



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



## **Low-Income Energy Assistance Program**

Refresher Training Webcast for Distributors  
and Social Agency Partners

November 18 & 21, 2013

# Presenters

## Board Staff

- **Lenore Robson**, Policy Advisor, Regulatory Policy
- **Rachel Anderson**, Policy Analyst, Regulatory Policy
- **Paul Gasparatto**, Policy Advisor, Regulatory Policy (In Attendance)
- **Takis Plagiannakos**, Manager of Rates, Conservation & Policy Evaluation, Regulatory Policy (In Attendance)

## Enbridge

- **Katrina McWhirter**, Manager, Process Optimization

## Union Gas

- **Margaret Nuttall**, Contact Centre Manager



# Agenda

- LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance (Lenore Robson)
- Low-Income Electricity Customer Service Rules (Rachel Anderson)
- Low-Income Natural Gas Customer Service Policies (Katrina McWhirter and Margaret Nuttal)
- Web Posting of Presentation Slides and Q&As





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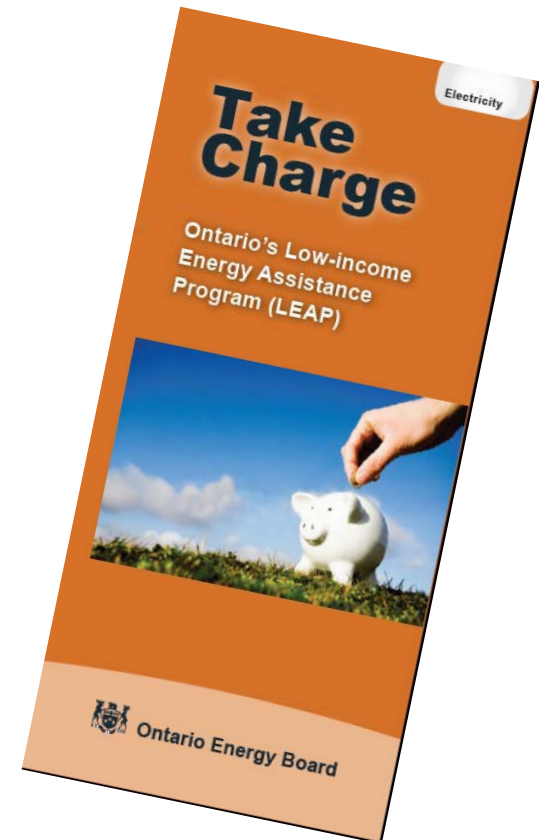
## LEAP Emergency Financial Assistance (EFA)

Lenore Robson, Policy Advisor

# What is LEAP EFA?

**LEAP EFA** is a grant program intended to provide **emergency relief** to eligible low-income consumers who may be experiencing difficulty paying their bill

It is **not** intended to provide **regular** or **ongoing** bill payment assistance



# Utilities Participating in LEAP

- 80 utilities participating in LEAP/Winter Warmth:
  - 75 Electricity Distributors
    - Excluding 3 First Nations Power Corporation distributors
  - 5 Gas Utilities
    - Enbridge, Union, Natural Resource Gas (NRG), Utilities Kingston, Kitchener Utilities
- 150 social service agencies participating in LEAP/Winter Warmth program delivery:
  - 99 lead agencies delivering LEAP in the electricity sector
  - 51 agencies delivering Winter Warmth in the natural gas sector



# LEAP EFA Program Manual

**LEAP EFA** Program Manual guides program implementation to ensure consistent delivery throughout Ontario

- Defines eligibility criteria
- Outlines roles of social agencies
- Establishes the application process



To accommodate unique local needs some aspects have been left to the **discretion of the agency**



# LEAP EFA Funding

**LEAP EFA** is funded by all utility ratepayers through the distribution rates of each utility

- Each utility is required to provide, each year, the greater of 0.12% of total distribution revenue or \$2,000
- Funds provided by a utility must be used **only** for that utility's customers
- Available to customers of unit sub-metering providers
- For approved applicants, funds remitted directly to the utility and credited to the applicant's account
  - Funds are **never** provided directly to customers
- Unused funds are rolled over to the following year





