



Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES  
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN  
AND  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH  
GUIDANCE**

**DECEMBER 2024**

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## DEFINITIONS

**Department or DPU:** The Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities.

**Division:** A branch of the Department that is responsible for the oversight of a specific Department function.

**Environmental Justice (or “EJ”) Population:** A neighborhood that meets 1 or more of the following criteria: (i) the annual median household income is not more than 65 percent of the statewide annual median household income; (ii) minorities comprise 40 percent or more of the population; (iii) 25 percent or more of the households lack English language proficiency; or (iv) minorities comprise 25 percent or more of the population, and the annual median household income of the municipality in which the neighborhood is located does not exceed 150 percent of the statewide annual median household income.<sup>1</sup>

**Hearing Officer:** An attorney designated by the Commission<sup>2</sup> pursuant to General Laws c. 25, § 4, to preside over a Department proceeding.

**Interpretation:** The act of listening, understanding, analyzing, and processing a spoken communication in one language (source language) and then faithfully<sup>3</sup> orally rendering it into another spoken language (target language) while retaining the same meaning. For individuals with certain disabilities that affect communication, this can include understanding, analyzing, and processing a spoken or signed communication in the source language and faithfully conveying that information into a spoken, captioned, or signed target language while retaining that same meaning.

**Language Access:** Providing LEP persons with meaningful access to the same services as English-speaking individuals.

**Limited English Proficiency (“LEP”) Persons:** Individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.

**Key Agency Action:** Any rulemaking, adjudication, investigation processes or any action based in whole or in part on substantive decision-making processes.

**Meaningful Access:** Language assistance that results in accurate, timely, and effective communication at no cost to the person with LEP needing assistance to eliminate communication barriers, such as sign language interpretation, real-time captioning, or other accessible form of communication as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; and Section 13 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972 (collectively as the “federal non-

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<sup>1</sup> An Act Creating a Next Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy, (2021), Acts Chapter 8, Section 62

<sup>2</sup> The Department is overseen by the three-member Commonwealth Utilities Commission appointed by the Secretary of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs with approval by the Governor. The Secretary designates one of the Commissioners as chair. G.L. c. 25, § 2; see also <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/the-dpu-commission> (last visited June 20, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Interpreting accurately and completely without adding or taking away from the meaning.

discrimination statutes”). Meaningful access denotes access that is not significantly delayed, restricted, or inferior as compared to programs or services provided to individuals with English proficiency.

**Meaningful Involvement:** All neighborhoods have the right and opportunity to participate in energy, climate change, and environmental decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, compliance and enforcement, and evaluation. Neighborhoods are enabled and administratively assisted to participate fully through education and training; are given transparency/accountability by government with regard to community input; and are encouraged to develop environmental, energy, and climate change stewardship.<sup>4</sup>

**Neighborhood:** A census block group as defined by the United States Census Bureau, excluding people who live in college dormitories and people who are under formally authorized, supervised care or custody, including federal, state or country prisons.<sup>5</sup>

**Public Involvement Plan (“PIP”):** A PIP (or project-specific PIP) is a public plan to ensure community planning and engagement specific to a project or proposal pending before the Department.

**Translation:** The process of converting written text from a source language into an equivalent written text in a target language as faithfully as possible while maintaining the style, tone, and intent of the text, and while considering differences of culture and dialect.

**Vital Document:** Vital documents are documents containing information that is critical for obtaining services or providing awareness of rights or is required by law.

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<sup>4</sup> The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (“EEA”), *Environmental Justice Policy of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs* (“EJ Policy” updated 2021) at 3 (2017, updated June 24, 2021) available at [www.mass.gov/doc/environmental-justice-policy6242021-update/download](http://www.mass.gov/doc/environmental-justice-policy6242021-update/download).

<sup>5</sup> EJ Policy (updated 2021) at 4-5.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Public Utilities (“DPU” or “Department”) is an adjudicatory agency overseen by a three-member commission. The Department is responsible for the oversight of investor-owned electric power, natural gas, and water utilities in the Commonwealth. In addition, the Department regulates the safety of bus companies, moving companies, and transportation network companies. We also oversee the safety of natural gas pipelines. The Department is also responsible for overseeing the safety of equipment and operations for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (“MBTA”) as the State Safety Oversight Agency (“SSOA”). The Department is charged with developing alternatives to traditional regulation, monitoring service quality, and the siting of certain energy facilities.

