

Approved Meeting Minutes



OEB Financial Assistance Working Group

Meeting Date: September 30, 2010

Time: 9:30 am – 4:45 pm

Location: 2300 Yonge Street, 25th Floor, ADR room

Attendees: **Financial Assistance Working Group:**

Jack Lenartowicz	Coalition of Large Distributors (CLD)
Julie Girvan	Consumers Council Canada (CCC)
Gord Eamer	Cornerstone Hydro Electric Concepts (CHEC)
Manny Sousa	Enbridge Gas Distribution
Mary Anne Rowlands	Housing Help Association of Ontario
Barb Allen	Hydro One Networks
Jennifer Lopinski	Low Income Energy Network (LIEN)
Chris Goethel	Ministry of Energy
Gladys Wong	Neighbourhood Information Post
Katherine Sparkes	Ontario Power Authority
David Whitehouse	Peterborough Distribution
Debra Johnston	Salvation Army
Mark Kitchen	Union Gas
Steve Lavery	United Way Toronto
William Harper	VECC / Energy Probe
Shayma Saadat	Ministry of Energy
John Bagnall	Neighbourhood Information Post
Kristi Billing	United Way Toronto
Marian Redford	Union Gas

Board Staff:

Alison Cazalet, Takis Plagiannakos, Stephen Vetsis

Status of Board Review of FAWG Recommendations

- Board staff reviewed the Board's decisions on the recommendations of the Financial Assistance Working Group (FAWG).

- Working group discussed transitioning gas utilities from Winter Warmth program to LEAP as well as any issues that may arise based from the Board's decisions.

Status on Utility-Agency Mapping

- Steve Lavery of United Way Toronto presented the results of a preliminary utility-agency mapping of nominated agencies for the electricity late payment settlement. Also discussed which regions of Ontario currently do not have a network in place.
- Working group discussed any possible issues with extending the late payment settlement network to the LEAP.

Coordinating intake for emergency financial assistance, conservation & customer service measures

- Working group discussed roles and responsibilities that social service agencies can play in coordinating and referring low-income customers to the OPA's low-income conversation programs.
- Working group suggested that agencies could play a key role in income screening applicants for conservation programs, pre-screening applicants' homes using a simple questionnaire and explaining the benefits of the participation to customers.
- Working group cautioned about too much detail in the Manual on customer service measures, as it sets an unrealistic expectation that social agencies be expected to know and understand all of the Board's customer service rules.

Review of LEAP Program Manual

- The working group reviewed the second draft of the LEAP Program manual.
- Working group mentioned that the manual had little mention, overall, of NRG and that discussions pertaining to the gas industry should be expanded to include them throughout the manual.
- The main recommendations for each section of the manual are described below.

Intro

- Wording should be altered to reflect that there should be some flexibility for utilities as well as social service agencies.
- Non rate-regulated utilities should be mentioned.

Who Does What?

- Working group agreed that generally, the agency employee that contacts the utility for a disconnection hold should also be the person to inform the utility when a decision has been made on the application, but that this would be left to the discretion of each Lead and Intake agency to decide who takes on this role.

Energy Conservation Programs

- It was recommended that the wording should be changed to reflect the possible variability in program offerings across the province.

Grant Level

- Working group suggested that the reference to “arrears payment agreement” should be made more generic to include both agreements as per the Board’s rules, and any other agreements that may be arranged with a utility.

Applications Process

- Working group expanded monthly reporting requirements to utilities to include:
 - Amount of LEAP funds remaining;
 - Number of households assisted (separated by utility and suite metering customers); and
 - Amounts of funds dispersed (separated by utility and suite metering customers).

Application Forms

- Working group suggested forms be altered to reduce redundancy for agents administering the program.

New Name for LEAP

- Working group discussed ideas for a new name for the LEAP.
- Suggested that name should include the following terms:
 - Emergency;
 - Low-income; and
 - Electricity and natural gas.

Action Items:

- The Salvation Army to provide a sample appeals process to be included in the LEAP Program Manual as a guide.
- OEB staff to prepare a table outlining the differences between the LEAP and Winter Warmth.
- OEB staff to prepare a sample spreadsheet for reporting.
- FAWG members to e-mail comments on the draft Program Manual and sample utility-agency agreement by Wednesday October 6.
- OPA to provide some sample screening questions for conservation programs to be included as part of the LEAP application form.

Next Scheduled Meeting:

- October 21, 2010