

Equity Advisory Group – Equity Lens Session

Meeting Date: September 23, 2022

Time: 7:30am – 9:00am

Location: Zoom Meeting

Attendees:

Facilitator:	EAG Members:
Amber Lenhart	Michelle Bennington – West Central Food Bank
Avista:	Clyde Abrahamson – Spokane Indian Housing Authority
Tamara Bradley	Amber M – Takesa Village
Renee Coelho	Alexandra Swenson – Girl Scouts
Ryan Finesilver	Margee Chambers
Amanda Ghering	Claire Trapp
Levi Westra	Larry Mattson - Jacobson
Kim Boynton	
Kelly Dengel	
	Guests:
	Chanel Nestor – P3
	Simone Robinson – P3
	Shay Bauman – Public Counsel

Agenda

	Facilitator
I. Welcome & Introductions	Amber Lenhart
– Overview of Meeting: Rules and Intent	Amber Lenhart
II. Introduction of Public Participation Partners (P3)	Tamara Bradley
III. Public Participation Group Discussion	P3
IV. Named Communities Investment Fund – Energy Efficiency	Ryan Finesilver & Levi Westra
V. CEIP Condition #19	Tamara Bradley
VI. Your Support Team and Next Meeting	Tamara Bradley/Amber Lenhart

Meeting Notes

Welcome & Introductions

Introductions and Meeting Rules and Intent

Public Participation Partners (P3)

Company: P3 is here to discuss Avista’s public participation strategy and learn from you. We keep revisiting this topic because it is a large part of the CETA legislation, and we have committed to improving our public participation throughout the CEIP implementation period and so we have brought in experts to help with this initiative. They have a strong equity lens focus on public participation, they are a woman owned organization. We wanted to ensure that the EAG has their own chance to meet with P3

outside of the larger advisory group meetings Avista conducted with P3 the week of September 12th.

Public Participation Group Discussion

P3: What are some of the things that customers need to effectively communicate and engage with Avista moving forward. We will be conducting smaller community meetings in person and electronically and we would like to learn from you on how we can better engage with the community to gain valuable and meaningful participation during these meetings.

Q1: Based on your experience as advisory group members, how would you like to receive or provide information from Avista?

Member: Avista reaches out to us by coming by Takesa Village and will plan meetings, there are a lot of people in this community that are not connected to the internet so there could be more we can do to reach them by sending out flyers. I like to get notices through Facebook on upcoming events or on my phone, email.

Member: Is West Central still considered a Named Community?

Company: Yes, it is.

Member: It is important to get out into the communities, especially those that struggle with balance issues, I am all for clean energy, we need to start putting people in place, putting a face with folks and so that we can start to talk about this. Most people do not read their bill inserts a lot of people do not even open their bills to get that kind of information. I would be happy to help get more community folks involved and get people to attend meetings and try to break it down without all the technicalities on the things we are trying to do so we can increase the number of residences that come and participate in this kind of group and conversations.

Member: I work with a lot of seniors, disabled people, and the working poor and yes, they do not open their mail and we send things in colored envelopes, so they remember to open it. I like email communications, I am at work every day and see my email, but I notice that a lot of people like to text now. They will look at a text before they will look at anything else. I know it is not a great way to communicate, but it is effective, even seniors can text, their kids have taught them. It is limited, but it works.

Member: bring in food, information pertaining to their bills, etc.... Ana has done this in the past and it has gone over well and well attended.

Q2: Have you ever attended any Avista fairs or community meetings?

Member: Yes, Avista has also given food away and so I attended that as well.

Q3: For those that have attended, was there anything that you thought that Avista did really well around how that event was conducted or the surveys they provided, how did they do with advertising about these meetings or surveys?

Member: Advertising was well, it provided an opportunity to put a face to Avista, we are here, we are hearing what your needs are, we may not be able to solve all of those, but we are here in your community, and we are listening, and we are trying to support that community. They do a good job talking about the increases and what they are doing

with that money. There was a good connection between way the raise in bills and what the money was going towards.

Q4: Likewise, is there anything that they did not do as well, and they can improve on?

Member: for what they were trying to do, they did it very well, if they were. It would be good to hear more about the raise in rates and why it is happening.

Q5: I know you all get mailers and stuff like that; how do you feel about the communications you are getting from Avista as a customer? Is it clear, is the information useful and clear to understand? What do you like or how can they improve?

Member: Avista has a noticeable and appreciated presence here at Takesa, distributing bags.