# Utility – Social Service Agency Partnerships

- Utilities must partner with at least one social service agency
  - many utilities will have a Lead agency and one or more Intake agencies, in order to ensure easier access by customers
- Partnerships should follow Program Manual framework
  - Some elements left to negotiation between utilities and their agency partners
- Timing & form of payments made by utilities to social service agencies to be agreed upon between partners
  - i.e. lump sum in January or spread out over several smaller payments



# Utility – Social Service Agency Partnerships

- Program admin/delivery fees are limited to 15% of the LEAP funds contributed by utilities:
  - Division of 15% between Intake and Lead agencies to be negotiated between agencies depending on local needs
  - Funds rolled over from previous year are not included in the calculating 15%
  - 15% calculated on funds provided by utility, and not funds distributed on behalf of applicants



# Intake Agencies

## Responsible for:

- ✓ Screening applicants for eligibility
- ✓ Processing applications and collecting information
- ✓ Informing the utility that assessment of eligibility is being undertaken
- ✓ Communicating with the applicant regarding approved or denied applications
- ✓ Tracking information



# Lead Agencies

## Responsible for:

- ✓ Selecting or contracting with Intake Agencies
- ✓ Making final decisions to approve or deny applications
- ✓ Receiving program funds from the utility
- ✓ Remitting payment back to the utility
- ✓ Implementing an appeals/internal review process



# Eligibility Criteria

To qualify, applicants must:

- ✓ Be an existing customer of the utility providing the funding;
- ✓ Reside at the address where there are arrears; and
- ✓ Have a pre-tax household income at or below the Statistics Canada LICO + 15%;



# Screening Guidelines

## Future Sustainability

- ✓ The grant will maintain or reconnect energy service

## Past Payment Performance

- ✓ Applicant has demonstrated a prior attempt to pay

## Emergency Assistance

- ✓ Applicant is in arrears but has not been disconnected

## Funding

- ✓ Accessed only once per year

Need to balance  
**emergency**  
**assistance** with early  
intervention



# Agency Discretion

**If** the applicant does **not** meet the income threshold or screening guidelines

Agencies may exercise discretion in **exceptional circumstances**

- ❖ You should have documented rationale for approving the applicant



# Grant Level

**Maximum** of **\$500** per fuel, per household, per year  
~ **\$600** for electrically heated homes

If the applicant owes **less** than the maximum

The grant cannot **exceed** the amount owed

If the applicant owes **more** than the maximum

The maximum grant may be provided, if energy service can be **sustained**





# What if an applicant owes more than the maximum?

## Options

- ❖ Enter into an arrears payment agreement with the utility for the balancing owing
- ❖ Supplementary Assistance through other funds for the balance
  - ✓ Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)

# Application Process



Pre-screen applicants over the phone **prior** to booking an in-person interview

## 5 Questions

1. Are you a customer of a natural gas or electricity utility?
2. Do you reside at the address with arrears?
3. What is your yearly/monthly pre-tax household income?
4. What are your sources of household income?
5. How many people are in your household?



# In-Person Interview

- ❖ All adults living in the household should attend the interview
- ❖ You must obtain the applicant's **consent** for the release of personal information
- ❖ The applicant must complete a **LEAP EFA** application form
- ❖ Telephone interviews are permitted in some situations



# Application Process

The applicant **must** provide the following documents

1. Current energy bills for their residence

2. Notice of Service Disconnection (if applicable)

3. 2 pieces of I.D. for main applicant (1 for others)

4. Rental receipt, lease or mortgage documents

5. Proof of household income (i.e. pay stub, tax return)

6. Bank statement from the most recent month



# Utility Verification

## Information to be Confirmed

- ✓ Amount owing on the account
  - ✓ Whether a disconnection notice has been issued
  - ✓ Payments made on the account
  - ✓ Discussions the applicant has had with the utility
- ❖ Advise the utility that you are assessing the applicant's eligibility for **LEAP EFA**

A customer has **10 days** from the day a notice is received to pay their bill to avoid disconnection



