

Structure and Organizing Principles: BPA Northwest Low-Income Energy Efficiency Workgroup

(Amended May 2024)

Mission

The BPA Northwest Regional Low-income Energy Efficiency Work Group is a venue for utilities, community action agencies, state agencies, advocates, and other organizations to come together to share information and develop best practices in order to improve access to energy efficiency services across the Northwest for income qualified residents.

Background

This Workgroup initially began in response to the BPA Post-2011 Review. The structure was largely undefined by the Post-2011 Review, leaving BPA to take the initiative to move this forward.

Objectives

- Provide a venue for utilities, advocates, and other organizations working to support low-income programming within the Northwest to collaborate.
- Increase shared knowledge of CAP and utility business activities to improve collaboration.
- Find simple solutions to streamlining program implementation between organizations including but not limited to CAPs, utilities, and Community Based Organizations (CBOs).
- Identify barriers and solutions to increasing low-income access to Energy Efficiency programs.

Workgroup Structure

Meeting Cadence & Duration

The intent of this workgroup is to convene at least three times a year or quarterly, as staffing resources are available. The length of each individual meeting will take into account content, location, and time of year.

BPA commits to facilitation of this group for one year at a time. If it is determined that BPA cannot perform this function adequately or the scope is too broad for the Workgroup to function effectively and efficiently, BPA may decide to discontinue facilitation or adjust the scope.

Facilitation

BPA will provide a facilitator. A steering committee will provide guidance as requested by BPA ([see below for more details](#)).

- Primary Coordinator: BPA Low-Income Energy Efficiency Program Manager
- Back-Up Facilitator: BPA Energy Efficiency Program Support

Location

Meeting hosts will make every effort to ensure meetings can be broadcast via WebEx and by telephone to make them accessible without travel. For in-person gatherings, it is beneficial to host meetings in a central location and other locations around the region to give different members an equal opportunity to attend in person. These in-person gatherings may coincide with other regional meetings or conferences that members may be attending so as to reduce travel costs. If it is deemed helpful, every other in-person meeting may be held in Portland.

Attendees

There is an “open door” policy for these meetings. BPA customer public utilities, community action partnerships, weatherization assistance program managers (WAPs), Tribal governments, state energy offices, low income advocacy groups, and other interested parties are invited to participate. Attendance is voluntary and encouraged.

Resources BPA Will Contribute

- Facilitator and coordinator staff time
- Pre and post meeting preparation
- Access to meeting spaces
- Communication to workgroup and other potential workgroup members
- Report out to BPA staff, customers and other interested parties
- Some staff time for research and analysis of low income energy efficiency measures, grants, or other relevant program activity
- Periodic share-out of progress with utilities and stakeholders
- Some collaboration with state agencies and public interest groups

Steering Committee *(to be updated as new members are selected)*

The Workgroup should be steered by a small balanced group representing all levels of the low income energy efficiency acquisition chain, such as utilities, community action agencies, and other interested parties with implementation experience as well as policy expertise.

1. Utility position 1: TBD
2. Utility position 2: TBD
3. Utility position 3: TBD
4. Non-utility position 1: TBD
5. Non-utility position 2: TBD
6. Non-utility position 3: TBD
7. BPA Low Income Sector Lead: Amy Burke
8. Other BPA staff to be involved: A COTR, an EER, Programs Team Manager, and Constituent Account Executive

Responsibilities of Steering Committee Members

Steering Committee membership is voluntary. Committee members provide a guiding role to help facilitate effective and valuable meetings. Committee member support can include, but is not limited to, providing input on agenda items, prioritizing topics of discussion, identifying and coordinating speakers and presentations for future workgroup meetings, and providing input to secure locations for in-person meetings. Committee members are also asked to provide feedback to the facilitator if the workgroup is moving beyond the original intended scope.

Time Commitment to Participate as a Steering Committee Member

The Steering Committee convenes for one planning meeting prior to each workgroup to discuss the proposed agenda and add to it and one planning meeting after each workgroup to close out or discuss open items from that meeting. Planning meetings are intended to run an hour. This adds an estimated six to eight additional meetings each year, depending on the number of workgroup hosted each year.

