

Grid Modernization Advisory Council (GMAC)
Equity Working Group
MEETING MINUTES

Friday February 20, 2025

Virtual Zoom Meeting

Members Present: Kathryn Wright, Barr Foundation (chair); Julia Fox, Department of Energy Resources; Chris Modlish, Attorney General’s Office; Kyle Murray, Acadia Center; Larry Chretien, Green Energy Consumers Alliance; Jolette Westbrook, Environmental Defense Fund; Mary Wambui, Planning Office for Urban Affairs

Non-Voting Members: Erin Engstrom, Eversource

Members Absent: --

DOER Staff Present: Elischia Fludd, Colin Carroll, Charles Dawson, Aurora Edington

Consultants Present: Tim Woolf, Chelsea Mattioda, Synapse

1. Call to Order

Kathryn Wright, as Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

2. Welcome, Roll Call, Agenda

Chair Wright took roll call and gave an overview of the agenda.

3. Meeting Minutes Review and Voting

Chair Wright called for approval of the minutes. Kyle Murray provided the motion to approve. Julia Fox seconded. Jolette Westbrook abstained. The December 6, 2024 meeting minutes were approved.

4. ESMP Stakeholder Engagement/Equity Metrics

a. Context Setting

Chair Wright gave context for the metrics discussion including a schedule of Phase 2 deadlines and upcoming EWG meetings and read from slides 5-6.

b. EDC Presentation on Metrics/Biannual Reporting March DPU Filing

Erin Engstrom of Eversource presented the EDC stakeholder/equity update. She covered the three metrics proposed by the EDCs in their ESMPs and reported that the EDCs tried to incorporate those into the narrative section. Erin then discussed what will be in the Biannual Reports and when they will be filed.

Erin also provided an update on the CESAG. All members of the CESAG have been chosen and they are working on scheduling a kickoff meeting before getting into a cadence of meeting every other week to start. ASG will facilitate. The CESAG will have one representative from Slingshot/Fix the Grid, one from Browning the Green Space, one from ABCD (focused on affordable and low-income priorities on the energy efficiency side of the house), one from Western Mass Health, one from Emerald Cities Collaborative and one from Amplify Latinx.

Mary Wambui: Did you share these EDC slides with us?

Julia Fox: Yes, we sent out the slides yesterday, and they are available on the website.

Chair Wright reviewed high level themes from EWG original feedback, referring to slide 10. Chair Wright prompted the group to discuss the EDC proposed metrics, and what the EDCs could prioritize.

c. Discussion on Priority Metrics and the Role of EWG

Mary Wambui: Reporting Metric 1, number of outreach and involvement meetings; Reporting Metric 2; number of outreach and involvement meetings; Reporting Metric 3; number and category of requests. I believe most of us here are people who have been around this for a while. We know it is not the number of involvement metrics that has been our issue. The issue is measuring meaningfulness and inclusiveness in addressing procedural equity. I don't have an answer right now, but our issue is not the numbers. We've done these for a long time, sign up in the sign-up sheet. You have 100 people. What does that mean? It has meant nothing in the last couple of years. We need to think if we are measuring procedural equity, which I assume the number of outreach is meant to capture. That's not the problem in Massachusetts. Inclusiveness, meaningfulness, and time are more important.

Chair Wright: That is fair. I have provided similar feedback to Erin directly. On Metric 3, I would encourage the EDCs to be more specific about what a response means. The three standard responses don't provide clarity on the EDCs reasoning or thinking. This third metric may not have real meaning for the public. My broader concern is that none of these metrics get to the

broadier problems of addressing benefits and burdens. If we are using community benefit agreements (CBAs), is there a way we can get a sense of the number and contents of those? Can we get a better sense of the affordability of the ESMP and other programs? How much is being rate based per customer? I know other grid mod plans do this in other states. That is missing and impacts our ability to scrutinize and make decisions.

