

## Diversity Advisory Council Meeting Notes

April 19, 2022

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### Attending from the council:

Dolores Martinez, EUVALCREE  
Indika Sugathadasa, PDX HIVE  
Cheryl Roberts, African American Alliance for Homeownership  
Susan Badger-Jones, special projects consultant  
Shane Davis, City of Portland  
Rebecca Descombes, Native American Youth and Family Center  
Kheoshi Owens, Empress Rules  
Terrance Harris, Oregon State University  
Oswaldo Bernal, OBL Media LLC  
Huong Tran, small business owner

### Attending from Energy Trust:

Elizabeth Fox	Kenji Spielman
Emily Findley	Kirstin Pinit
Amanda Thompson	Kate Wellington
Amanda Potter	Kyle Morrill
Adam Bartini	Kyle Petrocine
Amber Cole	MacKenzie Kurtzner
Ashley Bartels	Melanie Bissonnette
Amanda Zuniga	Mike Colgrove
Albert Stanfield	Mark Wyman
Bayoan Ware	Mia Deonate
Cheryle Easton	Quinn Cherf
Debbie Menashe	Renee Garrels
Dave Moldal	Steve Lacey
Emily Estrada	Sue Fletcher
Gina Saraswati	Thad Roth
Greg Stokes	Taylor Navesken
Joshua Reed	Tyrone Henry
Jessica Kramer	Wendy Gibson
Laura Schaefer	
Kesean Coleman	
Kathleen Belkhat	

### Others attending:

Lindsey Dierksen, LD Consulting	Josh Weissert, Energy350
Greg Delgado, Causa Oregon	Mustafah Finney, Rose City Alliance
Brooke Landon, CLEAResult	Shelly Beaulieu, Dragonfly Consulting
Raven Manta, Wildhorse Casino	Victoria Lara, Lara Media
Sylvia Tanner, Energy Trust Board	Ruchi Sadhir, Oregon Department of Energy
Peter Therkelsen, Energy Trust Board	Alder Miller, CLEAResult
Aaron Frechette, Cascade Energy Trust of Oregon	Jenny Sorich, CLEAResult
Cynthia Kinney, Cascade Energy	
Thuy Tu, Thuy Tu Consulting	

## 1. Welcome, Agenda Review and Group Reflection

Tyrone Henry, Energy Trust diversity, equity and inclusion lead, convened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. The agenda, notes and presentation materials are available at Energy Trust's website at <https://www.energytrust.org/about/public-meetings/diversity-advisory-council-meetings/>.

Tyrone Henry started the meeting by introducing Energy Trust's newest board members, Sylvia Tanner and Peter Therkelson. Sylvia works at Multnomah County's Office of Sustainability, serving as its Senior Data Analyst focusing on energy policy. Peter is the deputy of the Building and Industrial Applications Department at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, where his work focuses on industrial energy management business practices and policies.

Tyrone led the group in a reflection on a video clip featuring a middle school student sharing a reflection on teasing he experienced due to his style choices. The student spoke about the importance of rejecting materialism in favor of valuing the internal qualities of others. Council members and attendees reflected positively on seeing young people thinking like that, stating it gives hope for the future (Mustafah Finney). The council discussed how this also reflects well on parents who instill good values; however the reality is that many young people grow up without those influences and values. Our challenge is to continue doing good in the face of opposition (Shane Davis). Members acknowledged that children who grow up with a materialistic attitude grow up to be materialistic adults, and this plays out in the professional world even in the nonprofit space (Cheryl Roberts). The council reflected on how young biases become instilled, and how the ramifications of those biases continue to play out long afterward (Huong Tran).

## 2. Update on Working Together Grants

### *Topic summary*

Energy Trust staff members delivered an update on the recent award of the inaugural round of Working Together Grants. Small grants were awarded to 13 community organizations to complete work that will help diverse customers and communities save energy or use clean, renewable energy. The grants totaled \$125,000 and resulted from a selection process that included Diversity Advisory Council members and internal staff. Staff shared a list of organizations that received an award, including some that Energy Trust has worked with in the past and others that will be new relationships. Activities the awardees will pursue include home repairs, tenant education, career and industry information, and workshops and trainings on clean energy. Awardees will complete their activities by September, and a second round of grant funding will open later this year. Energy Trust aims to continue collaborating with these organizations and use lessons learned to better serve customers.

