



Equity Advisory Group – Equity Lens Session #2

Meeting Date: November 19, 2021

Time: 7:30am – 9:00am

Location: Zoom Meeting

Attendees:

Facilitator:	EAG Members:	
Amber Lenhart, cedarplank	Michelle Bennington	Vanessa Strange
	Tami Dillon	Shauna Meharry
Avista:	Connie Kliewer	Ryann Louie
Annette Brandon	Brooke Beeler	Jessie Twigg-Harris
Ana Matthews	Will Von Bracht	Joe Dumlao
Renee Coelho	Clyde Abrahamson	Larry Mattson
Jaime Majure		
Anne Gannon	Guests:	
Matt Halloran	Carmen Groom – SNAP	
Amanda Ghering	Isidra Sanchez – OIC	
Mikaela Terpko		

Agenda

- I. Welcome & Introductions
 - Overview of Meeting: Rules and Intent
- II. Energy Assistance and Named Communities
- III. Avista Marketing & Promotions
- IV. Marketing Case
- V. OIC Energy Assistance
- VI. SNAP Energy Assistance
- VII. LIRAP Remodel Potential
- VIII. Discussion
- IX. Your Support Team and Next Meeting

Facilitator

Amber Lenhart
 Amber Lenhart
 Mikaela Terpko
 Ana Matthews
 Matt Halloran
 Isidra Sanchez
 Carmen Groom
 Ana Matthews
 Amber Lenhart

Meeting Notes

I. Energy Assistance and Named Communities

Mikaela provided a review of the Named Communities map that includes areas most likely to benefit from bill and weatherization assistance. She addressed the current saturation rate of bill assistance against the CETA goals. Both weatherization and bill assistance are combined to achieve the CETA targets.

Clarification was requested around where the zip codes are located and how we determine 100%. The percentages are based on census tract data, so factors at the individual or household level are “rolled up” to the census tract, which is “rolled up” to the zip code level; the Department of Health data around vulnerable communities considers how some may have low socioeconomic status or otherwise be more susceptible to climate change impacts. Annette clarified this is our draft at identifying these areas – need to do more granular research in more targeted way with EAG and other advisory group assistance. Characteristics of these areas are captured in the customer benefit indicators – but we need to dig into the mapping part more for part of the process.

EAG member Question/Comments/Feedback:

- variety of zip code links provided to demonstrate where the Spokane areas are- <https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/99202/>
- if you hit a certain threshold – you “blanket” the community (e.g. free-reduced lunch)
- [Washington Tracking Network \(WTN\) :: Washington State Department of Health](#)
- Re: saturation slide – named communities face lots of barriers for e.g. - transportation – seniors/disabled – can’t count on the ride to be on time or show up. When the bill is received just looking at amount to see the damage and throw the rest away.
- Neighborhood Advisory Council that meet once a month – good place to get information out
- Is there a way to consolidate the information – overwhelming – those that have to deal with it by themselves can be hard; they are in panic mode, confusion, often let it go.
- Let people make payments on what they owe without cutting them off.
- Too much text in a letter or insert is intimidating
- FYI - Spokane Regional Transportation looking for members on a citizen advisory board to help with understanding the barrier to transportation.

II. Avista Marketing & Promotions

Ana presented an overview of 2021 advertising that was focused on bill assistance. She shared sample materials for the Connections newsletter, flyer to partner agencies and

the *Power of Compassion* for COVID debt relief along with Spanish translation. Information also included the Weatherization Postcard target mailing along with flyers

Avista provides targeted outreach by working with Marketing and our area Community Action Agencies. Fundamental message is to “Call Us”.

