

Grid Modernization Advisory Council (GMAC)  
Equity Working Group

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Tuesday, October 10, 2023**

Virtual Zoom Meeting

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<b>Members Present:</b>	Kathryn Wright, Barr Foundation (chair)* Julia Fox, Department of Energy Resources Larry Chretien, Green Energy Consumers Alliance* Chris Modlish, Attorney General’s Office Kyle Murray, Acadia Center* Vernon Walker, Clean Water Action Mary Wambui, Planning Office for Urban Affairs
<b>Non-Voting Member:</b>	Erin Engstrom, Eversource
<b>Members Absent:</b>	—
<b>DOER Staff Present:</b>	Sarah McDaniel
<b>Consultants Present:</b>	Jen Haugh, GreenerU Chelsea Mattioda, Synapse Daniela Miranda, GreenerU

\* *GMAC members*

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**1. Introductions and roll call**

GMAC Councilor Kathryn Wright, as chair, called the meeting to order at 11:02 a.m. Wright welcomed everyone to the meeting. Wright then took roll call.

**2. Review of meeting goals and agenda / approval of minutes**

Councilor Wright shared a couple of edits for clarification to the October 2, 2023, Equity Working Group meeting minutes. Those changes were reflected in an updated version, as were two edits from Engstrom. Wright moved and Murray seconded to approve the minutes of October 2, 2023. The motion carried unanimously.

**3. Stakeholder Plan for Technical Sessions and Workshops**

Engstrom presented slides 6–9. Slide 6 shows the language of the legislation requiring the technical sessions. The goal is to have a variety of folks from different technical sectors. They are hoping to have a broad range of voices heard ahead of plan approval. The dates are November 15 and 28, 2023, with times finalized by the GMAC meeting on Thursday, October 12.

The workshops will have a total of 30 statewide representatives from across sectors, which will be professionally designed and facilitated. These will be two four-hour Zoom sessions that will be recorded and posted on the EDCs' and the GMAC websites. Notification will include information in high-traffic areas. There will be opportunities to provide written feedback until December 4, 2023. All recommendations will be tracked and put into a formalized feedback loop for increased transparency.

**Kathryn Wright:** What kinds of topics are you thinking about discussing during these sessions?

**Erin Engstrom:** The first is what the ESMPs are to give folks a chance to understand the background and how they came about. Another will be on forecasting and demand, and another is specifically around stakeholder engagement and how we would do that to implement the ESMPs. Workforce development is another topic; there are sections that hit on this within each ESMP, but this warrants conversation within these sessions and workshops. Ultimately what we are envisioning is an opportunity to educate the stakeholders on who will be ultimately impacted by these plans.

**Julia Fox:** Regarding the feedback loop, is that also publicly available and tracked?

**Erin Engstrom:** Yes. Ultimately, once the full recommendation tracker will be created, the facilitators will pull together the summaries and make that publicly available.

**Larry Chretien:** You're on the right track. One concern he has is that no matter what you do, you won't get great representation. He doesn't know a Plan B. It will be important to see who showed up and to see if important voices are missed. It's not anyone's fault, but it's a likely possibility. Also, will there be breakout groups? You're trying to cast a wide net of people with different concerns, and there might be people whose eyes will glaze over on some parts, just hypothetically. The workforce development people may have very little interest in forecasting and vice versa. If you can put out the agenda as soon as you can, and if the agenda is clear that it will be a well moderated session with breakout sessions, that will be helpful.

**Erin Engstrom:** Yes, this is mostly within the facilitators' purview, but she will bring that feedback back to the group. For the panelists themselves (slide 8), we tried to hit on the groups written in the legislation itself, but we tried to go beyond that. Some sectors that were missing: CBOs, equity, EJC, etc. The groups on the righthand column are additional groups to be invited to listen in, but all told, there are more than 100 groups identified. She's looking for feedback from this group and GMAC.

