



EQUITY WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, March 25, 2022
Virtual Meeting: Zoom

Equity Working Group Members Present: Maggie McCarey, Cindy Arcate, Charlie Harak, JoAnn Bodemer, Mary Wambui, Maggie Downey, Cammy Peterson, Brian Beote, Stephanie Terach, James Collins, Ruth Georges, Marie Abdou (representing Amanda Formica), Anxhela Mile (representing Caitlin Peale-Sloan), Cindy Luppi, Margie Lynch

Other Attendees: Adrian Caesar, Danilo Morales, Alissa Whiteman, Emily Webb

1. Call to Order

McCarey, as Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:03 PM.

2. Welcome, Council Updates, and Business

McCarey announced that the Equity Working Group meetings would be treated as Open Meetings due to the fact that the group is an EEAC committee. The Equity Working Group members introduced themselves and their respective organizations.

Harak was hopeful that the Massachusetts Legislature would approve \$20 million in supplemental funding for fuel assistance programs.

3. Review Equity Working Group 2022 Schedule and Topics

McCarey reviewed a proposed Equity Working Group schedule and draft meeting topics. McCarey noted that the meetings were scheduled around Program Administrator (PA) deliverables and program rollout dates. McCarey said the Equity Working Group is scheduled to meet on alternating months, and planned 2022 meeting topics include program delivery strategy, annual reporting, and progress updates on specific initiatives.

Harak wondered if a report on workforce development could be provided earlier in 2022, as the workforce is critical for goal achievement and the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (Mass CEC) has planned efforts and funding. McCarey replied that workforce development would be

an agenda topic for the April EEAC meeting during which the PAs and Mass CEC would provide workforce development efforts. McCarey added that Mass CEC has launched a grant program for Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises. Harak said this update would be valuable for understanding how the PA and Mass CEC efforts are integrating.

Downey requested that Equity Working Group meeting dates are confirmed soon so participants can block off the time.

4. DPU Order on the 2022-2024 Three-Year Plan

McCarey summarized the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) Order on the 2022-2024 Plan and presented its impacts on proposed equity provisions. McCarey noted there were adjustments pertaining to the targeted equity communities, data reporting granularity, renter strategic plan filing, and Non-Participant Study follow-up.

Terach asked if the Annual Report listed in May on the schedule coincides with the Term Report. McCarey clarified that this topic item related to reviewing annual reporting on equity targets.

Beote asked if the new list of target communities was finalized. McCarey confirmed that the list was final, and additional details are included in the presentation's appendix and prior EEAC meeting materials. McCarey said the Department of Energy Resources (DOER) worked with the PAs to rerun planning models with the new DPU target communities.

5. Equity Targets Reporting Overview

Lynch described the reporting structure for the equity targets and commitments across target category areas such as moderate income, renters and landlords, Community Partnerships, and workforce development. Lynch indicated that some targets are quantitative in nature, while qualitative updates for other equity commitments would be provided. Lynch added that the first PA report would be provided on Moderate-Income weatherization jobs after Q1 2022. Lynch asked if the Equity Working Group would want to inquire about the form in which the PAs would deliver equity reports.

Harak asked how meaningful moderate-income data would be considering many eligible customers participate through market rate pathways. Lynch said the moderate income offering includes enhanced incentives, but there are definitely people missing out on cost savings here. McCarey said the moderate-income data paired with the updated Non-Participant Study would provide more insights into participation trends.

Terach said renters could be included in the moderate-income population, but they would need to complete income verification in order to receive enhanced heating system incentives.

McCarey asked if the PAs would include equity reporting in the existing quarterly reports, or if there would be an equity target-specific quarterly report. Downey responded that the PAs have not discussed the exact reporting framework, but equity reporting would make sense to include

in existing quarterly reports. Georges agreed. McCarey said the Executive Committee would discuss quarterly reporting in April.

6. Moderate Income Program Updates

Lynch shared a consolidated Equity Commitments matrix that incorporates the EEAC's October Resolution on the 2022-2024 Plan and Plan equity commitments, and key excerpts from the Term Sheet to be used as a reference for the Equity Working Group.

Bodemer asked if the Equity Commitments document was shared. Lynch indicated that Whiteman shared the document today with the meeting agenda. McCarey said the document could be shared with the full Council since it includes much additional information the PAs provided during Plan discovery.

Lynch showed that the planned moderate-income weatherization targets for 2022-2024 are significantly higher than in prior terms, and moderate-income heating system replacements have a significant ramp up planned between 2022 and 2024.

Terach noted that the PAs were in the process of selecting a third-party vendor to perform income verifications. Terach indicated there would be a revamped customer experience including Spanish and Portuguese online portals, options for expedited applications for emergency replacements, customer support chat functionality, and three different verification methods. Terach added that customers will be able to track application status online and see any submitted or pending application documents. Terach said the first verification would be a standard tax document review process like that which is currently in place. The second income verification option would be conducted by the third-party vendor using a national database, while the third option involves Form 4506-C through which customers can authorize the release of their tax information from the IRS. Terach clarified that the second income verification method would not be used to deem customers ineligible.

Harak asked what database the third-party vendor would use for verification. Terach indicated it was a national database from which they can query information, but no personally identifiable information (PII) would be stored by the vendor. Terach said customers could pursue other income verification means if they are not deemed eligible through this option.

Peterson asked for the name of the third-party vendor, and what the timeline is for each income verification method. Terach replied that the expedited verification for emergency replacements would take one day, but non-expedited verification would take three days, except for the 4506-C process. Terach was unsure if the vendor's name could be made public, but suggested that all verification pathways would be launched in April.