EAG member Question/Comments/Feedback:

- Avista is present at mobile food markets and senior meal sites with their materials and information.
- What about community members that can't read and don't speak English or lack access to technology?
- What Asian languages/translators does Avista have available/access to?
 - we have over 100 translation services available for phone – but have not moved into print yet. Spanish is the translation service most requested, so we often have materials available in that language.
 - OIC utilizes - Language Link services for a phone translation.
- I really like the element of compassion in these communications. Fear, desperation, and anxiety are big factors when a person is dealing with limited resources.
- Has Avista considered an App to access these resources? People are applying for jobs or ordering food on apps. Email is not utilized as much – but if I have an App that sends me a notification and there is a link – that may be a lot more ease to access.
- Training people at community organizations that people already trust may be helpful and powerful. (school, food banks)
 - Ana – commented on the Community Partner Network that is available to the community action agencies through the Low-Income Rate Assistance Program to collaborate with other organizations to engage hard-to-reach audiences – will connect with OIC to have additional conversation.
- There have been issues with people not even knowing about rental assistance, even though it's been available for a long time - how has Avista's outreach been different? There's also been high barriers to rental assistance access - is Avista's debt relief low barrier?

Marketing Campaign Case study was presented by **Matt Halloran**

The Avista Marketplace campaign was to gain better understand energy efficiency as it relates to purchasing decisions.

Previous EAG meeting thought the promotion was skewed more to homeowner's vs renters. Energy efficient electronics would also qualify for a purchase.

EAG member Question/Comments/Feedback:

- No one on this call had seen the promotion.
- Provide flyers to food banks with a big headline that states “Renters May Apply”

- Can it just be \$1500 not for the house (lol) people need food, household products, etc.
 - what if Avista just gives \$1500 to all people who fill it out and it's not a sweepstakes?
- Call out that “renters” could apply for this opportunity.
- Their agency only has money to translate in four (4) languages; many others to consider. Not enough people to help translate for every language available. Wouldn't be enough people to help with the process. Need to consider not only equity for energy but equity in their community
 - Offering sweepstakes is not enough. People in the community are experiencing a great deal of instability, including financially. For example, individuals are being evicted from their homes. Considering Avista's power and wealth, how can Avista better support household financial stability, especially during this time of great crisis? A \$1,500 thermostat will not address the immediate critical needs of the community around housing, food, services, etc. *“What are people going to do with a new appliance when they're about to be evicted? Carry it around on the street?”*
- How to provide the information out to community members in a way to support the organization that we are asking to help with this process?

EAG members and other community-serving groups in the community receive many requests to share information with their communities. However, this puts a burden on the organization to understand the critical points to communicate, adapt the key messaging to use simple language, and translate messaging to appropriate languages for their audience. This burden should not be on the community (not just EAG member organizations), but rather Avista should do better to meet the community where it's at and not put the onus on CBOs. For example, Avista setting up a tent at a community event with multiple translators available, or work with organizations like SNAP to hire or otherwise provide compensation to the community members and groups that are being asked to spread the word about Avista programs and opportunities.

III. Energy Assistance Programs

Isidra Sanchez – OIC – Grant and Adams County – Director of Rental and Utility Assistance Program

- Serve 5,000 clients within a program year
- Four funding services, Commerce, LIHEAP and LIHEAP arrearage, Pacific Power, Avista, Cascade Natural Gas
- Each has unique requirements and regulation
- Range 0-150% FPL to 200% FPL
- Grants/Adams bill assistance – refers to weatherization – range of cost \$10k-\$23k.
- COVID provided opportunities for phone intakes – historically face to face
- Rural area for Grant/Adam – timesaver with phone intakes
- Served other areas of arrearages (phone, garbage, etc.)

- Due to air quality/wildfire, Commerce has enhanced program for a/c and air purifier – allow for renters as well.
- Water assistance program – new program
- Dollars go to the utility – not to the client
- Client can go online or call the office – as the weather turns – calls increase – try to return within 48 hours.