**Kathryn Wright:** Wright expressed concern about how much the affordable housing community is going to be represented, both in public and private development. She recommended LISC and the Mass Association of Community Development Corporations be included, as their staff might have more capacity to attend.

**Erin Engstrom:** Engstrom agreed that that was helpful and asked for other feedback.

**Kathryn Wright:** We may have more feedback once the EDCs create agendas.

#### 4. EDC Proposed Stakeholder Process Metrics

Slide 11 showed the proposed equity metrics from the EDCs. Wright emphasized that there are two places this will be discussed: the metrics as proposed and then in the matrix we developed.

**Erin Engstrom:** Engstrom added that this is just a proposal; we wanted the EWG's feedback as well as the GMAC's feedback. Mentioned at the last EWG that the EDCs were struggling to come up with metrics, so they certainly welcome everyone's feedback on the best way to do this. They're looking at how to define certain words or metrics. Again, feedback is welcome.

Wright took a brief poll to see who had had an opportunity to read through the metrics proposed and asked for initial reactions.

**Kathryn Wright:** Wright observed that this set of metrics counts EDC activities, but not their responses. For example, for CESAG and the listening sessions the EDCs said they will track responses to comments publicly. she would like to see something similar within the stakeholder metrics so there is public transparency and accountability. There are broader questions about where metrics are posted and maintained and who the metrics will be reported to.

**Erin Engstrom:** Regarding the responsiveness component, this was one area where we really wanted the equity working group's feedback on definitions of addressing, incorporating, etc. How can we measure responsiveness?

**Kathryn Wright:** Wright said she thinks it's context dependent; people don't want to feel like they're shouting into the void. There were line-by-line responses from the EDCs to concerns that came up in the Equity Working Group of the EEAC for the 2022-24 Three Year Plan, which was helpful.

**Kyle Murray:** Is the understanding on these metrics that these are either (a) just reporting or (b) that these are performance incentive metrics? Because the latter is basically if the utilities hit their metric targets, they receive a bonus. He was asking because it's a very important distinction, because with (b) the utility is going above and beyond what is supposed to do, whereas what's proposed is a normal course of practice.

**Erin Engstrom:** Engstrom said she doesn't know that there is a mechanism within the GMAC process for the EDCs to be incentivized.

**Kyle Murray:** Murray wasn't sure.

**Kathryn Wright:** Wright said that as far she knew, we were thinking about these as reporting metrics.

**Julia Fox:** Fox said she wasn't sure about any sort of incentives through ESMP structure or the GMAC, but it's a good discussion to have.

**Kyle Murray:** We do need to have this conversation, because there is value in performance incentives, but he doesn't know that we could come up with that given the timing. He appreciates these outreach metrics; he also understands how difficult it is to come up with them. He's a little disappointed that stakeholder outreach is the only set of metrics we've received to evaluate; he was hoping to get more concrete metrics that have been talked about at the GMAC as well.

**Chris Modlish:** Modlish wanted to reiterate the importance of making responses public and as specific as possible. Even if we had the ability to decide on performance incentive/disincentive frameworks, with

public information, he could see members of this group be able to have an opportunity to advocate for a better outcome.

**Julia Fox:** Fox wondered if there are any stakeholder metrics with targets attached in the next set of metrics to be released, since these are about numeric representations of targets that the EDCs are trying to reach within a certain timeframe?

**Erin Engstrom:** This is a challenge without a baseline. We could use the first set of projects as a baseline. We've tracked in some regards, but we've also heard that the EDCs haven't done enough in this space, so not sure what the right target should be.

**Mary Wambui:** Wambui said she understood why there needs to be stakeholder engagement process metrics, but we have to think much more than the number of outreach and involvement meetings as well as number and category of requests. Right now, we are having stakeholder processes that do not always translate to procedural justice. So she just wanted to throw this out there that we need to think really hard about the metrics. She can see why we need the number of meetings and events, but wonders how we can account for what happens in the meetings. Basically, you can have as many meetings as you want, but whether those are enhanced presentation or engagement is really the big deal today, not so much the number of outreach activities.