Jolette Westbrook: To pick up on what Mary raised about meaningful engagement. Maybe the CESAG will address this more. It's not the number of meetings, though of course, you need a fair number of meetings to create opportunities to participate. When people come to a meeting, do they know why they are there? There are so many initiatives going on right now in MA, in the energy space with EDCs and LDCs. Confusion is running rampant. How do the EDCs help ensure that when people attend meetings that they know what is being discussed, why it's being discussed, and why it differs from other initiatives going on. We need clarity.

Erin Engstrom: All of these points are very helpful. Jolette, you are spot on that there's a lot going on. I'm trying to keep my head straight with everything going on. We need to make sure whatever we are presenting is clear. I hear you on the feedback loop, Kathryn. We need to explain why not so that people feel like they are being heard. Mary, you're hitting on the million-dollar question – how do we measure meaningfulness? On the benefits and burdens – we talked about this Kathryn – there is also the process going on related to recent legislation, there will be a working group through EEA about what CBAs and cumulative impact analyses look like. Is that something we could talk about incorporating in the future? I think we will want to see what comes out of that process.

Chair Wright: I get there is a lot going on, but there should be a commitment to track these things so we can have a sense of the full picture. Later, we will also need to understand where investments from the grid services compensation fund are going and where NWAs will be implemented.

Larry Chretien: I want to support what you said Kathryn. I am interested in benefits and burdens over time, that should be our focus. On this slide and Mary's comments, we are focused on the word metric. I'm thinking in the form of a deliverable. I'd like to see – there is a lot of subjectivity here – I would like to see someone whose sole job is to monitor on behalf of DPU and GMAC to observe, not participate, essentially audit why meetings were organized the way they were and assess inclusivity. We should be able to say the EDCs have tried these things over the course of the last few months. Here is what has been accomplished and here is what hasn't. This may be different than what Synapse is doing for us. How did people respond? Were EDCs clear?

Mary Wambui: To build on that, if this was like DPU proceedings, the equivalent of what I'm asking for is to enter into the record, was what the participants brought to the table brought into the record? Not just, we met people. What was the feedback? Has it been recorded? Eventually, we would be looking for a percentage of incorporation of what came from the public.

Chris Modlish: I wanted to reiterate what others brought up. We are always focused on affordability issues. It's critical that an affordability metric be added to track the bill impacts

from specific ESMP investments and a global bill impact analysis included in biannual reports so that stakeholders know the impacts and can track where they're coming from. It can be difficult to track even for us across dockets and revenue stream. It's important to understand this.

Chair Wright: This is also where my mind was going. It's the Future of Gas work streams too. There are several investments being potentially rate based.

Jolette Westbrook: In setting up the framework and metrics for stakeholder meetings, are best practices from other jurisdictions being looked at? In my mind, we just cannot afford timewise, money-wise to always start from square one. If the EDCs are working on community engagement issues in other jurisdictions, it seems to make sense that some of those best practices may be transferable.

Erin Engstrom: It's a great question Jolette. Related to the details of our stakeholder engagement in Chapter 3 of the ESMPs, it talks about these. I can speak for Eversource, we absolutely incorporate best practices and lessons learned. Massachusetts is in the forefront of moving in this space from the administration and department level. A lot of best practices are from MA. We are also incorporating best practices from past projects. We are using reports like the AG's "Overly Burdened, Rarely Heard" report. As Larry and Chris and Jolette have said, around the affordability metric, one thing I'm thinking is whether it should be a metric or commitment is to provide a narrative update in the biannual report. You might get more detail that way.

Chair Wright: That is where we wanted to head next. I do want to give folks a chance to speak and raise their hands. I do recognize that MA is in a leadership position, but there are other jurisdictions like HI who have done grid modernization and distribution planning longer than us and that integrate affordability and other metrics. I still think there are ways we can improve on transparency and clarity.

