



Equity Advisory Group – Equity Lens Session #1

Meeting Date: October 13, 2021
Time: 4:30pm – 6:00pm
Location: Zoom Meeting

Attendees:

Facilitator:	EAG Members:
Amber Lenhart	Clyde Abrahamson, Spokane Indian Housing Authority
Avista:	Claire Trapp, Rural Resources
Annette Brandon	Joe/Eliso Dumlao, Spokane Vet Center
Ana Matthews	KJ January, Spectrum Spokane
Renee Coelho	Shauna Meharry, SNAP
Jaime Majure	DeAnna Knope, Takesa Village
Mike Gump	Gretchen Chomas, Community Member (SCRAPS)
Guests:	
Latish Hill – Avista	
Kim Boynton – Avista	
Joni Bosh – NWEC	
Chris Davis – SNAP	
Molly Brewer - WUTC	
Simon ffitch – The Energy Project	
Shay Bauman – Public Counsel	
Unidentified caller	

Agenda

- I. Welcome & Introductions
 - Overview of Meeting: Rules and Intent
- II. Customer Benefit Indicators
- III. CETA Section 12
- IV. Bill Assistance
- V. Weatherization
- VI. Energy Assistance and Named Communities
- VII. Outreach and Engagement
- VIII. Discussion
- IX. Your Support Team and Next Meeting

Facilitator

Amber Lenhart
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Annette Brandon
Ana Matthews
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Renee Coelho
Mikaela Terpko & Mike Gump
Ana Matthews & Renee Coelho
Amber Lenhart
Amber Lenhart

Meeting Notes

Customer Benefit Indicators

- Environmental
 - Not as intuitive as initially thought - ability to measure at a locational area, etc. is something that we're still trying to figure out. What we'll start out with is number of weighted average days exceeding health levels and Avista plant air emissions. **Q:** To existing generation or proposed plants? **A:** Currently, it's existing, but as we move forward it will be something we're evaluating for new as well (it's a metric in our newest RFP).
- Access
 - Number of households reached by broadband internet. We realize how important this is, but we just don't have a way to measure it at this point. So, we are going to continue to work on it. So how will we help with this CBI? More fully develop Joint Use (partner with internet/broadband companies), work with communities, and TBD, as we just really haven't figured it all out yet. Will come back to this group again about this topic.
- More granularity with these CBIs: Energy Burden (instead of # customer with burden, measure more specific to Named Communities); Energy Availability (instead of CAIDI, identify additional methods); Indoor Air Quality; Supplier Diversity (more specificity in ensuring that suppliers are in, owned, or serving Named Communities).

Energy Assistance

- CETA has an entire section dedicated to energy assistance. Energy burden: more than 6% of income spent on energy bill is a high burden; customers should be spending less than 6% to have a manageable bill. We realize that affordability, comfort in your home, and having a safe/well-heated home is important.
- 5 different funding sources for customers, each with different eligibility requirements and ways in which they help people.
 - Federal program: LIHEAP, around since 1980s
 - Avista's tariff funded (a fee that's on your rate to pay for these programs): LIRAP, supplements LIHEAP
 - Huge component (Conservation Education & Outreach) to make sure we're connecting with customers with resources beyond just the bill assistance they're getting. Goals: keep customers connected to services, provide assistance to as many customers as we can, lower energy burden, and appropriate data to assess the effectiveness of the program.
 - Comprehensive educational program. **Q:** Do you guys provide training, someone that goes out into the community? **A:** Yes. Avista Outreach will go anywhere someone invites us and

give education, resources (energy saving items like weather stripping, window plastic, etc.). We used to have Energy Fairs—esp. our large event at the fair, SNAP would be processing grants. We have a van that goes out to all the food banks. And we always partner at partner events-like, housing events, etc. We'd be happy to partner with you. SNAP also has an outreach team that will go out on location to help offer or administer the programs and provide conservation education training. Rural Resources encourages their employees to bring home a box of conservation gear so they can actually use the materials so they can then let the customer know the specifics of a product and can help inform their purchases for future conservation materials.