### *Discussion*

The council suggested that Energy Trust increase involvement of Diversity Advisory Council members in the selection process. Doing this would help the selection committee ask harder questions to get to the bottom of whether the proposed grant activities would truly advance diversity, equity and inclusion. Members noted there is a need for more representation and perspective in this process (Huong Tran, Terrance Harris). Council members expressed appreciation that the first round of grants have been awarded, but agreed Energy Trust should work to design a more rigorous selection process, including finding out the internal demographics of grant applicants and strategies for increasing equity within their organization (Kheoshi Owens).

The council pointed out that only 13 of 21 applicants received a grant in this round and asked whether that was due to a limit on overall funding (Shane Davis). Staff said they distributed

about half the annual funding in this round, and the second half would be distributed in the second round. This approach allows Energy Trust to obtain learnings sooner, in time to consider for the budgeting process and to inform the second grant cycle. Energy Trust staff have been included in the kickoff meetings with each grant awardee to identify other opportunities to work together beyond the specified grant activities (Tyrone Henry).

#### *Next steps*

The 13 organizations that received a grant in this round will complete their activities by September. A second round of grant funding will launch later this year. Council members are invited to recommend organizations to be included in promoting the next round of funding.

### **3. Update on small business survey**

#### *Topic summary*

Members of the community-based liaison cohort for the Existing Buildings program shared findings from recent surveys conducted with small businesses.

Existing Buildings program manager Wendy Gibson introduced the community-based liaison approach, noting that the purpose and activities of the cohort has evolved over the course of the last year to give it more autonomy to enact change within Energy Trust internal and external processes.

The eight community-based liaisons, who are based throughout Oregon, joined the meeting to introduce themselves and sharing what this work means to them. Two consultants and internal staff who support the work of the cohort also introduced themselves. Wendy presented on what the liaisons will be doing in the upcoming year. Their activities include performing an equity assessment of Energy Trust's Existing Buildings program, creating and delivering an equity training for trade allies and conducting healing circles to address harm committed in the past.

Two of the community-based liaisons presented findings from recent engagement with small businesses, which included research surveys. Kheoshi Owens presented on findings from English-speaking businesses and Victoria Lara shared results from engaging Spanish-speaking small businesses. Both presenters noted that one of the biggest participation barriers for both audiences was low awareness of Energy Trust.

#### *Discussion*

The council asked both presenters what surprised them the most, and what they are most optimistic about (Indika Sugathadasa). Victoria Lara stated she was not surprised by the results, however the advantage of working with Latino communities is how eager and open they are to building relationships. Latino communities generally place a high value on community engagement. For example, one respondent shared he had lived in Oregon as a business owner for over 25 years without ever hearing about Energy Trust but was interested in engaging now. Kheoshi Owens expressed optimism about the potential for Energy Trust to become an equity leader in the energy space while working to go further to provide reparations through direct investment and hiring to support diverse communities.

#### *Next steps*

The community-based liaisons will continue working in their focus areas and develop a scope of work.

### **4. Guided Discussion on Improving Community Partnerships**

Senior Project Manager Renee Garrels led a discussion to capture input from Diversity Advisory Council members on ways Energy Trust can improve its partnerships with communities. She introduced the intention of the exercise as a way to engage Energy Trust's advisory councils in a more meaningful way that occurs earlier in the budgeting and planning process. Energy Trust will consider this feedback while shaping budget and planning decisions to create a better overall experience of stakeholder engagement. Hearing input earlier will give staff a better understanding of needs and priorities so they can reflect them better in their action plans, allocating more funding where it's needed.

#### *Discussion*

#### **Industry trends: how is the energy industry landscape changing compared to where we were in 2020?**

The council noted there is a lack of awareness of the impact of energy issues on communities, which points to a need for culturally responsive education in schools and through other channels. Energy efficiency is not at the forefront in the hierarchy of needs in these communities (Kheoshi Owens). An attendee added this lack of knowledge extends to Energy Trust's marketing, and people don't understand the concrete ways money is being lost. Many communities are still in survival mode, so the role of energy in day-to-day life is not evident due to a focus on more urgent needs (Mustafah Finney).

#### **What trends are you noticing that Energy Trust should pay attention to?**

Council members reiterated the prior discussion that people and businesses are still in triage mode, working to survive. The focus should be on how to support these customers to get out of this mode and into becoming more effective at what they are attempting to do. One way to do that is education, and Energy Trust should spend ratepayer funds in the right places to promote energy education in schools and within diverse communities (Tyrone Henry).

