



## **EQUITY WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, May 8, 2023**  
Virtual Meeting: Zoom

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**Equity Working Group Members Present:** Brooks Winner, Mary Wambui, Sonakshi Saxena, Jhenny Saint-Surin, JoAnn Bodemer, Charlie Harak, Amy Boyd, James Collins, Cindy Luppi, Maggie Downey, Stephanie Terach, Margie Lynch, Alissa Whiteman

**Equity Working Group Members Absent:** (None)

**Other Attendees:** Adrian Caesar, Alissa Whiteman, Ina Dasso, Benjamin Silverman, Seth Federspiel, Danilo Morales, Ian Finlayson, Aladdine Joroff, Anxhela Mile, Bernetta Morton, Degen Larkin, Gabe Shapiro, Jonathan Haas, Kristen Simmons, Isaac Wainstein, Christopher Lavallee, David Lyons, Kate Peters, Leah Cohen, Chris McClellan, Brian Beote, Brandy Chambers

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### **1. Call to Order**

Whiteman, acting as Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:04 AM.

### **2. Equity Working Group Updates**

#### ***Program Administrators: Equity Targets Data Tracking Issues***

Chambers stated that the program administrators (PAs) have been working with vendors to refine renter tracking, identify where renter status may not be flagged appropriately, and determine whether low participation by renters is reflective of challenges with implementation or data issues. Chambers said that the statewide vendor for evaluation, measurement, and verification (EM&V) may compare reported participation to units likely inhabited by renters as indicated by high turnover, or changes in occupancy, by tenants. Chambers said that All-In Energy, the vendor for the Community First Partnerships, is independently conducting renter analysis and confirmed that all data systems have been updated to track language used during home energy assessments.

Lynch commented that the 2022-2024 Term is well underway so accurate data on renter participation is critical to inform the continued implementation efforts and the 2025-2027 Plan.

Chambers replied that the scope of work for the renter comparison analysis will be discussed at the next EM&V Committee Meeting and the analysis should take about one month. Chambers said that Eversource conducted analysis using third-party data which indicated that their reported participation for renters may be accurate. Shapiro said that All-In Energy is using assessor data to identify discrepancies between the owner's address and physical address and buildings with multiple units and an in-house building owner in order to validate renter status. Shapiro said that Community First Partners will provide this assessor data to support the analysis.

Winner asked if the PAs have a contingency plan if low participation by renters is confirmed, similar to the efforts to improve moderate-income programs. Chambers responded that the PAs will aim to increase renter participation regardless of the accuracy of data. Peters said that the PAs are enhancing marketing by engaging with landlords and improving renter-focused strategies for outreach. Peters said that RISE Engineering, the new vendor for the multifamily program, has completed many projects that upcoming data reports should reflect, so the PAs can provide updates on current activity and additional strategies to serve renters.

Luppi commented that Connecticut has implemented effective strategies for renter engagement by conducting a roundtable discussion with landlord associations, tenant associations, and municipal officials in Waterbury. Luppi suggested that community organizers focused on access issues are key audiences to include in strategic discussions. Terach said that Liberty has connected with the city of Fall River through an hour-long radio broadcast with a city official and another broadcast on a Portuguese radio station that described renter and landlord incentives. Terach added that Liberty has tried to replicate engagement with landlord associations in New Bedford, but no traction has been achieved. Shapiro said that Clean Water Action is contributing to the Community First Partnerships and may be able to provide new recommendations. Luppi said that teams in Clean Water Action regularly coordinate across states.

***Program Administrators: Equity Language Access Plan***

Lavallee provided updates on the Language Access Plan including background information on language representation in the state, current status of the Language Access Plan, and future tasks to improve language-access policies and practices. Lavallee said that the first phase of the Plan includes an internal needs assessment to understand existing resources for serving customers that speak languages other than English.

Wambui contested that the language suggesting the PAs are not obligated to implement recommendations from the Language Access Plan is problematic. Lavallee explained that the Language Access Plan will provide a long list of recommendations to guide the PAs, but it is unlikely that each recommendation will be adopted. Lavallee confirmed that the PAs are obligated to support language access. Whiteman suggested that the PAs summarize recommendations once the Language Access Plan is developed.

Harak asked how non-English-speaking customers are served by existing call centers. Terach said that language lines are available, but they are not able to effectively serve all non-English-speaking customers. Harak asked if all customers with primary languages other than English are directed to the language lines. Peters said that it varies by PA, but all have staff capable of

speaking non-English languages. Harak commented that customers contact program staff for many reasons and said that all PA staff will require sufficient training to speak to all offerings.