The mission of the DPU is to ensure that consumers’ rights are protected and that utility companies are providing the most reliable service at the lowest possible cost. The Department seeks to promote safety, security, reliability of service, affordability, equity, and greenhouse gas emissions reductions.

## II. PURPOSE

The Department serves a diverse population of various ages and linguistic origins, and its work impacts nearly everyone in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The purpose of this plan is to ensure meaningful access to Department proceedings, services, programs, activities, and materials for all persons, regardless of sex, race, color, religion, creed, national origin (including limited English proficiency), gender identity, income, class, disability, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, genetic information, ancestry, or status as a veteran. This PIP confirms a commitment to eliminate barriers to meaningful access and involvement for all.

This PIP provides a framework for effective public engagement and meaningful public input and strives to eliminate barriers for limited English proficiency (“LEP”) persons and those with disabilities.

## III. POLICY AND APPLICABILITY

Adherence to this plan will promote compliance with Federal law against non-discrimination (e.g. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964), the state’s anti-discrimination statutes, Executive Order 526, Executive Order 552, and Executive Order 615. This policy applies to all Divisions within the Department and to the agency as a whole.

## IV. IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY TO BE IMPACTED BY A PARTICULAR DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Using the tools described below and in accordance with the process described in Section V, the Department will identify when a community may require more comprehensive planning and engagement due to its status as an EJ population and ensure that staff takes the appropriate measures to engage those community members in the decision-making process. The EJ population assessment is triggered when a proposed rule or action has the potential to cause disproportionate impacts (i.e., pose a risk to public health or the environment in a neighborhood) on an EJ population. The Department will primarily use the Massachusetts Environmental Justice Population Screening Tool, Languages in Massachusetts Tool, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Environmental Justice Tool to

assess potential project impacts on EJ populations. Federal tools referenced below will be used to gather additional information as needed.

#### [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool \(CJEST Tool\)](#)

The federal Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool provides data on census tracts that are overburdened and underserved, which are recognized as federal disadvantaged communities. The Department will access this tool to determine if there are any federally disadvantaged communities that are not also considered Massachusetts EJ populations. If so, the Department will take actions aimed at engaging these disadvantaged communities in the decision-making process.

#### [EPA's Environmental Justice Screening Tool \(EJ Screen Tool\)](#)

The United States Environmental Protection Agency Environmental Justice Screening Tool provides a nationally consistent dataset and approach for combining environmental and socioeconomic indicators. The Department will access this tool to determine if there are data that could inform the outcome of a proceeding. If so, the Department will reference the tool in its questions to the parties to get evidence on the record that would be considered as part of an agency decision.

#### [MA Environmental Justice Populations Screening Tool](#)

The Department will access the Massachusetts Environmental Justice Viewer, which is an interactive map that displays the 2020 EJ census block groups, based upon demographic criteria developed by the state's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs ("EEA"). If the Department identifies that an EJ population is potentially impacted by a proceeding, it will take actions aimed at engaging residents of these EJ populations in the decision-making process.

#### [Languages in Massachusetts Tool](#)

The Languages in Massachusetts tool is a map that shows census tracts where at least 5% of the population has speakers who report they do not speak English "very well," for the purpose of determining translation and interpretation needs. By clicking on a tract, the Department can identify which languages other than English are spoken in an area where there is a proposal for the agency's review, or the Department initiates an investigation in a manner consistent with the Department's Language Access Plan.

#### [Department of Public Health Environmental Justice Tool \(DPH EJ Tool\)](#)

The Department will access the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Environmental Justice tool, which was developed to inform a wide range of activities such as facility siting and permitting decisions, Brownfields clean-ups, Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act reviews, grant applications, transportation projects, and community, health, or climate-related impact assessments. The Department will access this tool to determine if there are data that could inform the outcome of a proceeding, particularly in the context of siting and climate-related utility plan proceedings. If so, the Department will reference the tool in its questions to the parties to get evidence on the record to inform the Department's decision.

