

Diversity Advisory Council Meeting Notes

April 18, 2023

Attending from the council:

Susan Badger-Jones, special projects consultant
Terrance Harris, Oregon State University
Indika Sugathadasa, PDX HIVE
Dolores Martinez, EUVALCREE
Oswaldo Bernal, OBL Media
Rhea Standing Rock, Sunlight Solar
Christopher Banks, Urban League of Portland
Rebecca Descombes

Attending from Energy Trust:

Michael Colgrove
Emily Findley
Elaine Dado
Elizabeth Fox
Danielle Rhodes
Cameron Starr
Alana Hoyman-Browe
Sarah Castor
Hannah Cruz
Elisa Simko
Abby Spegman
Mana Haeri
Cody Kleinsmith
Kathleen Belkhatay
Kate Wellington
Kenji Spielman
Themba Mutepfa
Steve Lacey
Lenora Deslandes
Sue Fletcher
Ashley Bartels

Jeni Hall
Kirstin Pinit
Sloan Schang
Emma Clark
Melanie Bissonnette
Mia Deonate
Tracy Scott
Wendy Gibson
Laura Schaefer
Amanda Thompson
Natalia Ojeda
Amber Cole
Scott Clark
Julianne Thacher
Jay Ward
Taylor Ford
Debbie Menashe
Amanda Zuniga
Alexis Brunelle
Thad Roth

Others attending:

Ezell Watson, Oregon Public Utility
Commission
Anna Kim, Oregon Public Utility
Commission
Michelle Scala, Oregon Public Utility
Commission
Shelly Beaulieu, Dragonfly Consulting

Huong Tran
Vanessa Burchfield, Burch Energy
Ivonne Saed, Saedgraphic
Guillermo Castillo, Small Business Utility
Advocates
Lindsey Diercksen, LD Consulting
Alder Miller, CLEAResult

1. Welcome and Group Reflection

Mike Colgrove, executive director, convened the meeting at 9:04 a.m. The agenda, notes and presentation materials are available on Energy Trust's website at <https://www.energytrust.org/about/public-meetings/diversity-advisory-council-meetings/>.

Staff member Cameron Starr reviewed protocols for available interpretation services in English and Spanish.

Mike Colgrove introduced Oregon Public Utility Commission's Michelle Scala, who is now managing its Energy Justice program. Michelle introduced herself and spoke about her role and ways it intersects with Diversity Advisory Council and the commission's overall diversity, equity and inclusion initiative led by Ezell Watson. Michelle assumed her new position last year after initially joining Oregon Public Utility Commission in 2020. The Energy Justice program aims to incorporate energy justice principles into oversight decisions to address disproportionate energy burden on communities of color. It envisions a more innovative, holistic approach involving dialogue between communities and decision-makers, and implementing a new diversity, equity and inclusions framework into utility decision-making in coordination with Ezell Watson. The program will work across utility divisions in coordination with Anna Kim.

2. Introductions and Diversity Advisory Council member renewals

Topic summary

Mike Colgrove led a round of introductions among the council members, starting with two new members who were recently confirmed.

Rhea Standing Rock has a degree in renewable energy from Clackamas County and comes with experience in energy efficiency as an electrician and installer. Rhea stated her motivation for joining the council is her desire to be part of the progression towards energy justice.

Christopher Banks is the director for education and workforce development at Urban League of Portland. Christopher shared his interest in participating in discussions about how to increase access for historically underserved communities and communities of color.

Mike Colgrove reviewed the existing process for recruiting new members to Diversity Advisory Council and invited input on whether certain steps of the process should be followed more formally in the future. For example, council members could create a skills matrix to review and score future candidates, implement an interview process for candidates or vote on new members as a group. Each council member can serve up to two three-year terms; after completing the first term, a member can renew for a second term with a verbal commitment. Mike Colgrove announced that two current members had just done this—Indika Sugathadasa and Delores Martinez.

Discussion

The council asked what would be included on a skills matrix (Rebecca Descombes). Mike Colgrove stated a matrix has yet to be developed, and that could be discussed at a future meeting or be delegated to a sub-group of volunteers. Energy Trust's board of directors uses a skills matrix for recruitment, and it includes attributes like industry experience, personal lived experience, background skills and geographic location. A Diversity Advisory Council matrix could help select for demographic criteria that the council deems important, and also help identify where gaps exist.