### **3. Equity Working Group Management**

#### ***External Members Selection***

Whiteman explained that the Equity Working Group Charter includes three non-EEAC members selected by general consensus. Wambui stated that each person who expressed interest in being a member of the Equity Working Group is worthy, valuable, and encouraged them to participate in ongoing dialogue. Wambui recommended three people for appointment to the Equity Working Group and explained the rationale behind each recommendation:

- **Cindy Luppi (Clean Water Action):** Luppi has a track record of representing residents beyond the Greater Boston Area which is important for equity. Clean Water Action has also been a member of the Green Justice Coalition and has advocated for equity for several years.
- **Doug Quattrochi (Massachusetts Landlord Association):** Renters face barriers to participation in energy efficiency and electrification programs on a national scale. For years, the Council has acknowledged the value of engaging landlords to serve renters since property owners make decisions for building upgrades.
- **Alexis Washburn (Emerald Cities Collaborative):** Columbia Gas PAs were seemingly reluctant to serve customers in Lawrence which was a detriment to participation. The Emerald Cities Collaborative is a leader in inclusive procurement and contracting and has administered a contractor academy designed to build capacity for minority- and women-owned business enterprises. To support equity in energy efficiency and electrification programs, a prepared and diverse workforce will be required.

Bodemer commented that the selection of three members is difficult since Conservation Law Foundation and other organizations would also be valuable members. Bodemer expressed confidence in the Emerald Cities Collaborative even though Conservation Law Foundation has been a valued participant. Wambui concurred, but said that workforce development is an important subject for the Equity Working Group. Bodemer agreed with the logic and reiterated that the selection of only three members is difficult.

Harak thanked Wambui for developing a great list of recommended Equity Working Group members. Whiteman reiterated that all Equity Working Group meetings are open meetings, so members of the public are encouraged to participate and offer their perspectives. Winner said that publicly accessible, engaging, and interactive meetings will be particularly crucial as the PAs develop the 2025-2027 Plan.

Whiteman, Bodemer, Wambui, Winner, Harak, and Collins agreed to select Cindy Luppi, Doug Quattrochi, and Alexis Washburn as members of the Equity Working Group.

#### ***February 13, 2023 Equity Working Group Meeting Minutes***

Downey and Boyd indicated that they attended the meeting and Wambui said that she did not attend the meeting. Lynch said that the attendance list should accurately differentiate Equity

Working Group members from other attendees. The February 13, 2023 Equity Working Group Meeting Minutes were adopted as amended.

#### **4. Moderate-Income Programs**

Peters stated that the PAs conducted a meeting to discuss improvements to moderate-income performance and developed a document which summarizes outcomes, barriers, and recommendations for improvement.

Boyd asked how the PAs will verify that home performance contractors (HPCs) and assessors are doing appropriate income screening to guarantee that moderate-income or income-eligible customers avoid paying market-rate prices. Peters said that the recommendation to update and streamline intake procedures included upfront income-screening to inform customers of income-eligible incentives. Peters said that a good script may diminish discomfort that HPCs and assessors experience with discussing customer incomes; in addition, knowledge of enhanced incentives will make sales easier.

Winner supported the recommendations to streamline intake procedures and update the program processes to allow HPCs to serve moderate-income or income-eligible customers. Winner asked if the PAs are confident that these recommended changes will be sufficient to put the moderate-income program on track to meet Plan goals. Peters replied that additional changes will be implemented, but the PAs are hopeful that the adjustments will result in the achievement of Plan goals. Peters encouraged the Equity Working Group and other stakeholders to provide input if the recommended changes are not sufficient. Winner asked why the PAs are concerned about double counting when serving moderate-income renters. The intention behind the equity targets and performance incentive is to ensure that market signals align with equity targets. Winner suggested that the PAs pool resources to serve both renters and moderate-income customers if there is overlap between each customer segment.

Wambui commented that other states have proposed expanding the threshold for moderate-income eligibility and self-identification of income to streamline participation. Wambui suggested that the PAs implement self-attestation of income soon instead of considering it for the future.

Lynch said that some of the recommended strategies warrant deep-dive discussion. Lynch said that many customers aged 60 and above are moderate-income and recommended a segmented approach to target these customers with an easy-to-understand offering. Lynch said that heating-system replacements for moderate-income customers are significantly below goal and an innovative approach is required to meet goals and serve customers effectively.

Beote cautioned against self-certification of income since there is a well-established process for income qualification. Beote said that the Low-income Energy Affordability Network (LEAN) and the PAs are working to streamline the process. Moderate-income customers can fluctuate between market-rate income-eligible, and some customers may self-declare as moderate-income when they are actually income-eligible. Harak agreed with Beote that the process for income

verification should be simplified. Whiteman suggested that self-declaration could result in directing customers to LEAN so they can be guided through program participation.

