

Diversity Advisory Council Meeting Notes

March 15, 2022

Attending from the council:

Dolores Martinez, EUVALCREE
Indika Sugathadasa, PDX HIVE
Cheryl Roberts, African American Alliance for Homeownership
Susan Badger-Jones, special projects consultant
Rebecca Descombes, Native American Youth and Family Center
Kheoshi Owens, Empress Rules
Terrance Harris, Oregon State University

Attending from Energy Trust:

Elizabeth Fox	Kenji Spielman
Emily Findley	Kirstin Pinit
Alex Novie	MacKenzie Kurtzner
Amanda Thompson	Melanie Bissonnette
Amber Cole	Renee Garrels
Andy Griguhn	Sloan Schang
Albert Stanfield	Steve Lacey
Bayoan Ware	Sarah Castor
Caryn Appler	Shelly Carlton
Emily Estrada	Sue Fletcher
Emma Clark	Thad Roth
Greg Stokes	Tracy Scott
Hannah Cruz	Tyrone Henry
Jackie Goss	Wendy Gibson
Jessica Kramer	
Julianne Thacher	
Kesean Coleman	

Others attending:

Lindsey Dierksen, LD Consulting	Anna Kim, Oregon Public Utility Commission
Alder Miller, CLEAResult	Ezell Watson, Oregon Public Utility Commission
Jenny Sorich, CLEAResult	

1. Welcome, Agenda Review and Group Reflection

Tyrone Henry, Energy Trust diversity, equity and inclusion lead, convened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. The agenda, notes and presentation materials are available at Energy Trust's website at <https://www.energytrust.org/about/public-meetings/diversity-advisory-council-meetings/>.

Tyrone Henry started the meeting by leading a group reflection on a news clip showing the discriminatory actions taking place in Ukraine towards Black citizens. While these actions are especially visible in the midst of the war and humanitarian crisis the country is experiencing, they represent an underlying attitude of anti-Blackness prevalent among the general population.

Several council members noted they were not surprised by the attitudes and actions portrayed in the video (Terrance Harris, Indika Sugathadasa). One member shared firsthand experience of racism in that part of the world and mentioned in some parts of Europe people from Africa still experience similar or worse treatment than Black Americans (Terrance Harris). One council member pointed out that in the news clip, the white newscasters referred to the Black population as “others” and “people of color” instead of Black. White people should make an effort to refer to specific racial groups instead of grouping them under the same “people of color” umbrella when possible. She said that it is appropriate to notice someone is Black, and added that whiteness is something anyone can perpetuate, not just white individuals (Kheoshi Owens).

2. Updates from Tyrone

Topic summary

Tyrone Henry delivered updates on ongoing work of interest to the council. First, he shared an update on an effort to develop a supplier diversity tracking system to give greater visibility into Energy Trust’s awarded contracts and enable reporting to stakeholders. After exploring the option of having an outside contractor build the system, we have ultimately opted to create this using internal resources. Energy Trust’s IT team and other staff are now working on this and hope to complete the project by the end of 2022.

Tyrone provided an update on two contract solicitations for program management and delivery contractors to administer Energy Trust’s Residential and Production Efficiency programs. He shared that there has been much more interest and engagement from potential bidders compared with the last contract solicitation, with more than 40 companies expressing interest through attending informational webinars and submitting applications.

Council member Kheoshi Owens has been nominated as one of Oregon’s Top 100 business leaders in the state. The council and attendees offered congratulations, and Kheoshi said the nomination was validating, since this work can be isolating and discouraging at times. Tyrone has also been selected as an honoree of Daily Journal of Commerce’s Oregon Building Diversity 2022 event on March 31.

Lastly, Tyrone announced that the Diversity First Thursday events will be on hold until September so he can dedicate time to other priority work.

Discussion

No discussion.

Next steps

Council members are invited to share ideas for topics to explore in future Diversity First Thursday events.

3. Recruitment for OPUC Community Advisory Council

Topic summary

Ezell Watson, diversity equity and inclusion director for Oregon Public Utility Commission, shared an update that the commission will soon begin recruiting for a new community advisory council. The council is being formed as a result of legislation passed in 2021 that requires the commission and utilities to get a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of energy burden on customers and communities.

The commission plans to explore accessible pathways to obtain direct input from communities, including by forming a community advisory council, which will be funded through intervenor

funding. The council's purpose will be to inform the commission on dockets, processes and activities. Ezell said that he is reaching out to the Diversity Advisory Council now to determine members' interest in participating on the new community advisory council.

The committee members will be compensated for their participation, and the commission will not ask members to share intellectual property without compensation. The compensation amount will be based on a set budget from an allocated fund. The commission determined a need to provide visibility into this budget. Diversity consultants can be in high demand, and it is not fair to disclose a request for information without giving them an idea of whether the compensation will be worth their time to participate.

The commission is also introducing a request for information seeking evaluators to help assess a tool it will use to gauge the ability to effectively engage specific communities without homogenizing them into one category. These environmental justice communities include Black, tribal and low income. Anna Kim shared that they are seeking one or two additional evaluators to help review, and they would be representing the Diversity Advisory Council as a member.

Discussion

The council commented that this request is familiar, asking how many Black and other people of color were consulted in determining the budget, and was the equity lens used in setting the budget (Kheoshi Owens). Ezell stated there were BIPOC individuals involved, including himself, but the overall amount of intervener funding being used was determined by legislation. Additional funds will be contributed by the commission from the lens of equitable access. Ezell stated he feels the budget is not currently equitable, but this activity represents an incremental gain. Activity is primarily implemented by commission staff, which is why it is seeking other perspectives from community members who will be given equitable access and visibility into commission processes. He added what he hopes to accomplish with the new committee is to leverage these community voices to get the commission to look internally at the organization and its processes.