## V. ASSESSING THE NEED FOR A PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN OR ENHANCED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

If a proposed rule or action has the potential to cause disproportionate impacts on an EJ population, the Department will take measures to enhance public participation efforts and engage in meaningful outreach. The Department's [Order establishing a tiering and outreach policy](#) ([Enhancing Public Awareness and Participation](#), D.P.U. 21-50-A (February 23, 2024)) determines which proceedings warrant greater levels of publication and outreach, and the procedures for enhancing public awareness of and participation in its proceedings. Proceedings such as base distribution rate cases, mergers, and inquiries that involve significant policy changes or fundamental changes to process will receive the greatest level of publication and outreach. In addition, proceedings that have the following characteristics will also require greater levels of publication and outreach: (1) a unique and specific impact on an EJ population in a particular geographic area within the petitioner's service territory that is not shared by the entire service territory (e.g., the siting of a substation or solar array in an EJ population); and (2) a material impact on safety, security, reliability of service, affordability, equity, or greenhouse gas emissions.

### Identify and Develop Community Engagement Strategy for Key Agency Actions, Activities, and/or Programs

The Department values meaningful community engagement on key proceedings, actions, and services and is using different tools to enhance community outreach and encourage public participation.

The Department understands the importance of making vital documents accessible to all, regardless of language barriers. To this end, we will follow our latest Language Access Plan (LAP) to translate materials and provide interpretation into relevant languages. The Department also maintains a webpage with information useful for EJ populations, including, but not limited to:

- Contact information for the Department's Director of Environmental Justice and Public Participation;
- A link to the EEA EJ Strategy;
- A link to the DPU EJ Strategy;
- A link to the EEA EJ Policy;
- A link to EEA's EJ website;
- A link to the Department's Language Access Plan;
- A link to the DPU's Title VI Non-Discrimination Complaint Form;
- Information for non-English speakers and individuals with limited English proficiency about requesting interpretation and translation services;
- Translations of vital documents relative to consumers' rights; and
- A non-exhaustive list of useful links on the Department's website to help customers navigate their energy bills. Such links may include information on energy incentive programs and arrearage management programs.

In addition to those noted above, the Department has developed or is in the process of developing the following strategies to engage with the public through direct outreach and education to facilitate

greater understanding of DPU processes and encourage broader participation in matters before the Commission:

- Finalizing a policy on enhanced notice procedures to increase awareness of and public participation in Department proceedings;
- Including more plain language in its notices designed to inform the public about proceedings before the Department;
- Establishing standards for petitioners before the Department to file plain language summaries of their proposals;
- Requiring distribution companies to provide bill impact analyses on EJ populations in base distribution rate proceedings;
- Developing standards describing when the Department will summarize public comments in its orders;
- Requiring distribution companies to track and report on EJ-related performance metrics, which the Department will post on its website;
- Providing more educational materials on its website;
- Promoting staff training on language access and EJ matters; and
- Assigning staff to act as the EJ liaison with other state agencies and the EJ point of contact to handle inquiries regarding engagement with EJ populations and language access.

### Use of Agency Discretion to Require or Not Require a Public Involvement Plan

As noted above, the Department has established criteria to determine which of its proceedings warrant greater levels of publication and outreach. For any proceeding, action, or service, the Department may consider the specific circumstances that warrant a project-specific PIP.

## VI. KEY ELEMENTS FOR CONDUCTING COMMUNITY OUTREACH OR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Department's public participation process should be accessible to all persons, regardless of sex, race, color, religion, creed, national origin (including limited English proficiency), gender identity, income, class, disability, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, genetic information, ancestry, or status as a veteran.

Enhanced public participation means that the Department will consider using alternative media outlets, such as community or diverse newspapers and other media such as radio stations, translating materials to other languages, and providing interpretation services during public meetings.

The Department may recommend that project proponents consider whether outreach efforts need to include an educational component to ensure that community members have the information necessary to evaluate a project's potential impacts.

All notices of filings will include information about how to request interpretation and/or translation services for LEP persons in the top 10 languages. The Department will strive to ensure that notices in English announcing public participation opportunities contain plain language to inform the public about the proceeding and facilitate reliable translation into additional languages.

The Department will host public engagement events that inform and educate the public about the work of its different Divisions, key agency actions, and how members of the public can participate in proceedings.

## When to Invoke a Public Involvement Plan for Key Agency Actions, Activities, and/or Programs

As noted above, the Department has established criteria to determine which of its proceedings warrant greater levels of publication and outreach. If the Department determines that a project-specific PIP is warranted for any proceeding, the action, or service, it shall take into account the project-specific circumstances in developing such project-specific PIP.