The council emphasized that Energy Trust should shift responsibility from the communities it seeks to better serve, to the energy industry that has left them out. Communities are exhausted, and resources are often not there. It costs more to shift to energy efficient technology, and Energy Trust should budget to meet customers where they are in order to move everyone toward energy efficiency, starting small by focusing on no-cost offers (Huong Tran).

Council members and attendees advised Energy Trust should lead by promoting the benefits of energy investments, so communities start to listen. Messages need to be clear and simple with a call to action (Victoria Lara). A council member shared a recent experience of seeing an Energy Trust commercial on television, stating that even with prior knowledge of the organization, it was confusing (Shane Davis).

The council pointed out that in rural areas, sensitivities to energy price increases. Those areas are also seeing concerns about energy resilience, wildfires, possible outages and awareness that power lines contribute to wildfire activity. There is a long-standing challenge of patchwork utility services, where eligibility for Energy Trust offers may vary by community due to utility service area. The community-based liaison group should consider giving equal focus to low-income and rural customers, not just communities of color. There is not the same attention to rural diversity because there's a lack of critical mass to bring these concerns into the conversation (Susan Badger-Jones).

#### **What barriers are customers facing?**

The council said that in certain rural communities like Hermiston, Malheur County and Umatilla County, the cost of energy is high, and Idaho Power is the only available electric utility in some

places. There is low awareness of energy programs in general. Idaho Power has a lot of resources that are not promoted effectively to the community. There is a need for more education about using renewable energy technology to lower energy costs. Overall, there is a need for more education in culturally specific languages and more community discussions for business owners on ways to lower energy costs (Dolores Martinez).

An attendee brought up the diversity within rural communities, stating Energy Trust should examine those additional challenges due to isolation (Greg Delgado). The council discussed that rural communities adjacent to larger metro areas, such as those near Bend, do have challenges but they are different than those facing frontier communities that lack proximity (Susan Badger-Jones).

### **What are the biggest market opportunities?**

A staff member noted a big opportunity to increase outreach and understanding of tribal communities and indigenous customers (Tyrone Henry).

### **How can Energy Trust better support communities in rural areas, communities experiencing low incomes and communities of color?**

The council indicated opportunity to provide meaningful support through education and workforce strategies. Energy Trust should design programs to engage with schools. Since 2016, Energy Trust has spent \$200 million supporting white male-owned businesses and just over \$7 million on Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC)-owned and women-owned businesses. The organization should take responsibility for that behavior (Kheoshi Owens). Council members also pointed out that the board of directors has been largely absent from these conversations, wondering why they are not more involved (Kheoshi Owens).

#### *Next steps*

Input from this discussion will be considered and incorporated into early planning and budgeting. There will be a more comprehensive engagement with the council in June or July.

## **5. Update on Board of Directors Recruitment**

Greg Stokes gave an update that since a board member recently stepped down due to personal reasons, Energy Trust will be recruiting a new member in 2022. Staff are actively recruiting diverse candidates who have expertise and experience in finance. The council is invited to support outreach to broadcast this opportunity to possible candidates in addition to ongoing advertising on Energy Trust's website and news channels.

#### *Discussion*

Attendees asked for clarification on how to refer a potential candidate to indicate that they are vouching for that person (Bayo Ware). Greg clarified that there were several ways to share the opportunity with someone by pointing them to the webpage, by phone, submitting a nomination through a web form or by letting him know directly.

The council asked if the board has a racial equity policy (Kheoshi Owens). Greg clarified it does not. The council discussed that it would like to see new Black members on the board, which has been a huge challenge. To be inclusive, the board needs to add a requirement to hold a certain number of seats for racially specific members. The seat would be held open until a racially specific member with the right experience is identified (Kheoshi Owens). Council members shared that they were not willing to continue nominating from their networks because so many past nominations have been disqualified, often without even being invited to interview. Staff proposed to continue the discussion outside of the meeting.

*Next steps*

Diversity Advisory Council members are invited to nominate a potential board member or broadcast the opportunity to their networks.

**6. Announcements**

Tyrone Henry made an announcement that Energy Trust has hired Huong Tran as its new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Specialist. In this new position, Huong will assist Tyrone in carrying out DEI-focused projects and initiatives. This will be Huong's last meeting as a Diversity Advisory Council member. Recruitment for a new council member has already begun. Huong expressed they will miss participating on the council as a member, however they hope to help bridge the divide between the council and staff decision-making in this new role.

**7. Public Comment**

There was no additional public comment.

**8. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m. The next council meeting is scheduled for May 17, 2022, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.