



WEAF Advisory Group Meeting
February 15, 2023 2:00 – 3:30pm Pacific

Welcome and roll call – *Byron Pfordte*

Advisory Group Member	Contact
Blue Mountain Action Council	Sylvia Schaefer
Community Action Connections	Dalia Ochoa
Community Action of Lewis, Mason, & Thurston Counties	Dale Lewis, Sandra Koch
Coastal Community Action Program	Debbie Gregg
Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council	Vern Gurnard, Kristi Hills, Alan Walker
Kitsap Community Resources	Kandi Balandran
Lower Columbia Community Action Center	Deanna Dahlberg, Kathy Bates
NW Community Action Center	Jose Alvarez, Todd Hilmes
OIC of Washington	Heidi Silva, Casandra Ochoa, Candi Jaeger
Opportunity Council	Marie Stangeland, Lorena Shah
Community Action of Skagit County	Misty Velasquez
Snohomish County Human Services Dept	Constance Hockett, Manu Morgan, Sarah
WUTC Staff	Heather Moline, Andrew Roberts, Andy Sellards
The Energy Project	Ross Quigley, Yochi Zakai
Public Counsel	Corey Dahl
NW Energy Coalition	Charlee Thompson
Department of Commerce	Michelle DeBell
Cascade Natural Gas	
Mark Chiles, VP of Regulatory Affairs & Customer Service	Lori Blattner, Dir Regulatory Affairs
Dan Tillis, Dir Customer Experience	Chris Mickelson, Mgr Regulatory Affairs
Byron Pfordte, Mgr Customer Experience	Noemi Ortiz, Mgr OR Conservation & Weatherization
Shannon Steed, Consumer Specialist	

1. Company update – *Byron Pfordte*

Pfordte, Byron - I don't have a whole lot to share. I do have a series of emails and I'm not entirely sure who all was included on those, but there is going to be a focus on developing the EDP program ahead of AMP program, we've agreed to that and so the focus will be on that discount program. Chris has been addressing questions around the calculator and I want to encourage anyone who hasn't recently read through the low income needs assessment that we provided, to do so. It addresses several of the questions that have been submitted surrounding the calculator, so it may be something good to review as we continue to develop that. Outside of those updates, I don't have anything else unless there's questions from the group for the company. No, then I will turn it over to Lori.

2. Small group meeting update – *Lori Blattner*

Blattner, Lori – Chris is actually going to provide the small group meeting update today.

Mickelson, Christopher - If I mischaracterize anything or forgot something from our small groups, those who were part of those meetings, please chime in. But basically, over the last two small group meetings, we agreed to a tier structure where it reflects FPL and AMI. We are still discussing the tier breaking points, but I think for at least a couple of the tiers we pretty much have those finalized. It is more the lower tiers where we're deciding where those breaking points should be. We also came to a general agreement on customer self-attestation of income and household size, establishing post qualifications verification process, a post verification process which would be conducted by the Community Action agencies, and the company being allowed to qualify customers for these programs. That was the general discussion and agreements we had back in our January 25th small meeting. Then, last week for our February 8th small meeting, the calculator, as Byron referred to, was actually a financial model showing what pledges, bill discounts we would be looking at and what the overall cost and participation would likely be. It's still a model that was provided only to the small group, but we're willing to share that with this larger group if need be. Once we do have a final version, obviously I'll be sharing it with this larger group, but we're still in the midst of that process. As Byron alluded to, there has been a few emails asking about questions related to the model and some of the calculations, which is all based off that low-income assessment analysis report. The other aspect we talked about last week was the collection of income and other demographic and customer data. We are still discussing that, but to give you some idea of what those were; some of the fields we were considering was language spoken, gender, account of housing type etc. I think we've got a few of them ironed out, but there's still more discussion to be had. As we come to a general agreement and conclusion, we will bring that to the larger group. Any questions? None

3. Unresolved items from the previous meeting – *Byron Pfordte*

- a. The additional 25% WEAFF grant has been applied to account

Pfordte, Byron - If I'm recalling correctly, this was presented in our last meeting that we did apply the 25% WEAFF and grant an additional 25% retroactively to the accounts.