# Recommendation about Funding

## Recommendations should address

- Whether or not to approve the application
- Amount of the grant to be provided

## Key Considerations

- ❖ Will the disconnection be halted?
- ❖ Will the applicant be able to pay the future?
- ❖ REMEMBER to document the reasons why an application was **denied**

LEAP is **NOT**  
intended to  
provide long-term  
financial  
assistance



# Notifying the Applicant

Applicants should be **notified** as soon as possible whether or not their application has been approved

If the application is **approved**

Payment should be reflected on the applicant's account within a reasonable amount of time

If the application has been **denied**

Assist the applicant in making other payment arrangements  
and  
Inform them of the **appeals process**



# Appeals / Request for Internal Review

Applicants may **request** an Internal Review if they disagree with the denial of their application

Requests must be made within  
**10 days**  
of being notified of the denial

An **Internal Review Form** should be provided to any applicant who requests one





# Reporting Requirements

- Set out in Appendix C of LEAP EFA Program Manual
  - Developed by the Financial Assistance Working Group (FAWG)
- 3 Forms of Reporting:
  - Monthly reporting by agencies to Distributors
    - Tracks each utility's LEAP funds spent over the course of the month
    - To be submitted by agency by the **15<sup>th</sup> day** of the following month
  - Monthly tracking by agencies:
    - Tracks applicant demographic information
    - Lead agency to keep and store data for use in program evaluation
  - Annual reporting by Distributors to OEB
    - Distributors will provide an annual report to the OEB for program evaluation
    - Lead agencies to send complete data to distributors by **March 31<sup>st</sup>**



# Reporting and Record Keeping Requirements (RRR) Data

- Electricity and Natural Gas Distributors are required to annually file the following information:
  - Total LEAP funding available for 2013
  - Total amount of LEAP funding from distributor funds & non-distributor funds (donations)
  - Total amount of LEAP funding carried forward from previous year(s)
  - Total amount of LEAP funding provided to customers (distributor customers & unit sub-metering customers)
  - Number of applicants who received funding; number of applicants who were rejected (distributor customers & unit sub-metering customers)
  - Average amount of funding granted per applicant
  - Month in which funds were depleted
- Data collected for the period January 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup> and filed with the Board by **April 30<sup>th</sup>** of the following year
- Appendix C.2 of the Program Manual lists the annual reporting requirements



# Annual Reporting Requirements Cont'd

- As a condition of its licence, each distributor is required to file its LEAP information with the Board each year
- Data collected by agencies should be:
  - Submitted on a timely basis
  - Accurate
  - Protected as required to comply with applicable law
- Data will be used to:
  - Measure and evaluate program performance
  - Understand how effective LEAP has been in managing low-income consumer energy issues
- A template has been provided for ease of reporting



# Monthly Monitoring Requirements

Appendix C.3 lists the demographic information that is to be tracked by agencies on a monthly basis, including

1. Total Number of Adults Assisted
2. Total Number of Children Assisted
3. Average Monthly Income per Applicant
4. Primary Source of Income (i.e. OW, WSIB, EI, CPP)
5. Average Arrears owed per Applicant
6. Applicant Type (i.e. Single with Children, Married/Common Law)
7. Housing Type (i.e. rent, own, social housing)
8. Reason for Needing Assistance



# Monthly Monitoring Requirements Cont'd

9. Reasons Applicant was not Accepted
  10. # Applicants where Grant Money was Insufficient
  11. How Applicants Heard about the Program
  12. # Applicants Where Funding Was Not Required Due to Successful Advocacy with Utility
  13. # of Applicants Referred to Conservation Programs
- Agencies should send complete monthly monitoring information to distributors by **March 31<sup>st</sup>**; distributors are to file with the Board by **April 30<sup>th</sup>**
  - An Excel template has been provided for ease of reporting
  - Information will be used to review and assess program performance



# Additional Questions?

## Market Operations

[market.operations@ontarioenergyboard.ca](mailto:market.operations@ontarioenergyboard.ca)

**OR contact me directly**

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