



Ontario Energy Board Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario



Giving Energy Consumers a Stronger
Voice in OEB Adjudicative Processes

May 13, 2016 - Check Against Delivery

Presentation Purpose & Outline

Purpose

- Provide overview
- Get your input
- Discuss next steps

Outline

- Background and Context
- Objectives
- Research, Analysis and Findings
- Consumer Engagement Framework
 - Awareness, Information, Access
 - Tools
 - Roll-out
 - Next Steps

Background and Context

OEB has been undertaking a review of how customers participate in its processes for several years in phases:

Step 1: Strengthen the Rules (completed in 2014)

- Examined the OEB's approach to intervenor status, cost eligibility and cost awards
- Implemented several procedural and administrative changes to existing intervenor funding process, strengthening transparency and accountability (Intervenor Phase 1 Consultation)

Step 2: Test New Approaches to Customer Engagement (2013-2016)

- Reviewed and revised legal notices – plain language, readability, understanding
- Piloted community meetings for larger rate hearings

Step 3: Review Best Practices in Customer Engagement (late 2015-2016)

- Identified and evaluated alternative models to the OEB's current approach through a jurisdictional review
- Developed a new Consumer Engagement Framework which adopts best practices to ensure effective and transparent consumer representation in OEB processes

Step 4: Implement the New Customer Engagement Framework (2016-2018)

- Get input from customers, intervenors and other stakeholders
- Roll-out the various tools for consumer engagement
- Assess and evaluate each tool

Deliverables

The OEB's regulatory process is easily understood by Ontario electricity and natural gas consumers

Residential and small business consumers have access to and can meaningfully participate in OEB hearings

The OEB has effective mechanisms to ensure the voice of the consumer is heard

OEB decisions consider the views of the consumers impacted

Research and Analysis

We looked closely at our adjudicative process to:

- Determine whether we are seeking/getting the views we need
- Identify barriers to engagement and participation
- Explore ways to involve local and small business consumers into our process

Did a jurisdictional review to:

- identify best practices for consumer engagement and representation

Research and Analysis: Findings

Model 1 Self- Selected

- Individuals, associations, groups request standing and ask for funding
- Participants self-select based on notice information
- Employed in Ontario, NEB, California

Research and Analysis: Findings

Model 2 Board/ Commission- Selected Consumer Representative

- Can be staff of the regulator or a separate entity (individual or group) with expertise in consumer representation
- Goal is to represent consumer interests
- Roles can vary –provide advice and information to regulator and/or be directly involved in regulatory proceedings
- May take on other functions, such as research, education or mediation
- Employed in Nova Scotia, Alberta, California, New York, Ohio, UK, Australia

Model 3 Consumer Panels

- Designed to inform utilities or regulators
- Two types: technical experts and “average” consumers
- Largely used where hearings are not part of rate-setting process
- Employed in UK, Australia, Scotland; OEB Consumer Panel currently being developed

Consumer Engagement Framework

Suite of tools to give residential and small business customers information and access to OEB adjudicative processes