## Identify Languages Spoken by Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Persons

Before scheduling public hearings for certain complex or high-profile proceedings (e.g., base distribution rate proceedings and statewide investigations), the Department will use current U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey data and Massachusetts interactive mapping tools regarding environmental justice and languages spoken to determine the applicable languages into which notices, and relevant documents will be translated and for which interpretation services will be provided at public hearings (see the tools referenced in Section IV above). Specifically, the Department will seek to provide language access services by translating and interpreting into languages regularly encountered within the applicable service area. Depending upon the nature of the proceeding and needs of potentially impacted populations, the Department will strive to provide translation and interpretation into more languages than those regularly encountered.

## Consult data available from United States Census Bureau

Instructions for accessing the Census Bureau's American Community Survey data are as follows:

- a. Go to the U.S. Census Bureau website at: <https://data.census.gov>.
- b. Enter code B16001 (for "Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over") in the search box then enter.
- c. "Filter" is displayed on the left corner of the page. Click on "Topics." Then click on "Populations and People." Next, select "Language Spoken at Home."
- d. Go back to the Filter and click on "Geographies." Click on "County Subdivision." Then scroll down to select "Massachusetts."
- e. A list of all the counties will appear. Select the appropriate county.
- f. Next, select the appropriate city/town under the county subdivisions.
- g. Go back to the Filter and click on "Years." Select the latest year (currently 2022).
- h. Go to the toolbar under the search box and click on "Tables."
- i. A table will appear on the right side of the page showing the total population for the city or town with a detailed breakdown of the languages spoken by the residents and the number of residents who "speak English less than very well."
- j. To export the data as an excel document, click on the ellipsis under "More Tools" in the right corner and select "Excel."

Staff will use the Languages in Massachusetts tool for the purpose of determining translation and interpretation needs.

## Consult with Community-based Organizations

For proceedings identified as requiring greater publication and outreach, as noted above, the Department requires petitioners to work with stakeholders in affected communities to develop outreach plans and determine which platforms or locations to use to publicize notices. Petitioners are required to conduct outreach to municipal and community leaders at least 30 days prior to filing a petition with the Department or to explain why such outreach could not be accomplished within that time period. In addition, the Department shall consult with municipalities and local entities such as boards/commissions, schools, places of worship, senior centers, and other community specific organizations as appropriate for certain municipality-specific proceedings, such as municipal aggregation proceedings.

For significant Department-initiated proceedings, the Department will publicize opportunities to provide feedback and conduct its own outreach to legislators and stakeholders, including statewide and community-based organizations.

## Translation of Materials

To identify languages in which vital documents should be translated, staff will consult the latest DPU Language Access Plan. The Department will also endeavor to provide translation and interpretation services upon request, provided such request is made in a timely manner in the context of the proceeding, as determined by the Department on a case-by-case basis. These services are provided free of charge to the individuals requesting the service.

- For proceedings initiated by a petitioner, the Department will direct the petitioner to procure interpretation and translation services. The Department will direct that the services procured by the petitioner include trained interpreters and translators with appropriate experience and technical knowledge of the industry.
- For proceedings initiated by the Department, the Department will procure interpretation and translation services itself. The Department will endeavor to select interpretation and translation vendors with appropriate experience and technical knowledge of the industry.

Translated documents will be posted on the Department's website and any relevant petitioner's website as directed by the Department.

The Department's website is formatted to allow for translation into multiple languages using the AI generated translate function on the page. Users can select the desired language using the dropdown menu and selecting "Select Language," which is accessible from the globe icon on the website tool bar.

The Department will endeavor to post vital documents on its website in a format that allows for unofficial translation into multiple languages using the translate function on the page. The Department will also use its social media platforms to provide translated vital information and increase messaging to populations with LEP.

Interested individuals may contact the Department's Language Access Coordinator to request translated materials. The Department's Director of Environmental Justice and Public Participation will work with all divisions to assess opportunities to improve language access.

## Interpretation Services (Virtual or In-person)

The Department is committed to ensuring that public hearings for significant proceedings and important events and technical sessions are accessible to everyone, regardless of language barriers. We will maintain assisted listening and interpretation equipment for hearings. The Department will ensure that all Department Hearing Officers are trained on the proper uses and functions of the Department's assisted listening and interpretation equipment.