Q6: What are some of the barriers to the community that you represent that we can make sure to accommodate to help improve the engagement that takes place in the future?

Member: In my neighborhood we have a large community of refugees, they do not all speak Spanish, they are Afghani and Palestinian and Ukrainian now and Arabic, Congolese, Dharia, the different languages they speak are not typically used in the bills that go out and so it is difficult for them to understand and I have told them that they can go to Avista and get help with their utilities, but they do not understand me because I do not speak their language. It is hard because they are not as common and Spanish so many do not provide translation for them.

Member: Technology and comprehension barriers.

Member: Fear of opening your bill, not understanding that there is help available. In our community outreach program, we advertise all the time that there is help available for energy bills, but until I go knock on people's doors to tell them about it, they will not apply. We also have many people who come into our food bank, and they do not live within our neighborhood boundaries so we cannot help them with their utility bills, and we have to give them other resources and it is a big defeat, and we are letting them down when we cannot help them. Not sure who is setting the boundaries, but it would be nice to help in removing that barrier.

Member: The community I live in, now has broadband and communication should improve through email and the internet. One thing I am fearful of is the housing authority now has a new program that is used to help pay rent and utility bills, that program is going to end at the end of the month, we spoiled them in a sense and now they are going to have to pay their utility bills and rent on their own. I see a problem coming in the future with that program ending.

Q7: We will be hosting community meetings in specific communities to ensure we remove barriers for broadband and technology issues. We know the area is large and so we need to be very intentional about where we hold these meetings, are there areas or spaces within communities that would be open to us coming to share this information?

Member: We have a clubhouse at Takesa where there are chairs and a table. Please reach out to me and I can get in touch with anyone if needed.

Member: The City of Spokane has community centers in many of the low-income communities, reach out to the directors and also the schools, the schools have spaces, you can also provide food distribution and an Avista energy fair and that will increase participation.

Member: The west central community Center has a large gymnasium that we can meet in. Kim, the director, can help with logistics.

Member: The Spokane Tribe and the Spokane Indian Housing Authority has several places to meet it all depends upon the size of the group.

Member: in Cheney we have a program called Feed Cheney, the occur monthly at the REC center in Cheney, there is also a food bank and clothing bank in the same center, so you may be able to reach out to them. I think the laundromat is a great place to add flyers for promoting the event.

Member: If you are going to have a meeting in this area, we would like to combine it with our weatherization program and the solar program for the tribal members here.

Q9: What else would you like to share with us as we plan the public engagement strategy around this?

Thank you for your time, we will definitely be using this information for reaching out to the community.

[Named Communities Investment Fund – Energy Efficiency](#)

Energy efficiency (EE) program within our CEIP is called named communities projects, this is designed to give the control to the EAG to help decide which projects to pursue. Let's start with a baseline around EE and what it is, it is basically having the same function of electricity while using less energy. We use other terms like conservation and demand side management. The biggest benefit is saving energy and reducing the energy burden, we do not want you to waste energy with inefficient equipment. As a system wide resource, energy efficiency helps keeps rates lower.

The named community investment fund is funded by the energy efficiency group, about \$2 million annually and approximately \$500,000 will be specifically for EAG led programs.

We partner with community action agencies, local installers, regional programs, and customers.

Member: Will solar panel funding and installation ever be available for my low-income community?

Company: Let's parking lot and come back to it shortly. Solar is not part of EE, but we will still have room for that conversation.

Energy efficiency focuses on residential water heaters, space heaters, insulation, doors, windows, thermostats, new construction, and home energy audits. As well as lighting, food services and shell, HVAC, grocery, other customer projects, and audits for businesses. A lot of savings can occur with having a smart programable thermostat.

Maybe the EAG wants to look at a community organization which is why I am mentioning business incentives.

Overview of programs available on myAvista.com under the “find rebates” section.

Member: If you are a renter, who would bare the costs to upgrade the housing? Would it be the renter or the landlord?

Company: That is a great question and one of the hardest questions to answer, there are split incentives, where the landlord and the tenant each get something. We want to make it easy and give everyone something, we must approach the landlord as they own the property. We also do not want rent to go up by making significant repairs to the home, so it is fine line we have to walk.

Member: Has Avista done studies on savings using Heat Recovery Ventilation systems?

Company: Yes, we have done many projects using HRVs.

Member: So, is the investment with HRV to cost savings ratio worth it for most homeowners?