Council members asked if there have been cases in the past where an applicant was new to the energy space and lacked industry experience (Rebecca Descombes). Mike Colgrove answered that in the past, recruitment relied heavily on networking by former council lead Tyrone Henry and members of the foundational Diversity Advisory Council. For this council, members are not required to have an energy background, and there is a need for people who are connected to their communities and have other areas of expertise.

The council asked if Energy Trust's Conservation and Renewable Energy advisory councils used a skills matrix for recruiting, and what their overall process was like (Susan Badger-Jones). Mike Colgrove stated those councils are also in the process of re-examining recruitment practices. Conservation Advisory Council facilitator Hannah Cruz provided an update that the two councils each developed and began using a skills matrix for recruitment in 2022. The council said developing a skills matrix is important to help discover and clarify what the council needs when recruiting new members (Susan Badger-Jones).

An attendee asked if it has been difficult to identify new Diversity Advisory Council members, and how important is it to have all the vacancies filled—that could affect how many steps to include in the process (Anna Kim). Mike Colgrove said recruitment has been ongoing for several months to fill four vacancies. Many potential candidates were identified in that time, and some exited the process for various reasons. Having a broader group working on recruitment rather than just one person is expected to be a process improvement.

A council member asked if Energy Trust could provide an example skills matrix showing different categories of experience that could show up in the new matrix being developed (Rhea Standing Rock). Hannah Cruz showed the matrix the Conservation Advisory Council uses and reviewed the different types of professional and lived experience included on it.

Next steps

Energy Trust will follow up to provide examples of skills matrices for council members to review. Council members are also invited to volunteer for an initial sub-group to move forward with this area of work.

3. 2023 Work Plan Topics

Mike Colgrove led a discussion on several council work plan topics for 2023. First, council members discussed timing and format for a planned social event with members of Energy Trust's other advisory councils in June. The event will take place in Portland, with Energy Trust covering transportation and lodging costs as needed for members located in other parts of Oregon.

Council members also discussed their availability for another social event with Energy Trust's board of directors. Possible dates include July 12 when the board will be assembling for a retreat and Diversity Advisory Council will also be meeting for a deep dive engagement session. This can take place as either a lunch event or an afternoon social, or a dinner the night before.

Mike Colgrove then reviewed a calendar of topics the board will be discussing in 2023. In May, they will hear the final results from 2022, as well as progress toward the current five-year strategic plan. The board will also kick off development for Energy Trust's next five-year strategic plan this year, starting with hearing from a market intelligence panel and selecting six topics they would like to learn more about. Energy Trust staff will develop a white paper to dive deeper on each of these topics over the summer.

In June, the board will hold its meeting event in Coos Bay, which will also include project tours and a community reception. In August, the board will be engaged in budget development and diversity, equity and inclusion topics. It will also continue an ongoing series of deep dive sessions on each of the program sectors throughout the year. In October, the board will hear a presentation on the 2024 draft budget, and the advisory councils will also have an opportunity that month to hear the budget presentation in a joint engagement.

Discussion

Council members shared their availability for the proposed social events; some members had prior commitments while others confirmed they can attend. A council member expressed a preference for the lunch engagement option with the board (Christopher Banks). Other members expressed no preference, stating any format was fine provided the full group has a chance to mingle, which could be limited by a seated table situation (Susan Badger-Jones).

Mike Colgrove asked the group what topics they might like to learn about in future meetings and provided some suggestions. The council expressed interest in learning more about collaborations with community-based organizations, stating these organizations provide connections with community members that Energy Trust can tap into to boost its outreach and reach more customers (Rebecca Descombes). Council members also want to hear personal stories from customers and communities that received Working Together grants (Susan Badger-Jones).

A council member asked about Energy Trust's Trade Ally Network and how it is supported by staff, explaining they would like to better support conversations with potential trade allies (Indika Sugathadasa). Mike Colgrove shared that while there is not a community liaison specific to trade allies, they can speak with Energy Trust's customer experience manager, Cameron Starr, who can also connect them with local trade organizations such as Professional Business Development Group.

