



EQUITY WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES

Monday, July 10, 2023
Virtual Meeting: Zoom

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

Equity Working Group Members Absent: Doug Quattrochi

Other Attendees: Adrian Caesar, Ina Dasso, Aladdine Joroff, Bernetta Morton, Danilo Morales, Gabe Shapiro, Ian Finlayson, Kate Peters, Kristen Simmons, Leah Cohen, Melanie Coen, Sam Nigro, Seth Federspiel, David Lyons, Emma Zehner, Carmine Lemoine, Molly Fairchild, Zack Lippert, Degen Larkin

1. Call to Order

Whiteman, acting as Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:03 AM.

Luppi joined the virtual meeting at 11:15 AM.

2. Assessment of Equity Goals

Program Administrator Presentation on Progress Against Equity Targets

Downey, Terach and Shapiro, on behalf of the program administrators (PAs) presented an assessment of progress against equity targets for 2022-2024, which indicated that the PAs are on track to meet goals for statewide-equity benefits and participation in environmental justice communities (EJCs) but experiencing challenges in supporting participation by renters, moderate-income customers, and small businesses.

EWG Discussion

Wambui appreciated the use of Energy Trust Oregon's format for providing updates in a color-coded fashion.

Harak commented that performance of the moderate-income program is distressing and acknowledged that it will take substantial efforts to improve performance. Harak asked if the Community Action Agencies (CAAs) identify and refer moderate-income customers to the program administrators (PAs) if they are not income eligible and whether the PAs would leverage the CAAs to perform income verification. Terach said that the PAs are considering all strategies to improve the moderate-income program. Harak suggested that the CAAs have identified over 160,000 households eligible for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, so they are skilled at identifying and qualifying income-eligible customers. Harak asked if moderate-income renters are included in participation data. Terach replied that only customers who complete income verification count toward moderate-income participation, so there are likely renter participants omitted from the results. Harak requested clarification on metrics to assess Community First Partners (CFPs) and where the CFPs report data. Shapiro said that the CFPs are evaluated on volume-based metrics including completed weatherization jobs, small-business projects, and HVAC rebates. The CFPs and PAs set goals, but a rubric for participation by target populations and baseline comparisons is also used to assess program impact. Shapiro noted that participation trends for CFP communities suggest positive program impacts and increases in home energy assessments (HEAs). Harak asked if the CFP communities provided input on performance metrics or if the PAs established metrics. Shapiro said that PAs determined the initial metrics, but each community provided input on following evaluation rubrics and metrics.

Luppi encouraged the use of numbers to provide context, such as sharing the fact that CFP resources are available for 28 of 61 “hard-to-reach” communities, as defined by the Department of Public Utilities. Shapiro clarified that 73% of CFP residents reside in environmental justice communities (EJCs).

Keller and Harak left the virtual meeting at 11:44 AM.

Winner asked if program impacts were greater for communities that have participated in the CFP for longer. Shapiro confirmed that program impacts were greater, but first-year-program effects on HEA and weatherization volume were greater for new participants in 2022 than in 2021. Winner asked if evaluation studies could estimate the number of moderate-income renters served by the program without income verification. Terach replied that income must be verified in order to contribute toward moderate-income participation. Wambui said that a workforce-housing project in Haverhill completed through Mass Save included 27 moderate-income residents, so the program is reaching but not tracking moderate-income customers in some cases.

Peters left the virtual meeting at 11:51 AM.

Wambui stated that the CFP has enabled Lowell to complete projects in underserved segments including 10 small businesses projects, 190 weatherization jobs, and 250 HVAC-system upgrades. Wambui said that a group of Cambodian residents in Lowell were able to participate through Mass Save since the CFP is effective at the grassroots level. Wambui added that Mass Save does not have a true moderate-income program.

Morton supported Harak's recommendation that the PAs leverage CAAs in order to serve more moderate-income customers. Morton said that a recent Boston Globe article reported both low uptake of heat-pump rebates and discrepancies between advertised and actual incentives, which is problematic for moderate-income customers. Morton said that her understanding is that customers will receive the standard heat-pump rebate of \$1,200 per ton instead of \$10,000 if they do not use an approved supplier.

Keller rejoined the virtual meeting at 11:55 AM.

EEAC Consultant Presentation on Equity Benefits

Lynch described the performance-incentive mechanism in place for the 2022-2024 Plan, which includes an equity component tied to benefits achieved in EJs, and highlighted achievement of equity benefits relative to 2022 goals.

EWG Discussion

Luppi asked if there are meaningful trends represented by the achievement of equity benefits. Lynch responded that National Grid pulls down statewide-electric results because an error in their Plan filing resulted in very high goals. Lynch added that the first year in a term is often the slowest year and expected an increase in achieved benefits, but the EWG should track progress closely.

Harak asked if the PAs annualized the metrics for the achievement of equity benefits. Lynch confirmed that the PAs established annual goals within the 2022-2024 Plan.

Wambui commented that the addition of equity and electrification components to the performance incentive was a significant achievement since a renter component was rejected in 2019. Wambui suggested that the EWG determine how to make the performance-incentive mechanism included in the 2025-2027 Plan more equitable.

