$125 • The test is open book; the book costs \$850 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • License is voluntary and supersedes any local requirements • 14 hours of continuing education units are required each year
LA	<u>Landscape Irrigation Contractor License</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass state exam 	The state investigates complaints about unlicensed or poor quality work and assesses penalties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam fee \$114 • License fee \$100 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must attend a recertification seminar once every three years
MS	<u>Separate Landscape and Irrigation Licenses</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass state exam for specific license 	The state investigates complaints about unlicensed or poor quality work and assesses penalties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application fee \$400 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a surety bond • Licenses are required for commercial construction but not residential
NV	<u>C-10 Landscape Contractor License</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 years' work experience • 3 years of related education can substitute • Pass state exam 	The state investigates complaints about unlicensed or poor-quality work and assesses penalties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam fee \$140 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam contains a section on xeriscaping principles • There are two separate licenses that landscape contractors can receive: one for landscape work without irrigation, and

State	License	Requirements	Enforcement ³	Costs	Notable Elements
					one for landscape work with irrigation
OR	<u>Landscape Construction Professional License</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 years work experience • Or related higher education degree • Pass state exam 	The state investigates complaints about unlicensed or poor-quality work and assesses penalties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual license fee \$170 • Exam fee \$85 • Business license fee \$600 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensing is for individuals who supervise others and businesses • NALP⁵ Certification can substitute for work experience or education requirements
RI	<u>Irrigator License</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different experience requirements for different levels; Journeyman is for those new to the industry, Apprentice is the level after 1 year of experience, and Master is the level after 4 years' experience under a licensed supervisor • Pass state exam 	State investigators investigate reports of work done without a license; \$1,500 fine per employee doing unlicensed work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam fee \$75 • License fee \$240 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing education unit credits are required every 2 years • Three levels of licenses: Journeyman, Apprentice, Master
TN	<u>Contractor license</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass state exam 	Public complaint portal, license revocation possible based on incident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam fee \$75 • Application fee \$250 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State has jurisdiction over projects greater than \$25,000; counties have jurisdiction over projects less than

⁵ NALP is an acronym for National Association of Landscape Professionals.

State	License	Requirements	Enforcement ³	Costs	Notable Elements
					\$25,000. If county has not opted into license, state can't enforce licensing in that county.
TX	<u>Irrigation License</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No education or work experience required Three different levels of licenses: Landscape Irrigator, Irrigation Technician, Irrigation Inspector Complete training based on license level pursuing Pass state exam 	Local enforcement, reporting system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam fee \$45 Licensing fee \$111 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The irrigation industry was strongly involved in passing the license
UT	<u>S-330 Landscape and Recreation Contractor</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take licensing course; applicants complete a 25-hour course and pass through participation in course 	The state investigates complaints about unlicensed or poor-quality work and assesses penalties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$300-\$400 to take the pre-licensing course License fee \$226 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Licensure is only required for projects over \$50,000

Table 1 shows the specific licensing requirements for 11 states with landscape or irrigation professional licenses.

Based on interviews with state representatives, the project team identified the following key takeaways to consider in establishing a landscape and irrigation professional license in Colorado:

Provide access to materials in Spanish: Spanish speakers make up a large portion of the landscape and irrigation industry in the states we interviewed. Some states offer Spanish-language materials or offer translation services for their trainings and exams. For example, California, Texas, and Tennessee offer translation services for exam takers, most often in Spanish, but also accommodate other languages. Florida and Oregon offer some, if not all, training or exam materials in Spanish. Utah offers its license qualifying training in Spanish. In Colorado, this would be important to consider for any statewide requirement, as a large percentage of the Colorado landscape industry speaks Spanish and translation could help comprehension and skill-building.

Account for prior experience and education: Landscape and irrigation professionals often learn on the job or have prior education of some kind. Accounting for prior experience and education would be important for any state requirement. For example, most states require prior work experience before an applicant can apply for a license. The most common requirement is four years' prior work experience, as seen in California, Nevada, Florida, and Rhode Island. New Jersey and North Carolina require three years of work experience, and Oregon requires two years. All states with work experience allow a related college degree or a certain number of years of education experience to substitute for work experience. These examples could apply well to Colorado to account for prior experience and education in the industry.

Establish an exam or testing protocol: Most states also require completion of a licensing exam to receive a license, with a variety of different types of trainings that are required or recommended before the exam. Connecticut, Florida, and Texas require a specific course administered or approved by the state that applicants must complete before taking the licensing exam. Utah only requires license applicants to attend a state licensing course to receive the license. Others, like Oregon, allow a variety of work experience or educational backgrounds to qualify for the licensing exam, including allowing those who have received the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) Landscape Industry Certified Technician certification to skip the work experience/education requirements. In Colorado, a licensing exam could be developed with recommendations for different trainings or resources that individuals could complete to prepare for it. For some professional licenses in Colorado, a third-party testing company is employed to develop the exam and study materials and to administer the exam.

Determine qualifying training curriculum: Two of the states we researched, Texas and Utah, require the completion of a specific training course to be eligible to receive a state license. Texas requires a basic irrigator training course to prepare applicants for the state licensing exam. Utah requires applicants to complete a 25-hour course that qualifies them for the license upon completion. All the other states require applicants to pass a state licensing exam to receive a license and provide flexibility in how applicants prepare for the exam. Most commonly, the state provides recommended study-guide materials, but applicants can also prepare for the exam via certifications, higher education, or gaining experience in the industry beforehand. Since there are several certifications currently offered in Colorado — and new certifications and curriculum in development — it may be reasonable to allow flexibility in the certifications and/or industry experience that are required for licensure eligibility.

Incorporate water conservation: Water conservation best practices are frequently incorporated into training and testing materials to emphasize their importance in a state program. For example, California includes **Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance** (MWELO) water conservation policies as part of its exam to receive a landscape license. New Jersey requires license holders to complete 16 hours of continuing education every two years, with eight being required to relate to water conservation. An emphasis on landscape and irrigation water efficiency would be critical for a Colorado state license. Findings from Colorado Springs Utilities' Colorado Landscape Industry Education for Water Conservation effort would be helpful to inform how to structure this for Colorado ([view this section of the report](#) for additional details on this project).

Consider how to fund a new state license: States charge a fee for professionals to receive a license. Most of the states use these fees to fund the salaries of the staff managing the state programs, making the programs revenue neutral. Typically, there are three separate fees to cover any licensing exam, the application process, and the license itself. States with business licenses, as explained below, may have an additional fee. Among states interviewed, costs to take a licensing exam range from \$45 in Texas to \$85 in Oregon. Application fees for a license range from \$75 in Oregon to \$450 in California, and the fees to receive a license range from \$111 in Texas to \$350 in California for an individual license. In total, the state with the lowest fees to obtain a license was Texas, and the state with the highest fees was California. Separate business licenses range in cost from \$600 in Oregon to \$800 in California. If Colorado pursues establishing a statewide license, fees that allow the program to be revenue-neutral and sustain itself should be considered, while also considering affordability for applicants and businesses. Additionally, Colorado licenses rely on exams developed and administered by a third party, so those exam fees would be set by those organizations.

Consider levels of licensure: As mentioned above, many of the states interviewed require professionals to have years of prior work experience or education before applying for a license, though individuals new to the industry can apply earlier for apprentice licenses in some states. Within the licensing structure, two states, Rhode Island and Texas, issue different levels of licensure for different jobs in the irrigation industry. In Rhode Island, the levels include Apprentice Irrigator, Journeyperson Irrigator, and Master Irrigator. Anyone new to the industry must register as an apprentice and work under a licensed Journeyperson irrigator for a year to qualify to take the licensing exam. The Master Irrigator designation allows an irrigator to operate an irrigation business. In Texas, the levels are Irrigation Technician, Landscape Irrigator, and Irrigation Inspector. No prior education or experience are needed for these levels; they primarily represent different skill sets and each have their own training and exam and allow professionals to conduct different types of work. Colorado could consider requiring different licenses for different positions in the industry. Requiring someone new to the industry to register as an Apprentice, as is done in Rhode Island, would require them to work under someone with more experience until they have enough experience to apply for their own license in time.

Consider including a business license: Two of the states, California and Oregon, require both individual and business licenses. These requirements allow the states to hold businesses accountable for their work including any poor-quality or unlicensed work. Stakeholders in Colorado have suggested businesses should be licensed and held accountable for their work, in addition to individuals.

Enforcement is key: Enforcement is very important for a state licensing requirement. Without it, a licensure program can be ineffective. Enforcement mechanisms vary across the states. Most of the

states have public reporting systems available to report unlicensed work. Several states employ investigators who evaluate complaints about licensed and unlicensed work. Unlicensed work is investigated by state investigators in Oregon and Rhode Island. In Texas, some local governments require a license to pull a permit for a local landscape or irrigation project. If Colorado implements a statewide licensing requirement, enforcement would be important to ensure compliance and to give the license meaning.

Colorado License Development & Administration

In addition to consulting with other states, the project team also conducted interviews with key Colorado agencies to better understand how existing state licensure programs for other professions operate and what lessons they may offer for any future landscape or irrigation contractor licensing framework. These conversations with the Colorado Department of Agriculture Pesticide License program and the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies provided a detailed look at how Colorado agencies administer occupational licensing. The interviews helped clarify how licensing programs are funded, how competency is defined and assessed, how compliance is monitored, and what level of evidence is required to demonstrate a public need for new regulation. The following sections summarize findings from these discussions and outline key considerations in pursuing a new state licensure for landscape and irrigation professionals.

Colorado Department of Agriculture's Pesticide Applicator License

The Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) manages Colorado's pesticide licensing program, which was established under federal law in 1972 and revised in the 1990s to enhance safety and professionalism in pesticide application. The program includes three levels of licensure: Private Applicator, Commercial Operator, and Qualified Supervisor/Certified Operator, with 22 specialized categories. Landscapers most often obtain turf, ornamental, and right-of-way licenses. From its inception, the program was broadly supported by industry because it raised professional standards and improved safety practices.

The program is funded primarily through license and examination fees, supplemented by pesticide product registration fees. Individual licenses cost \$100 for a three-year period, while commercial business licenses are \$350 annually, and each exam costs \$40. Continuing Education Units (CEUs) are also required for renewal and their cost varies depending on the provider.

Colorado currently has approximately 9,000 licensed individuals and 1,100 commercial applicator businesses. Compliance is generally strong, with around 50 reported complaints per year, most of which do not result in confirmed misuse. The CDA emphasizes education and voluntary compliance over punitive measures, though penalties such as cease-and-desist orders, fines, or license revocations may be applied when necessary. The industry often self-polices by reporting unlicensed activity. The most common compliance challenges include lack of awareness about requirements and confusion over overlapping or unclear license categories.

Financially, licensure costs are modest compared to other professions. The main barrier is meeting the experience requirement for the Qualified Supervisor license. Exam passing scores are set at 70%, with pass rates ranging from 85-90% for Certified Operators to 60-70% for Qualified Supervisors, the latter being more challenging due to its focus on laws and regulations. Currently, exams and study materials

are only available in English, though CDA is exploring the addition of Spanish and other language options to improve accessibility.

To measure program success, CDA tracks complaints, inspection outcomes, and violations. Overall, compliance remains high, with few formal issues relative to the large number of licensed applicators.

In offering guidance for any new licensing efforts, the CDA emphasized that new regulatory programs should be based on clear evidence of consumer harm or widespread industry problems rather than on symbolic or “feel-good” motivations. The agency encouraged evaluating whether identified gaps might be better addressed through education instead of additional licensure.

Colorado Department of Regulatory Affairs' Sunrise Review Process & License Administration

The Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA), and specifically the Colorado Office of Policy, Research, and Regulatory Reform (COPRRR) department within DORA, evaluates new professional licenses in Colorado and would be the agency responsible for administering a potential landscape or irrigation contractor license. COPRRR is responsible for determining whether to recommend that a new license be created through the state's Sunrise Review process; DORA then administers licenses created by the state legislature.

Before any new license can be created in Colorado, proponents must submit a **Sunrise Review application to COPRRR**. This application must clearly define the proposed scope of the license and provide verifiable, detailed evidence of public harm caused by unqualified or unregulated practitioners. Hypothetical risks or general dissatisfaction cannot support licensure; instead, applicants must provide specific examples of physical, emotional, environmental, or financial harm, including when and where the incident occurred, what happened, how severe the harm was, and how the harm can be attributed to the type of practitioner being proposed for regulation. Although anecdotal information from professionals or utilities can support the review, COPRRR places the greatest weight on verifiable cases from affected consumers. Applicants must also clearly identify who would be licensed, what tasks the license would cover, and what minimum qualifications or examinations would be required. If continuing education will be required, a **continuing education** application needs to be submitted at the same time as the Sunrise Review application. Sunrise Reviews address the regulation of individuals rather than businesses. If stakeholders also seek business-level regulation, that issue must be addressed separately through legislation and would not go through the Sunrise Review process.