The Department will develop and maintain a list of technical and legal terms commonly used in Department matters and provide such list to translators and interpreters. The Department will provide interpreters with relevant materials so that they have an adequate opportunity to review materials before the event.

The Consumer Division currently has Spanish, Cape Verdean Creole, Haitian Creole, and Portuguese speaking staff available to answer the toll-free line. The Consumer Division's automated telephone system allows consumers to opt for Spanish language recordings and/or Spanish-speaking staff. The Department's Consumer Division will periodically review call center system analytics and information collected through its automated call center system to identify possible areas of improvement and, to the extent possible, improve the automated call center system functionality.

The Department has a vendor that provides over-the-phone interpretation services to staff in over 200 languages to assist members of the public who call in to the Department. Staff are instructed to call the language service, identify themselves as DPU staff and provide a customer code, request the language for which interpretation is needed, and then wait to be connected to the interpreter. In some cases, DPU staff may need to arrange for a call back in coordination with the interpreter. There are several [state vendors](#) on the [PRF75](#) Statewide Contract. All staff will have access to and be trained on the over-the-phone language service provider.

## Time and Location of Public Meetings

The Department will ensure that the factors used to determine the time, place, location, duration, and security at public hearings and meetings are developed and applied in a non-discriminatory manner. Most Department hearings and meetings are held at the Department or virtually. The Department will endeavor to host hybrid meetings to make public meetings accessible to more people. When scheduling public meetings elsewhere, as for service territory hearings, the Department should consider the time of the meeting, availability of public transportation to locations, and whether locations are child-friendly and culturally appropriate. When possible, the Department should hold public meetings in places that community members already routinely use and feel comfortable visiting. The Department will consult with the parties to a proceeding, including petitioners, the Attorney General's Office, and the court reporter (if appropriate). The Department will endeavor to hold a mix of daytime and evening meetings and to provide information on access and transportation to the meeting location.

## Remote/Virtual Option Meetings

The Department currently offers options for virtual meetings and hearings. Notices of these events contain details on how the public may access the meeting remotely, including telephone access.

## Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) Accommodations

The purpose of meaningful access for people with disabilities is to promote inclusivity and maximize access in addition to complying with federal non-discrimination statutes and ensuring that a person with vision, speech, language, hearing, or other disability can convey information to, communicate with, and receive information from the DPU. People with disabilities may require different auxiliary devices or assistive technology for language and communication access depending on their functional needs.

The Department’s offices and the public buildings in which external meetings are held are ADA accessible. Upon request, the DPU will provide screen readers for people who are blind or low-vision as well as alternative text to describe images that screen readers cannot interpret. Upon request, the DPU will also provide American Sign Language (“ASL”) or Communication Access Real-Time Translation (“CART”) services for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

Requests for reasonable accommodations should be made at least one week prior to the date of the public hearing or event and be directed to —Melixza Esenyie, ADA Coordinator at 617-626 1282 or [eeadiversity@mass.gov](mailto:eeadiversity@mass.gov). A link to the [EEA/DPU Policy on Ensuring Meaningful Access for Persons with Disabilities](#) is found [here](#).

## VII. ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

For certain proceedings, as noted above, the Department has implemented the following publication and outreach efforts: prominent publication on the petitioner’s website; newspaper postings; outreach to interested persons and service lists; and outreach to municipal and community leaders. The Department strives to expand this list. Further, the Department strives to hold hearings and meetings in places that community members already routinely use and feel comfortable visiting, such as public offices, libraries, and community centers.

### Inform Constituents of Key Agency Actions, Activities and/or Programs

The Department interacts with the public in multiple ways. The main points of contact with the public are through the Consumer, Legal, Pipeline Safety, Rail Transit Safety, Transportation Network Company (“TNC”), Transportation Oversight, Siting, and Environmental Justice and Public Participation Divisions.

