

Grid Modernization Advisory Council (GMAC)  
Equity Working Group

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, October 2, 2023**

Virtual Zoom Meeting

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**Members Present:** 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

**Non-Voting Member:** Erin Engstrom, Eversource

**Members Absent:** —

**DOER Staff Present:** Aurora Edington, Julia Fox, Sarah McDaniel

**Consultants Present:** 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 2:02 p.m. Wright welcomed everyone to the meeting. Wright then took roll call.

**2. Review of meeting goals and agenda**

Wright shared slide 4, which covered the meeting goals and agenda. She flagged that there has been a stakeholder meeting held by the Advanced Energy Group, so there has also been some thinking done on ESMP and equity. Regarding equity metrics, we originally thought the EDCs might be able to give us draft metrics before this meeting, but they need a little more time, so we won’t have anything specific to react to until our next meeting. Meeting agenda for Meetings 2 and 3 may need to adjust accordingly.

### **3. Reminder of the EWG charter**

Wright reviewed the charter (slide 5).

### **4. Consultant presentation: the ESMPs through an equity lens**

Jennifer Haugh, GreenerU, walked through slides 6 through 36, highlighting the following observations:

- Slide 7: There are different definitions of equity among the EDCs. The Equity Working Group may want to recommend a shared definition.
- Slide 10: The GMAC has brought forward concerns about the Community Engagement Stakeholder Advisory Group (CESAG) proposed jointly by the EDCs, stating that efforts may be duplicative with similar advisory groups, and that leadership of this group might be better served with a non-EDC co-chair.
- Slide 12: Data transparency has been regularly highlighted as an issue throughout the ESMPs.
- Slide 13: This is National Grid's summary table for EV charging equipment, energy efficiency, and weatherization financial incentives geared toward EDCs.
- Slide 15: A disproportionate number of existing substations are housed in EDCs statewide (example here is Worcester) without discussion of burdens or benefits.
- Slide 21: This is Eversource's summary table for financial incentives to EDCs.
- Slide 23: Many benefits could be implicitly beneficial to EDCs, but not explicitly. Again, public benefits of communities hosting substations are not clear.
- Slide 35: Again, the lack of specifics throughout the ESMPs are concerning; the narratives offer good intentions without always sharing intended outcomes.

### **5. DOER task force presentation: thoughts from AEG grid modernization stakeholder challenge**

Mary Wambui presented.

The Advanced Energy Group (AEG) Equity Task Force is a stakeholder body trying to provide an understanding ESMPs from angles of health, equitability, and stakeholder involvement. Their maps provide visibility into investments and EJ communities and offer that to the GMAC.

The AEG uses an equity matrix with guiding questions about areas of concern and comments. For example, equity begins with the acknowledgment that past processes have not been just.

Slide 42 shares additional thoughts: should the GMAC EWG establish equity values or success criteria and then check the ESMP against that criteria to see if they meet muster, and if not, do they make recommendations to bring plans to that point? Do they provide access, resilience, investments to accelerate green energy transition? Is there meaningful community engagement and provision of dollars for technical experts that represent community interests? Is there intervening capacity-building for communities? Have the ESMPs acknowledged and recognized past systems of marginalization of disadvantaged groups?

Finally, do ESMPs extend financial benefits to communities from investments and how? Are they directly mitigating systemic environmental impacts on disadvantaged communities?

Slide 43 shows an example from New Mexico of elements that make up a grid modernization plan.

## 6. Discussion

Wright cued up questions for discussion:

- a. *What are the historical inequities that we would like to see addressed in the ESMPs?*
- b. *What are the primary areas of concern for the EWG in the ESMPs?*
- c. *What are the equity metrics we would like to see in the plans?*
- d. *How would we like to structure our comments and review?*

Wright posed the following as historical inequities:

- Better representation and agency in utility stakeholder processes
- Affordability and heavier energy burden faced disproportionately by EJCs and LMI customers
- Everyone is paying into other utility-funded programs like Mass Save, but not everyone is being served equitably (e.g., community benefits agreements)
- Some communities have experienced differences in service quality and reliability (e.g. where are brownouts occurring?)

