



EQUITY WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 12, 2023
Virtual Meeting: Zoom

Equity Working Group Members Present: Brooks Winner, Mary Wambui, Alexis Washburn, Cindy Luppi, Amy Boyd, Doug Quattrochi, James Collins, Jo Ann Bodemer, Mary Wambui, Brianna Kane (for Maggie Downey), Sonakshi Saxena, Jhenny Saint-Surin, Stephanie Terach, Alissa Whiteman, Margie Lynch, Michelle Keller

Equity Working Group Members Absent: Charlie Harak

Other Attendees: Adrian Caesar, Ina Dasso, Aladdine Joroff, Benjamin Silverman, Bernetta Morton, Chris McClellan, Brian Beote, Danilo Morales, Degen Larken, Gabe Shapiro, Ian Finlayson, Kristen Simmons, Leah Cohen, Melanie Coen, Sam Nigro, Seth Federspiel

1. Call to Order

Whiteman, acting as Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:04 PM.

2. Equity Working Group (EWG) Engagement in Three-Year Planning Process

Whiteman presented the draft schedule for EEAC participation in the Three-Year-Planning process and described how the EWG would develop recommendations to inform the 2025-2027 Plan. Whiteman explained that the EEAC Resolution on Plan Priorities is due in December 2023 and the Draft Plan due in March 2024. Lynch requested suggestions on how the EWG should operate to contribute to the EEAC Resolution on Plan Priorities.

Lynch described the approach that the EWG applied during development of the 2022-2024 Plan, where the EWG gathered information through a series of meetings that included “panel experts” and presented findings and recommendations to the Council. Lynch asked if this process would be appropriate to repeat. Collins suggested that the Council conduct an equity-focused workshop first in order to support early engagement on equity issues. Bodemer said that the EWG could develop recommendations to guide or complement all Three-Year Plan Workshops, or the Council could conduct an equity-focused workshop first. Bodemer expressed support for applying an equity lens to all findings from the Workshops. Luppi asked if the Council could:

identify key issues in equity for the current Term, new considerations for 2025-2027, and develop equity recommendations following the Workshops. Luppi agreed with Collins that discussing equity earlier in the process will help center other discussions around it.

Lynch said that the EWG should determine a meeting schedule that will support the development of equity recommendations for the 2025-2027 Plan.

Discuss and Prioritize Focus Topics for EWG

Lynch listed potential priority topics for the EWG, including electrification for low- and moderate-income customers, moderate-income weatherization, pre-weatherization barriers, partnerships, renters and landlords, small-business customers, and workforce development.

Washburn asked if the EWG would receive a summary of progress toward 2022-2024 equity goals in order to prioritize recommendations for the 2025-2027 Plan. Whiteman replied that progress toward current equity goals was covered during the last EWG meeting.

Bodemer commented that the program administrators (PAs) have struggled to serve the most vulnerable customers, so the EWG needs to discuss how to facilitate participation by moderate-income and small-business customers. Bodemer said that potential changes to delivery models and program designs, such as enhanced incentives for barrier mitigation, need to be focus areas for the EWG.

Wambui emphasized Washburn's comment that equity priorities for the 2025-2027 Plan need to be informed by a review and assessment of current progress. Wambui said that it will be impossible to identify key topics and reach underserved customers without determining what changes to existing programs are required. Whiteman said that the July EWG meeting will focus on review of progress toward equity goals.

Luppi flagged that advocates and environmental justice communities have discussed issues such as energy costs following electrification that the EWG should discuss. Luppi said that rate and bill impacts influence electrification for low- and moderate-income customers.

Collins agreed that the cost of electrification is a major concern and asked whether fuel assistance could be modified to accommodate for rate and bill impacts. Collins encouraged the EWG to consider new initiatives that will produce results in the next 6-10 months as they assess progress toward equity goals.

Wambui agreed with Collins and Luppi about the importance of rate and bill impacts and said that planning needs to acknowledge the universe in which energy-efficiency programs exist. Wambui said that there are discussions and climate initiatives around the state that have interactive effects with Mass Save. Whiteman suggested that the July EWG meeting could also cover the overall landscape of clean energy programs. Wambui said that programs need to shift significantly to support equitable decarbonization, which may require expanding the criteria for income-eligibility.

