

Low Income Utility Assistance Workgroup

May 25, 2022

2:00pm - 3:30pm

Join with Google Meet:

meet.google.com/fhd-gxss-fob

Join by Phone

(US) (US) +1 617-675-4444 PIN: 592 296 368 8037#

Attendees:

Shansie Smith

Bob Smith

Brendon Coulsting

Cindy Carter

Emory Brown

Gina Roberts

Kate Natafgi

[Laurel Peltier](#)

Lauren Graziano

Lauren Molineaux

Lisa Smith

Delegate Lorig Charkoudian

Senator Malcolm Augustine

Nathan McCurdy

Nichole Fernandes

Paula Tolson

Robbie Black

Ronnie McTier

Venkata Putchakayala

LaSherra Ayala

I. Introduction

A. Meeting minutes from December 15, 2022 approved.

B. Review of the charge of the group:

- a. To examine the forms of federal, State, local, and private assistance available to low-income residential electric and natural gas customers

C. What will we consider?

- a. Different systems and forms of financial assistance are available to low income customers
- b. Inefficiency and gaps in the processing of applications
- c. The feasibility of establishing a new or expanding the existing natural gas universe service program
- d. Coordination of programs and benefits
- e. Demand for financial assistance
- f. feasibility of establishing one or more financial assistance programs for small businesses in low-income communities

II. Application Process - DEMO by MD THINK

- A. Can we add the OHEP redetermination function to this portal?
- B. Can people select several programs to apply for at the same time from that first screen?
- C. Reformat so the second page is the public facing page making it easier for folks to identify the program they would like to select.
- D. How does someone without a SSN submit an application?
- E. Optional questions should all be at the end after everything required has been submitted.
- F. Even if the eligibility criteria across programs is not aligned yet, will customer information populated in the initial program application be pre populated into the subsequent selected applications?
- G. The OHEP list of boxes to check leaves the choice of grants up to the customer which is confusing.
- H. What is the QA process for customer use? Is there a small sample of real people/advocates/etc testing the pages to make sure the language and questions are understood? If there is not, one should be put in place.
- I. Seems like a lot of information that is being requested is not made needed for the OHEP application such as assets, etc.
 - a. We recommend a function that does not take OHEP only applications through screens that are not needed.
- J. EUSP and MEAP does not mean anything to clients the label upfront should talk about the grants for Electric and heat as well as what the state calls the program
 - a. Language should be consistent and user friendly.
- K. What documents are required and where is that communicated?
 - a. Additional information on how to upload documentation is helpful as well.
- L. Eligibility guidelines should be offered. User would have had to know that beforehand?
- M. Text needs to be in video for all the people who do not read from monitors. It needs to have a video to explain what all this is.
- N. What is the purpose of limiting the application to 30 days? What is the value of making someone start again outside of the 30 day window?
 - a. How does deleting the information after 30 days align with the legislation that gives customers more time to turn in documentation for incomplete applications?
 - b. I'm confused about why the system lets you "submit" if there are still things that are required that were not included. It seems people could think they are done when they are not. Then they wait 30 days and lose everything. Recommend revising the submission and confirmation process.
 - c. Applicants should receive a notice to complete the application within 30 days
- O. Such a critical point about energy efficiency as 75% of applicants are renters. It's tricky to have an OHEP applicant under duress & discuss fixing energy usage and then they must

work with a landlord, not often the best relationships. Did it last week w/ an applicant who had a \$3800 yearly BGE bill, and she rents. in reality. The contractor calls and often it sounds like a scam call . This population is HIGHLY targeted by predatory folks, they're skeptical of much.

- P. Do we have data on abandoned applications and how many people are denied because of issues that may be problems with the application?
 - a. Not sure about abandonment issues, but the overall data on support received versus support eligible suggest that there's a lot of headroom that could be filled if funds were available.
- Q. Update the language for weatherization
 - a. This leaves the education up to the viewer, and to understand what's available.

III. EUSP Changes

- A. Removing the requirement that the electric bill is not in your name for EUSP effective July 1, 2022.
 - a. Current practice with MEAP

IV. Closing

- A. Categorical Eligibility will be discussed in a following meeting.
- B. Next Meeting scheduled for June 23, 2022
- C. Workgroup staff will circulate recommendations borne out of today's discussion to issue formal recommendations for the Energy Assistance application. Recommendations will be reviewed and discussed at the next meeting.
- D. Meeting Adjourned.