Bodemer supported self-declaration of income as a method to encourage participation, but said that income-eligible customers should complete the standard process for income verification since they can receive benefits beyond energy-efficiency offerings. Bodemer asked if customers aged 60 and up are customers that fluctuate between income categories since their income may level off at some point. Bodemer also asked if census-tract data could validate self-certification of income.

Morton stated that income-eligible customers have qualified for programs administered by Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) but receive market-rate incentives when referred to LEAN. Morton said that there are discrepancies between incentives and directives and LEAN was unable to provide clarity. Morton advised the PAs to use ABCD to verify low- and moderate-income customers and that income eligibility last three years. Peters requested that Morton share additional details on the reported issues. Beote said that ABCD and LEAN cover 100% of installation costs for all income-eligible customers, so any rebate below that is incorrect. Collins echoed Beote and suggested that there may have been confusion across programs.

Winner asked if the Department of Public Utilities would have to approve certain moderate-income strategies in its review of the 2025-2027 Plan or separate proceedings. Winner said that the Equity Working Group and PAs should explore discounted electricity for moderate-income customers who complete electrification projects and other strategies that may require regulatory approval. Peters said that the PAs can discuss self-verification of income and expansion of moderate-income eligibility for inclusion in the 2025-2027 Plan, but the PAs would need to determine the regulatory approval process if there is momentum behind implementing such strategies in 2024.

Collins anticipated improved performance since HPCs will be able to actively target and serve moderate-income customers.

Luppi strongly supported streamlined processes for participation and concierge services for moderate-income customers. Luppi said that space-heating costs for low- and moderate-income families are a major equity concern. Heat-pump costs can be daunting, so many people are interested in methods to support heating electrification.

## **5. Equity Working Group and Three-Year Planning Process**

Lynch described the process by which the Equity Working Group developed recommendations to the EEAC for the 2022-2024 Plan. Lynch said that the Equity Working Group met twice a month in order to develop a total of 72 recommendations to inform April Draft Plan in 2021. Lynch noted that the timeline for the 2025-2027 Plan is accelerated with the EEAC Resolution on Plan Priorities due in December 2023 and Draft Plan due in March 2024. Lynch requested suggestions on how the Equity Working Group should operate to contribute to the EEAC Resolution on Plan Priorities.

Wambui commented that many recommendations for the 2022-2024 Plan should have been implemented decades ago and many recommendations are still valuable for the 2025-2027 Plan. Wambui suggested that the Equity Working Group review and assess progress on equity goals in the current Plan, determine opportunities to advance equity goals through existing programs, identify recommendations that were not integrated into the 2022-2024 Plan, revise equity targets for 2022-2024, and elevate electrification goals for the income-eligible sector.

Winner seconded Wambui's suggestion to begin 2025-2027 planning by assessing current performance and data. Winner said that framing discussions around different customer segments is an effective organization method since participants in Equity Working Group meetings will likely convene with their own constituencies. Winner also said that the Equity Working Group should engage municipalities soon to understand their perspectives.

Luppi agreed with Wambui and said that many members of the Green Justice Coalition have concerns about whether there are adequate resources to address pre-weatherization barriers for low- and moderate-income customers, in addition to additional barriers faced by renters. Luppi said that the Equity Working Group advanced the 2022-2024 Plan by conducting deep-dive meetings on equity issues. Lynch said that pre-weatherization barriers and Community First Partnerships would be suitable topics for deep-dive meetings, especially since the Equity Working Group has advocated for alternative partnership models and the Community First Partnerships has evolved into a framework that will help reach underserved customers. Lynch said that implementation staff may also provide valuable insights on achieving equitable outcomes.

Whiteman stated that DOER and the Equity Working Group co-chairs can draft a proposal outlining the Equity Working Group process for contributing to development of the 2025-2027 Plan. Whiteman asked if the Equity Working Group should meet prior to its next-scheduled meeting in July given the accelerated timeline. Bodemer said that the Group can hold a shorter meeting in June if the intention is to finalize the process for the 2025-2027 Plan. Lynch and Winner agreed.

## **6. Adjournment**

Whiteman, acting as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 1:02 PM.

### **Meeting Materials:**

- Official Meeting Notice
- Meeting Agenda
- February 13, 2023 Equity Working Group Meeting Minutes
- Language Access Plan May EWG Update
- Detailed Summary of Moderate-Income Discussion