**Kyle Murray:** Yes to all of that. He wanted to add that there be more direction between community benefits agreements and the infrastructure being put in. He was at a round table on Friday listening to what New York is doing, which is allowing discounts on electric bills based on having the infrastructure located in a particular area. That's the kind of thing that he'd want to see is a real material benefit for residents for having to host the infrastructure.

**Mary Wambui:** Agreed. There are discounted rates that lower-income communities are not benefiting from.

**Erin Engstrom:** Agreed that host communities should receive benefits if they're going to host the infrastructure. Would people be open to looking at increasing energy efficiency incentives. in those host communities? Is there an opportunity there?

**Mary Wambui:** On the energy efficiency side, we are shaping performance incentives. What comes out of the GMAC should be in addition to that.

**Kyle Murray:** Many low-income communities don't benefit from a discounted rate. The host benefit agreement should be an extra benefit there.

**Mary Wambui:** National Grid says that low-income communities are not taking the benefits.

**Larry Chretien:** This is going to be a harder issue for us to nail down than this meeting can handle. We have to get far more specific and granular. When does it become a burden vs. an asset to a community? To have the grid requires infrastructure; he can easily walk to a couple of substations in his neighborhood, and they're out of the way and don't cause problems. But he can understand where in some cases a substation might cause grief in some fashion. How do we measure that? Or more specifically, do we mean substations, or do we mean something else? When do we know when to compensate those communities? Is it a matter of income? Are we going to compensate an affluent host community because they got a new substation? What if a current EJC community could stand to benefit from objective measurements of new infrastructure?

**Kathryn Wright:** It makes sense to me in the context that we are missing a lot of information that would help us make determinations about net benefits from some of these investments, particularly like we don't have a sense of rate impacts and affordability questions. There are perhaps some recommendations that we could think about regarding what our suggested parameters or what the utilities could share about community benefits agreements directly related to investments, and we can ask some specific questions.

**Erin Engstrom:** We're struggling with how to define and measure certain aspects, and we could all measure it very differently and view different aspects very differently. That's what we're hoping this group can help us solve. This is our first time for pulling these types of metrics as well. At the same time, we're not against being pushed and striving to achieve as much equity and stakeholder engagement as we can, but we need to define those boundaries and what we're going to measure. Without that, this won't end well for anyone. We want the metrics to show successes or areas for improvements. We're struggling with that as well.

**Larry Chretien:** It might be helpful to create separate policies per topic, e.g., workforce development might be worth discussing at a meeting. Health is another area that needs definition. We should separate community benefits, which are location-specific, vs. rate impacts, which impacts everyone.

**Kathryn Wright:** Based on other research, health and workforce development are important components, but we should probably identify other areas as well.

**Erin Engstrom:** For the metrics that we would want to propose, are we thinking metrics around ESMPs or metrics around implementing them? Proposed projects around the ESMPs? There's going to need to be education and outreach about the ESMPs.

**Kathryn Wright:** There's likely going to be a mix of both. The resilience section does not explain what parameters are—can the documents themselves improve? Then there's been a second set of concerns, which is how are we ensuring there's good accountability and process?

**Erin Engstrom:** If we can be clear when we're speaking about it, that would be helpful.

**Mary Wambui:** Changes are identified as measures; the reality is that we do need to acknowledge that there are regressive system costs. Massachusetts is way up there in terms of lack of affordability.

**Chris Modlish:** Our office is concerned about affordability as well. He was curious about Mary's slides regarding Connecticut's plans. Did they have any specific affordability metrics that we could model after?

**Mary Wambui:** They did not have exact details, but affordability was one of their main tiers.

**Kathryn Wright:** Perhaps this is something we can ask the consultants to dig into. This might give us something to work with at the next meeting.

**Julia Fox:** DOER's internal team and GMAC discussions are often about the lack of data, which is especially true of reliability and resilience within EJCs. It would be helpful to have an overlay of EJCs with climate hazards and climate risks, along with existing infrastructure.