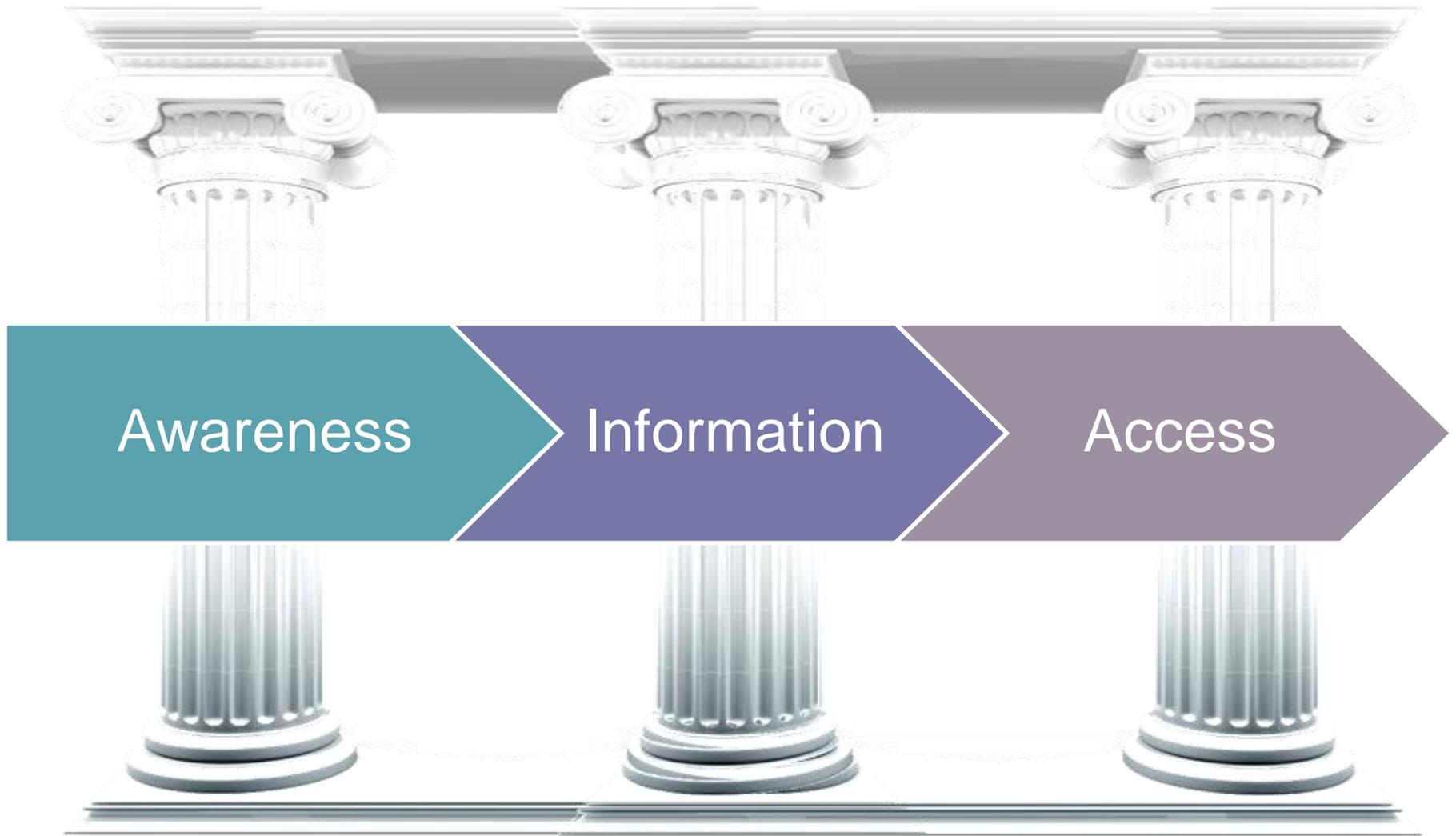
Consumer Engagement Framework

- What it is...
 - Complementary with existing tools
 - More systematic
 - Getting the customer point of view
 - Capacity building
 - Energy literacy
 - Decision making that considers the views of all customers

Consumer Engagement Framework

- What it is NOT ...
 - Replacement for intervenors
 - Overlap with utility responsibilities
 - One size fits all

New Consumer Engagement Framework



Awareness

Information

Access

Awareness

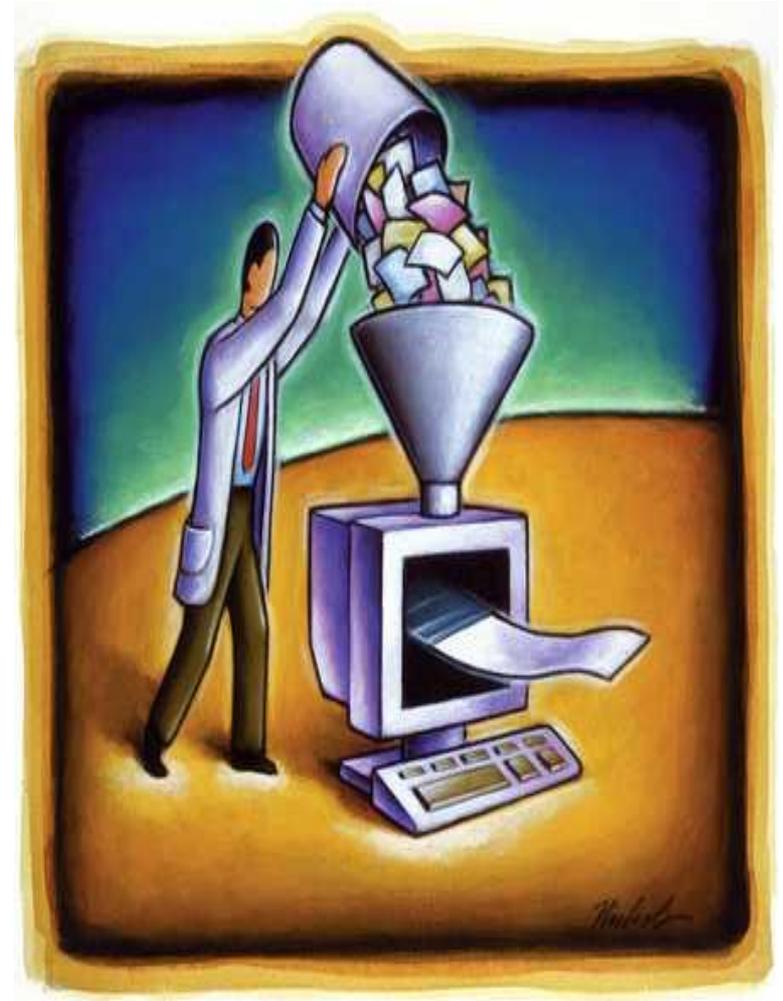
Better awareness of:

- The OEB – who we are, what we do and how we do it
- How the OEB's processes affect electricity and natural gas customers
- How customers can:
 - learn more about the OEB and its processes
 - get involved



Information

- Ability to engage requires a better informed consumer
- Information needs to be clear, relevant, helpful, understandable and easily available in a format, language and medium that consumers relate to



Access

Making OEB hearing process more accessible by:

- Building capacity by enhancing education and literacy
- Removing barriers to access
- Providing simple and meaningful ways to participate



Tools: Consultation by Utility

- OEB already requires that a utility engage with its customers before filing application (Renewed Regulatory Framework for Electricity)
- OEB tests the sufficiency of the engagement by considering how customer needs, preferences and expectations have been reflected in the application
- Utility-specific engagement ensures customers are informed of:
 - proposals being considered for inclusion in the application
 - value and impacts of proposals to customers (i.e. costs, benefits and the impact on rates)

Tools: Notification

- Increase awareness
 - Go beyond legal notice requirements
 - Leverage multiple channels
 - OEB website
 - other websites (utility)
 - email
 - social media
 - direct mail
 - bill
 - other



Tools: Enhanced Consumer Website

The OEB's role in setting rates

Your utility

An easy to read summary of what your utility requests

How you are impacted by a utility application

How OEB hearings work

How to get involved

How to find your Regional Consumer Representative

How to contact the OEB's Process Counsel or get more information

Copies of OEB decisions

Tools: Guidebook/Quicktools

- Plain-language, easy-to-use guide made up of a number of “quick tools” 
- Available in hard copy, distributed at public meetings, and made available through local distributors
- Available on the enhanced consumer website, and supplemented with more interactive media such as videos and tutorials
- The guidebook and supporting “quicktools” will be a passive and non-intimidating way for customers to see first-hand how the OEB goes about its work and how they can get involved at each step of the process

Tools: Legal Notice

- Posted on the OEB's and applicant's website
- Personally served on anyone that is affected or is likely to be affected
- Published in newspaper(s) in the area most affected by the proposals in an application
- OEB developed a new, shorter, plain language notice and took the publication process in house
- OEB will review the notice again to:
 - Balance reader friendliness with content
 - Use best channels to reach consumers
 - Serve notice directly as often as possible
 - Go beyond notice to notification

Tools: Process Counsel

- A dedicated customer contact person at the OEB who knows:
 - What applications have been filed with the OEB
 - How OEB's decision making processes work
 - How consumers can get involved in the process
 - help reduce barriers faced by consumers that want to know how to effectively participate in an adjudicative process/hearing
 - provide helpful, clear information to help consumers:
 - Determine whether they wish to be involved
 - Determine how, where and when to get involved
 - Access additional resources (regional consumer representatives, enhanced consumer website, utility information)
 - Navigate the hearing process (asking written or oral questions, making submissions, etc.)



Tools: Letters of Comment

- Customers will continue to be able to provide their comments on an application by:
 - submitting comments directly through enhanced consumer website (easier online process)
 - e-mail
 - regular mail (post)
 - at a community meeting
- Plans to enhance online letters to provide a template or questions to solicit relevant feedback on applications
- All comments received are made part of the legal record of the case and are explored by OEB staff through questioning
- The comments are taken into account when a decision is made

Tools: Community Meetings

- OEB piloted community meetings in 2015
- Community meetings give:
 - local customers a way provide input and comments directly to OEB
 - the OEB a way to get customer views and opinions into a hearing
- Community meetings are:
 - broadly advertised
 - held after an application is filed but before the hearing
 - local - held in the applicant's service area
 - informal - open house format is a more relaxed way for customers to engage