The Sunrise Review process takes up to six months to complete. COPRRR evaluates the application for consumer harm, examines how other states regulate similar professions, reviews complaint data from related agencies, interviews stakeholders, and analyzes whether licensure is the most effective way to prevent or mitigate the documented harm. COPRRR's resulting report provides a recommendation to the legislature, and although the recommendation is advisory rather than binding, it typically informs legislative interest and decision-making. The findings remain valid for 24 months and can guide up to two legislative sessions. Regardless of COPRRR's recommendation, only legislation can create a new license, and proponents must work with legislative sponsors to draft and advance a bill if they wish to establish a regulatory program. DORA does not sponsor or initiate legislation and

plays no role in deciding whether a license should exist; its authority begins only after the legislature creates the regulatory program.

If the legislature enacts a new landscape and/or irrigation license, DORA would then be responsible for defining minimum competency standards based on what is proposed in the Sunrise application, approving examinations, establishing fee structures, issuing and renewing licenses, enforcing compliance requirements, investigating consumer complaints, and taking disciplinary action when necessary, including fines, suspensions, or revocations. DORA does not develop or administer licensing exams; all professional licensing exams must be developed and administered by a third-party administrator. The department would maintain public-facing records, allowing consumers to verify license status and review disciplinary history. DORA does not sponsor or initiate legislation and plays no role in deciding whether a license should exist; its authority begins only after the legislature creates the regulatory program.

COPRRR identified several common challenges faced by applicants seeking a new licensing program. The most significant barrier is inadequate evidence of harm, which frequently leads COPRRR to conclude that regulation is not warranted. Other issues include unclear definitions of practitioner roles, lack of differentiation between existing national certifications and proposed state licensure, and incomplete descriptions of training pathways, supervision practices, or gaps in oversight. To strengthen a proposal for a new landscape or irrigation license, COPRRR advised that applicants gather detailed and verifiable examples of consumer harm; clearly define the specific practitioner roles, qualifications, and scope of practice for licensed individuals; engage industry associations, utilities, and consumer protection organizations; and begin discussions with potential legislative sponsors early in the process to ensure alignment with policy objectives. A comprehensive, evidence-driven Sunrise application that clearly articulates the benefits of licensure and documents the harm it would prevent will be the most likely to meet COPRRR's criteria and support legislative decision-making.

Initial Research into Instances of Harm

To better understand the types and extent of instances of harm in landscape and irrigation projects, the project team developed and disseminated a survey to landscape industry stakeholders, including members of the Steering Committee, water providers, and HOA board members. The goal of this effort was to understand the types of problems occurring in the field, their causes, and whether professional regulation through licensing might help prevent or mitigate these issues. This qualitative input provides valuable insight into the connection between workforce training, accountability, and project outcomes across Colorado's landscape industry.

The survey was sent to over 75 stakeholders and received a limited response. There was concern expressed about providing names and contact information for companies or clients. Of the six survey responses that were submitted, they indicated strong consensus that professional regulation could have prevented or reduced the harm described; 100% of respondents answered "yes" to this question, though several noted some nuance.

The most common themes among respondents emphasized that licensed or certified professionals tend to uphold higher standards of knowledge and accountability, leading to better project outcomes

and water savings. Respondents cited recurring issues such as untrained or unqualified staff making critical installation decisions, lack of oversight by certified supervisors, and failure to follow basic industry standards. Several participants also noted that regulation could provide mechanisms for enforcement, such as license suspension, bonding requirements, and defined performance standards. Overall, the findings suggest that consistent professional standards and credentialing would significantly improve quality, safety, and sustainability in landscape and irrigation work.

FIGURE 1: INSTANCES OF HARM

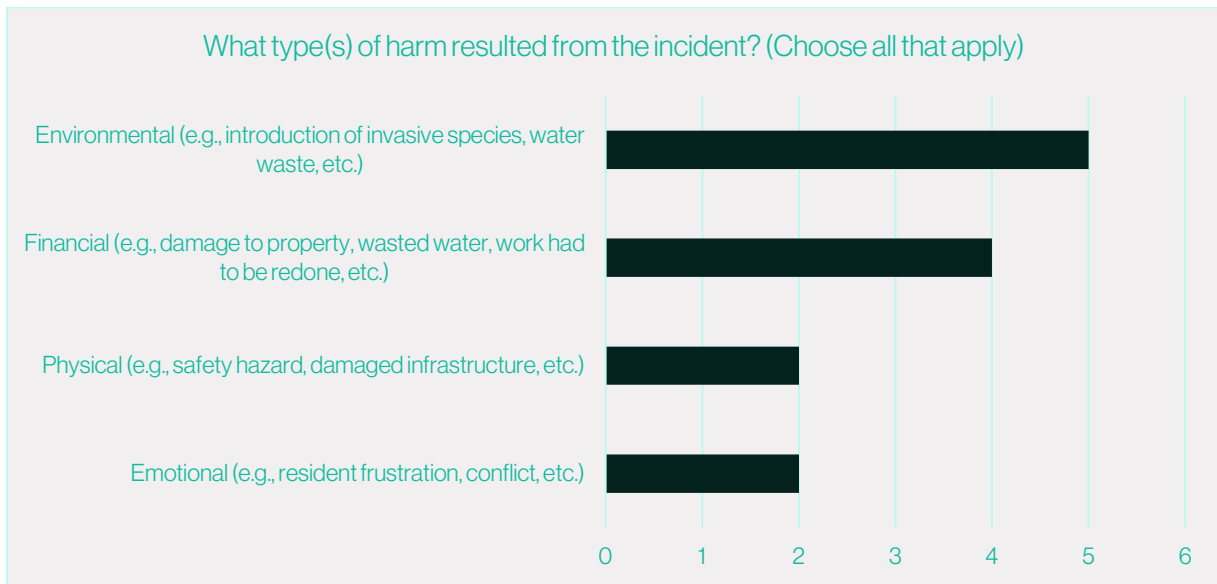


Figure 1 shows what type of harm resulted from incidents in landscaping or irrigation projects.

Current Colorado Landscape & Irrigation Certification Programs

The project team analyzed the education and certification programs currently available to landscape and irrigation professionals in Colorado to better understand uptake within the industry and how the exams and training structure could potentially inform a state license.



Overview of Certification Programs

Colorado has several active certification programs, each with its own purpose, curriculum, and renewal requirements, and all require participants to pass an exam demonstrating competency. This review focused on three programs: the Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL) program, Irrigation Association (IA) professional certifications, and the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC) Sustainable Landscape Management (SLM) certification. These programs differ in scope and rigor but collectively contribute to building technical knowledge across the industry. Based on available data from these programs, we identified a total of 2,335 Colorado landscape and irrigation professionals who currently hold at least one active certification from one of those programs.

Additional trainings are available in the state but were not included in this review because they are offered infrequently in Colorado or are not yet available to the public (such as the **Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado's new Coloradoscaping program**). The following subsections summarize the major certification programs in Colorado and highlight the current level of state uptake within the landscape and irrigation workforce. **Colorado Springs Utilities' Colorado Landscape Industry Education Plan for Water Conservation** provides additional information about and analysis of these and other programs that are helpful to review.

A. Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper Certification

The Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL)⁶ certification program trains landscape professionals in hands-on irrigation system auditing, water-efficient landscape design, and sustainable practices to conserve water resources.

- **Exam format:** The certification consists of an in-person workshop over multiple days followed by a 100-question multiple-choice exam completed within three hours. The exam assesses applied knowledge through factual questions, calculations, and data interpretation. The exam and training manual are available in English and Spanish, though most classes are conducted in English.
- **Experience:** Entry-level, no prior experience or knowledge is necessary.
- **Fees:** Depending on the provider administering the course, they range from \$50-\$180.
- **Renewal:** No renewal fee.
- **Continuing education:** To maintain certification, professionals must self-report two continuing education units (CEUs) each calendar year through the QWEL Pro website, with at least one CEU focused on efficient irrigation.

Regional providers and municipalities including South Metro Water Supply Authority and Castle Rock (jointly), the City of Aspen, and Eagle County and Summit County (jointly) deliver QWEL trainings to build the state's landscape and irrigation workforce capacity.

As of July 2025, Colorado had 352 active certified QWEL professionals and 274 lapsed certifications. Approximately 35 QWEL certification courses have been offered in Colorado since 2019. Participants represent a diverse range of industry roles, from field technicians to landscape designers, reflecting the program's reach across Colorado's green industry.

South Metro Water Supply Authority and Castle Rock Water Program

Since 2019, the South Metro Water Supply Authority has offered 21 QWEL certification classes in partnership with Castle Rock Water, achieving a 94% pass rate among participants. All SMWSA QWEL classes are hosted by Castle Rock Water, which offers two training courses annually in the spring and fall to provide regular certification opportunities for landscape and irrigation professionals in the region. SMWSA has 318 active QWEL certified professionals, and 180 expired certifications, representing a 64% retention rate.

City of Aspen Program

Since 2018, the City of Aspen has hosted 11 classes. The exam and reference manual are offered in English and Spanish. As of July 2025, Aspen has 56 active QWEL certified professionals and 49 expired certifications, representing a 53% retention rate.

⁶ More information is available on the QWEL website: <https://www.qwel.net/>.

Eagle County and Summit County Program

The Eagle County and Summit County Program hosted three classes between 2022 and 2023. Materials and classes are offered in English. This program has 24 active QWEL certified professionals with 51 expired certifications, reflecting a 32% retention rate.

B. Irrigation Association

The Irrigation Association (IA) offers a range of professional certifications that establish standards of knowledge, competency, and professionalism across the irrigation industry. Each certification is earned through a proctored multiple-choice exam that evaluates applied knowledge in irrigation design, installation, auditing, and water management. The certifications represented within the Colorado programs below include the Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor (CLIA), Certified Irrigation Technician (CIT), and Certified Irrigation Designer (CID).

- **Exam format:** All exams are written and multiple-choice, with no hands-on component.
- **Experience recommendations:** Varies by certification, generally from six months to three years of irrigation-related field experience or education is recommended, but not required, to test.
- **Fees:** Exams range from \$175-\$495 for IA members to \$300-\$495 for nonmembers. Retake fees are slightly lower.
- **Renewal:** \$75 per certification for members and \$125 for nonmembers, plus \$25 for each additional certification.
- **Continuing education:** IA requires ongoing CEUs to maintain certification, available through both in-person and online courses covering irrigation design, water management, electrical systems, and business practices.

The Irrigation Association does not publicly share comprehensive data on the total number of active or expired Colorado certifications or statewide exam participation and pass rates; therefore, it was not possible to verify the total number of Colorado professionals currently certified or historical exam success rates through publicly available sources.

Regional partners who offer IA trainings include Northern Water and Colorado Springs Utilities. Between 2014 and 2025, Colorado Springs Utilities and Northern Water together hosted approximately 48 Irrigation Association classes, training a combined total of about 1,729 participants.

Colorado Springs Utilities Program

Colorado Springs Utilities began offering IA classes in 2015 and has since provided a broad range of professional training opportunities in landscape irrigation. Colorado Springs Utilities has taught 16 classes since 2015.⁷ Colorado Springs Utilities offers these classes at least once per year, often in both spring and fall, with attendance typically ranging from 30 to 75 participants and averaging around 45.

⁷ Colorado Springs' courses have included Advanced Landscape Irrigation Design & Management, Landscape Drip Design & Management, Landscape Irrigation Auditor, Landscape Irrigation Design, Landscape Irrigation Contractor, Landscape Irrigation Technician, Landscape Water Management & Planning, and Principles of Irrigation: Landscape.

The classes and accompanying materials are offered free of charge, with local irrigation suppliers providing sponsorship for breakfasts and lunches. Exam participation varies depending on the level of the course, with approximately 45% to 75% of attendees taking certification exams. CSU has occasionally subsidized exam fees to encourage participation. In 2024, Colorado Springs Utilities certified 46 individuals in either the Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor (CLIA) or Certified Irrigation Technician (CIT) programs through its IA classes and hosted exams.

Northern Water Program

From 2014 through 2025, Northern Water offered 32 classes featuring 16 different Irrigation Association trainings, reaching a total of 859 participants across beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. Annually, Northern Water has supported between one and four IA classes that align with professional certification pathways, including the Certified Irrigation Designer (CID), Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor (CLIA), Certified Landscape Water Manager (CLWM), and Certified Irrigation Technician (CIT) credentials.

Since 2014, Northern Water has offered an array of Irrigation Association training courses supporting multiple professional certification pathways. Certified Irrigation Designer (CID) preparation has included six courses serving 147 participants, comprising Advanced Landscape Irrigation Design and Management with three courses enrolling 61 participants and Principles of Irrigation Landscape with three courses enrolling 86 participants. Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor (CLIA) preparation has been delivered through eight Landscape Irrigation Auditor courses enrolling 215 participants. Certified Landscape Water Manager (CLWM) preparation has been offered through two Landscape Water Management and Planning courses serving 71 participants, while Certified Irrigation Technician (CIT) preparation has been supported through two Landscape Irrigation Technician courses enrolling 85 participants. Northern Water has also provided 14 supplemental classes covering advanced topics.⁸

C. Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado Sustainable Landscape Management Certification

The Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC) Sustainable Landscape Management (SLM) program⁹ trains landscape professionals in sustainable maintenance practices. The program emphasizes why these methods differ from traditional approaches and the benefits of proper techniques.