**Kathryn Wright:** Wright says she appreciates this perspective, and the next section will get into some external inputs. She reiterated that wanted to see how people are giving of their time and how we're accounting for responding to their time.

**Erin Engstrom:** Engstrom said that's where the EDCs are struggling, because some of that information is subjective. Whatever we decide, it should be clearly defined on how we are measuring it. What is currently proposed is more numbers-based because these are things we know we can track, but we are looking for feedback on the best way to measure that.

**Kyle Murray:** Murray echoed Wambui's point about the EEAC work and their equity working group and there being lessons there in developing metrics. He thought that that equity working group set equity targets for the 2022–2024 plan. Metrics and targets are different, but one thing to remember is that targets should have principles—targets are results oriented, time-bound, etc. Working those into these metrics would be appreciated. Let's use lessons learned and not reinvent the wheel on some of this stuff.

**Kathryn Wright:** We can go back and reference some of those as well as we update the equity metrics assessment table.

## 5. Review of Equity Metrics Assessment Table

Wright cued up the next section, which was the equity metrics assessment table. This was put together as a conversation starting point for this group to think about making recommendations for improving the ESMPs in terms of thinking about metrics and some of the big topic areas that we prioritized last time. This new version of the file is also on the GMAC website. The intention is to discuss some of these major topic areas and to work to edit this in real time so we can take some of this information and broader comments and start shaping some recommendations for the GMAC. Based on survey results, the majority agreed that the topics of **accessibility/community engagement, affordability, and financial incentives/benefits** should be covered in this meeting. If there's time, we'll hit some of the other topics in this document.

### a. Accessibility and community engagement

Wright went over the general table contents, which included:

- a problem statement about what we know about historical equity concerns;
- what's in the ESMPs right now to address these particular challenges;
- what outcomes we would like to see; and
- metrics of success we can use to help the EDCs shape their ESMPs.

**Mary Wambui:** Wambui expressed that we should track demographic representation as part of accessibility and community engagement, because we do need to evaluate the diversity and inclusiveness in the stakeholder process.

**Erin Engstrom:** Engstrom said that Wambui brought up a good point that is really challenging in this space. The EDCs would love to know who's attending and providing information, but people already always willing to share their personal information. We have work to do to build trust. She is looking for suggestions on how to track that information. Another question she asked was, would impacted communities being impacted carry larger weight than others providing feedback on attending the meetings? We get a lot of input from folks who aren't actually impacted by projects.

**Mary Wambui:** This is what we usually hear. But if you are in Lawrence, and you know what percentage of Lawrence residents are language-isolated and renters and you have a stakeholder engagement meeting there and none of these groups are represented, you want to know that. Just because it's uncomfortable, it doesn't mean we shouldn't try. We can't make a blanket assumption that most people are uncomfortable about giving their demographics. She has also often heard that people are uncomfortable talking about their income, but if there are incentives available for an income range, people are willing to share theirs.

**Kathryn Wright:** Wright thinks this is a good point. There are a lot of ways to understand who's coming to these meetings: renters, other demographics.

**Vernon Walker:** Walker said we should be intentional about trying to uplift and include folks in underserved communities, and if we're not getting them at the table, we should think about what we could do to involve them. And what would be helpful is to engage community anchoring organizations that have the trust—faith-based, libraries, community centers—to look for more equitable representation. While it's important to hear from strong opinions, but there are other important voices, too. Maybe we think about stipends or other ways to honor people's time, particularly from overburdened communities. If it's in person, maybe we think about offering dinners or having childcare to get the maximum amount of participation. Maybe host events at anchoring institutions. There should be a focus on accessibility, reliability, and stakeholder engagement.

