



UTC Equity Docket A-230217 Communications Plan: 2023-2026

Background: The Washington State Legislature established the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC or Commission) in 1905. The UTC regulates the rates and services of investor-owned electric and natural gas utilities, telecommunications companies, water companies, garbage-collection carriers, household-goods moving companies, charter-bus companies, commercial ferries, pipeline companies, pilotage companies, and a low-level radioactive waste repository. The UTC also manages the state’s pipeline, railroad, and intrastate bus and trucking safety programs.

The UTC’s regulation varies by industry but primarily focuses on rates, service quality, consumer protection, and safety.

The UTC advances the public interest consistent with state law by balancing the needs of regulated companies with the needs of Washington consumers, ensuring that vital services are safe, equitable, available, reliable, and fairly priced.

In 2019, Washington enacted the Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA). CETA includes equity provisions that impact investor-owned utilities (IOUs) regulated by the UTC and requires the Commission to provide oversight on policies and actions related to IOUs implementing CETA’s provisions.

In 2020, the Washington’s Office of Equity (OOE) was established. The OOE requires state agencies to include equity considerations in the execution of their delegated responsibilities and obligations.

In 2021, the Legislature enacted three statutes with specific equity provisions. The Multiyear Rate Plan (MYRP) statute, among other things, expands the public interest standard to include equity as a consideration to the extent it affects the rates, services, and practices of IOUs. The Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act supports environmental justice and addresses disparities among vulnerable populations and overburdened communities. Finally, the Climate Commitment Act (CCA) requires equitable consideration of meaningful investments that benefit vulnerable populations. Additionally, Executive Order (EO) 22-04 requires agencies to implement Pro-Equity and Anti-Racism (PEAR) Strategic Plans.

In 2023, the Commission opened a multi-phase Equity Docket. The Equity Docket is designed to provide regulated companies with resources to help each industry integrate equity into its processes and create equity action plans to guide those processes. Through this work, regulated companies will assist in developing guidance for creating equitable solutions for customers and communities impacted by regulated companies’ operations.

This project will focus on applying equity through an energy justice lens, which includes the following:

- Distributional Justice
- Procedural Justice
- Recognition Justice
- Restorative Justice

Project Goal(s):

- Identify and develop resources for regulated companies to help them integrate equity into their work.
- Develop a Commission policy statement that formalizes the UTC’s dedication to equity work.
- Establish equity action plans for the Commission and regulated companies that will create greater benefits for ratepayers.
- Build trust with consumers and advocacy groups.
- Create avenues to receive, analyze, and implement feedback as appropriate.

Communications Plan Goal(s):

- Recruit participants from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences to participate in workshops.
- Identify key messages and inclusive language for all Commission staff and regulated companies to use.
- Inform commissioners, staff, members of the public, and other interested groups about project updates and outcomes.

Audiences:

- Please see the [outreach distribution list](#).

Equity Docket Key Messages:

- The Equity Docket memorializes the UTC’s commitment to furthering principles of distributional, procedural, recognition, and restorative justice, and creates an operating framework for integrating these considerations into all of the Commission’s work.

The purpose of the Equity Docket is to:

- Determine how to incorporate the tenets of energy justice into Commission and regulated company work.
- Expand the definition of “distributional equity” beyond what is outlined in current laws.
- Incorporate feedback from multiple participants in decision making to achieve procedural justice.
- Recognize how Commission decisions, policies, and practices have harmed marginalized communities and receive honest feedback.
- Provide a process for regulated companies to recognize how their actions have harmed marginalized communities and receive honest feedback.

- Develop expectations for regulated companies to integrate equity work into their processes and present well-researched proposals to the Commission.
- Reevaluate the current participatory funding policy statement and recommend changes.
- Create user-friendly ways for participants to maximize participatory funding and compensation.

Definitions:

- **Docket:** a log containing the complete history of each case or project in the form of brief chronological summaries.
- **Energy Justice:** ensuring that individuals have access to energy that is affordable, safe, sustainable, and affords them the ability to sustain a decent lifestyle.
- **Equality:** everyone receives the same treatment without accounting for differing needs or circumstances, which leads to or upholds inequitable outcomes.
- **Equity:** the act of developing, strengthening, and supporting procedural and outcome fairness in systems, procedures, and resource distribution mechanisms to create equitable (not equal) opportunity for all people. Equity focuses on eliminating barriers that have prevented the full participation of historically and currently oppressed groups.
- **Distributional Justice:** the distribution of benefits and burdens across populations. This objective aims to ensure that marginalized and vulnerable populations do not receive an inordinate share of the burdens or are denied access to benefits.
- **Participatory Funding:** A program where those representing energy utility customers can receive funding to participate in UTC proceedings.
 - learn more about [participatory funding](#)
- **Procedural Justice:** inclusive decision-making processes that seek to ensure that proceedings are fair, equitable, and inclusive for participants, recognizing that marginalized and vulnerable populations have been historically excluded from decision-making processes.
- **Rates:** also referred to as charges, the cost of service charged to consumer for a specific service or usage.
- **Recognition Justice:** requires an understanding of historic and ongoing inequalities and prescribes efforts that seek to reconcile these inequalities.
- **Restorative Justice:** using regulatory government organizations or other interventions to disrupt and address distributional, recognition, or procedural injustices and to correct them through laws, rules, policies, orders, and practices.
- **Tariff:** a utility's schedule of rates or charges. Utilities must submit tariff changes to the UTC for approval.
- **How decisions are made at the UTC:**
 - **Commissioners:** The UTC has three commissioners that are appointed by the governor. The commissioners are tasked with presiding over cases and making decisions related to regulated companies.
 - **Quasi-judicial agency:** The three-member Commission often functions in a Quasi-judicial capacity and holds hearings to decide contested decisions.
 - Commissioners make decisions about regulated companies' ability to:

- Increase company revenue,
 - Build or invest in new infrastructure,
 - Change service policies,
 - Address safety concerns, and
 - Address reliability issues.
- **Executive Director:** The Executive Director is responsible for making major agency decisions, managing overall operations, and setting the agency's strategic direction.
- **Leadership Team:** Members of the leadership team are tasked with leading their respective divisions and make decisions related to internal procedures, division of labor, and daily work.
- **What decisions are made by the UTC:**
 - **Process:** In reviewing requests and filings, the Commission functions much like a court and must decide the case based on the evidence brought before it.
- **Resources:**
 - [UTC 101 Part A](#)
 - [UTC 101 Part B](#)
 - **Equity work at UTC:** the Equity Docket A-230217 is one of many projects designed to help integrate equity into Commission practices and procedures. Another docket that is equity forward in its considerations is the Performance-based Regulation Docket U-210590. (*We are making a graphic to help demonstrate this work at the UTC and will link it once it's finished.*)

Equity Docket A-230217 Work Plan (July 2023- March 2026)

EVENT	ESTIMATED TIME
Complete Communication Plan (including Outreach Plan and Work Plan)	July 2023
Implement Outreach Plan; Communicate Work Plan and Communication plan through press releases and docket notices	As of July 2023,
Procedural Justice	
<i>Notice of opportunity to file Comments with questions:</i> 1. What Procedural Justice considerations would you like to see discussed? 2. What element(s) of Procedural Justice is most important to you?	September 29, 2023
Comments Due	November 28, 2023
Notice of Workshop issued	April 4, 2024
<i>Workshop:</i> <i>Discussion topic:</i> Implementing the principles of Procedural Justice	April 30, 2024
Interim Procedural Justice Policy Statement issued	August 30, 2024
Recognition Justice	
<i>Notice of Opportunity to File Comment:</i> Recognition justice emphasizes the need to understand different types of vulnerability and specific needs associated with energy services among social groups, especially marginalized communities (EEP 2022 Report) ¹ . Often associated with who is impacted and who benefits from the system.	September 1, 2024
Comments Due	October 1, 2024
Notice of Workshop issued	November 30, 2024
<i>Two Workshops: (#1 for community, #2 IOUs)</i> <i>Discussion topic:</i> Identifying and recognizing the harm to named communities that the Commission and or utilities have caused and continues to cause	January 20, 2025 January 27, 2025
Interim Recognition Justice Policy Statement issued	March 30, 2025

¹ Energy Equity Project (EEP) 2022 Report, School for Environment and Sustainability, University of Michigan

Distributional Justice	
Notice of opportunity to file Comment: Current Distributional Equity Analysis (DEA) efforts by the Commission and IOUs.	April 30, 2025
Comments Due	May 30, 2025
Notice of Workshop issued	June 30, 2025
<i>Workshop:</i> Discussion topic: Equity mandates and Distributional Equity Analysis Collaboratives	July 30, 2025
Interim Distributional Justice Policy Statement issued	September 30, 2025
Restorative Justice	
Notice of opportunity to file Comments: It encourages decision-makers to ensure that all potential harms and injustices that may arise are addressed, and prevention, mitigation, and restoration plans are implemented (EEP 2022)	October 30, 2025
Comments Due:	November 30, 2025
Notice of Workshop issued	December 30, 2025
<i>Workshop:</i> <i>Discussion topics:</i> 1. Moving toward transformative equity and justice in policies, rules, laws, processes, and practices for equitable service deliveries 2. Feedback and Discussion on Commission checklist, action plan, and regulated companies' action plans	January 29, 2026
Integrated Policy Statement and Action Plans issued	March 30, 2026

Phase One: Procedural energy Justice (July 2023 –August 2024)

Phase One Key Messages:

Why is procedural energy justice important?