- **Exam format:** Certification is earned through an online, open-book exam with 50 questions (70% required to pass) and must be renewed every two years via a renewal exam and a \$50 fee.

⁸ Northern Water's supplemental classes include: Advanced Irrigation Design, Alternative Water for Landscape Irrigation, and Advanced Irrigation Design for Water Conservation; intermediate subjects including Advanced Irrigation Wiring Methods & Troubleshooting, Landscape Drip Design, Maintenance & Scheduling, Landscape Drip Irrigation Design & Maintenance, and Managing a Landscape Irrigation Service Company; beginner-level courses like Electrical Troubleshooting: Diagnosing Field Wiring Problems and Landscape Irrigation Design; and one class of unknown level, Landscape Irrigation System Installation & Maintenance.

⁹ Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado Sustainable Landscape Management Certification information: <https://www.alcc.com/slm>.

- **Experience:** Entry-level
- **Fees:** \$125 (member rate) for the class, \$50 for the required manual. In addition to Irrigation Association trainings, Northern Water supports SLM training costs for professionals working in their geographic area by subsidizing classes to cost \$65 per individual.
- **Renewal:** \$50 renewal fee, and a requirement to retake and pass the certificate exam, which costs \$50.
- **Continuing education:** None

As of May 2025, there are 254 active SLM certificate holders in Colorado and 231 expired certifications, which suggests a renewal rate of 48%. However, ALCC reports that SLM has a renewal rate of 16%. SLM certificate holders are required to maintain membership with ALCC. Membership fees vary depending on company size. So, when membership lapses, the certificate holder no longer shows up in the SLM data. Most SLM certified professionals are company owners or supervisors, followed by field technicians, designers, managers, administrators, sales representatives, and water efficiency or conservation specialists.

ALCC and its partners have offered 47 trainings with a total of 813 certifications administered since the program's inception in 2019. The training is run in partnership with various third-party organizations across Colorado.

Findings from Colorado Springs Utilities' Project to Assess Current Training Programs and Identify Gaps

In 2024, Colorado Springs Utilities, with support from WaterNow Alliance, ALCC, and Brendle Group, embarked on a Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB)-funded initiative to identify key water conservation skills and knowledge required for effective landscape and irrigation education in Colorado. The project is referred to as the Colorado Landscape Industry Education Plan for Water Conservation. This was done by assembling industry professionals at engagement events throughout the state as well as smaller, subject-matter teams to identify the skills and knowledge needed in the landscape industry for landscape design, installation, renovation, and maintenance techniques that ensure measurable water savings. Existing educational resources and programs (including those discussed above and others) were also assessed to identify gaps and strengths. This work provides key insights into several of the research questions raised in this report and also makes clear that additional work is needed.

Skills and Knowledge Survey

As part of this project, a list of 72 key landscape industry skills and knowledge areas needed to holistically build and maintain high-quality landscapes was developed based on input received from landscape and irrigation professionals and other subject-matter experts. Skills and knowledge were organized into four categories: construction, design, maintenance, and irrigation. The professionals were surveyed to determine which would be of the most benefit in terms of water savings, landscape and plant health, and potential co-benefits (e.g., air quality, water quality, pollinators, wildlife). Key **skill and knowledge survey results** include:

- Irrigation skills and knowledge scored the highest for water savings.
- Maintenance skills and knowledge scored the highest for landscape and plant health and for co-benefits.
- Construction and design skills and knowledge scored only slightly lower than Irrigation and maintenance skills and knowledge on water savings, landscape and plant health, and co-benefits.

Survey results also evaluated how easy it was to gain the skills and knowledge, which practices (e.g., limiting the use of landscape/weed barrier fabric in Colorado) should be regulated, and which industry professionals should be familiar with which skills and knowledge.

Existing Certification Program Skill and Knowledge Gap Analysis

To understand how the 72 identified skills and areas of knowledge align with existing certifications, a gap analysis was conducted comparing them to the content of five existing certification programs: Irrigation Association's Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor (CLIA), Green Industry of Colorado (GreenCO) Best Management Practices (BMPs), National Association of Landscape Professionals Landscape Industry Certified Technician (NALP LICT), Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL), and the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado's Sustainable Landscape Management (SLM) certificate program. Key **Skill and Knowledge Gap Analysis** takeaways include:

- The GreenCO BMPs received the highest scores, with a 'meets expectations' rating in every category, followed by QWEL.
- All certifications have their own strengths, with certifications scoring higher in certain categories depending on their focus.
- Most of the skills and knowledge identified through the project are covered by at least one, if not more, of the certifications reviewed. However, some topics — such as native grasses — are not well integrated in any training.

Project Next Steps

The next step of this project is to develop a comprehensive statement of work to identify gaps in skills and knowledge not provided by existing programs. Modules to meet those gaps may be developed to provide landscape industry professionals with comprehensive training focused on water conservation and other landscape outcomes geared toward more water-wise landscapes. The goal is to develop a follow-up grant project to identify and create training resources, develop an administration system, and identify a long-term organization to manage any resulting curriculum and/or program.

Stakeholder Outreach Findings

To evaluate the feasibility of a statewide landscape and irrigation license and gauge industry support, the project team engaged in a range of outreach activities, including Steering Committee meetings, conference presentations, event tabling, surveys, and one-on-one interviews. The Steering Committee's feedback played an important role in shaping project decisions and interpretation of findings. Presentations and booths at industry events allowed the team to reach professionals across

roles and regions, introduce the project, and gather feedback on a potential state license. The survey gathered data on educational pathways, current certification levels, and attitudes toward state licensing, while interviews offered deeper insight into industry challenges, barriers, and priorities. Together, these outreach activities ensured that findings were informed by diverse, real-world perspectives and that recommendations are grounded in the needs and experiences of those who would be most affected by a statewide licensing program.

Steering Committee

The project Steering Committee was formed by WRA in 2021 and is comprised of approximately 20 water providers and landscape and irrigation professionals. The committee served as an advisory body, providing expertise, guidance, and feedback throughout the project. At regular meetings, the project team updated the committee on the progress of research and stakeholder engagement results from surveys, interviews, and conference outreach. Members shared perspectives on industry practices, challenges, and opportunities related to certification and licensing, and provided guidance on how to frame policy design considerations, such as potential licensing structures, enforcement approaches, and accessibility. Their input helped ensure that the project remained relevant to industry realities and needs. Toward the end of the project, the steering committee was presented with survey and interview results and offered recommendations on next steps that are reflected in the **recommendations** and **next steps** sections of this report. Their ongoing advisory role helped the project team synthesize findings, identify priorities, and ensure that recommendations were practical, feasible, and informed by real-world industry experience.

Industry Events

The project team participated in presentations and tabling at the following events, which are described in more detail in **Appendix A: Industry Event Details**.

- **Rocky Mountain Turfgrass Association Conference:** Dec. 4-5, 2024, in Loveland, the project team hosted an informational table and gathered survey responses from 35 attendees.
- **ProGreen EXPO:** Jan. 28-30, 2025, in Denver, the project team hosted an informational table and a bilingual panel session exploring the practicalities of developing a statewide license, with a specific focus on the critical role industry professionals can play in shaping and implementing this initiative. Forty-seven green-industry professionals attended the panel session, and 161 conference attendees completed our survey.
- **CPS Spring Fling:** March 11, 2025, in Denver, the project team hosted an informational table and gathered survey responses from 35 attendees.
- **ALCC LatiKnows Happy Hour:** Aug. 21, 2025, in Westminster, the project team partnered with the ALCC LatiKnows Committee to host a happy hour event aimed at engaging Latino members in the landscape industry. Approximately 15 attendees participated and the project team conducted six one-on-one interviews (four in English, two in Spanish with an interpreter) to gather insights on industry practices, training, and perspectives on professional certification.
- **Colorado Springs Utilities Landscape Education for Water Conservation Workshop:** Dec. 2, 2025, in Golden, approximately 50 landscape and irrigation professionals, water

providers, municipalities, and nonprofit staff attended the event. The project team presented our preliminary project findings and polled the audience on outstanding questions related to our findings.

- **ProGreen EXPO 2026:** Feb. 3-5, 2026, in Denver, to wrap up our project outreach, the grant team will host a panel session on “Raising the Bar: The Next Chapter for Colorado’s Landscape and Irrigation Professionals.” We will share project details, findings, and recommendations, and a link to this report, followed by a panel discussion with industry and municipal leaders on what’s next for professional state-level requirements.

In addition to collecting survey responses, these events allowed the project team to connect informally with industry representatives and to learn more about their perspectives on state licensing and various strategies for reducing barriers to entry. Several participants across the events expressed concern about workforce barriers in the licensing process. They noted that reciprocity with other states that require a license would be valuable, especially in addressing existing labor shortages. Many emphasized that third-party testing can be expensive, stressful, and discouraging for people with test anxiety or limited academic experience, with some observing higher failure rates in online formats.

Participants also shared examples from related certification areas such as backflow prevention and stormwater programs where hands-on, in-person training has proven far more effective than online coursework. In these programs, two-day, in-person trainings followed by an on-site test led to stronger outcomes, while online components resulted in more failures.

Attendees also underscored the importance of test preparation, clear guidance, and language access to ensure equitable participation. Some programs allow up to three test attempts at no additional cost, a model participants suggested could reduce barriers and better support applicants. Others questioned how the system accounts for seasoned professionals who have long worked in the industry, warning that additional testing requirements could further strain an already challenged labor market.

Survey Results

To better understand workforce conditions, training pathways, and perspectives on professional certification within Colorado’s landscape and irrigation sectors, a statewide survey was conducted between December 2024 and September 2025. A total of 294 individuals responded, providing a strong, data-informed overview of the current workforce. The survey was offered in both English and Spanish, with 10 responses completed in Spanish, supporting broader participation across the industry. The survey was distributed through multiple channels, including email outreach, targeted engagement with Western Slope communities, and in-person distribution at industry events. While most respondents were located along the Front Range, participation from the Western Slope ensured representation across Colorado. Respondents represented organizations ranging in size from 2 to 10,000 employees, with most responses coming from smaller companies, reflecting the structure of much of the landscape and irrigation industry.

As shown in *Figure 2*, the highest response rates came from landscape maintenance crew members, business owners, irrigation technicians (maintenance and installation), landscape supervisors, and landscape and/or irrigation designers, capturing perspectives from both field-based staff and leadership roles. In addition to the predefined role categories, many respondents selected “Other,” identifying positions in administrative and office support, arboriculture and forestry, horticulture and plant science, parks and public works, sales and business development, specialized technical and operations management, and education-related roles. These responses highlight the range of disciplines and functions involved in Colorado’s landscape and irrigation workforce.

The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative information on job roles, education and training backgrounds, certification experience, employer support for professional development, and views on the potential benefits and challenges of statewide certification or licensure. Full survey results can be viewed in **Appendix B: Survey Results**.

FIGURE 2: CURRENT ROLES



Figure 2 shows the current roles held by professionals in the industry who responded to the survey.

Training Backgrounds

Training pathways among respondents were predominantly experiential. Among 287 respondents to the training question in *Figure 3*, 214 reported developing skills through on-the-job learning such as mentoring or apprenticeships, and 129 identified as self-taught. Formal education and credentialed training were also well represented, with 74 respondents reporting completion of a two- or four-year college degree and 83 indicating participation in professional landscape or irrigation training and certification programs. Additional training pathways included specialized certifications and continuing education in arboriculture, horticulture, water management, safety, and technical instruction delivered

through conferences, workshops, online platforms, and technical colleges. A smaller subset of respondents (21 individuals) reported having received no training or education in landscaping or irrigation.