3. Opportunities for Advancement of Equity Goals

Lynch summarized PA responses to equity-related recommendations for the 2022-2024 Plan in order to identify recommendations that the PAs are implementing and recommendations that the EWG could propose again for the 2025-2027 Plan.

EWG Discussion

Wambui emphasized the importance of moderate-income recommendations that were not included in the 2022-2024 Plan as solutions to poor performance and suggested that they could be included as recommendations for the 2025-2027 Plan. Additionally, Wambui advised the EWG to reexamine requirements for weatherization prior to electrification upgrades. Lynch noted that the recommendations examined were developed based on the 2022-2024 April Draft Plan, so they may be different from the final set of EWG recommendations. One notable difference in the final recommendations was a stronger focus on a comprehensive model for delivery of the moderate-income program.

Harak rejoined the virtual meeting at 12:24 PM.

4. Meeting Topics and Future Schedule

Lynch asked what topics require focused discussion and solutions for the 2025-2027 Plan.

Harak said that workforce development is an important topic that can support economic development and participation in underserved communities. Wambui replied that workforce development is being addressed by the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (Mass-CEC) and program budgets determined by the PAs have direct impacts on moderate-income households.

Wambui stated that 80% of area-median income is not wealthy and Mass Save needs to reconsider the moderate-income threshold. Wambui said that converting electric-resistance- and fossil-fuel-heating systems to heat pumps needs to be a greater focus in the 2025-2027 Plan. Wambui added that active-demand management for low- and moderate-income customers will be increasingly important as electrification progresses, electric rates adjust, and electric demand changes.

Bodemer concurred with Wambui that there are significant efforts to support workforce development outside of Mass Save and moderate-income customers are a priority segment. Luppi also highlighted the importance of serving more moderate-income customers.

Beote left the virtual meeting at 12:31 PM.

Luppi asked if elements of program design could deepen engagement with renters and landlords. Luppi advised the PAs to examine barriers to moderate-income participation and asked if incentives to remediate pre-weatherization barriers are sufficient. Luppi agreed with Harak that developing a diverse, multilingual workforce is essential to serve customers, particularly those in language-isolated communities. Luppi said that Community Labor United or other entities might help advance workforce development.

Winner reiterated Luppi's suggestion on pre-weatherization barriers. Winner said that the CFPs have supported meaningful progress toward reaching underserved communities, but PA reports suggest that program participation can be time intensive and complex. Winner said that streamlining program intake is a theme across all sectors and that Mass Save has a responsibility to equitably deliver benefits to customers. Washburn said that the PAs need to identify the participation barriers throughout the customer journey and determine how to address them.

Morton said that CAAs have a track record of comprehensively serving landlords and renters, so if they can serve one unit in a building then they will likely reach all units.

Wambui asked if the PAs could estimate costs of expanding income eligibility to 80% of SMI and moderate-income eligibility to 100% of SMI early in development of the 2025-2027 Plan. Wambui said that Mass Save programs exist in an ecosystem with other programs, so other entities or initiatives might address problems that the PAs and EEAC cannot.

Downey suggested that the EWG and PAs track whether legislative or regulatory changes would be required to implement certain recommendations, such as expanding thresholds for income eligibility.

Lynch said that language access is a persistent challenge and said that specific stakeholders and subject-matter experts should be invited to certain meetings. Winner agreed and noted that the CFPs are an effective tool to support language access. Luppi commented that input by subject-matter experts helped develop a comprehensive set of recommendations for the 2022-2024 Plan.

Proposed Schedule

Lynch shared the proposed EWG-meeting schedule in order to support development of the 2025-2027 Plan. Lynch said that the EWG meetings and discussion should support and inform the EEAC Workshops.

Downey requested that the Department of Energy Resources share calendar invites once meeting dates are set.

Lynch suggested that the EWG could cover related topics during the same meeting, but others such as small-business programs have not been explicitly listed. Washburn said that performance in small-business programs needs to improve and the EWG should dedicate time to discuss strategies. Keller added that although there are technical discussions on small-business programs, there are no equity-focused discussions on the subject. Whiteman said that perhaps renters, landlords, and small businesses are related topics.

Wambui recommended that the Commercial & Industrial (C&I) Working Group leverage the Small-Business Nonparticipation Study in order to address small-business programs. Keller indicated that the C&I Working Group focuses on and is comprised of large C&I customers. Wambui believed that the C&I Working Group would be better equipped to discuss small-business strategy. Bodemer understood that the EWG would focus on how to serve small businesses that are minority- or women-owned-business enterprises or members of EJs, as opposed to discussing small businesses as a subset of the C&I sector. Bodemer added that these small businesses are also more likely to be renters or language isolated. Lynch said that the Small-Business Nonparticipation Study indicated that microbusinesses have much lower participation rates and statistically demonstrated rates of low participation by microbusinesses represents an equity matter.

Lynch announced that the EEAC Consultants would group related topics, determine additional meeting participants, and share calendar invites.

5. Adjournment

Whiteman, acting as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 1:04 PM.

Meeting Materials:

- Official Meeting Notice

- Meeting Link
- Agenda
- Assessment of Progress Against Equity Targets
- 2022 Equity Benefits
- Program Administrator Responses to EEAC 2022-2024 Three-Year Plan Equity Recommendations