The council shared interest in mentorship and learning opportunities for new small businesses in the energy field, and for students who want to get involved in the trades or other energy-related jobs (Oswaldo Bernal). Mike Colgrove said the new Communities and New Initiatives sector will be engaged in workforce development activity and can share updates with the council.

Next steps

Mike Colgrove will use all the feedback gathered at the meeting to develop a work plan for the 2023 calendar year, in coordination with staff and potential speakers. The draft workplan will be shared at the next meeting before being adopted. There will also be an update on the future of Energy Trust's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion services function, which Mike Colgrove is currently working to envision with the help of Human Resources and the Executive Team.

4. Legislative Update

Topic summary

Hannah Cruz, stakeholder relations and policy manager, provided an update on state legislative activity. Hannah provided a reminder of Energy Trust's grant agreement, which prohibits lobbying, advocacy and taking position on any legislation, ballot measure or candidacy; staff may provide information to legislators provided they do not attempt to influence them.

This year's session saw more than 2,900 bills and resolutions introduced. Hannah Cruz explained the 2023 session builds on previously enacted policies such as Governor Brown's

executive order directing state agencies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Hannah reviewed other significant energy laws that were passed in 2021 and 2022.

Hannah Cruz presented on energy bills of interest to Energy Trust and their status, many of which are now in the joint Ways and Means committee, meaning they have a budget or funding impact for the state. Many equity and community access bills have moved on to joint Ways and Means committee, such as one dealing with low-income bill assistance and another directing Oregon Department of Energy to establish a program for environmental justice communities to learn about energy resources. Another category of bills Energy Trust is tracking are based on recommendations from the REBuild (Resilient, Efficient Buildings) Task Force, which is looking to decrease emissions across existing and new building types.

Other bills of interest focus on renewable energy and community resilience, energy strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, clean energy technology and housing. Hannah Cruz shared that one proposed bill that would have prohibited Energy Trust from incentivizing certain gas appliances did not move forward in this session.

Discussion

The council asked about a bill that would raise the baseline for efficient lighting, and how that change would be communicated to businesses if it were to pass (Oswaldo Bernal). Hannah Cruz said that wasn't known yet, but in the past when standards have been set for products, the state agency in charge is typically in the lead. Energy Trust would work to coordinate with that agency and follow up with communications and outreach to customers.

The council asked about the next steps for the low-income assistance bills (Christopher Banks). Hannah answered that House Bill 3459 is in joint Ways and Means, and anticipate it being picked up and considered again after May 17.

Council members asked what happened with one of the recommendations from the REBuild task force that would re-direct Energy Trust funding to support climate and equity goals. Hannah answered that policy recommendation has not surfaced in any bills currently being considered.

Next steps

Energy Trust will continue providing updates as remaining bills move forward in the process.

5. Market Intelligence Information Gathering Session

Topic summary

Alanna Hoyman-Browe, project manager, shared questions to guide a discussion on market intelligence, which were provided in advance. She re-iterated that the purpose of these sessions is for Energy Trust to start building out its budget and business plan for the following year with a strong grounding of where the market is and what communities are experiencing.

Alanna reviewed how council will be engaged throughout the remainder of the year. There will be a second deep dive session in July that will be more focused on specific questions and program designs. The collected feedback will be reflected in action plans developed through the budget process.

Discussion

How is energy landscape changing since April 2022? What market trends are on your organization's horizon in 2024 that Energy Trust should plan around?

A council member stated energy prices have generally increased, putting social and financial pressure on African American communities. Gas prices are also fluctuating, which tends to hold electrical distribution systems hostage and filters down to consumers (Christopher Banks).

Another council member stated they learned in a recent Energy Trust customer survey that Latino communities were one of the hardest impacted groups in terms of not receiving the same information as other communities, such as what offers are available for them to participate in (Dolores Martinez).

Council members discussed opportunities to help people trying to figure out how to assemble available resources in one place. There was a trend at end of last year of people pausing weatherization programs in expectation of new federal funding opportunities, but now people are confused. Supply chain issues caused delays and people shied away from borrowing money to do work due to interest rates. The private side has slowed down. One area where Energy Trust can help is providing information on trade allies and general guidance for customers to get projects done. There is a need for a place to direct people to figure out their options efficiently (Indika Sugathadasa).