- It identifies who is and is not at the decision-making table and promotes diverse representation of impacted communities and vulnerable populations among decision makers and regulated companies.

How does this impact the companies we regulate?

- Enhances equitable outcomes by seeking and incorporating the voices of historically marginalized communities into regulated company decision making.

How does this impact consumers/ratepayers?

- Ensures those directly impacted by the decisions are heard throughout the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs, services, rates, and policies.

How does procedural justice impact the next steps of the Equity Docket?

- Adopts policies, programs, and strategies to shift existing systems and processes for long term, transformative change for equitable outcomes.

Phase One - Communications Deliverables:

- Communications plan
- Key project messages
- Key phase messages
- Initial recruitment email for participants (both for utilities and transportation regulated companies)
- Introductory presentation for first workshops
- FAQ to send to participants in advance
- Standard definitions
- Promote workshops
- Assist with revised messaging and messaging timing throughout phase one of project
- Assistance with creating project update information for commissioners, staff, participants, and other interested groups
- Graphic to show different work at UTC
- GovDelivery message?

Phase Two: Recognition Energy Justice (September 2024 – April 2025)

Review project key messages:

Why is recognition of energy justice important?

- It identifies the types of communities and populations that have been harmed by the actions of the Commission and regulated companies.
- Provides the Commission and regulated companies an opportunity to listen, lean in, and accept the harm created by their actions.
- Creates greater trust with the communities impacted by the decisions of the Commission and regulated companies.

How does this impact the companies we regulate?

- Informs companies of social vulnerability index, historical harms caused, and insecurities to support effective equity programs and policies.

How does this impact consumers/ratepayers?

- Provides an opportunity for the public to build trust with the Commission and regulated companies.
- Identifies and recognizes issues that impact vulnerable populations and marginalized communities.

How does recognition and justice impact the next steps of the Equity Docket?

- Provides needed feedback to develop appropriate equity action plans, policies, and programs.

Phase Three: Distributional Energy Justice (March 2025 – September 2025)

Review project key messages:

Why is distributional justice important?

- To better understand how benefits and burdens are experienced across populations and to address barriers to the equitable allocation of benefits and burdens.
- Define distributional justice work to provide transparency and compliance with CETA and CCA.

Specific to distributional equity analysis (DEA):

- To address the conditions brought forward in two recent settlements.
- To ensure that distributional planning leads to equitable investments.
- Aid the Commission in understanding the impact of rates on customers of those investments.

How does this impact the companies we regulate?

- This work will create systems to incorporate distributional equity analysis throughout planning processes to ensure regulated companies comply with CETA and the CCA.
- This aims to develop methods, analyze results, and identify what is missing in our decision-making work.

How does this impact consumers/ratepayers?

- The distributional justice work will help ensure the equitable allocation of costs and benefits and ensure access to programs.

How does distributional justice impact the next steps of the Equity Docket?

- This phase will allow for transparent processes that provide regulated companies with the ability to incorporate equity into their operating and planning processes.
- This will help decision makers identify disparities that could be remedied through applying the other principles of energy justice.

Phase Four: Restorative Energy Justice (October 2025-March 2026)

Review project key messages:

Why is restorative energy justice important?

- Plays a vital part within the concept of energy justice through the development of guiding policy, rule, law, or order.
- Aims to repair injustices created by Commission and regulated company decision-making.
- Encourages decision-makers recognize past, present, and potential harms and injustices arising are addressed, while prevention, mitigation, and restoration plans are implemented.

How does this impact the companies we regulate?

- Address historical, present, and potential harms/injustices in their operations.
- Acknowledge, take responsibility, and address through policies and programs.

How does this impact consumers/ratepayers?

- Address harm to consumers/ratepayers.
- Address rate and service disparities, especially for vulnerable populations and marginalized community.
- Policies and programs that are more humane and less profit-driven.

How does restorative justice impact the next steps of the Equity Docket?

- An integration of procedural, distributional, and recognition energy justice tenets that informs an equity centering tool aimed at healing and preventing the harms and inequities arising from UTC regulations.