FIGURE 3: TRAINING OR EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUNDS

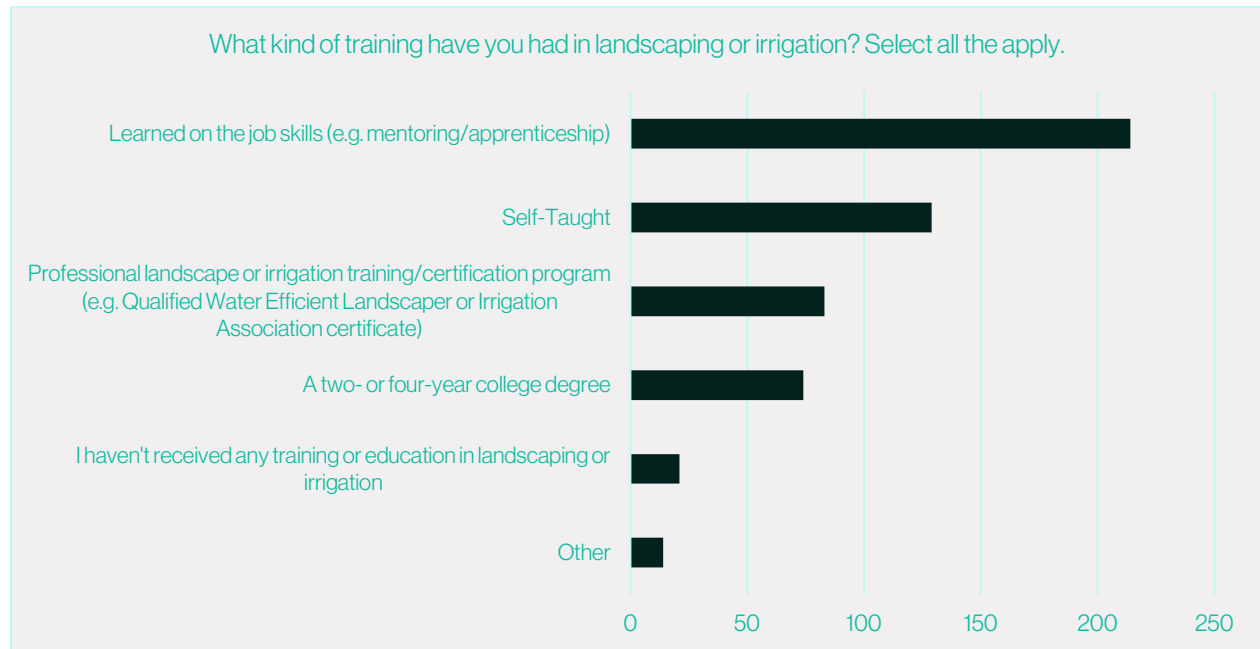


Figure 3 shows the predominant training pathway is experiential in the industry.

Certifications

Survey responses indicate that a minority of respondents currently hold a landscape or irrigation professional certification. As shown in *Figure 4*, a total of 72 respondents reported holding an active certification, while 207 indicated that they do not currently hold a certification and 13 reported that a previously held certification has expired. Among respondents with current or past certifications, a wide range of professional licenses and credentials were reported, reflecting varied levels of formal credentialing across the workforce. The most common credentials included Irrigation Association Certified Irrigation Technician, held by 28 respondents, and Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper, held by 25 respondents, followed by Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor with 20 respondents and the Association of Landscape Contractors of Colorado Sustainable Landscape Management credential with 16 respondents. Additional certifications included Certified Irrigation Designer, Landscape Industry Certified Technician, and G3 Waterwise credentials. In addition, 26 respondents reported holding other licenses or certifications, including irrigation licenses from other states, licensed landscape architect credentials, arboriculture certifications, pesticide applicator licenses, nursery professional certifications, backflow and cross-connection control certifications, and horticulture-related credentials, highlighting the breadth of technical expertise and regulatory engagement within the respondent pool.

FIGURE 4: CERTIFICATIONS

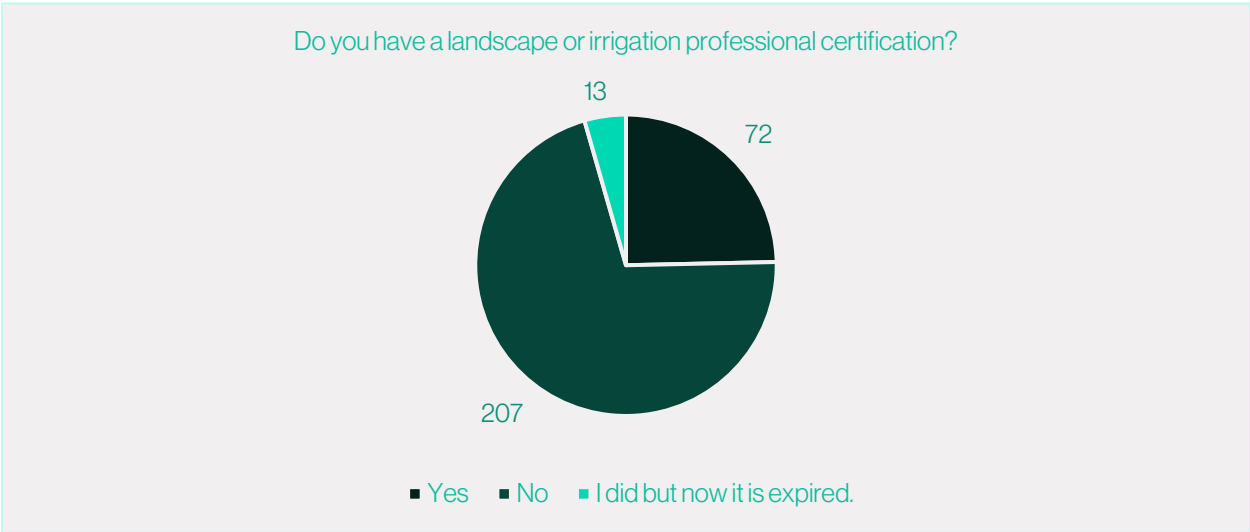


Figure 4 shows that only a minority of respondents hold landscape or irrigation certifications.

Support for a Statewide License or Certification

Professional advancement was the most frequently cited motivation for becoming certified, with 69 respondents indicating certification supporting their career development. Other motivations included helping customers improve water efficiency and responsible water management (29 respondents), employer requirements or encouragement (18 respondents), and regulatory or jurisdictional requirements (15 respondents). A smaller number cited municipal recognition programs or other reasons.

Pictured in Figure 5, survey responses indicated majority support for a required statewide certificate or license for landscape and irrigation professionals in Colorado. A total of 160 respondents expressed support, while 31 indicated opposition and 92 reported needing more information before forming an opinion. Written responses (see **Appendix B: Survey Results**) revealed broad support for elevating professional standards, improving installation quality, enhancing industry credibility, and reinforcing water efficiency and responsible water management at a time when resource constraints are increasingly pronounced. Several respondents emphasized that licensure should apply not only to contractors but also to designers, recognizing that design quality strongly influences long-term performance and water-use efficiency. Others viewed licensure as a mechanism to attract new talent to the industry. Texas' irrigation contractor licensing program was cited by some respondents as a model associated with higher installation standards.

FIGURE 5: LICENSE OR CERTIFICATION SUPPORT

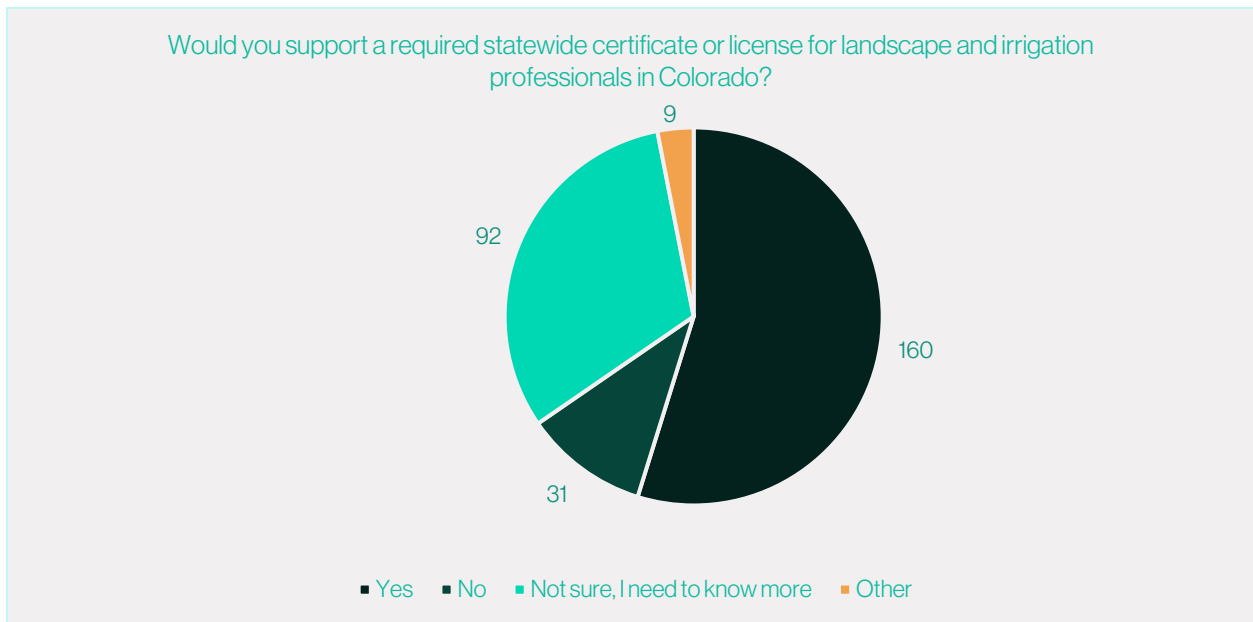


Figure 5 shows most respondents support a required statewide landscape license or certification.

Benefits of Statewide License or Certification

Respondents identified multiple perceived benefits of statewide certification or licensure, shown in Figure 6. The most frequently cited benefit was reducing inefficient water use (176 respondents), followed by protecting consumers from the costs associated with improperly installed or maintained projects (171 respondents). Many respondents also emphasized elevating industry credibility and public trust (159 respondents) and standardizing practices and services (152 respondents). Public health protection was identified by 115 respondents as an additional benefit. Open-ended responses reinforced these themes while also noting potential benefits such as improved irrigation design quality and increased interest in the profession among younger workers. A small number of respondents expressed skepticism, raising concerns about whether licensure would deliver meaningful improvements or could create unintended impacts for small businesses.

FIGURE 6: BENEFITS OF A STATEWIDE LICENSE OR CERTIFICATION

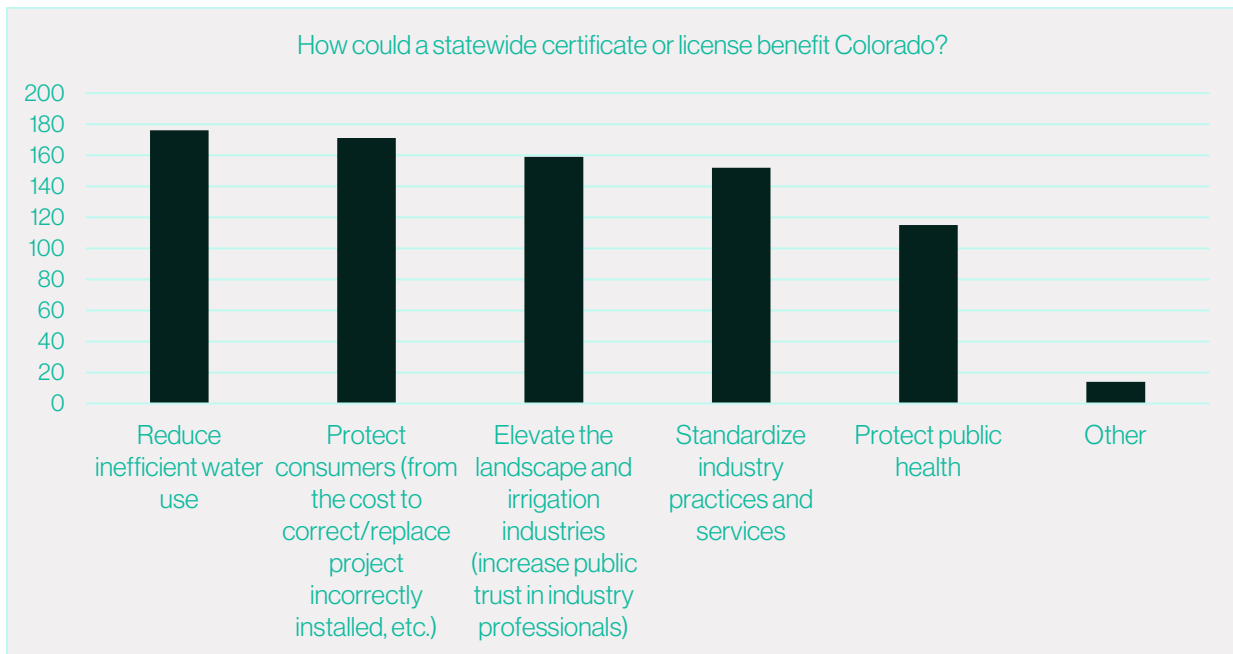


Figure 6 shows the types of benefits respondents perceived a certification or license could bring to the industry.

At the same time, respondents identified significant challenges associated with a required certificate or license. The most common concerns were the time required to complete training or prepare for an exam (149 respondents) and the associated cost (141 respondents). Access-related challenges included finding nearby training or exam opportunities (92 respondents) and access to Spanish-language training and exams (34 respondents). Ongoing continuing education requirements were cited by 93 respondents, while 39 respondents expressed concern about passing an exam. Thirty-five respondents indicated they would face no challenges. Open-ended responses further highlighted concerns about workforce retention, training accessibility, duplicative requirements for already licensed professionals, and potential impacts on small businesses.