**Larry Chretien:** Chretien supports Wambui's point. We should at least ask this information, anonymize it, and tabulate it, and we'll get a decent response. Any data we can get is valuable, particularly if it's contextualized.

**Kyle Murray:** Murray wanted to echo everything Walker and Wambui said, and that he appreciated all the work that went into creating this table. In looking at metrics of success, "Stakeholders demonstrate a feeling of agency in their relationship to EDCs," needs more refinement—this seems abstract.

**Kathryn Wright:** Wright said she's not sure there's an easy way to measure this, but given the number of meetings proposed, maybe there's a way to take a poll at the end of meetings to see how relationships are changing over time. She knows the utilities proposed a couple of different advisory groups and committees, but in many cases, the extent that we can think about co-leadership with community or public

sector leaders, there are multiple ways we can get at stakeholders' and EDCs' relationship changing over time.

**Chelsea Mattioda:** We have a ton of metrics from which to choose; we may hear from the EDCs that we don't have data to start with, so that could be a way to improve the ESMPs, is starting to track and measure these.

**Erin Engstrom:** One of the main things the EDCs have heard is that folks would like it to be a co-led advisory group. The EDCs are in support of discussing what that would look like with a community-based organization. They probably could have done a better job of explaining why they would have proposed this, including ways we could have improved stakeholder engagement. The EDCs have heard loud and clear that engagement needs to start before locations are being determined. The CESAG presents an opportunity to begin having those conversations with communities now about what the best way is to engage people. Communities want a seat at that decision-making table, and the EDCs want to exhibit best practices. Within those projects, the EDCs would develop a community benefits agreements that are project- and community-specific. The EDCs envision the CESAG as this forum for where to identify strengths and opportunities to have those conversations, which is something they'd like to do jointly with community-based organizations. It's ultimately a response to the feedback they've received to date to show the GMAC and EWG that they are all in on making changes as to how we perform stakeholder engagement.

**Kathryn Wright:** Wright wanted to lift up what Walker said about compensation.

**Mary Wambui:** Wambui wanted to echo and amplify about what Mattioda said about tracking, which is that even if some of these metrics or pieces of data are not part of the final metrics commitment, to begin tracking actually sets us up for success in the next go-around.

## **b. Affordability**

**Larry Chretien:** This might be incomplete, in that absent data that's been somewhat vetted by our consultants about the range of rate impacts, we're whistling in the dark. Without data, it's a concern. He wants to talk about statements we would make for this one and is hopeful that we can figure out the pace of infrastructure investments that they're worth the money. And the flip side is that we can feel good about the benefits that come with it for people with the highest energy burden. Going through some of the chart, if EDCs talk about DERs or affordable solar access program, he would like to see some sense of impacts on LMIs—how many are going to participate, and what's the forecast? What do we envision for that? Will we be able to provide affordable solar to all? Probably not. We need a design that supports both consumers individually and in aggregate regarding affordability. He thinks we should be clear that this is a topic for which we don't have great information just yet.

**Erin Engstrom:** Would bill impacts or potential bill impacts be helpful? What data could we get you today or in the next month? The way the current review structure is to go through each section at GMAC meetings, but final recommendations will be shared at the end of November. We're struggling with how to respond to those recommendations in a meaningful way between now and November.

**Larry Chretien:** Ideally, potential bill impacts would be helpful. He's not that concerned about long-term planning regarding 10-15 years from now. He wants more accuracy for short-term forecasting, which he thinks we can get for the next five years, because the range of potential investments is better known than in 15 years from now. What's the range of investment and bill impact? Try to use two to four cohorts for comparison—LMI vs. someone in a larger home and income. The average is interesting but a not clear

enough picture by itself. What we generally know is on average, LMI have smaller homes, smaller bills, but a higher energy burden. How much would grid modernization affect them?