- LIRAP Sub-Programs: Senior/Disabled Rate Discount, Energy Grant, Emergency Share Grant, Arrearage Management Program (to help pay off past due balances, takes 90% of what you owe, spreads it over 12 months, and for every payment you make towards the remaining 10% we'll pay the other 90%).
 - FPL = Federal Poverty Level. We take our income guidelines past the FPL that the federal guidelines require
 - Donation-based Project Share
 - Community fuel fund – not just helping Avista customers with Avista bill, some other utilities (Inland, etc.)
 - Tax credit/CARES donation that we put back out into the community
 - Various funding from churches, etc.
- Agencies, founded during Johnson administration (War on Poverty), are in place to help people with various programs—the majority have bill assistance and weatherization, among other programs. They promote programs, set up appts, verify eligibility (documentation), and make the determination of what kind of benefit that customer gets
 - If you have any thoughts about how we can provide better ease in access, please do let us know.

Weatherization (Wx)

- We provide \$3M annually to 8 community action agencies and the Spokane Indian Housing Authority, to deliver energy conservation as well as energy efficiency improvements to homes. Partner with the same agencies as bill assistance.
- A lot of Wx customers come in through the Agencies—while the intake worker is helping the customer get energy assistance, they will talk about the state of the home, etc. and refer the customer for Wx.

- Our program serves owner-occupied homes that use Avista electric or natural gas, does not cover alternative fuels like wood, pellet, etc.; rentals can be served, as long as the landlord participates.
- Agencies can also tap into multiple funding sources for Wx projects; they take a holistic look and maybe Avista can help with a heat pump and a federal program can help with attic insulation
- Wx is a tariffed program, like LIRAP. Improvements can include conversions (baseboard to electric heat pump), replacing lights, insulation, windows, furnaces, water heaters, etc. that may be impacting the efficiency of the home.
 - Health and safety: say a customer needs attic insulation to keep heat in/provide more comfort in a home, but the home has a hole in the roof. The Agency can use Avista dollars to repair that hole, so that they can then do that attic insulation improvement.

Outreach & Engagement

- When someone is living with limited resources, that situation puts them in a “crisis”; how do people in crisis receive information? Reaching and connecting with our customers in person is extremely important – we do that through Energy Fairs and energy assistance days, mobile and general outreach, vans, and workshops. And then we use all the typical methods to connect through print/digital ads (tv, press release, radio, whatever we can get to connect people to this information), social media, and inserts.
- We’re just trying to find the best or most efficient ways to reach people where they are. Avista referrals through our CSRs, CARES (work with our most vulnerable customers that may need some additional help or resources due to medical or some other emergency).
- As a way to try to reach more customers, this summer (2021), we took a neighborhood sweep approach—worked with SNAP to identify two organizations that could use extra help: one non-profit housing organization (knew we had bill assistance, but didn’t know we have Wx),. We waived the Wx paperwork, since the Agency already have the income and necessary documentation for the programs. The other organization is a mobile home community (resident owned). A lot of them have participated in assistance or Wx, but a lot of them just fell outside of the eligibility gap—they make too much to receive a free service, but they don’t make enough to afford the improvements on their own. We’ll bring this project back around to you to let you know what we’ve learned, but if you have any other ideas on how we can find these customers that need the help, we’re open to hear your ideas.
 - **Q:** in a low-income/disability/senior mobile home park, there is a resident that is partially blind and does qualify for assistance but SNAP will come and weatherize but they can’t put insulation under the home because the skirting isn’t on. New skirting is like \$2,500, and they can’t afford this. **A:** That is information we need to know, so we can try to find a solution. I will follow up with you on this.

Named Communities

- Provided map and breakdown of communities identified as Named Communities (NC's), and breakdown of these areas, as well as bill assistance utilization among these customers. Spokane County appears well-served by assistance; if anyone has ideas for how we can reach these more rural communities, we

- Those living in NC's are clearly in need of bill assistance, but the data shows that assistance recipients extend beyond these communities. Bill assistance saturation rate ranges from 21-25% in general, and 11-12% in NC's
 - Suggestion: working with community-based organizations. I know TEP has been doing some work like that in Puget's service territory.
 - Avista has engaged a Community Partner Network (CPN) and you can see the results of their work, and we continue to expand our reach in these ways.

What ideas do you have to make sure everyone can access these programs?

A: Waive the paperwork!

Q: Are there any programs for unsafe electrical in older mobile homes?

A: Nothing available for electrical panels or things of that nature, but forums like this will help us to find out things like this that are an issue so we can look into what kind of partnerships, etc. we can establish to try to find a solution.

Follow Up: Members and attendees are encouraged to follow up with Ana or Renee with any ideas, thoughts, or questions they may have.