- The Department’s Consumer Division maintains a toll-free line to receive consumer complaints involving their investor-owned electric, natural gas, and water utility bills or services. The Consumer Division staff also answers questions from consumers who call the hotline or contact the Department through email and other means. The Consumer Division investigates consumer complaints as appropriate.
- The Department’s Legal Division primarily interacts with the public during public hearings held pursuant to General Laws c. 30A, § 10. Many Department proceedings involve a public hearing to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to be heard on the rates and services provided by their investor-owned utilities. The Legal Division also responds to public inquiries.
- The Department’s Pipeline Safety Division engages with homeowners and contractors during informal conferences and addresses public inquiries related to Dig Safe matters.

- The Department's Rail Transit Safety Division is responsible for overseeing the safety of equipment and operations of the MBTA and receives and responds to safety concerns from the public about the MBTA's Blue Line, Green Line, Orange Line, and Red Line.
- The Department's TNC Division interacts with driver applicants during denial appeal hearings. The TNC Division also has in-person and telephone conversations with rideshare drivers during various stages of the rideshare application process.
- The Department's Transportation Oversight Division interacts with drivers of Division-regulated vehicles who are required to hold motorbus certificates. The Transportation Oversight Division also interacts with consumers, primarily by correspondence, to resolve complaints about common carriers.
- Beginning in 2024, the Department's Environmental Justice and Public Participation Division is led by a director and includes staff from other divisions working as the Environmental Justice Team. The Environmental Justice Team includes call center professionals, planners, economists, attorneys, a language access coordinator, and compliance officers, and is focused on best practices for complying with the DPU's Environmental Justice Strategy. The Environmental Justice and Public Participation Division ensures meaningful public participation in the Department's work at the forefront of important energy, environmental, and technological trends that are transforming energy and transportation infrastructure in Massachusetts.
- Each of the Department's other divisions (e.g., Electric Power Division, Gas Division, and Rates and Revenue Requirements Division) also interacts with members of the public in response to inquiries.

The Department uses multiple channels of outreach to inform the public about opportunities for public comment, including the channels listed above under section VII as well as the DPU website, File Room, emails to stakeholder and service lists, and social media. DPU staff is continuously working to improve its website and maintains webpages unique to proceedings and topics that it anticipates will be of interest to the public. The Department is also increasing multi-lingual messaging through its social media accounts to provide information to the public about upcoming events and agency work.

## Consult with Constituents about Key Agency Actions, Activities, and/or Programs

The Department solicits public feedback in particular proceedings, for regulations, and for important policies, such as the LAP and PIP. For significant proceedings, the Department often holds technical sessions to gather additional input to inform the decision-making process.

Legislation enacted in November 2024 ([An Act Promoting a Clean Energy Grid, Advancing Equity and Protecting Ratepayers](#)) authorizes the Department to implement an intervenor support grant program to ensure that more diverse viewpoints and voices are heard and considered. The program will make it easier for qualified intervenors, including organizations and community groups, who may be substantially and specifically affected by a proceeding to meaningfully participate through the decision-making process.

To increase transparency, the Department conducted a series of Road Shows across the state throughout 2024, which provided an opportunity for the Department to engage directly with the public.

Our three Commissioners, who oversee the Department, began each Road Show by giving a presentation outlining the work of the Department, our recent successes, and plans for future work. Following the presentation, the Commission responded to comments from the public. The Department will continue to host public engagement events that inform and educate the public about the work of its different Divisions, key agency actions, and how members of the public can participate in proceedings.

### Provide Timely Notices

The Department issues or directs the issuance of Notices of all proceedings shortly after they are commenced. Each Notice contains detailed information on the nature of the proceeding, how to file comments or attend a public hearing, how to request language access services, and additional contact information.

### Comments Submission

Comments on Department proceedings may be submitted: (1) in writing or electronically before, during, and after the public hearing; or (2) orally at public hearings. Oral and written comments submitted in languages other than English will be translated and considered in the decision-making process. The Department will set forth a reasonable deadline for comments in each Department proceeding, taking into account the nature of the hearing and its relationship to the Department's decision-making process. In those cases involving a statutory deadline, the Department will specify deadlines for written and electronic comments in order to meet such statutory deadline.

### Incorporate Feedback from Constituents (Where Applicable)

The Department is committed to ensuring that all voices are heard in its decision-making process and recognizes the importance of integrating environmental justice across all our work. The Department will review and consider all comments submitted in a proceeding and address them as appropriate in a substantive order issued in that proceeding. Orders issued by the Department make a note of comments received and the Department's position on key issues raised. For significant proceedings, the Department will endeavor to include an appendix to the order that summarizes and notes the responses to public comments received, which comments were incorporated, which comments were not incorporated with a short explanation.

