



# Ontario Energy Board

## Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario

### New OEB Consumer Engagement Framework Frequently Asked Questions

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- **What is the Ontario Energy Board's (OEB) new Consumer Engagement Framework?**

The Consumer Engagement Framework is the OEB's new, more comprehensive approach for engaging and empowering electricity and natural gas consumers throughout the OEB's decision-making process. It is designed to build consumer awareness, provide consumers with simpler and more meaningful information and make it easier for consumers to participate in OEB hearings.

This framework includes a diverse set of tools – existing and new – that will:

- Help consumers better understand OEB's regulatory process
- Enable consumers to access and participate in OEB hearings
- Ensure the consumers' voice is heard
- Consider consumer views in OEB decisions

- **Does the OEB include consumer views in your decision-making now?**

Yes we do, and broader consumer interests are well represented in the current model. Consumer interests are typically represented by OEB staff and by intervenors who act on behalf of consumers. The OEB's new consumer framework is giving individual consumers more opportunities to participate directly.

- **Why are you changing things?**

The OEB wants individuals, local residential consumers and local small businesses, to have a stronger voice. The more input we get from more consumers, the more information we can consider in our decision-making.

That's why we are making our processes friendlier and easier to access. The OEB's current decision-making process is a formal, legalistic "hearing" process that takes place in a court-like setting. It can be intimidating. OEB hearings are also in Toronto, making it difficult for people across Ontario to attend the hearings. By simplifying our processes and taking the hearings to local communities, we hope to engage and empower Ontario's energy consumers.

- **So what exactly is new?**

Consumers have always been welcome to participate. This new framework and additional new tools make participation easier and more accessible. This allows customers who can't or don't want to engage in person to be heard in the hearing room; or to get involved close to home. New opportunities and ways to participate include:

- An enhanced consumer website
- Meetings and hearings within the community affected by rate applications and OEB decisions
- Regional consumer representatives
- A new, dedicated OEB contact person
- New expanded notification – going beyond placing a notice in the newspaper to announce rate applications and ways consumers can get involved

This is in addition to our existing participation tools, which include:

- Local newspaper notices
- Web postings
- Letters of comment
- Intervention on behalf of consumers

For more information about ways to access OEB hearings visit

[OntarioEnergyBoard.ca/ConsumerVoice](http://OntarioEnergyBoard.ca/ConsumerVoice)

- **What does all this mean for energy consumers?**

Our goal is for consumers to be able to more meaningfully participate in the decisions that affect their pocketbooks. More specifically, consumers:

- Will have new ways to get involved and have their voices heard in the OEB's hearing room
- Will have access to better information to find out about things that matter to them, like rate changes and the utility service they can expect to receive for those rates
- Can find out whether their utilities have applications with the OEB that may affect them
- Should better understand what they are getting for their money and the value utilities are delivering

- **Will this new framework help reduce rates?**

The OEB believes that better informed and more engaged customers should result in utilities working even harder to operate more efficiently. The new framework puts in place opportunities for consumers to speak directly with their local utility and the OEB. This will allow consumers to ask questions and help them better understand exactly what they are getting for their money.

The new Consumer Engagement Framework will allow for greater involvement by consumers in the OEB's process. The OEB will hear the views, concerns and questions of local, directly impacted consumers – those that pay the bill.

The more consumer input the OEB has, the more the OEB can take consumer concerns into account in deciding whether the rates the utility wants to charge are just and reasonable.

- **Will this new framework increase rates? How much will all this cost?**

The costs of giving consumers a stronger voice in OEB processes will be modest and will provide greater value. Consumers will be able to actively engage and be heard in OEB decisions that affect them personally.

- **What does this new framework mean for my utility?**

Utilities are expected to consult with consumers in the development of their applications. They will also be asked to participate in community meetings.

Utilities will be made aware that the OEB, and the new local consumer representatives will be in their communities to hear and gather feedback from local consumers when large rates cases are before the OEB.

Hearings may also be held within one or more of the communities within the service area(s) of a utility.

- **Are all gas and electricity utilities affected the same way?**

Yes, the OEB's consumer engagement framework applies to both gas and electricity utilities.

- **What does the Consumer Representative do and how do I find out who mine is?**

Starting in 2017, OEB will pilot the use of representatives that will be available in the local community affected by a requested rate change. The representative will be expected to:

- engage with local residential and small business customers
- gather information, comments, questions and opinions from local residential and small business customers
- advocate on behalf of local customers during the hearing

The OEB is still finalizing the details of its new consumer representation model, including the number of representatives needed, the appropriate skill sets, and the geographic areas to be covered. It is expected that this work will be completed over the next year.

- **I have some ideas about this new framework. How do I share them with the OEB?**

We want to hear from you and welcome your feedback. Please send us an email at: [Consumer.Voice@ontarioenergyboard.ca](mailto:Consumer.Voice@ontarioenergyboard.ca). We look forward to your suggestions.