- b. An additional grant to reach \$125 minimum have been added to accounts per Misty's request

Pfordte, Byron - We retroactively went back and applied additional funds to those who did not get the \$125 minimum applied to their account. So those have been taken care of. I believe Shannon notified the agencies of the accounts that were adjusted.

4. Update on new program design focusing on agency impacts – *Byron Pfordte*

- a. Propensity Model by Forefront Economics and estimated completion time

- i. Mark Thompson from Forefront Economics to join future meeting to discuss

Pfordte, Byron - I don't have an estimate for the completion time for the propensity model from Forefront Economics for Washington. I know that they're focusing on Oregon right now. Dan has been in more communication with them than I have – I should have reached out to him for more information, but I don't have an estimated completion date unfortunately. I apologize for that, but I think he will be here for our next Advisory group meeting. At some point, Mark Thompson from Forefront Economics will present on the propensity model and the needs assessment for Washington that they're conducting for us. Any questions on that? Obviously, the goal is to help us identify customers that would have a tendency or need to enroll in these programs, but for whatever reason have not. Also, allowing us to identify and target them with specific communication and outreach opportunities.

Yochi Zakai - Thanks, Byron. When you send out the notes from this meeting, could you perhaps include an estimated completion time for that?

Pfordte, Byron - Yes. No other questions.

5. Dedicated discussion of an agreed upon topic – *Byron Pfordte*
 - a. CBO Program Development
 - i. Use of funds

Pfordte, Byron - There were some emails that went around outside of this meeting, proposing some points on how the program should be developed and I believe it was proposed that the \$73,000 annual budget be provided to the CAA's and they control the outreach for for, and to, CBO's and the compensation would be for those outreach efforts – not tied to referral fees. In speaking internally, I don't think there has been any objections to that method, there would need to be, from our needs,, diligent reporting on activities to support the CBO. We'd like quarterly reporting on pledges received and compensation awarded. And, if it comes to it, a plan for unused funds, but I'm all ears and open to any suggestions on the direction for how this CBO program should be developed and administered. I will open it up for anybody's comments.

Yochi Zakai - I can chime in. I put the e-mail that I sent around earlier into the chat so folks would have it handy. Basically, the company would offer grants to CAA's that are interested. They could use that to perform outreach to community-based organizations, and then contract those community-based organizations to perform outreach programs, letting customers know about energy assistance. I'm really excited about this program and excited that we're talking about it. I reached out to many of the CAAs in advance to see who would be interested in participating in the program, and so far, I've heard back from Misty at Skagit and Lorena at Opportunity Council. They are definitely interested in learning more and seeing if they could participate. I don't think we should limit it to those two, but that just goes to say that I don't think we would expect every CAA to participate, but perhaps just more of a limited number of those that self-select, as interested. Lorena - do you want to add anything else?

Lorena Shah - I'm glad you teed up that conversation. Like Yochi said, we as an agency are very interested in this. We've been doing a little bit of this work with our rental assistance programming, which was a different way of working with the CBO's. The main points from our agencies point of view, for it to be viable is that there are funds to contract to those CBOs in order to support their capacity to do outreach, and to potentially bring people to the programs. Also, that there is sufficient capacity within whatever contracts, a certain level of FTE to be devoted to managing those contracts, and convening those CBO's together, learning from each other and going out to their location. This is not as simple as sending out subcontracts and subcontracting out all the money. We do need to retain funds to do a good job of subcontracting out because the expertise obviously lies with us on energy. And it's just really important that the agencies that do opt in, have FTE devoted to really do a good job on this type of outreach, and that there is also money to share with the CBO. So, we are paying for their knowledge and expertise in their communities that they serve. I would add just one note about thinking about what CNG is thinking regarding how many people are you signing up for the programs, I would say yes that is something we would also agree with. But, especially for folks that are new to this work, that there is definitely time that's needed to build these relationships for them to be really productive relationships. We still don't have the right recipe even in in Whatcom County all the time, a lot of times there are programs that don't quite fit the needs of the community. You're trying to advocate for the programs and for the benefits of the programs to a group of people who are kind of skeptical of your

programs. -UPDATE - Chris just sent me a message and he had the answer Yochi's question regarding when forefront is estimating to be done in Washington with their study, and it's at this time, it's mid-June.