Employer support for certification varied across respondents. Common forms of support included covering or subsidizing certification costs (108 respondents) and sharing or promoting certification opportunities (99 respondents). Incentives such as raises or promotions for certified employees were reported by 69 respondents, and 42 respondents indicated their company covers lost wages while employees complete certification. Fewer respondents (25) reported that certification is required upon hiring, while 63 respondents indicated their company does not actively support certification programs.

Finally, open-ended responses offered detailed guidance on how a statewide certification or licensing program could be implemented effectively. Respondents commonly recommended limiting requirements to owners, supervisors, and key irrigation and design roles; allowing crews to work under a certified supervisor; and phasing implementation over multiple years with grandfathering provisions for experienced technicians. Respondents emphasized the need for accessible training options, including online, evening, and weekend offerings, regularly updated content, and improved language

access, particularly Spanish-language guidance. Several suggested pairing certifications with market-based mechanisms such as public registries or grading systems, while others recommended complementary policies, including requirements for landscape designs or as-built documentation, to strengthen baseline quality, accountability, and water use efficiency.

Polling Results

In addition to the survey results, the project team had an opportunity to conduct a live poll during the Colorado Springs Utilities Landscape Education for Water Conservation event on Dec. 2, 2025, in Golden. Approximately 50 landscape and irrigation professionals, water providers, municipalities, and nonprofit staff attended the event, and the project team shared our preliminary project findings and polled the audience on several key outstanding questions related to designing a state license.

As shown in Figure 7, respondents were most supportive of requiring a state license for individuals who are working in a project management or supervisory role (18 responses), or after several years of experience in the industry (17 responses). Respondents were less supportive of requiring a license for entry-level individuals (6 responses), project managers or supervisors who specifically work on large projects (9 responses), and business owners (9 responses).

FIGURE 7: STAGE OF LICENSE REQUIREMENT

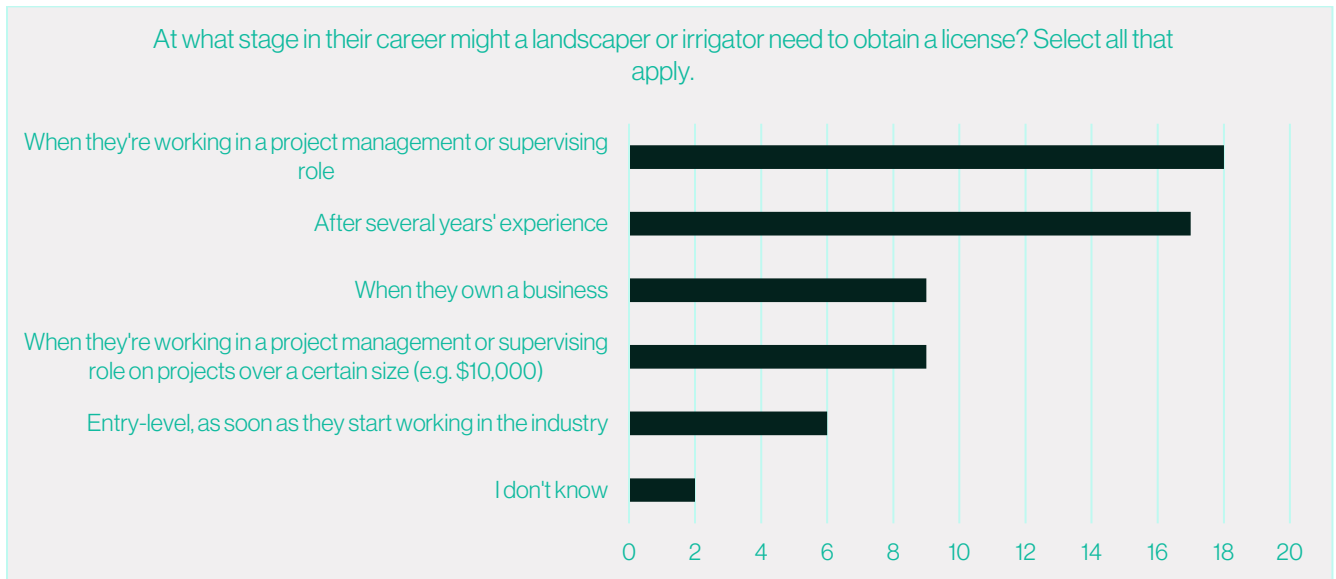


Figure 7 shows when respondents believe they should be required to obtain a license or certificate.

Prerequisites or Qualifications

When asked whether individuals, businesses, or both individuals and businesses should hold a license, there were an equal number of responses (11) for each answer. As shown in Figure 8, when asked about prerequisites or qualifications for receiving a license, respondents were most supportive of an apprenticeship period working in the industry under the supervision of a licensed landscape and irrigation contractor (25), followed by prior experience working in the industry (20), having specific certifications like QWEL or IA (17), and passing a written licensing exam (14). Most respondents didn't feel that a college degree or a landscape architect license should be used as a prerequisite.

FIGURE 8: PREREQUISITES OR QUALIFICATIONS

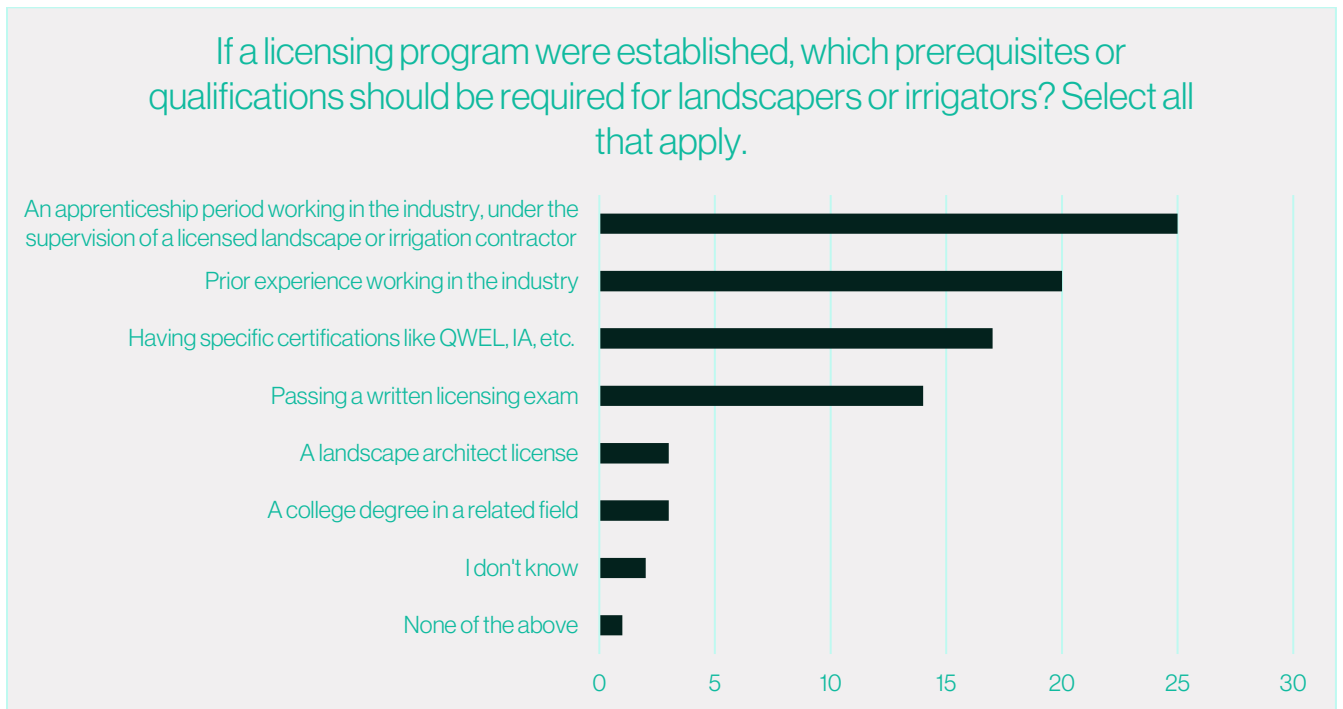


Figure 8 shows prerequisites respondents think should be required to obtain a license.

Ensuring Success

A well-crafted exam that includes water conservation best practices and technical skills ranked the most highly among elements critical to ensuring the success of a licensing program. This was followed closely by affordability of the exam and licensing fees, access to taking the exam, and access to all materials in Spanish.

Respondents were also asked “What else would you like to make sure is considered if a license is established?” We received 19 answers to this write-in question.

- Eight respondents asked how a license would be enforced.
- Five respondents asked us to consider how to avoid a required license becoming a barrier to entering the industry.
- Other responses included: considering who to license in the industry, creating a public list of license holders, finding ways to make sure the public will value the license, and ensuring that those doing the work on the ground have the skills they need to improve work outcomes.

One-on-One Interview Findings

To better understand current practices, challenges, and perspectives within Colorado’s landscape and irrigation industry, interviews were conducted with project managers, supervisors, and operations staff from several landscape and irrigation companies across the state. Participants represented a range of company sizes and roles, providing insight into training practices, certification attitudes, and workforce

needs. The interviews were conducted in both English (eight) and Spanish (two). The Spanish interviews were conducted with the help of an interpreter. The following key takeaways summarize common themes and perspectives that emerged across interviews.

- a. Certification vs. licensing:** Interviewees expressed broad support for certification programs (e.g., QWEL or SLM) as a way to elevate professionalism and strengthen customer trust. State licensing, however, was viewed more cautiously, with participants noting concerns about added cost, administrative complexity, and the potential for unintended barriers for small companies and new workers entering the field.
- b. Training and skill gaps:** Many companies rely heavily on in-house training and base training on current certification training materials to train more employees. Employers consistently described challenges related to high turnover and workers starting with little or no experience. Interviewees emphasized that hands-on learning is essential and that training must be available in Spanish and delivered in culturally relevant formats.
- c. Impacts of licensing:** Participants believed that a well-designed license could raise the overall standard of practice, increase wages, and improve installation and maintenance quality. At the same time, they noted risks, including increased costs that may burden small businesses. Several interviewees described licensing as a potential tool to level the playing field and reduce water waste caused by poorly installed systems.
- d. Support for employees:** Many companies already encourage professional development by offering incentives such as pay increases, time off to participate in trainings, or internal training programs. Interviewees expressed interest in potential state-level support such as stipends, tax incentives, or insurance discounts, if licensing becomes mandatory.
- e. Common mistakes and corrective work:** Professionals described having to frequently repair irrigation installation errors or poor-quality design and maintenance performed by others. They felt that a standardized requirement could help reduce these recurring mistakes by establishing a consistent baseline of knowledge and competence across the industry.
- f. Industry needs from licensing:** Stakeholders emphasized the importance of practical, job-relevant skills, including reading plans, understanding local codes, and correctly installing irrigation and trees. They also highlighted the need for leadership training for foremen and supervisors, along with continuing education that is accessible and genuinely valuable to the workforce.

Next Steps for Advancing Landscape & Irrigation Professional Licensing in Colorado

Findings from this project indicate that state licensing is a viable option for advancing training and expertise in water-wise landscaping and irrigation practices in Colorado. While several irrigation and landscape certifications are currently available to the industry, there are many members of the industry who have not participated in these mostly voluntary training opportunities, and there are identified gaps in the water efficiency-related key skills and knowledge covered through these certifications. A state license could help ensure more consistent landscape and irrigation knowledge across the industry to improve water-wise landscape and irrigation practices, increase consumer protection, and elevate

industry professionals. Establishing a state license will necessitate careful attention to equity, workforce realities, and strong industry leadership. The following section outlines proposed next steps for establishing a license.

The establishment of a state license will be most meaningful, and likely most successful, if the process is undertaken by the industry. Industry representatives have the most hands-on knowledge of how a license should be designed and will be the most compelling advocates for new policy. For this reason, we recommend that industry representatives take the lead on submitting an application as part of the COPRRR's Sunrise Review process, and subsequently, advancing legislation to establish the license.

The first step to establishing a license to regulate individuals in an industry in Colorado is to submit an application for consideration through the COPRRR Sunrise Review process. The application asks for verifiable instances of harm resulting from unregulated individuals in the industry, details on who in the industry should be regulated, and requirements for obtaining a license. The project team began the process of collecting verifiable instances of harm, the details of which can be [found here](#). These examples are not complete, so the Sunrise Review applicant will need to conduct additional outreach and provide other examples for the application. At the end of COPRRR's six-month-long investigation into the examples of harm, the organization makes a recommendation to the state legislature of whether it believes the industry should be regulated via a state license through DORA.