Winner agreed with Wambui and recommended that the EWG discuss federal funding opportunities and energy costs in July.

Bodemer proposed that the PAs present challenges and accomplishments for the current Term and discuss them with the EWG. Bodemer said that this discussion should include suggestions like offsetting installation costs with a combination of incentives and bill credits.

Winner suggested that language access be included as a discrete topic if it is not integrated into other Workshop topics. Winner said that development of the 2025-2027 Plan is in early stages, so the EWG should consider recent program performance and recommendations from the prior planning process.

Lynch clarified that the equity-focused topics will be discussed in all Workshops, but the Council needs to schedule each Workshop to ensure participation by the appropriate people and subject-matter experts. Winner concurred that scheduling meetings and topics will help avoid conflicts.

3. Topics and Schedule for Remainder of 2023

Washburn recommended that the July EWG meeting include a recap of recent program performance and that topics be prioritized within the existing Workshop and EWG schedule. Whiteman responded that determining topics in advance will inform meeting schedules.

Collins raised that some initiatives are still in-progress and developing data reports will be difficult for July, so the meeting topics should be determined as soon as possible. Wambui said that achieving systemic equity requires managing many complex elements, and it is difficult to achieve since Mass Save has not historically been intentional about equity. Wambui agreed that scheduling in advance is helpful, but preparedness is essential as things often deviate from plans in this type of work.

Washburn highlighted electrification for low- and moderate-income customers as a priority for the 2025-2027 Plan. Washburn said that the discussion should not rehash old conversations, but focus on issues that still require solutions. Lynch said that strategic partnerships, including the Community First Partnerships (CFPs), are essential. Wambui said that moderate-income programs are a priority. Luppi agreed with Washburn and Wambui. Washburn added that the coordination of federal funds and Mass Save programs is important.

Wambui stated that her neighborhood in Lowell has experienced issues with marketing and suggested that best practices for marketing and targeting customers be included as topics. Wambui said that marketing materials for Mass Save are not appropriately targeted or designed. Collins noted that there is marketing driven by both the PAs and CFPs; the CFPs were intended to shape marketing tools to meet local needs, so perhaps the discussion should focus on how to better leverage the CFPs.

Quattrochi commented that Esther Duflo, an economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, conducted research on barriers to adopting new technology related to how busy

people are. Quattrochi said that time constraints particularly inhibit the ability of small-business customers and renters to adopt energy-efficient technologies, so this issue should be addressed in the Workshops.

Lynch said that the EEAC Consultants can identify equity recommendations that were not implemented in the 2022-2024 Plan and present a list of meeting topics so that a final list can be determined in July. Bodemer said that summarizing previous recommendations may not be valuable if the PAs would reject them again. Bodemer believed that the EEAC Consultants should work with the EWG to determine strategies for achieving equity goals. Wambui replied that before exploring new recommendations, the EWG first assess the previous recommendations since they included good strategies. Whiteman said the EEAC Consultants can develop a straw proposal informed by both prior recommendations and new ones.

Washburn said that when the EWG reviews progress toward equity goals for 2022-2024 in July, the Group can also discuss unsuccessful strategies, ways to refine existing models, and new ideas. Whiteman said that this review will inform the prioritization of topics for the 2025-2027 Plan Workshops and EWG meetings.

Winner stated that the EWG will try to solicit public comment at the start of each meeting in order to make meetings more interactive and hear about work going on in different communities.

Washburn asked if the Department of Energy Resources would conduct a poll to select EWG meeting dates. Whiteman said that the EWG will need to determine how many meetings will be required between July and September to support development of equity recommendations for the 2025-2027 Plan.

4. Adjournment

Whiteman, acting as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 2:02 PM.

Meeting Materials:

- Official Meeting Notice
- Meeting Agenda
- Equity Working Group 2025-2027 Plan Priorities and Schedule Presentation