Pfordte, Byron - Obviously having some experience, probably more experience than most of us on this call, we will likely bend your ear quite a bit on setting some goals and how to best administer this project, but I think you know the goal is to grow it so that there are more agencies involved. I think it would be good whether you plan to opt into this program initially or not, to still voice your concerns or offer your ideas in developing these programs so that it is something that, you know every agency need and capability I think is a little bit different. If we can make it as easy and uniform as we can across all the agencies, I think that would be beneficial. So please don't hesitate to speak up on this topic as, hopefully, it will be something that you utilize.

Pfordte, Byron – Lorena – to get a baseline of what to expect and make this program more successful, can you provide any insight as to realistic goals, enrollment goals?

Lorena Shah – I definitely would want to give some more thought to it but I would say I think it will definitely depend on the size of the organization that one would be working with, and what they're reach is into the community. It may be that there is different types of goals or different metrics for different types of organizations, or different sizes of organizations. I'm not sure a straight sort of percentage would work. I have to give that more thought. I would say when we're talking about some of our most vulnerable people, like it's a win to get a small handful of those who have been so disconnected from these types of services, even though it's a relatively small amount – those are really big wins for us. One example is we work with the hearing speech and deafness center here in in Bellingham, and there's, to be frank, not a ton of folks that are deaf in our community. They serve a rather small group, but these folks are so disconnected from mainstream society that the benefit of bringing in such a valuable resource, whether it's rental assistance, or a bill discount rate. So, I just want to be mindful of even small amounts of increases to me as a win because we are connecting some of the most disconnected folks in our communities. But I know that doesn't really answer your question. I think I'd have to think through that because it depends on how many gas accounts we have, knowing those that you're serving and that kind of thing to come up with some sort of formula for determining what's a reasonable goal for those different types of CBO. Another example we work with is a group that works primarily with farm workers, which I know OIC is on here and you guys are going to have probably loads more experience with this than us, but this group that provides promotoras to those communities, like many of them, are in housing that this type of service isn't going to really work. But there may be a portion of those that are in housing that do have gas bills, so it's kind of trying to make some guesstimates on out of your 200 people you serve, who is seemingly going to be a fit for this, and of those, how many do we think we could enroll?

Pfordte, Byron - Maybe for enrollment goals we table that for a little while as it may paint a clearer picture of what our goal should be as we address the types of outreaches and then also how many agencies are going to participate in this program? And so, with a \$73,000 budget are there any ideas for outreach to the CBO's and then any light that can be shed on how the CBO can be assisted in their outreach with those funds. I'll also ask if there's any issues with providing detailed reports on a regular basis, at least quarterly, on these activities and what compensation has been or what amount of the funds have been used for outreach, and how they've been used?

Lorena Shah - I do think that your quarterly reports of some sort are totally reasonable. We require that in the types of outreaches that I'm doing with CBOS's right now. We have some templates that we modify for each type of different outreach, with our current funding that we're using to support them with, we're doing a flat amount each month to those organizations for outreach and have included in their scope of work the type of outreach we're expecting. We're not doing cost reimbursement, which is harder to manage, we are doing cost reimbursement in the sense that the work happens, then we pay, but we're not billing. They're not sending in expanded general ledgers to us. And we only pay the amount they that they actually spent on the program. We are paying them flat monthly rates, as low as \$1000 for one of my programs and then upwards from there with rental assistance, which is a far bigger program and was fairly robustly funded for this work. Those contracts are bigger but ideally it would be, here's the scope of work, these are the types of activities, this is what you're going to report on, and we're going to give you a flat amount each month to accomplish that work. I don't know if that is something for CNG to consider, but from my perspective, which has worked out the best and it's the cleanest.

Pfordte, Byron – You're receiving outreach info from the CBO and then you're distributing that flat fee?

Lorena Shah - Correct.

Pfordte, Byron - And you're not requiring any sort of detailed report as to how it's spent. Is that correct?

Lorena Shah – Yes.

Pfordte, Byron- So, is there any measurement for your return on that that flat fee?

Lorena Shah- The quarterly reports then give us both narrative and numeric information on what was accomplished.