Once COPRRR issues its recommendation, regardless of whether it recommends regulation, legislation can be pursued to establish the new license within 24 months. The DORA Sunrise Review process only applies to regulating individuals in the industry; if a business license is established, it would likely be through legislation and does not need the COPRRR recommendation.

Once legislation is passed creating the license, DORA will then establish the license administration details, and a third-party administration will need to develop and administer a licensing exam and any related study-guide resources. As referenced earlier in this report, Colorado Springs Utilities has undertaken a related effort to develop a list of skills and knowledge that are important for landscape and irrigation professionals to have in order to design, install, and maintain water-wise landscapes. It's undetermined what the final form of their project effort will be; however, this research could be used to inform a potential license exam and to inform the trainings or topics while supporting water savings.

Recommendations & Outstanding Questions for Licensing Design

A landscape and irrigation license in Colorado will only be successful if it's designed with careful consideration for how the license may impact individual members of the industry. Based on project findings, the project team, in consultation with the Steering Committee, proposes the following recommendations for designing and implementing a state license. We would like to acknowledge that these recommendations should be further vetted with additional industry representatives and that there are still several important outstanding questions that require further consideration. These questions are also explored in this section.

a) Licensing Overview

- i. **Applicability:** Based on our state research and polling results, we recommend that the industry consider requiring a license for project supervisors and business owners. Requiring a license for each individual working on landscape and irrigation in Colorado would likely present significant barriers to entry and exacerbate existing workforce shortages. These licensed supervisors and licensed business owners would provide oversight to those newer to the industry to help ensure a consistent, water-wise work product. Entry-level professionals could work under these licensed individuals until they've gained sufficient hands-on experience to obtain a license.
- ii. **Prerequisites:** An important detail to consider is what prerequisites should be required to obtain a license, or the specific training and/or experience that should qualify an individual to take a potential licensing exam. Based on our stakeholder outreach, industry representatives felt that hands-on work experience with supervisor oversight is likely the most important prerequisite for obtaining a license. Holding specific trainings and certifications (such as QWEL or IA) was also viewed as favorable to help qualify for a license.

To strike a balance between ensuring sufficient skills and knowledge and limiting challenging barriers to entry, we recommend providing some amount of flexibility in the prerequisite requirements that individuals must meet to obtain a license. For example, individuals could be required to have several years of work experience under a licensed supervisor, *or* this experience could be substituted for some combination of advanced degrees in a related field, other experience in the industry, *and/or* a current landscape and irrigation certification (like those currently offered in Colorado).

- iii. **Establishing an exam:** Beyond the prerequisites for applying for a license, to help ensure consistency in the skills and knowledge held by licensed individuals, we recommend that a third-party administrator develops a licensing exam. This licensing exam could incorporate the best practices identified by the Colorado Springs Utilities' Landscape Education for Water Conservation project and should be developed with significant input from industry representatives. A licensing exam is the most common approach taken by the states researched in **Section 1**. In Colorado, third parties develop and administer licensing exams, in coordination with DORA. In addition to the exam, the third party could develop study-guide resources that direct applicants to existing educational resources and certification programs to best prepare for this exam. This approach provides flexibility, acknowledging that some seasoned professionals may not need any additional training or education on water conservation best practices, whereas early-career practitioners may need additional preparation before becoming licensed.

b) Access and Affordability

- i) **Language access:** Since a large portion of the landscape and irrigation industry in Colorado is Spanish-speaking, it is critical to offer the exam, application materials, and training materials in Spanish and to have Spanish-speaking staff at DORA who can address questions. Other non-English or Spanish speakers could have/use a translator for training and/or testing or use a translation app.
- ii) **Accounting for diverse educational experience:** Since members of the landscape and irrigation industry have differing degrees of educational experience (e.g., formal college education and advanced degrees, high school diploma, or some grade-school education), an exam and any associated training materials should be designed to be as accessible as possible to those with less formal education. Including a hands-on component of the exam, such as an irrigation audit, was repeatedly cited as critical to advancing industry knowledge, and could be an approach for improving the inclusivity of the testing. Allowing applicants to retake the exam a specified number of times at no additional cost would also help to ensure that the license is accessible. There could also be an option to allow for an extended period of time to take the exam if a legitimate reason to do so is provided. The exam will need to be designed to be sufficiently rigorous to ensure adequate skills and knowledge while remaining practical, relevant, and attainable.
- iii) **License affordability:** It is important to consider affordability when determining licensing and exam fees. Making the program revenue-neutral would be ideal, such that the fees cover the cost of program administration. However, the fees will need to be financially attainable for applicants and/or businesses, particularly small businesses.
- iv) **Exam accessibility:** Providing accessible options to take the exam is also important. Some states with existing programs certify numerous proctors around the state to administer the exam, which expands regional access. Colorado could also consider regularly offering online exams in testing locations around the state at different times (including weekends and weeknights) and consider how to make a hands-on portion accessible around the state.

c) Training Programs and Materials

- i. **Training options:** We recommend providing flexibility in the training program(s) that prospective licensees can complete to prepare to take a state licensing exam. There are many existing certifications available to help educate applicants, and there is also the potential for the Colorado Springs Utilities' Landscape Education for Water Conservation effort to culminate in educational modules that could help current industry members shore up skills in preparation for the exam. These various trainings could be recommended as part of an exam study guide. This approach acknowledges that some applicants may need more robust training and skills development to prepare for the exam, while others may only need to develop a couple of new skills.

- ii. **Training accessibility:** To ensure that prospective license holders can access the training and education they need to obtain a license, there will need to be additional funding and capacity to regularly offer training courses around the state (and virtually) at different times. The Colorado Water Conservation Board could be a potential source of funding for increasing the number and extent of trainings offered around the state.
- iii. **Focus on water conservation best practices & consumer protection:** Trainings for the state exam should focus on water conservation best practices. The Colorado Springs Utilities' Landscape Education for Water Conservation effort has resulted in a comprehensive list of skills and knowledge that can be used to guide training recommendations that specifically instruct professionals on creating and maintaining water-wise landscapes. Consumer protection also ranked highly as an important benefit of licensing. Topics associated with common consumer issues such as maintenance problems should be included.

d) License Details

- i) **Phase in requirements:** Any state requirement should allow the industry members who would be affected a period of time in which to come into compliance. This can be written into state legislation, and the industry's feedback will be important for determining the right timeline. One option could be to begin with mandatory licensing for contractors working on larger, commercial-scale projects and then phasing in to include smaller, residential work.
- ii) **Consider license specialties:** More consideration is needed to determine if a state license should be designed to have more than one level or specialization. For example, to incorporate the experience of a given applicant, the license could be designed to offer an early-career track, a mid-level supervisory track, or a seasoned-expert track. These levels could then correspond with differing prerequisite requirements and different exams with differing levels of difficulty. Licensees could then be eligible to perform different types of landscape and irrigation services (e.g., residential project installation vs. large-scale commercial project installation). Alternatively, acknowledging the varied roles that individuals play in the industry, the license and exam could be designed to target specific categories of work such as landscape irrigation design staff, installation staff, and maintenance staff. These licensees would then be eligible to perform only their specific tasks. While providing useful refinement for a broad industry, this approach may add administrative and enforcement complications.
- iii) **Renewal requirements:** Another important consideration is how long a license should be valid before renewal. Given review of other state licenses and feedback from the Steering Committee, we recommend that license renewal occurs every two to three years. The specific duration should be decided on with industry engagement. Additionally, license renewal fees will need to be determined. We heard in one interview that high renewal fees

could burden individuals or businesses paying for their employees' licenses.

- iv) **Continuing education:** Whether a license should require Continuing Education Units (CEUs) will also need to be determined. Some states reviewed require a certain number of CEU hours per year to keep education and best practices current after the initial license requirements have been fulfilled. While CEUs are useful for maintaining knowledge and skills and staying up-to-date on industry advancements, the specific CEUs should be accessible and attainable to limit barriers to maintaining a license. If a DORA license is pursued and if continuing education will be required, a **continuing education** application needs to be submitted at the same time as the Sunrise Review application.

- v) **Enforcement:** An enforcement mechanism will be important to ensure compliance with licensing requirements. Most of the states researched have a public portal to file complaints against unlicensed or poorly completed licensed work. An entity of the state reviews those complaints and assigns a penalty, which could include a fine and/or license revocation. Many states list companies that have been fined or have had their licenses revoked. Texas also requires communities of a certain size to regulate irrigation licenses locally by requiring a license to pull a local permit to install a new irrigation system. Colorado could consider a mix of both enforcement mechanisms, especially if license investigation is not feasible at the state level. Additionally, the state could establish a public-facing portal for customers to use to identify licensed professionals.

- vi) **Consider a Separate Business License:** While not the primary focus of this project, an outstanding question raised through this research is whether to license only individuals in the industry or to also include licensing for businesses. Based on research from other states, landscape and irrigation business licenses are primarily motivated by consumer protection issues as opposed to enhancing water conservation education. Only a few states license both; however, we heard from stakeholders that licensing businesses could be important to ensuring consumer protection and consistent standards across the industry.

Conclusion

This project provides a critical foundation for assessing whether a statewide landscape and irrigation professional license is feasible, supported, and capable of advancing Colorado's water-efficiency goals. Through detailed research, multi-agency collaboration, and broad stakeholder engagement, the project has clarified the opportunities, challenges, and key design decisions that must guide any next steps. The findings indicate that licensure is possible in Colorado, but will require careful attention to equity, workforce realities, and strong industry leadership to be successful.

Appendices

Appendix A: Industry Event Details

Rocky Mountain Turfgrass Association Conference

The RMTAC is an annual conference that brings together professionals from golf courses, sports fields, municipalities, and more for education and networking. At the 2024 conference held in Loveland, Colorado, on Dec. 4 and 5, the project team hosted an informational table to engage directly with turf and landscape professionals from across the state. Throughout the event, we connected with a steady flow of attendees representing golf course management, sports turf, parks departments, and commercial landscape companies. The table served as an opportunity to introduce the concept of a statewide landscape professional license, answer questions, and gather informal feedback on industry needs and perceptions. Visitors also had an opportunity to complete our project survey about a potential state license. We gathered 35 survey responses from the conference. Many attendees expressed interest in elevating professional standards. The tabling experience helped raise awareness, build relationships with key stakeholder groups, and identify potential participants for future licensing discussions.

ProGreen Expo

ProGreen is the largest green-industry conference and trade show in the Rocky Mountain region, held annually at the Colorado Convention Center in Denver. At the 2025 expo, held Jan. 28-30, the project team hosted a table to interact with industry members and collect survey responses, and hosted a panel session.

The informational table was part of CSU Extension's larger tabling section. We received many industry visitors throughout the event, the majority of whom were supportive of some form of licensure or certification. At the same time, many also said it's important that any license be done right; flagging concerns like requirements for individuals with many years of experience, ensuring equal access to required training and testing for professionals throughout the state including rural communities, and keeping time and costs of certification reasonable, among others. Visitors were also asked to complete our survey about potential licensing, with 161 survey responses gathered at the conference (including tabling and during the panel session).

The panel session explored the practicalities of developing a statewide license, with a specific focus on the critical role industry professionals can play in shaping and implementing this initiative. The project team was joined by panelists Dale Coffman, a retired irrigation industry professional, and Donovan Ryan, Business Development Manager at Environmental Designs, Inc., for a discussion about industry perspective on the viability and potential shortfalls of a statewide landscape professional license. The audience of 47 green-industry professionals was given the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback to the team through live Q&A and the online survey. This session was offered bilingually in English and Spanish.

CPS Spring Fling

The project team attended CPS Spring Fling at the National Western Complex in Denver on Wednesday, March 11, 2025. The team had a booth in the entrance of the Expo Hall, where it displayed the survey QR code and swag to entice people to stop by. When people stopped at the booth, the team asked them to take the survey on their phones. As a result of tabling at the event, 50 survey responses were collected over the course of the day.

ALCC LatiKnows Happy Hour

The project team partnered with the ALCC LatiKnows Committee to host a Happy Hour event on Aug. 21, 2025, at Prost Brewing Company in Westminster, aimed at engaging Latino members of the landscape industry. Approximately 15 attendees participated, enjoying food and networking opportunities. During the event, the team conducted six one-on-one interviews (four in English, two in Spanish with an interpreter) to gather insights on industry practices, training, and perspectives on professional certification. The event provided valuable qualitative feedback from a key stakeholder group and supported the project's goal of inclusive, culturally responsive outreach.

Colorado Springs Landscape Education Event

The project team was invited to present this project's preliminary findings at a Colorado Springs Utilities Landscape Education for Water Conservation event on Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2025, at the Golden Community Center in Golden, Colorado. Colorado Springs discussed findings from Phase 1 of their project identifying skills and knowledge the landscape and irrigation industries should know for water conservation, discussed in further detail above. Around 50 landscape and irrigation professionals, water providers, municipalities, and nonprofit staff attended the event. The project team presented preliminary project findings and polled the audience on some outstanding questions related to the findings.