**Kyle Murray:** Getting potential bill impacts, what are we going to see? He's not sure if it's possible to do a sensitivity analysis with a high and low end based on what we need or might not need. But the potential for seeing what's out there based on what info we have would be helpful. He also wanted to note on the affordability section that he really likes the proposed metrics listed there. This is the kind of stuff we need to know in good conscience to vote on this stuff.

**Mary Wambui:** Wambui agrees with Chretien, but wanted to say that the success of equity metrics is pegged on this section of affordability. We know that all customers—not just LMIs—with electrification will be affected by rate changes. She trusts that the GMAC will communicate the urgency of finding this answer. Massachusetts is not the only state electrifying; the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) has carried out studies on the potential affordability of bill impacts for their region. The utility companies or someone need to do this study, which accounts for varying demographic types, households, head counts, etc.

**Chris Modlish:** The table does a good job of expressing information we need to see on the question of affordability. The only thing he would add is infrastructure changes and rate impacts are intricately linked to community engagement. It's hard for any group to think about the impacts of infrastructure without thinking about bills. We'll have to figure out whether there is alternative funding available. We may get to a point where ratepayers can't shoulder costs themselves.

**Kyle Murray:** Murray expressed that we need to be more mindful about the potential for avoided investments on the grid—maybe alternative investments. What would it cost to put in solar PV and batteries? Is there a potential to save money?

**Kathryn Wright:** This might fit under the last section (financial benefits and incentives).

### c. Financial benefits and incentives

**Erin Engstrom:** It's good point that we need metrics around non-wires alternative solutions. This goes back to outreach and education—when you get for the need for a substation, that means all NWA options have been exhausted.

**Kathryn Wright:** We tried to track at least all the new and existing programs as interacting with the ESMPs and attempted to quantify the benefits, but we may have underemphasized the impacts of NWAs.

**Chris Modlish:** Modlish emphasized the importance of “o. Community solar enrollment in EJC’s” and “p. Residential solar enrollment in EJC’s.” There have been a lot of complaints at the Attorney General’s office about solar scams. This should be bundled with some sort of consumer protection and outreach; AGO would be willing to partner with the EDCs to help consumers become aware of the pitfalls.

**Mary Wambui:** Wambui said she was confused between financial and economic benefits—where would we capture local communities’ self-determination in energy projects? This is a longer conversation.

**Kathryn Wright:** Right now workforce and economic benefits is more focused on jobs rather than self-determination aspects, but she agreed self-determination was an important conversation.

**Kyle Murray:** Going back to Modlish’s comment, he hasn’t heard a lot of complaints about community solar so much as competitive electric suppliers. This is probably a conversation for another time.

**Chris Modlish:** The AGO has focused their efforts on electric supply, but there's been a huge increase in complaints about community solar lately, and they're working on their response.

**Larry Chretien:** The Green Energy Consumers' Alliance's experience is that community solar has not been a great model for LMI so far in Massachusetts. But as people might know, the Solar For All program from the EPA is well endowed, and Massachusetts is putting in a proposal for more than \$200 million in funds. This will be a game-changer. Chretien recommends to the EDCs that they follow that and to the extent that community shared solar might be part of the modernization mitigation package, we'll know more in a few months as to how much we can lean into that. Hopefully it's something we can be happy with.

## **6. Wrap-up and adjourn**

Wright thanked the group for taking the time to work through these details today. There are three sections we didn't get to, but will make time for that at the third and final Equity Working Group meeting scheduled for Monday, October 23, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. If there are any strong reactions and thoughts, email them so we can start talking through those and draft recommendations for the GMAC. The October 23 meeting is two hours to allow for 30 minutes of public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
*Jennifer A. Haugh*  
GreenerU

### **Meeting attachments:**

- Meeting agenda
- Draft meeting minutes of October 2, 2023
- Meeting presentation slides for October 10, 2023
- Equity Metrics Assessment Table
- Energy Equity Project Report from the University of Michigan