Company: Yes, it can be, we do recommend that the HRV comes after any "leaks" in the home have been dealt with, then the HRV starts to make economic sense. As part of the audit process leakage can be identified and measured and fixes for the leaks can be identified.

Member: Many of the properties in my neighborhood are being sold to LLCs, have you had any success working with them?

Company: It is a reality that there are businesses buying properties, we are open to engaging with them. But that is a hard question to answer.

Member: It would be good to reach out to property management companies that manage homes and apartments, and they may be captive audience to help get ahold of who actually owns the home and see if upgrades can be made.

Facilitator: As a small landlord, this is something we just went through. We want to upgrade from baseboards to a ductless system because we care about energy conservation and lower bills for our tenants, but balancing the upfront cost is hard when the landlord isn't saving money on the upgrade

Company: Thanks - for being a great example of a landlord who cares about the environment and is helping their tenant manage their energy bill. You may not be seeing the energy savings per se - but it may result in a tenant who sticks around because they can manage the costs related to the operation of their home. Or if you ever move into your rental - you will be happy with that upgraded heating system! 😊

The named community approach will be EAG driven projects such as residential energy efficiency, multifamily shared incentives (tenant and landlord), bring efficiency to businesses who serve named communities, and mobile home health and safety. Purpose: to achieve meaningful EE improvements on projects identified by the EAG as a high priority. \$500,000 annually with flexibility for project completion. The fund can only be used towards energy efficiency measures and can go towards and health and safety measure such as roofing or wiring or correcting things that will prevent energy efficiency.

We do not want the EAG to feel overwhelmed or like this entire project is on their shoulders, we have about 30 employees that are here to support these initiatives.

The EAG will own the process for identifying, nominating, and prioritizing projects, determine the correct selection and prioritization methodology.

This is a rolling timeline, this \$500,000 will be available annually. There is no better time than now, but we do not need to select anything now or create a process now, but if you know of something now, it would be good to talk about that sooner rather than later.

Please throw your thoughts in the chat, talk to your communities, and send us an email or call Tamara, Amber, or Renee.

Member: Does Avista have a rubric or other tool to help the EAG prioritize the projects and the benefits to the community, I think there needs to be some type of impartial tool to help the EAG reduce down the ideas they brainstorm.

Company: We can help develop a tool, we have experts who are looking at these daily and can help with providing information, we do not want to put a lot of red tape on it we want things to be done that are important for this group.

What questions do you have?

Member: That was a lot to absorb, is there a way that the food bank can get some help in terms of just doing something to make it better for our workers as well as the people that come to see us. I am not sure how that would look, so maybe what we can do it get together with Avista or someone from Avista to talk about what that would look like.

Company: I think we will follow up with you Michelle. This could be a project that we can bring to the EAG to discuss and see if it would qualify based in what the EAG decides. Thank you for bringing this project up, starting the project can start with a conversation just like this. So, thank you.

Member: In Avista's service area, is there a way to get data on low-income home ownership. That may be a good audience to go after for EE projects. That way you do not have to deal with absentee landlords....

CEIP Condition #19

With the approval of our CEIP, we were required to comply with 38 conditions on top of the actions required from our CEIP. In the upcoming months we are going to start going through those conditions in more detail. Sometimes we will be asking your thoughts on how we did in certain areas, and some will require EAG approval. Condition #19 does not require EAG approval, but we still want to inform you and make sure that you are on board with this. This condition required Avista to track translation services and we need to come up with that metric by Oct. 1. We discussed internally and came up with 2 metrics. We are going to track the number of translation services available for certain customer outreach channels. Could be website, could be printed materials, phone calls etc., We are working on narrowing those channels and we will also count the distinct languages utilized for each outreach channel identified such as energy efficiency materials, energy assistance materials etc.,

That is a lot of information, we will update you next month on the channels selected. Are we making steps in the right direction?

Wrap Up

Avista: We have a lot of conditions, provided a tentative schedule of agenda items for the remainder of 2022 and into 2023. There is a lot coming so thank you for your time and your input we really appreciate it. We may send emails, we may send surveys, we may have joint meetings with other advisory groups. There may be times where we are going to need to reach out to you outside of our regularly scheduled session so we would like to know how you would prefer that communication? Sounds like most people are good with email being the number one form of communication. We are excited to have the new fund for the EAG to consider.

Facilitator: We really appreciate you and your connections to the communities, we encourage you to think about this awesome opportunity of the named community's investment fund between now and the October meetings and how we can use this fund to support the community,

Reminder of upcoming meetings on October 19th and 21st