Appendix B: Survey Results

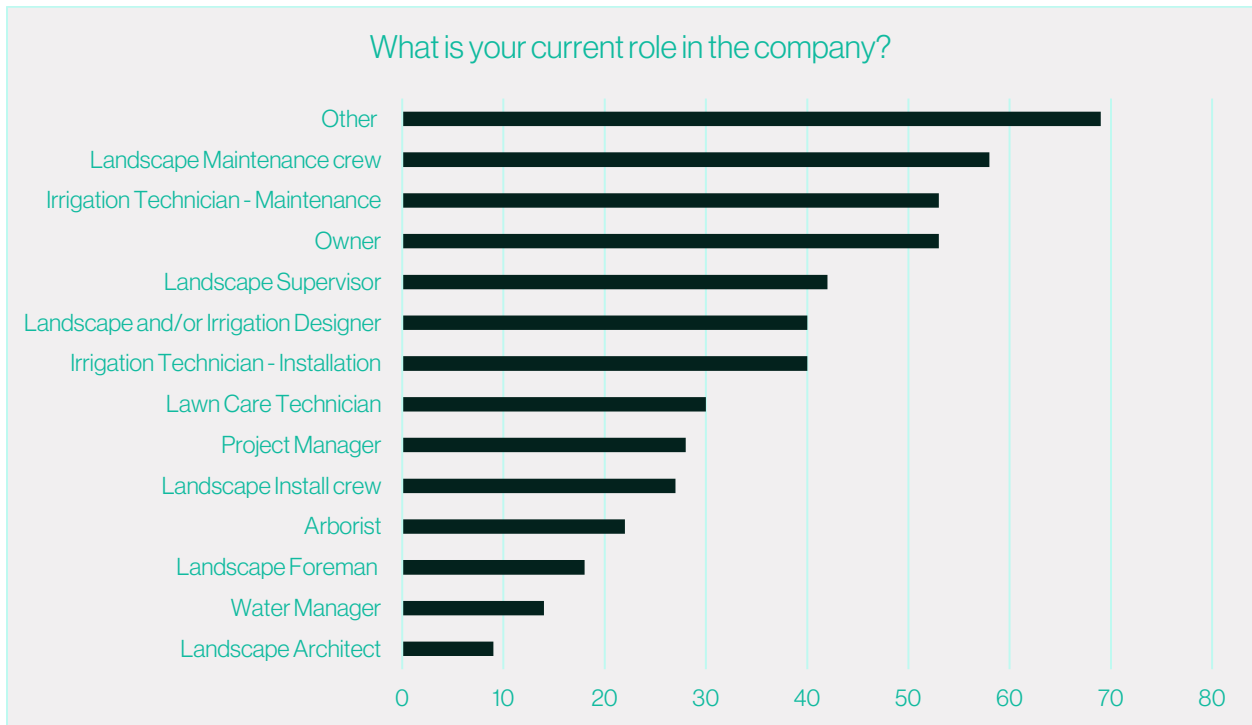
Q1: Where does your company provide landscaping or irrigation services? (e.g., Statewide, Grand Junction, Denver Metro Area, Jefferson County, Other, etc.)

Most of the respondents were from the Front Range, some were from the Western Slope.

Q2: How many employees does your company have? It is okay to estimate.

Company size ranged from 2-10,000. Most responses were from smaller companies.

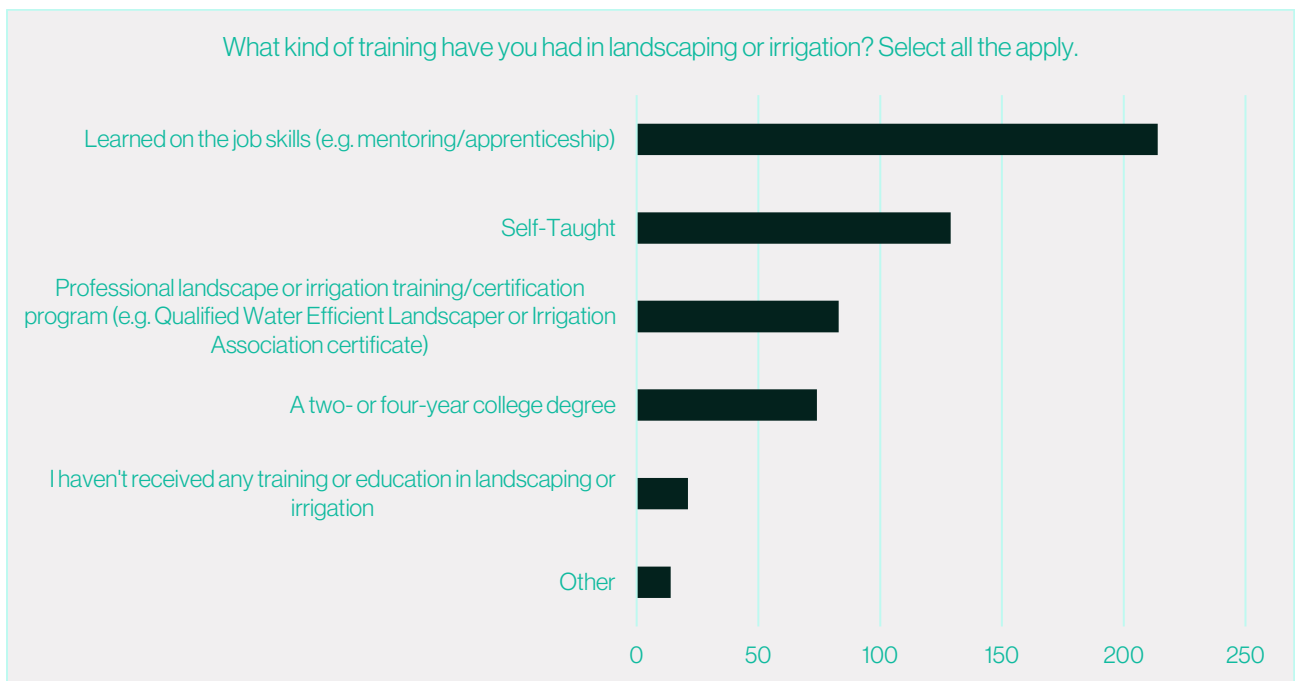
Q3: What is your current role in the company?



Q3: Other Respondent Categories	Nonmatching Responses	Response Count
Administrative/Office/Support Roles	Back Office Admin; Admin; Executive Coordinator; Office Manager; Program Admin; Commercial Project Admin; Project Administrator; Project Administrator; Accounts Manager; Account Manager	10
Arboriculture/Forestry	Arborist; Forestry Technician; Forestry Assistant	5
Horticulture & Plant Science	Horticulturist; Horticulture Tech; Horticulture Educator; Plant Research; Native Management	6
Parks & Public Works	Parks Technician; Park Maintenance Lead; Parks Supervisor; Parks Supervisor – Turf And Irrigation; Seasonal Parks Maintenance; Public Works; Public Works Technician	6

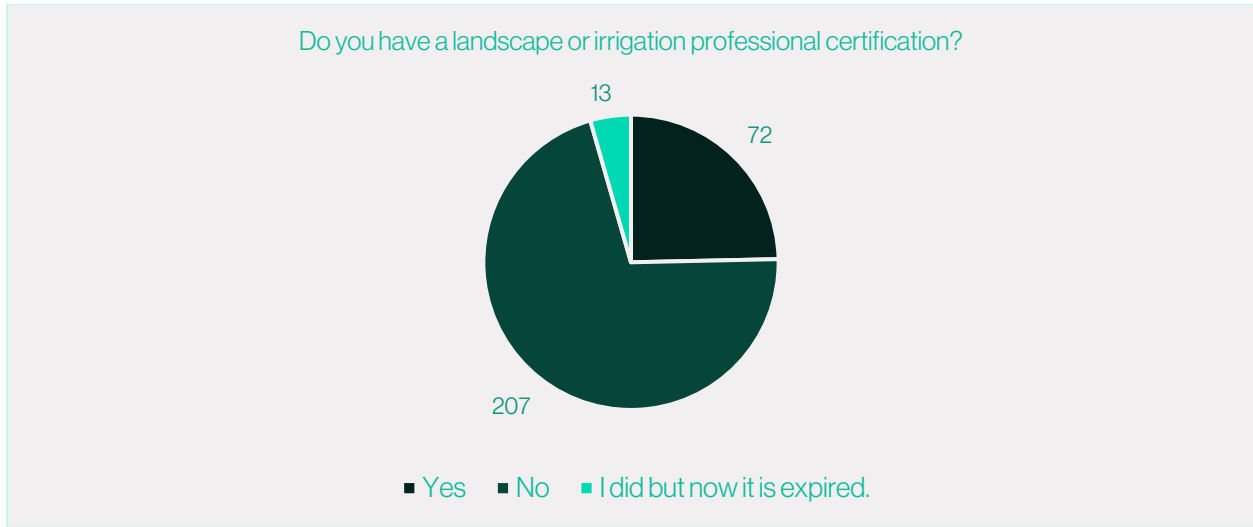
Sales & Business Development	Sales; Business Development and Senior Leadership; Irrigation Sales and Service; Distributor	4
Specialized/Technical Roles	Mechanic; Maintenance Manager; Operations Manager; Equipment Operator; Assistant GM; Athletic Field Maintenance; Groundskeeping; Turf And Irrigation Supervisor; Division Manager Of Water Conservation and Maintenance; Reclaimed Water Analyst; Director of Sustainability; Ecologist	12
Education & Academia	Student; Education	3
Other/Unique Entries	Consultant; Designer (without "Landscape/Irrigation" qualifier); Nursery; Weed Control; All And What Client Wants; All The Above; Empleado; Outdoor Services LI; Don't Have One; X; The Muscle	8

Q4: What kind of training have you had in landscaping or irrigation? Select all that apply.

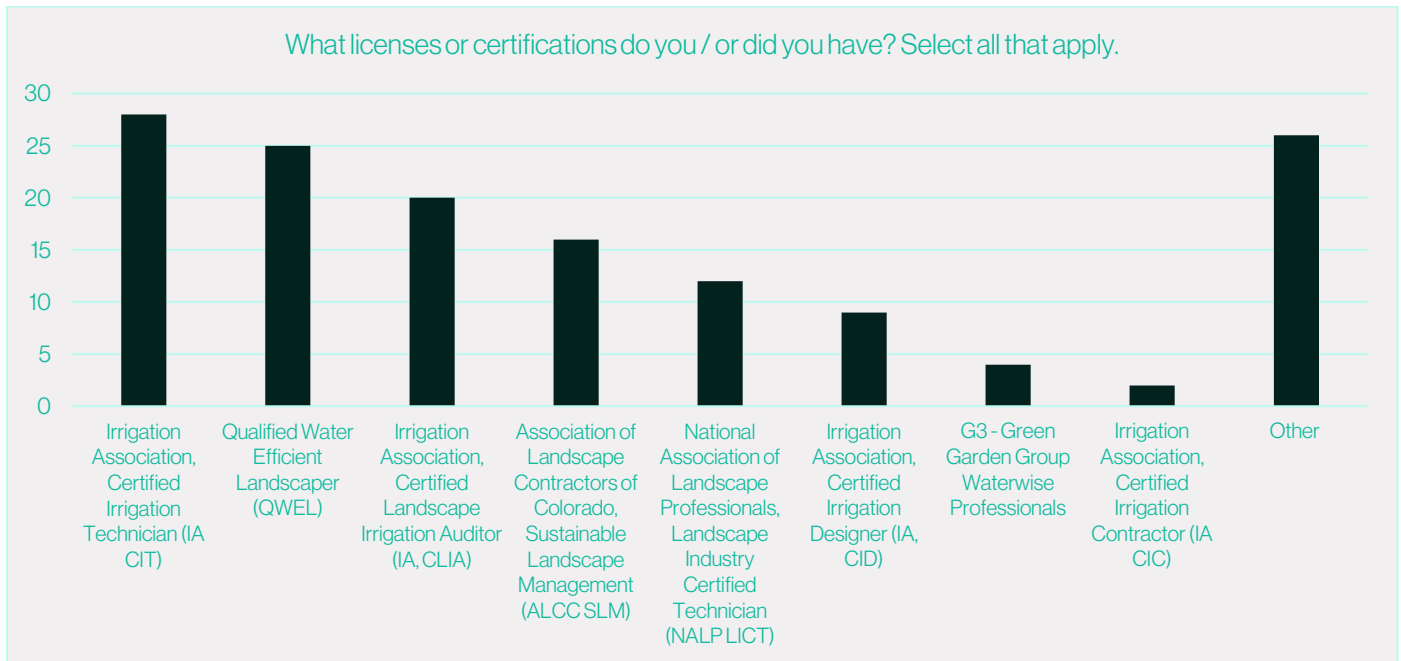


Q4: Other Training Responses	Response Count
Certified Arborist/International Society of Arboriculture (ISA)	2
Native Plant Master/CSU Master Gardener	2
Horticulture	1
Various continuing education/conferences/online training/workshops	3
Groundskeeping	1
OSHA	1
Certification Course at Picken Technical College	1
Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor (CLIA)	1

Q5: Do you have a landscape or irrigation professional certification?