Kristi Hills (Guest) - I just wanted to chime in for Chelan Douglas Community Action Council. We also engage in contracts with what we consider our buying for partners, so they reach segments of the population, maybe a little better than we do at times. We trust them with the communications and pay them also for their work in a similar way that was just being talked about. We don't track the level of detail like how many applications were completed. We feel like that level of detail is not as beneficial as getting the word out, so our partners spend the time getting the word out. The kind of tracking that you maybe would be hoping for like the actual results are just going to be a little bit harder to track in this model. But we know through some of our programs like the eviction Rental Assistance program for example, we have no doubt that the outreach our partners are doing is effective just sheerly by the numbers of people who come through the door for that service.

Pfordte, Byron – Any idea how our eventual energy discount program and arrearage management program would fit into the presentation that the CBO provides to potential customers? I'm asking out of pure ignorance as I've never really experienced how outreach efforts and programs are prioritized. Anybody have any idea that can kind of educate me on that a little bit?

Kristi Hills (Guest) - Some of our clientele really works best by verbal communication as opposed to written communication. So, knowing who our partners are, for example, a small nonprofit close to us has regular in person, verbal communication with the Hispanic population around here.

So, we can share with our partners a particular message for quite some time. It's about rent and now it's switching to the working family tax credit, we just asked them to change their messaging for us. And sometimes it's about informing of the ramping down and closing out of a program, sometimes it's about the time frame, but the partner is here for us; what our needs are for the messaging and then they change the messaging as we need them to. When they have these conversations with others, they will hand out the flyers and things like that that we produce as well, and that's always nice. They include us in social media of their own. They make efforts in other types of media as well. So, it's just that extended reach that they have and those are partners that we have really solid relationships with already. They just talk to some of our customers more regularly if that makes any sense.

Pfordte, Byron - Absolutely.

Mickelson, Christopher - Within Cascades last journal rate case, the Commission, within its order established a pilot program for the CBO funds, and they gave us three years, but they expect to see results. So, kind of getting back to the previous question Byron asked about maybe more detail, I think we may need that to show results, otherwise we're not going to have a lot to be able to show the Commission. Something to consider as we design this.

Kristi Hills (Guest) - Is this coming down from CETA, also is it what other utilities do?

Mickelson, Christopher - This was specifically for Cascade within our general rate case order. So, I don't know if there was something else that may also impact this.

Lorena Shah – I do think between the company and those of us that may be interested in in taking up this pilot, we can show reach efforts. I'm trying to remember all the metrics we are collecting through our quarterly report, though I would agree with Christi, we are also working with our CBO's as well. Some of that also depends on how people are signing up, CNG may want to consider a field on how people learning about this. But I feel like we could come up with some interim level of metrics that would hopefully make the Commission feel comfortable that these funds are accomplishing something. We don't want to lean on straight enrollments because there's a lot of preparatory work and other work that that happens, that is useful and beneficial to count as well.

Mickelson, Christopher - I understand completely. I just wanted to bring this up because this is a three-year pilot, at which point I assume Cascade will have to go back to the Commission show the results, whatever that may be, as we've designed it, to continue the program. Otherwise, if we don't really have anything we can truly show result wise, I could see three years from now they say well that was nice of you, you're no longer funded for this program. I'm just throwing it out there, just something to consider as we do design the CBO program.

Kristi Hills (Guest) - Will there be a time that this group will be able to see what those benchmarks are? Well, the outcomes that you're trying to achieve that the Commission is trying to see realized. Will we be able to see what that looks like to maybe start getting a little more creative about how we could demonstrate.

Mickelson, Christopher - The Commission is in a process of performance-based regulation and there could be some benchmarks we want to try to tie in, there's some equity and marginalized communities that were supposed to try to reach there. So maybe we'll try to use some of those benchmarks, but overall, the Commission said; Cascade work with the advisory group to come up with a process and

design for this program that provides results in essence. I think most of the benchmarking is kind of what we feel we can get, that's not an overly administrative burden, both to agency, CBO or the company and kind of go from there.

Kristi Hills (Guest) - Great. Thank you. I would agree with what was said earlier, I think that we can be creative enough to come up with some outcomes as long as we're really understanding what they are. You know, we're pretty small here and as far as our reach with your services, high electricity here and less of the Cascade natural gas, but there is probably a percent or two here and we just have a hard time getting to them but would love to be a part of being creative to help you with this.