Tyrone Henry asked when the request for information would be released, who the target audience is and if the commission needs help broadcasting this opportunity to communities of color. Anna Kim said it has been released and closed March 24, and at that point the panel would review the responses and set interviews. The work supporting outreach and helping collect information from communities will be done during second and third quarter. Tyrone suggested sharing these types of opportunities directly with the source, specifically ethnic chambers of commerce and similar organizations.

A council member offered that Energy Trust Existing Buildings Program's Community Based Liaison group is a model for equitably engaging diversity consultants while giving them agency to create change. The member shared their positive experience participating in this group, stating they receive an hourly rate and that it is a different experience and structure compared with Diversity Advisory Council. The liaisons are racially diverse individuals who bring their own areas of expertise and have the autonomy to decide what Energy Trust needs and what assessments and activities to take on within their purview. It was suggested that the commission should adopt this model instead of creating a council in order to be more efficient in assessing internal processes (Kheoshi Owens). Ezell responded he welcomes the dialogue and suggestion, however some of the commission's processes are driven by legislation, which limits what it can do unilaterally.

Tyrone expressed approval for the Community Based Liaison model and its members and thanked the Existing Buildings program for creating this structure. Upon request, Energy Trust staff member Wendy Gibson shared an overview of how the group was created in October 2020 and how it has evolved based on input and learnings from group members. Instead of simply being in an advisory role, the group is now empowered to create and execute a scope of work to have real influence to make Energy Trust's activities more equitable.

Next steps

Council members who are interested in participating are invited to let Ezell Watson or Anna Kim know soon.

4. 2022 Budget Update

Melanie Bissonnette and Greg Stokes provided a preview of changes to Energy Trust's annual action-planning and budgeting process based on feedback heard from stakeholders, including the advisory councils. Stakeholders indicated they wanted to be engaged earlier in the planning and budgeting process in ways that are relevant to their expertise, with less detail but more context. To address this feedback, Energy Trust will be engaging its advisory councils earlier, with an initial engagement in April followed by a "deep dive" planning workshop in June/July to provide subject matter expertise and collaborate with staff in the early development of action plans.

Discussion

The council expressed appreciation for the new process and asked how Energy Trust can move council input from an advisory role toward a collaboration role to create change more quickly. Racial diversity leads to quicker action, and Energy Trust should not feel like it needs to do everything on its own (Kheoshi Owens). Staff emphasized that the "deep dive" planning workshops in June/July are an opportunity for closer collaboration between advisory council members and Energy Trust staff in the early stages of developing action plans. The council observed that perfectionism is prevalent at Energy Trust and that can hold back progress. Staff stated the project team is following an iterative approach to evolving the budget process; introducing and adapting incremental changes more quickly based on feedback.

The council also requested that a joint meeting with the Conservation and Renewable Energy advisory councils, that was canceled to accommodate the new budget engagement sessions, be rescheduled in some form in order to meet and connect with the other councils (Kheoshi Owens). Although the joint meeting was cancelled to accommodate the new process, staff acknowledged the value of relationship-building between the councils.

Council members expressed interest in bringing all three advisory councils together in an informal social event scheduled in the near future to build and strengthen relationships (Kheoshi Owens). The council indicated typical council meetings don't provide enough opportunity to truly connect and build trust (Susan Bader-Jones). Tyrone offered to support this event and indicated he could also explore hosting it as an in-person engagement.

The council asked about the racial demographics of the Conservation and Renewable Energy advisory councils and whether members had received any equity training. A council member expressed concern based on a first-hand experience of encountering racism at an Energy Trust meeting, stating it should not risk exposing other council members to that painful experience (Kheoshi Owens). Staff acknowledged both councils were predominantly white. Hannah Cruz, who facilitates the Conservation Advisory Council, shared that both councils are exploring a new enrollment process to help diversify membership, using an approach that is similar to what is

used with the Diversity Advisory Council. She stated that as part of the process, each current member will complete a skills matrix to help identify knowledge and experience gaps, and part of that involves disclosing what equity training they have received. She also said there is intention to bring equity training to the council and not assume their knowledge.

The council reiterated the risk of new members of those councils experiencing racism. Council leads should create a harm reduction strategy to respond to any incidents that may occur (Kheoshi Owens). Tyrone expressed that Energy Trust is growing, and with that growth there are quite a few scars. He echoed the need to be intentional in order to move past the harm, and that means being prepared to address racism in the moment. A council member thanked Kheoshi Owens for speaking up and sharing her personal experience, although it is painful to hear about the pain of others, it is one way of learning and registering that pain within ourselves. A council member noted there is still a lot of work to do, as Energy Trust is still in the process of educating its own board of directors (Susan Badger-Jones). The council discussed normalizing a culture of love where direct feedback would be welcomed, instead of a culture of fear that keeps people silent.

Next steps

The next council meeting on April 19 will focus on asking council members to share perspectives on market trends and customer/community needs. The “deep dive” planning workshop will take place in June or July.

5. Announcements

Council members were invited to share updates and announcements. Kheoshi Owens gave an update on a new cohort and discussion series from her company Empress Rules. Discussion topics will include anti-racism in communications, anti- and pro-Blackness, climate change and Black and indigenous healing.

6. Public Comment

There was no additional public comment.

7. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:47 a.m. The next council meeting is scheduled for April 19, 2022, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.