Duration of Steering Committee Membership & Term Limits

Committed membership is for one year starting in the third quarter of each calendar year. However, the BPA Steering Committee positions which shall remain constant.

There are no term limits. Any existing member who wishes to renew their position may do so. In the event of a vacancy, new members are selected by the current steering committee. All vacancies shall be filled for this Steering Committee by the start of the new calendar year. If a Steering Committee member chooses to vacate their position mid-year, the Steering Committee will solicit a new member from the larger Low-Income workgroup to serve out their term. This policy can be revisited at any time.

Reference: Excerpt from Historical Document Originally Shaping this Workgroup

Workgroup #3 Recommendations

Recommendation #1: BPA shall adopt a Low-Income Energy Efficiency guiding principle.

The Preamble

- Financial constraints limit low-income ratepayers' participation in traditional incentive-based programs.
- There are a large number of low-income households throughout BPA service territory that could benefit from energy efficiency and conservations measures.
- Existing sources of funding, including state and federal resources, are insufficient to meet current needs.
- The high number of funding sources used for this work and the number of entities involved complicates effective and efficient program implementation and reporting.
- Current efforts sometimes lack coordination and could benefit from improved communication.
- Management and administration of programs usually works best when there is involvement at the local level — from the utility and low-income agencies.

- One single solution will not work in every electric service territory and for every utility. Therefore, recommended actions are developed with a variety of options to choose from in order to ensure management and administration remains at the local level.

The Principle: BPA customer utilities should provide equitable access to energy efficiency services tailored for low-income customers funded through utility self-funding and/or BPA incentive dollars.

The rationale for this recommendation is to set a common framework for future work and action. The principle grew out of the concern of some stakeholders that BPA and its customer utilities lacked an adequate commitment, given the need, to low income energy efficiency. Once it was agreed to the development of a principle a sub-committee was formed and task with bring a proposal to the entire group. The sub-committee completed its task on time and presented the proposed preamble and principle to the entire workgroup. There was lengthy give and take on behalf of the all Participants and the workgroup was able to reach consensus on the both the Preamble and Principle.

Recommendation #2: Ongoing Workgroup for Low-Income Programs

BPA reconstitute a workgroup to meet quarterly on Low Income Energy Efficiency (LIEE) in its service area to address some of the topics identified by this group, such as:

- Path for small utilities to do more low-income work.
- Data streamlining: More comprehensive tracking system meeting requirements from U.S. DOE and BPA's Implementation Manual.
- Best practices and improved communication, coordination and collaboration including but not limited to setting guidelines for structuring an agreement including CAP administrative costs and approaches for reasonable cost control.
- Align so measures line up between the US DOE requirements and utility requirements in the Implementation Manual, which are misaligned and have some conflicting requirements.
- Understand BPA's role in facilitating access to Low-Income EE across its service territory.
- Training facilitation.
- Other topics that the workgroup may choose.

The rationale is that this was the first time in many years, if ever, that this type of Workgroup has been convened. Although we made great progress, we did not have time to develop solutions for the core issues in these meetings over 90 days. In this recommendation #2, the Workgroup asks that the dialogue continue on these important topics.

Recommendation #3, Turnkey Implementation for Low-Income Programs

BPA facilitates a method or process that would allow utilities to designate some of their EEI or other utility funds for implementation of LIEE, where BPA is the administrator of the funds.

A number of Utilities that served on this Workgroup already provide funds to their local CAP Agency to install Low-Income measures that meet the specifications in the Implementation Manual. Some of the smaller Utilities may not have a CAP Agency, may not do business with the local CAP Agency even if there is one in their service area, or may not have the time, staff, or expertise to do Low Income programs. The Utilities are looking to BPA for assistance in this area. BPA provided guidance that it cannot transfer EEI funds to CAP Agencies because BPA does not have an Energy Conservation Agreement (ECA) with the CAPs. The smaller Utilities have asked BPA for additional help from BPA. It is recommended that BPA spend time to determine if and how best this could work best for the Utilities, the CAPs, other Stakeholders, and BPA.