Tools: Intervention

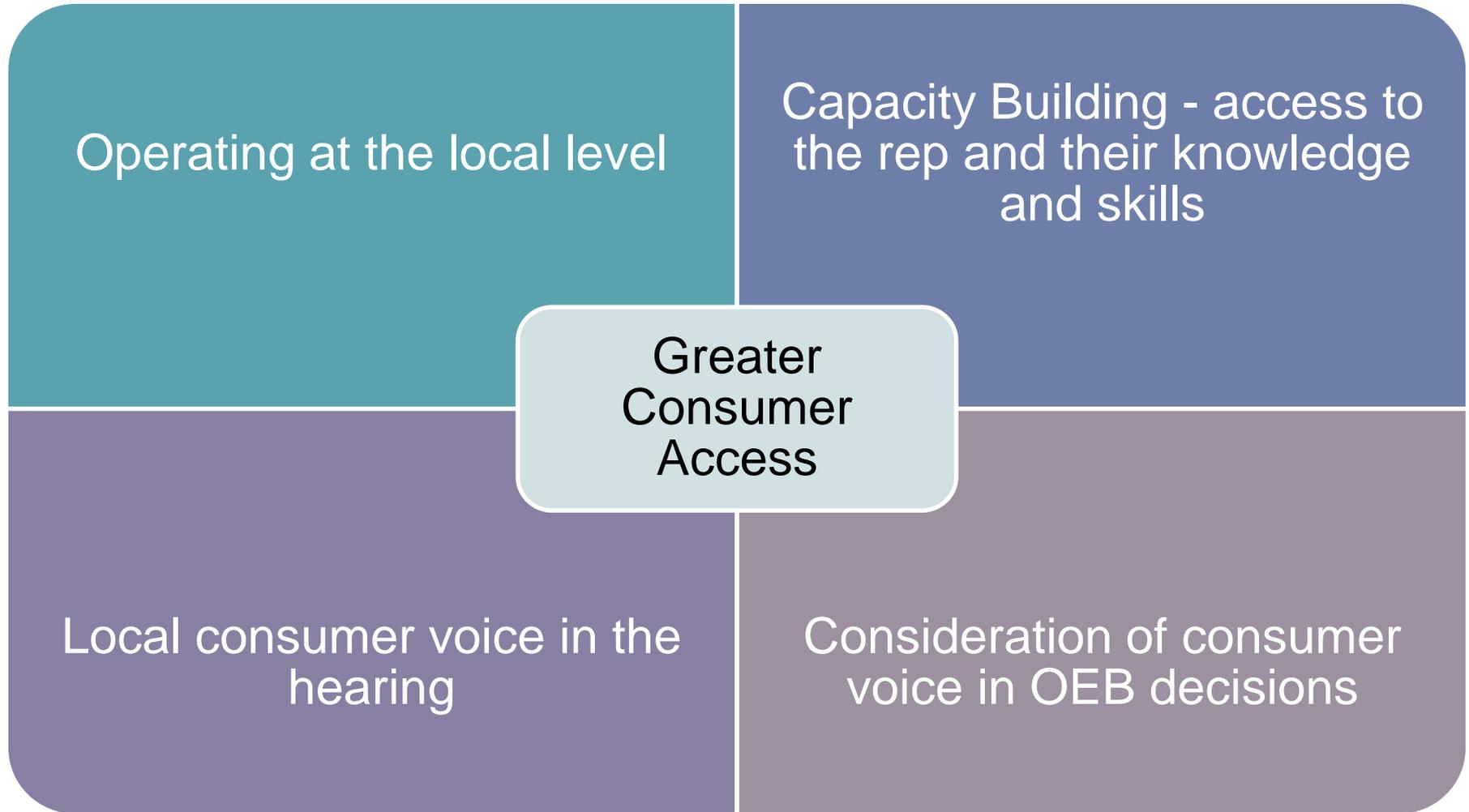
- The OEB has had a well-funded, self-selected intervenor model for decades
- Associations and other organizations participate in OEB proceedings on behalf of various customer groups/classes and provide:
 - broad perspectives
 - expertise
 - challenges on applications before the OEB
- Directly impacted parties, or the associations and organizations that represent them, will continue to be able to intervene in the OEB's processes in accordance with the current Rules

Tools: Regional Consumer Representatives

- Starting in 2017, OEB will pilot the use of local community-based representatives to gather information from and advocate on behalf of local customers during the hearing
- Representatives will be selected based on:
 - experience in hearing advocacy
 - familiarity with regional/local energy issues
 - knowledge of energy matters
 - community-based engagement and consultation skills
- Representatives will be expected to:
 - coordinate and facilitate effective engagement with local residential and small business customers
 - record and report the views, comments, questions and positions of local consumers
 - advocate for local customer interests as informed by those customers in the OEB's hearing process



Tools: Regional Consumer Representatives



Tools: Hearings in the Community

- In 2016 the OEB will hold larger hearings (in whole or part) in a local community impacted by an application



Consumer Voice in OEB Decisions



Consumer Voice in OEB Decisions

- 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 OEB will take these concerns into account in deciding whether the rates the utility wants to charge are just and reasonable

Consumer Engagement Framework – Roll-out

- Beginning this fall, the following tools will be available:
 - Community meetings
 - Process Counsel
 - Hearings in the community
 - Guidebook/Quicktools
- Start with rate cases and eventually apply to all cases
- Enhanced consumer website will be available mid-2017
- Further opportunities for input will be provided

Next Steps

- Meet with intervenors and utilities
- Consult with consumer panel
- Develop pilot and implementation plan for Regional Consumer Representatives
- Develop content and roll-out plan for enhanced consumer website

Questions