Q6: What licenses or certifications do you/or did you have? Select all that apply.



Q6: Other Licenses/ Certifications	Response Count
4-Year Degree In Park Resource Management Minor In Turf Grass Science	1
Colorado Certified Nursery Professional, Colorado Department Of Agriculture Qualified Supervisor	1
Cross Connection Certificate	1
Licensed State Of CO Landscape Architect	3
GreenCO BMP	1

Landscape Pro In Another State	1
Landscape Architect	1
Tx Licensed Irrigator	1
Isa Arborist	2
Department Of Agriculture QS Pesticide Applicator	4
Master Gardener	1
Irrigation License Regional Building & Asse Certified	1
Colorado Certified Nursery Professional (Ccnp)	1
Horticulture Certificate	1
Backflow Certification	2

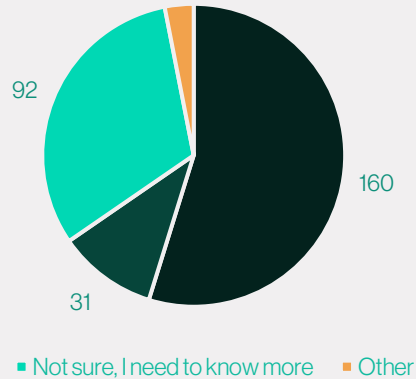
Q7: Why did you become certified? Select all that apply.



Q7: Motivation for Pursuing a Certification Other Responses	Response Count
Educate myself in what is being missed in education in relationship to reality	1
Clients liked it	1
Credential help me sell services to high end clients	1

Q8: Would you support a required statewide certificate or license for landscape and irrigation professionals in Colorado?

Would you support a required statewide certificate or license for landscape and irrigation professionals in Colorado?

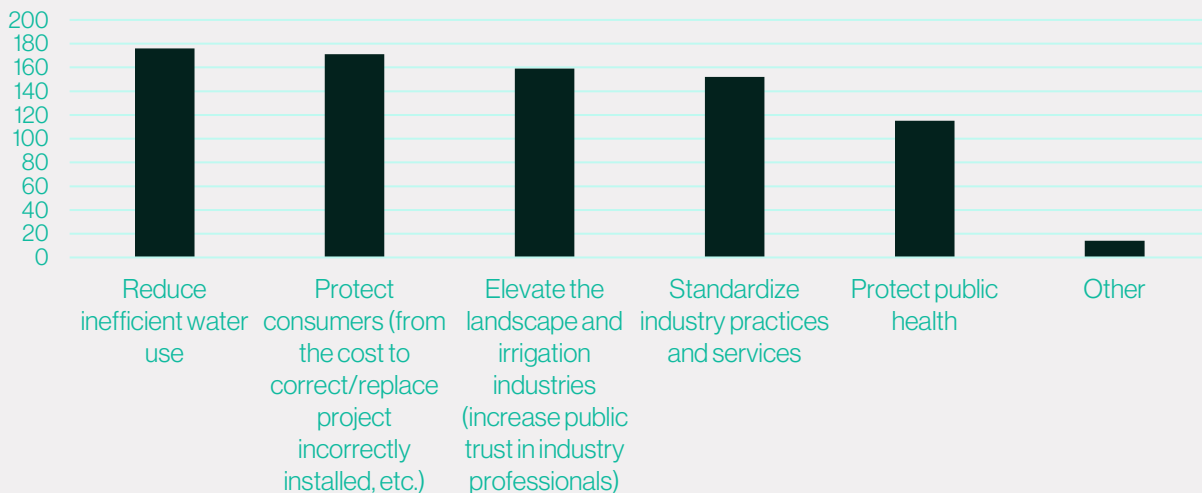


Q8: Other Responses Related to Establishing a State License

I support the idea but landscapers around here have a hell of a time finding/keeping good help. However I have seen lots of damage caused by ineptitude.
I think optional is better to reduce barrier to entry; the business is challenging enough already
I would in Wyoming
I would support crew members being able to work under a supervisor with a license
Maybe, but it needs to be accessible
Not if it is a requirement
only for irrigation
Only if it was pair with some type of scoring system that graded contractor's ability to produce actual results
Yes – but only if done properly and with input from the industry

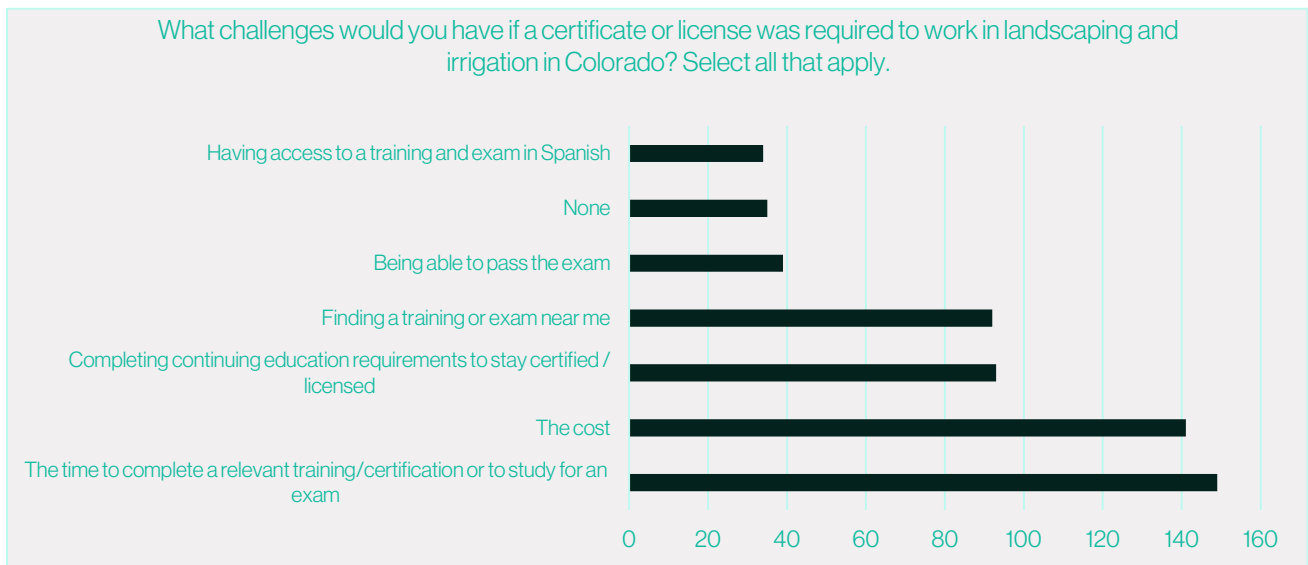
Q9: How could a statewide certificate or license benefit Colorado?

How could a statewide certificate or license benefit Colorado?



Q9: Other Responses Related to Establishing a State License	Response Count
Increase unemployment and benefit large companies at the cost of small	1
I oppose this.	1
None	1
I don't think it would.	1
ldk	1
Not sure	1
Reduce poor practices	1
Get younger generation more interested in the industry	1
Teach proper irrigation design?	1
Unsure overall quality of end product	1

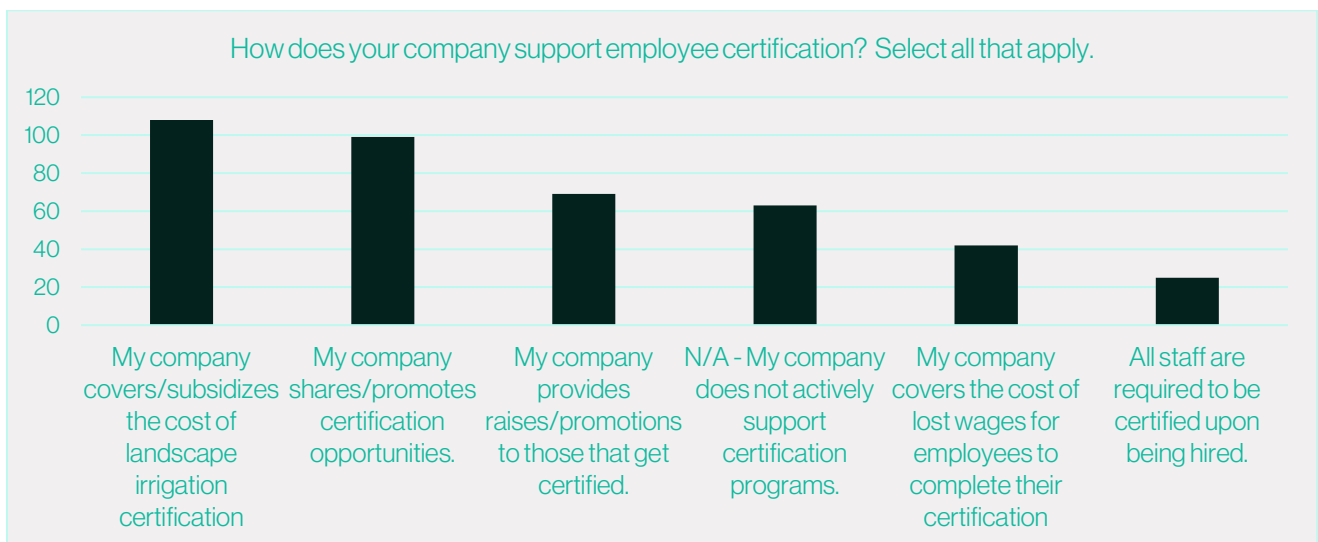
Q10: What challenges would you have if a certificate or license was required to work in landscaping and irrigation in Colorado? Select all that apply.



Q10: Other Response	Response Count
Time cost. A one-time license or infrequent re-cert would be better. Or simply room for uncertified people in the field.	1
Finding qualified candidates and providing state-required training.	1
It would be difficult to retain individuals due to all of these challenges.	1
Most people in this industry do not take tests well, that's why they are doing something that doesn't require academic credentials	1
Not necessary	1

It would need to be a very compelling program and very well thought out along with exceeding in the current industry. Most programs now are not that great in Colorado outside of the university system.	1
Access to education could be a barrier to entry	1
Getting my employees into trainings. Hard to believe at for as an owner	1
I already have an LA license	1
If already have degree in industry becomes a duplication of time and money already spent (there would need to be exemptions built in)	1
the context of curriculum required, there needs to be higher standards for certification.	1
Irrigation service professionals are hard to find now this will make it more difficult to employ workers	1
I can see all these being challenges for smaller organizations and companies that don't have budgets for education.	1
Enforcing the rules and regs	1
only having the time to complete the certification before a deadline.	1

Q11: How does your company support employee certification? Select all that apply.



Q12: Anything else you would like to add on this topic?

Themed Responses to Q12 below:

Main Benefits of a License:

- **Raise standards and credibility** – certification is seen as improving installs and reputation. “This is a good thing for the industry ... too many poor installs and no accountability.”
- **Water stewardship** – training tied to conservation. “With water scarce, managing our allocation is very important.”
- **Target irrigation/design first; include designers** – “It’s important for Designers to be certified, not just contractors.”

- **Career pathway** — helps attract new talent. “Would make irrigation professionals a legitimate career path for more young people.”

Main Concerns About a License

- **Hiring and cost pressure** — risk of worsening existing labor shortages and raising prices. “Workers are very hard to find and keep.”
- **Red tape / over-regulation** — especially for small firms. “Please do not create another level of red tape for a small business.”
- **Enforcement fairness** — how to apply rules equally across large and small/less-visible companies; right-to-work cited. “Enforcement ... seems to be the biggest obstacle.”
- **Test/credential quality and access** — exams perceived as underwhelming or too difficult; limited class times. “Current certifications are underwhelming ... course times aren’t convenient.”

How to Implement (Guardrails Respondents Asked for)

- **Scope it** — require for owners/supervisors/irrigation and design roles; allow crews to work **under a certified supervisor**. “I’d be more open to it for business owners or staff supervisors.”
- **Make it phased and practical** — multiyear rollout, **grandfather** current techs. “This should be a years-long process.”
- **Accessible training** — online options to avoid lost wages; evening/weekend offerings; keep content **updated; monthly seminars**. “Certification should be able to be completed without causing lost wages. Preferably online.”
- **Pair with market signals** — **grading/rating** system or public lists so quality is visible even if many are certified. “If every contractor is certified, what’s the point of difference? Hence a grading system...”
- **Complementary policies** — consider contractor **licensing/permitting**, and require **designs and as-builts** to lift baseline quality. “A BETTER thing would be landscape designs being required, and as-builts shared/common.”

Other Notes

- **Texas vs. Colorado** — Texas irrigation licensing cited as producing higher installation standards.
- **Language access** — request for Spanish info (“Cómo obtener certificaciones”).