**Kathryn Wright:** This is a recap of topics she's heard so far:

- Accessibility—visualization, language, public education, how people are going to use these plans
- Affordability—elevating that more within the plans, rates

- Workforce implications
- Health
- Net benefits, specifically community benefits agreements
- And to reemphasize adaptation, how we're bringing it together

**Mary Wambui:** Even without enough data, we still need to come up with metrics that can be revised. But there are broad areas in equity that are general, and we can come up with sufficient metrics.

**Kathryn Wright:** The GMAC is structuring its comments differently than EEAC; there are comments grouped in spreadsheets with evaluation questions. They're writing comments by chapter and providing some of those evaluation questions. It's not realistic for this group to attempt to get to that level of detail on each of the chapters. Maybe there's sort of a mix of recommendations we're sharing overall (bigger topics) and we get into specifics about metrics and recommendations based on priority areas we identify. Probably not a giant spreadsheet, but a Word document that the Council could still use that's tied to chapter or sections. What is helpful for this group? What might be a good method of presentation for this group?

**Mary Wambui:** She liked what Wright laid out.

**Kathryn Wright:** She proposed working with the document similar to the EEAC's and recommended the EWG share any other working group reports that folks have seen work well in other contexts. In our follow-up email, we'll share what the EEAC has done.

## 7. Preview of upcoming meeting goals and agendas

Wright walked through slide 47. Meeting 2 should include some information from the utilities on their metrics data. Meeting 3 is hopefully prior to October 27 / listening sessions.

**Erin Engstrom:** The EDCs are planning stakeholder workshops and plan to invite more than 100 different types of stakeholders, but then would like to narrow that down to 30 people to participate in the actual workshop with the facilitators. She would like for this group to preview and offer feedback—is that possible? These are joint meetings with the EDCs on November 16 and November 28 with interpreters. If there's time at the next meeting, would it be possible to talk about that?

**Kathryn Wright:** Does the group have any reactions or if there is an interest to add 30 minutes to the next meeting to discuss?

**Mary Wambui:** What is the intent?

**Erin Engstrom:** We would like to be as transparent as possible and want to ensure that the right folks are at the table. People can submit written comments outside of the 30 participants included. The statute doesn't include CBOs, EJC, other communities, but we (EDCs) would like to include them.

**Kyle Murray:** It would be valuable to include 30 minutes at the next meeting.

**Julia Fox:** It would be valuable to carve out time to think about this, and perhaps to bring to the full GMAC as well. Would it be helpful for the EDCs to have a little more time at the next meeting? They will look internally to see whether adding time is possible.

**Kathryn Wright:** Looks like we'll try for both venues. She suggested we take some time to lay out a rough agenda over the next two days, which we'll have to post publicly.

**Erin Engstrom:** Could also receive feedback and collect that to share with the EDCs—send draft via BCC to get review?

**Sarah McDaniel:** Yes, that's okay.

**Kathryn Wright:** That would be especially helpful.

## **8. Meeting feedback: strengths and improvables**

Wright asked for feedback.

**Kyle Murray:** This worked well for a first meeting. We'll learn as we go potential ways to improve. The real difficulty is going to be coming down to very specific recommendations on certain things. We talk generally about what we'd like to see, but nailing down those specifics is going to be the big challenge.

**Kathryn Wright:** In the full GMAC meeting(s), the consultants pulled out some very preliminary recommendations and we responded to those. We can talk about whether that can help us get to specifics.

**Julia Fox:** This meeting has gone well. We need to be cognizant of our next meeting being in close proximity, so give yourselves the time and grace to get through everything and be prepared for next Tuesday's meeting.

## **9. Adjourn**

Wright said that there will be will follow-up after this meeting with draft agenda for the next meeting along with meeting minutes, metrics from the EDCs, some more specific topic areas, and a scheduling poll for Meeting 3. The meeting adjourned at 3:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
*Jennifer A. Haugh*  
GreenerU