McCarey asked if PAs would change the types of required income verification documents. Terach said the standard tax document review process would require the same documents, but the 4506-C documents would be provided by the IRS. Terach said this process would prevent customers from having to resubmit information for Income Eligible Services eligibility.

Lynch asked if the new vendor would be promoting the offer in addition to their income verification work, especially since year-to-date moderate-income weatherization performance is on pace with goals. Terach responded that the vendor is just performing income verification, but the PAs are doing additional outreach to market the verification tools and direct customers to virtual home energy assessments. Terach added that the PAs will be promoting heating system replacements to community partners and existing customers that have been verified and approved previously. Terach said the PAs have provided ad hoc presentations in Northampton, Acton, Framingham, and Westborough, but they are open to other promotional strategies.

Peterson asked if there were other customer support options aside from the integrated virtual chat in the event of technical difficulties. Terach believed there was a dedicated customer support phone line, but would confirm this was the case with the PAs.

Harak asked if income verification would be based on adjusted gross income. Terach agreed to follow-up to confirm what income type was used for verification.

7. Renter Strategic Plan – Tactics

Georges, on behalf of the PAs, presented proposed renter and landlord strategies in order to solicit feedback from the Equity Working Group participants. Georges noted that the goals for increased partnerships and renter participation align with equity commitments. Georges said that PAs would initiate outreach to community partners and discuss implementation strategies in April and May, with the Renter Strategic Plan being finalized in September. Georges hoped the Equity Working Group would provide support regarding potential partnership strategies, connections to community-based organizations, and other contacts who may be interested community partners.

Harak asked if the 7-8% annual increase in serving renters could detract from services provided to Single-Family Income Eligible customers given the high number of Income Eligible renters. Lynch replied that there are two equity targets, and the one in this presentation only applies to market rate renters. Lynch said there is a specific target for attached low-rise buildings because this was identified as an underserved customer segment. Harak commented that there have been many groups at EEAC meetings that may be good partners, such as the Green Justice Coalition and Clean Water Action, so it may be fruitful to reach out to such organizations who have expressed support for affordable housing. Harak offered support on coordinating this effort with the PAs. Luppi agreed that there are many parties interested in community partnerships.

Luppi suggested that the Green Justice Coalition, Neighbor to Neighbor, Viva Urbana, and other organizations are conducting many housing-related efforts in 2022. Luppi asked how the PA goal of 2-3 additional community partnerships each year would translate in practice. Georges said the overall vision for the partnerships is increased program participation, education, and awareness. Luppi said Right to the City might be an interested partner and volunteered to follow up with more details. Georges encouraged meeting participants to share any contacts they have.

Harak said Lewis Finfer and the Massachusetts Community Action Network reach all communities in the state, including non-English-speaking communities. Harak wondered if the

utilities' own customer lists might be useful since there are about 20,000 customers on arrearage management programs. Harak also suggested that Income Eligible elders and those with oxygen concentrators may be good targets for weatherization, as is a practice in Connecticut. Georges encouraged participants to share suitable contacts following the meeting. McCarey guided attendees to send DOER all potential contacts.

Peterson recalled that the stakeholder session with the Massachusetts Landlord Association and its Executive Director was very productive. Peterson said that cities and towns collaborate closely with renter populations, so the Community First Partnerships should target high renter population cities. Peterson hoped to better understand how the partnerships would function in order to inform and improve program implementation. Georges responded that each community partner will need its own tailored approaches. Georges indicated the PAs envision bilateral discussions in which suitable community education and engagement efforts to improve Mass Save program participation. Georges added that the PAs wanted to consider Equity Working Group feedback prior to conducting outreach.

Arcate recommended food pantries, such as the Greater Boston Food Bank, as potential community partners since market rate customers also utilize them.

Luppi believed that the potential partners would be more responsive to warm introductions since the PAs may not have direct connections. Luppi said that politics can be nuanced and localized in marginalized communities, so engagement with specific community groups may be required. Luppi suggested Seniors Across the Board and Mass Senior Action as two good organizations with which to connect.

Beote was pleased by the community partnerships and engagement strategies. Beote mentioned that LEAN regularly interacts with food banks and the Massachusetts Landlord Association to enroll more landlords in the programs. Beote said LEAN has received case by case approval to collaborate with landlords in the Multifamily program.

Lynch wanted to ensure Renter Strategic Plan would include both market rate and Income Eligible renters. McCarey added Small Business renters as a target as well. Georges replied that Small Business renters are not explicitly called out in the Renter Strategic Plan. Lynch said that partnerships with local organizations are crucial, in addition to statewide organizations. Lynch encouraged the PAs to use Non-Participant Study data to target underserved communities with many savings opportunities. Lynch said the Renter Strategic Plan has a heavy emphasis on marketing and outreach, but hoped it will include new program design elements that can increase the appeal of offerings to renters and landlords. Georges encouraged the Equity Working Group to share ideas on program implementation. McCarey said the original list of renter recommendations, which included ideas for landlord referral incentives, would be a helpful reference. McCarey said that DOER can redistribute the renter recommendations shared in April 2021.

Collins acknowledged the effort the PAs have put into client-facing and marketing content, but noted that implementation needs to move quickly to serve target segments.

Harak asked if the PAs could find insurers that will provide discounts on home insurance if customers receive weatherization services since there may be a chance of reducing claims through weatherization barrier mitigation that can be pitched to the home insurance agencies.

McCarey asked attendees to send potential contacts to DOER. Georges also requested feedback on the presentation and contacts as soon as possible. McCarey directed everyone to provide comments on the slides by the end of the following week.

McCarey announced that calendar invites would be distributed for Equity Working Group meetings.

8. Adjournment

McCarey, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 4:37 PM.