Additionally, council members discussed inflation and its impact on communities. Energy costs went up and members noticed utility companies are resuming disconnects for non-payments, and those customers will have to pay even more to resume service. There is more interest from community members about solar, how it works, and how to install it. A council member stated they own a house built in mid-1970's and, for a long time, homes didn't need air conditioning. They are now realizing that it is needed, their energy use has gone up as a result (Oswaldo Bernal). There is also a lot of misleading information about solar, especially on social media ads. These false ads claim that the state will pay for installing solar, which is untrue. A council member recently helped a friend get a bid on solar for a house, but due to the geographic location the panels would only produce 70% of energy needed. That makes it harder for customers to pay back that investment (Oswaldo Bernal).

Customer and community needs: what have you been hearing through community engagements and customers? What needs and barriers?

Council members stated there is a lack of Native American and Black homeowners in Portland, so those customers are excluded from installing renewable systems (Rhea Standing Rock). One of the customer needs and demands is affordable battery systems for energy storage. There's a wait for that equipment, and many electricians don't want to or don't know how to deal with these systems. There was an incentive at one time for batter storage, but installers and retailers weren't ready for it, which impacted overall affordability. The incentive for battery backup sounded good but couldn't be implemented effectively (Rhea Standing Rock).

Council members expressed that residential energy rates have gone up 19-20% in some areas and interest rates are going up, although supply chain issues have lessened somewhat. A member stated they have been working on a strategic community energy plan group and has observed a lot of confusion between individual and community-level resilience (Susan Badger-Jones). Their region experienced several 12-hour outages in the past months, which has a significant impact in very low temperatures. Eastern Oregon has the additional challenge of messaging confusion due to a service area that includes co-ops and individual utilities. Overall, there is an increase in interest in energy efficiency. Additionally, some customers are also wanting to switch from liquid fuels to electric due to cost, but also climate change (Susan Badger-Jones).

A council member stated their area doesn't have many resources for electric efficiency because Idaho Power is the main utility for electric. There are not many Energy Trust incentives that can be used because eligibility is limited to natural gas. Electric costs have increased, and community members need education and guidance to find resources that would benefit them (Dolores Martinez).

Another council member stated there is a need for more resources for gas-only areas, such as Wallowa County. Many people are switching to heat pumps but using alternative fuels as a backup, which may be needed for 10-20 nights per year on average (Susan Badger-Jones).

Opportunities in next 12-18 months:

A council member shared that for their business/community, working with community-based organizations is the biggest priority (Indika Sugathadasa). Some projects have been started with city and federal funding, but there is a need for more opportunity to educate the community on the available funding in an efficient way. One member expressed that communities can be supported in efficiency by using funding to do projects like heat pumps (Indika Sugathadasa). There is a need to be creative and find opportunities, finding ways to bridge the gap for parts of a project that funding may not cover. There is great need for resources to get information directly to relay to clients and business partners.

Another council member shared that there's a lot of opportunity to help rural schools and trade apprenticeships with information on energy careers—they're looking for ways to keep kids at home with good jobs, there's also a shortage of skilled trade labor. Particularly the energy buildings sector (Susan Badger-Jones).

Strategic priorities over next 12-18 months:

Urban League is focused on education and workforce among many things. It is looking at pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs and would be interested to see anything Energy Trust develops in that area. For affordable energy, it does a lot of rental assistance and processes a huge share of utility aid. Urban League could offer greater help for clientele and community by working with Energy Trust to explore how to minimize the negative impact on low-income communities where it can. In turn, that would help better manage utility assistance. When customers come to Urban League, sometimes the person who needs assistance can't pay their energy bills even though they are still working (Christopher Banks).

A council member shared that there is an opportunity to think about disparate impact across programs. Certain customers are situated differently, so they will not benefit equally from a given offer. For example, a moderate-income customer will benefit differently compared with a very low-income customer (Ezell Watson).

Next steps

Energy Trust will engage advisory councils to follow up with deep dive discussions on specific questions and ideas in July. In October, the councils have an opportunity to review the draft 2024 budget, which will reflect input from the previous engagements.

6. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:32 a.m. The next Diversity Advisory Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 16, 2023. <https://www.energytrust.org/about/public-meetings/diversity-advisory-council-meetings/>.