EAG member Question/Comments/Feedback:

The phone appointments at OIC will continue after COVID – has found it to be very advantageous

SNAP – Carmen Groom

- Energy and Water = Community Action portion of SNAP
- A variety of ways for outreach – word of mouth gets the word out quickest.
- Didn't want any additional promotion due to ability to handle the amount of people coming in the doors for assistance.
- Open appointments Oct-Dec all at once; with pandemic – managed workflow by open appointments monthly 3rd Tuesday of every month at 8am – taken in 2 ½ hours – continue through September – if hardship or shut off – can do an emergency appointment – 20-40 a day.
- Tend to overbook appointment due to the 20% no show rate. Workers 5-8 appointments a day. Developing a community portal (app) that people can utilize to book appointment or check on their app.
- Verify income, SS#, address, bill – this can be problematic – have ability for people to self-declare to ensure integrity. LIRAP (Avista) mirrors LIHEAP – the qualification is the same.
- Referrals to all the other programs – Wx, Rental Assistance Food, Senior tax, etc....Ride to Health – providing additional referrals, Water Assistance
- Lots of energy and rental assistance available and finding other creative ways to get assistance
- Had opportunity to work partner with Community agencies to bring Avista Debt relief to BIPOC, Latinos in Spokane, Jesus is the Answer, Pacific Islander Community of Washington – building these relationships
- Also engage customers with conservation education material

Ana - LIRAP Bill Discount Proposal

Help is available – how do you feel about your knowledge about these programs and the accessibility of the programs? What they do to make people aware and know things are available?

- LIRAP is Avista funded program – regulatory oversight by the WUTC. Laws that occur that change how we provide this work.
- CETA has provisions that affect our program design.

- Senate Bill 5295 – provisions around the process – but how do you help low income with bills as well as education and outreach.
- CETA heightens the eligibility threshold for who can qualify for these programs.
- SB requires that we include a rate discount that is available to ALL INCOME ELIGIBLE customer - % off your bill.
- The proposal to be shared has to be approved by the WUTC with accompanied rate case descriptor about what the rate should be intervenors, etc. it is a an 11-month process.
- Energy assistance advisory group – subcommittee (list of the participants (Avista, agencies, WUTC, public council and the Energy Project) work the design to move from grant based to bill discount. Different discount percentages based on income range. Providing affordable bill based on income. May have past due balance – lowest income – wipe out arrears. Spread the arrearages out – on time payments for a whole year – 90% of arrears will be wiped out. Emergency grant available to help others. The program rework proposed by the subcommittee has three components:
 - Bill discount - affordability
 - Arrearage – past due
 - Emergency – hardship
- Program strives to reduce the amount of income a customer spends towards their utility bill – goal is 6% or less
- Intake process by the agencies today – for this effort – self certification or enrolled in another program already or within income agencies either verbally or written – would be enrolled. Zero income would have to provide additional information. Within 6 months of enrollment – provide documentation to provide eligibility. Could be on the program for the year – no paperwork – would be discontinued.

EAG member Question/Comments/Feedback:

- One tool that is really helpful is **Unite Us** which is a database that connects services from all over Washington state. It is free to non-profits and does not require a phone number etc. for the individual you are referring and follow all HIPPA guidelines.
- What is the highest bill that we see? For those who aren't paying the bill is there any reach that we are doing?
 - Avista Action Team during the Power of Compassion – phone calls including knocking on doors to connect with those with past due balances and inform them of the assistance and payment options available.
 - COVID past due balance amount? Ana could not provide specifics but stated there are customers with considerable balances; pre COVID past due average was \$350
 - SNAP receives hardship referrals regularly and has a referral hotline for Avista customers in crisis. Avista does a great job connecting their customers with our services.

- Any Native families (from any Tribe) applying with your agency or office the Spokane Indian Housing Authority has a program that will pay their rent and utility for one year. Contact Lorrie at (509) 818-1495.
- Spokane County Regional Veterans Service Center can assist Veteran with energy concern, regardless of the provider.
<https://www.spokanecounty.org/1122/Veteran-Services>
- Thank you for all of the great information--in the presentation and in the chat.

EAG Final Comments

- Thank you for all your work; appreciate the difficulty to work with government requirements and appreciate the work you are doing with named communities who are suffering right now.
- Celebrating with students - first time ever seeing snow – special moment in their life!