### Statewide Publications

The Department issues final orders in its proceedings (containing rulings or other decisions that have precedential value) and provides them to the established service list or, where appropriate, a distribution list for that proceeding. The Department posts the orders on its online File Room for that particular proceeding, which is accessible at this link:

<https://eeaonline.eea.state.ma.us/DPU/Fileroom/dockets/bynumber>. In some cases, the Department establishes a dedicated webpage for the proceeding or provides links to the orders on the DPU home page. The Department is enhancing its online File Room to make its contents more accessible and searchable. The Department will post translated copies of orders and other materials available on its website and will send such materials as appropriate to service and distribution lists.

Copies of the orders are also published by the Social Law Library, and rulemakings are published by in the Massachusetts Register by the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

## Maintain Relationships and/or Follow up with Constituents

The Department conducts ongoing outreach through its Director of Environmental Justice and Public Participation, its Director of Governmental Affairs, and its Director of Communications.

## Use of Information Repositories

[The File Room](#) is a publicly available, central information repository. The Department is in the process of revamping its File Room to make it easier for people to navigate, track, and search proceeding-related information. Personal identifying information added to the File Room or included in a transcript during proceedings can be redacted upon request. In addition to the File Room, the Department posts information about its proceedings, activities, and services on its website and through social media. The Department maintains and regularly updates a list of issue-specific stakeholders, including statewide, regional, and local community-based organizations. The Department will endeavor to update this list regularly to reflect current and active organizations. The Department provides public records through its Public Records team.

## Use of Alternative Media Outlets

Where appropriate, the Department requires publication and outreach in newspapers in other languages. The Department maintains a list of alternative media outlets.

## VIII. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN GUIDANCE

The Department will provide copies of this plan to all staff and conduct staff trainings as noted below.

### Staff Training

This plan will be:

- Posted internally for all employees, and staff will receive periodic reminders about the document;
- Incorporated into the orientation for new employees as part of the on-boarding process;
- Presented to management so they are fully aware of and understand the plan to reinforce the plan's importance and ensure its implementation by staff; and
- Presented to Department staff having contact with the public during trainings about best practices for public participation.

The Director of Environmental Justice and Public Participation will lead trainings for staff at least once per year, or more often as necessary, and notify Department employees of additional trainings available through other agencies. DPU will ensure that all staff, as appropriate, have been properly trained on these processes and procedures. DPU will continue to offer anti-bias and cultural competency trainings to all DPU staff and contractors and will ensure that such trainings are a routine part of the on-boarding process for new employees and contractors.

## IX. MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

The Department will review and update this plan at least every two years to reflect lesson learned and stakeholder input. The review assesses:

- Whether there have been any significant changes in the composition or needs of the populations served;
- Whether Department staff knows and understands the plan;
- Whether additional proceedings or services require application of the plan;
- Identification of any issues or problems related to application of the plan; and
- Identification of any recommended actions to provide more responsive and effective access to Department proceedings, programs, services, activities, and materials.

Monitoring the effectiveness of the plan may include:

- Analyzing current and previous data on public involvement;
- Surveying staff on how often they use this plan, if they believe there should be changes to the plan, and if they believe that the plan is meeting the needs of the public; and
- Seeking out and monitoring feedback from community-based organizations, legal services, and other stakeholders about the effectiveness of the plan and the Department's effectiveness and performance in ensuring meaningful access to Department proceedings, programs, services, activities, and materials.

## X. QUESTIONS/COMPLAINTS

The Department will respond to public inquiries and complaints regarding this plan, including with thorough investigations, implementation of necessary corrective actions, and feedback and communication with the complainant.

Complaints regarding the implementation of this plan may be filed with the Department's Director of Environmental Justice and Public Participation within six months of the alleged denial of the benefits of this plan. The written complaint may be submitted to:

Veena Dharmaraj, Director of Environmental Justice and Public Participation  
 Department of Public Utilities  
 One South Station  
 Boston, MA 02110  
 Email: [Veena.Dharmaraj@mass.gov](mailto:Veena.Dharmaraj@mass.gov)  
 Ph: 617-305-3779