Julia Fox: I want to echo everything that has been said. Clearly with the metrics that has been proposed we are missing elements of distributional and structural equity which are important. DOER is still looking for more of a distributional equity analysis. We want to see a granular analysis of impacts and outcomes. We could look at reliability metrics already reported but look more specifically at EJ communities which we defined in our report and EDCs defined in the EDCs. There are other elements like employment increases and impacts on the economy. I think there is room to look at the qualitative aspects of this in the biannual reports, but we should look at more quantitative aspects. Kathryn mentioned the grid services compensation fund – if anyone is interested 12-2 on March 3 there is a workshop on that. I could send that link around.

Chair Wright: Any additional points on metrics?

Tim Woolf: On all of the comments we heard about best practices, I know there are several firms out there who do this work for EJ communities and making effective processes.

Mary Wambui: I'm confused about the terminology we are using. My understanding of the proposed stakeholder metrics. These are in procedural equity realm. Structural and distributional equity are different, and I thought we could discuss those.

Chair Wright: We are talking about how we may want to augment the current metrics to address distributional and structural equity. We can keep talking about the metrics to discuss the quantitative aspects, but we can also talk about biannual reports.

Mary Wambui: Structural and distributional equity is where the actual value is for communities. I want to make sure we can have substantial time to discuss that. My hope is that is not subjected to only qualitative assessment.

Chair Wright: Some comments have blended the two and called out to the benefits and burdens, we want tracked. People should feel free to jump in to share more thoughts on distributional and structural equity. At the end of the call, we will also talk about how we can continue to engage on this topic.

Julia Fox: With these metrics, to confirm, with these three metrics and other five ESMP metrics, are you envisioning these will be reported in each biannual report?

Erin Engstrom: We are wrestling if there is value providing that annually or biannually. There may not be significant progress after six months.

Kyle Murray had departed at 10:30am and returned at 10:52am.

Chair Wright: Final time to raise comments on metrics. I know utilities have a lot of other metrics they are reporting on, but many are relevant to our understanding the ESMPs. I appreciated states that took the time to centralize this information for holistic understanding of impacts on rates, burdens, and affordability, and how many projects are being deployed. This is an opportunity to make a lot of these disparate proceedings be centralized in a way that is understandable for stakeholders and the public.

Mary Wambui: Have you considered, Erin, a restorative justice metric to look at damages to East Boston and corrective measures?

Erin Engstrom: That is a heavy question, Mary. We have not thought about restorative justice. That's something I think even from a stakeholder engagement question – we didn't cover that in our ESMPs. It's something we should consider. We should talk. I think it's something that could be discussed.

Mary Wambui: I'm showing what kind of metrics mean something to communities. It may not be specific to Eversource, but as you think about these investments that's something you could report on.

Erin Engstrom: The benefits of the projects would be clear – kind of focusing on the burdens and how we have addressed or helped to mitigate those burdens?

Mary Wambui: We can talk about it elsewhere.

Erin Engstrom: Maybe that's something that is incorporated in a CBA.

Mary Wambui: Yes.

Chair Wright: Let's switch gears to the biannual reports and broader information the utilities should consider. I'd like to see what folks would like to see in there and treated qualitatively or with more detail. I think it would be helpful to have updates on things we know are coming and how utilities are thinking about equity components. In the next couple years we will have a new model of DER compensation and understanding more specifics there and equity components will be helpful.

Mary Wambui: I remember at one time, DOER or someone prepared a slide or something that put out all of the input you received from communities grouped somehow to show all stakeholder processes and what themes emerged from those processes.

Chair Wright: Do you recall where that was from or have an example?

Mary Wambui: I'm trying to remember – it shows you specific themes that come from communities that rise to the top and warrant attention.

Chair Wright: That sounds like a powerful tool and would be helpful for this group.

Jolette Westbrook: In thinking about what might be helpful in the biannual report, it seems there would be benefit in knowing how the EDCs addressed the concerns that were raised. If communities had concerns about A, B, or C, it's great to know communities had those concerns, but how are those concerns being considered. That could be something included in a narrative and included in a section of the biannual report.