Pfordte, Byron – From what Chris has shared about the performance based regulations that the Commission is looking for, they definitely have details tied to low-income customers and a big part of that is enrollment, specifically arrearage management plans and reduction of arrearages. So obviously the programs we develop here have a huge impact on both those metrics. In my thinking, those are the sort of metrics that they're going to be looking for to justify the effectiveness of these programs. I know that Yochi said he sent an e-mail out and only heard from I think Misty and Lorena as far as interest in participating at least initially in this CBO program. While we have, I believe most agencies represented on this call, are there any others that would be interested in participating in this program?

Kristi Hills (Guest) - I'd say Chelan Douglas has some interest. The initial presentation got us a little nervous because the administrative burden seemed pretty high, but I think the open conversation here helps for us to be a little more open to it, so I'd say we have some interest.

Sylvia Schaeffer - This is Sylvia with Blue Mountain Action Council and I agree with Christy. I think we would be interested as well.

Lorena Shah - Byron, what is the time frame on this initial \$73,000? Is this for the whole three years we would be expected to contract or is this like a year one budget?

Pfordte, Byron - It is annual.

Lorena Shah- OK, starting in September or in October, or at any point, we get this up and going?

Mickelson, Christopher - It is actually tied to our annual WEAF program budget year, so start October through September.

Pfordte, Byron - I think with four or five agencies at least initially interested would be a good test group to get this off the ground. Would perhaps give a little more leeway in budget and coming from a marketing background I know that it takes a lot of trial and error and testing to find the right formula to reach customers, so we have a little bit of room to fail, which is not a bad thing.

Kristi Hills (Guest)

One question, just wondering if the agencies who are interested do agree, will we get some help from Cascade natural gas identifying, perhaps who to send mailers to or will that not be an option?

Pfordte, Byron - We will support how we can, and I think through the propensity study we will hopefully be able to identify and provide some targeting for outreach efforts for CBOs in those areas to connect with.

Pfordte, Byron – Knowing some of the metrics we need to receive, the hurdle to receiving detailed metrics about enrollment and applications, if it comes down to the Commission wanting to know quantities of applications and specifics about outreach conducted by the CBO's, are there any concerns that that will be an issue getting that information? No concerns.

Pfordte, Byron

Just for the record. Can I get agreement? I guess verbally or in the chat, if there are any issues with moving forward with the \$73,000 annual budget for outreach, for the CBO, just so we have it on the record? Or better to ask is there agreement on that with the above caveat? Full agreement.

Lorena Shah - Agreeing, as long as we can collaboratively develop those metrics, which was my only caveat.

Pfordte, Byron

And if those metrics do include quantity of applications generated by the CBO. You don't see that as an issue though, correct?

Lorena Shah - No, just more setting reasonable goals around it. But I think collecting it should be fine. In most cases, we may miss some if they are signing up in a different way. But that is something to think through too.

Kristi Hills (Guest) - I guess I would add to that too - If it is the same dollar amount across the board with the same expectation for the metrics across the board, we would be challenged with that in our area.

Pfordte, Byron - We would need to consider the demographics and geography of each of your areas and adjust goals accordingly. I don't think there can be a one size fits all for each of these CBO programs and outreach efforts from each agency. If anybody feels differently or disagrees, let me know.

Kristi Hills (Guest) – Okay, great, I think unique goals would be really important. I appreciate that you've acknowledged that. Thank you.

Pfordte, Byron - I don't think we had anything else on the agenda. I will open it up just to see if there's any general comments or questions.

Mickelson, Christopher - Our next large advisory group is March 15th. And of course, we will have two small advisory group meetings between then, so hopefully that next large meeting will come back with what our energy discount tiers are, percentages and maybe even show you some expected enrollment levels and things of that nature. We may even have demographic and customer information that we have decided on at that point. If not then, obviously that will get rolled to the next large meeting.

Pfordte, Byron - Topics for the next discussion or next meeting? I think it would be safe to add the tiers, the demographic, or at least data fields for our applications and surveys, and then I think we should probably continue discussing the CBO program. There is such a difference from one agency to the next, and the customers in the areas that you serve, we will need to rely on you for realistic metrics and goals for your agencies in this CBO program. So if you voiced interest in participating in that program please think about some realistic goals that can be achieved through that program, knowing the budget and your agency capabilities and we can we can discuss those and hopefully form some sort of plan for

measuring goals for each of you, and then collaboratively what the whole program goal can be. Meeting adjourned.