



## Equity Advisory Group – Equity Lens Session #2

Meeting Date: November 10, 2021

Time: 4:30pm – 6:00pm

Location: Zoom Meeting

### Attendees:

<b>Facilitator:</b>	<b>EAG Members:</b>
Amber Lenhart, cedarplank	Gretchen Chomas, Community Member (SCRAPS)
	David Tietz, Salem Arms
<b>Avista:</b>	Adelle Whitehead, Martin Luther King Family Center
Annette Brandon	Jupiter McGee, Community Member (Sunrise Spokane)
Ana Matthews	
Renee Coelho	<b>Guests:</b>
Jaime Majure	Joni Bosh – NWEA
Colette Bottinelli	Molly Brewer - WUTC
Anne Gannon	Shay Bauman – Public Counsel
Matt Halloran	Carol Weltz – 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  
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 Mikaela Terpko  
 Colette Bottinelli  
 Matt Halloran  
 Isidra Sanchez  
 Carol Weltz  
 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.

### II. Avista Marketing & Promotions

Colette 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. Colette also presented the Weatherization Postcard target mailing along with flyers

EAG member comments:

- One member expressed that she like the collateral.
- The Marketplace slide – “appliance” offer is not clearly applicable to renters
- Are you capturing all voices – homeowner vs. renters

### **Matt Halloran**

The marketplace campaign was conducted to gain better understand energy efficiency as it relates to purchasing decisions.

EAG Member Question: Do you aim at property owner or landlords?

Matt responded that the promotion was sent to all Avista customers. He also elaborated that a filter for homeowners was not applied and shared that more than just appliances that qualify for purchases – tv and computer monitors could also apply. Matt stated that he recognizes the survey information bias to homeowner and based on information the company is acquiring. The intent was to learn: -Are you aware of the marketplace? Would you be willing to use it?

EAG Member Comment: “appliance” part of the house, stays with the house, so this marketing material did not provide an incentive for a renter to want to complete the survey. Adding something else “electronic”, including with the graphic or wording to make it clearer that the prize isn’t just for house appliances. Matt pointed out the challenge of competing with space and attention.

EAG Member Comment: add images of the other items [non-appliance] in the header

Ana asked whether anyone had seen the Power of Compassion campaign. EAG member responses were:

- receives mailers but doesn’t pay attention to the topic,
- another did not see the campaign,
- and one attendee said she saw the social media ad.

Colette stated that we saw our response rate go up on our bill assistance page as a result; do watch the website stats and did drive the traffic.

Ana expressed that we want to make sure this is appealing; how it affects the agencies and their capacity; close proximity to Idaho and how it affects. Colette stated that campaigns can cause confusion quickly if materials are widely distributed around Clarkston/Lewiston and Pullman/Moscow.

### 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.

#### **SNAP – Carol Weltz – Director of Community Action - Energy Bill Assistance Presentation**

- 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.
- 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....
- Lots of energy and rental assistance available and finding other creative ways to get assistance

### **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 UTC. Laws that occur that change how we provide this work.
- CETA has provisions that affect our program design.
- Rate Case descriptor about what the rate should be intervenors, etc. it is a an 11-month process
- SB 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.
- 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 Feedback: Love the verification happening after rather than before.

Isidra – Good way to spread the work. There is a lot of complexity to fill out the documentation but if the family is in crisis then they often miss out on the opportunity.

Avista would enroll right at the moment – another point of access to the benefit instead of referring to the agency.

EAG Member Feedback:

- likes the verification afterwards.
- want to get the programs to the tenant - any ideas to better engage them?

Isidra – target the general population – attend food bank, flyers. Would like a collaborative approach with renter association that they can provide information to their tenant.

Carol – apartment community partnership – the communication piece is hard –give them the cake first – this approach will work well.

EAG Member feedback:

- works closely with SNAP on the energy piece specifically with their apartment
- taking the urgency off to do the paperwork later – this is a huge barrier administratively – her experience by giving them the upfront gives people who are struggling a moment to take a breath – now I have a minute to concentrate on the next thing.
- it can take a long time to acquire needed documentation if you need a new copy of some official document (e.g. gender marker change on birth certificate)