Chair Wright: I agree and that goes beyond our metrics. I know we are early with CBAs. There are certain things that lend themselves to a metric and others lend themselves to a narrative form – what are discussions and negotiations looking like? I know legally you maybe can't reveal everything, but some categorization could likely be done. Asked about how and if the working group would like to participate in the Phase 2 proceeding.

Larry Chretien: I appreciate the group discussion. I think you, Kathryn and Julia, have done a good job distilling the different thoughts that have been laid out. I don't want to lay the responsibility on you, but I think you represent us well. I think it would be good to make comments and do it collectively before they are do.

Kyle Murray: I agree with Larry. I know a lot of groups who were active in Phase I have not had capacity to be active in Phase II so getting more comments into the docket would be a good way to use our capacity here.

Chair Wright: We will discuss internally how to do that and work within the GMAC processes for approval to get answers for next time we meet. Feel free to reach out to us before the next meeting.

5. Equity in Long-Term System Planning Process (LTSP)

Charles Dawson at DOER presented on the LTSP, referring to Slide 12, including some background, an overview of the EDCs' proposal, and notes on the proposed GMAC role.

a. Discussion

Charles Dawson invited the group to provide feedback on the LTSP process.

Mary Wambui: Thank you for the presentation. Did you say that the LTSP is discussing cost recovery?

Charles Dawson: So far, the discussion of cost recovery has been relatively high level. The EDCs proposal so far differs between solar facilities and regular customers. Solar facilities would pay an upfront fee, and customers would pay through an LTSP factor. There are questions about how to consolidate an LTSP factor and ESMP factor to limit what is being recovered through these other mechanisms.

Mary Wambui: Thank you, that is why I was asking.

Charles Dawson: These conversations will be more substantive in Phase II.

Chair Wright: To date, the LTSP has been driven by a top-down approach driven by the state and large developers, and it would be great to think bottom-up, incorporate community solar, and use input from communities to inform the LTSP. Do you have a sense of when the issue around whether the electrification load should be included in the forecast will be resolved?

Charles Dawson: Great comment and question. On the question, that is something we are advocating for. The EDCs proposal has only focused on distributed generation, and we would like to see it not just for DG.

Julia Fox: On the GMAC role, we will discuss this more next week to get the GMAC's blessing to have a sub-group on LTSP. It would be good to get this group's thoughts on topics, who should be at the table, etc.

Chris Modlish: To Kathryn's point about bringing in more voices than big DG industry, it's something we should think about invite those other voices we think are important as these inputs are development. It's been industry, the AG, and DOER driving things. In the LTSP, we are talking about the process to set up a future process. We should take advantage of that.

Charles Dawson: I agree that the GMAC and this group can think about the membership of that future group. I also want to say that we invite feedback and involvement now if there is a way that people in this group or in your network, our door is open.

Chris Modlish: Same here for the AGO.

Chair Wright: The proposed representation of the GMAC sub-group – I don't think it's responsive to the comments I've made. I think there is room to brainstorm there. A broader array of folks will want to weigh in on the LTSP investment prioritization while right sizing the time commitment.

Larry Chretien: I appreciate you working on this, Charles, and everyone else's work on LTSP. I used to be someone who really thought long-term, but I really think we need to get the next 5 years right. Everything is fuzzy the farther out you look. A lot of the forecasting and things – we will need to redo those very quickly. I think we need to hit our mark for 2030. I consider that to be sacred. I will watch these biannual reports and grid reform and heat pump adoption and those things.

Chair Wright: For time's sake, I'll let Larry have the last word on this topic. There is a GMAC meeting next week. Between the next GMAC meeting and following EWG meeting the EDCs will submit Biannual Reports so we will be in touch.

6. Closing/Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chelsea Mattioda

Synapse Energy Economics

Meeting materials:

- Meeting agenda
- Meeting presentation slides