

Diversity Advisory Council Meeting Notes

November 12, 2024

Attending from the council:

Indika Sugathadasa, PDX HIVE
Martin Campos-Davis, Oregon Human Development Corporation
Terrance Harris, Drexler University
Rhea S. Rock, Sunlight Solar
Rebecca Descombes
Delores Martinez, EUVALCREE

Attending from Energy Trust:

Emily Findley	Greg Stokes
Mike Colgrove	Jeni Hall
Elizabeth Fox	Angela Clayton Schmidt
Aly'ce Brannon-Reid	Julie McMorine
Melanie Bissonnette	Emily Cahill
Amber Cole	Alex Novie
Danielle Rhodes	Johana Nelson
Gloria Gunn	Themba Mutepfa
Jen Shafer	Cameron Starr
Ernie Guerrero	Kathleen Belkhat
Carolyn Rice	Julianne Thacher
Joy Turtola	Abby Spegman
Taylor Ford	Alistair Simmonds
Matt Getchell	Sarah Castor
Debbie Menashe	Sloan Schang
Robin Brown	Tracy Scott
Logan Egbert	Gemma DiMatteo
Megan Greenauer	Amanda Zuniga
Abi Sloan	Akanksha Rawal
Natalia Ojeda	Kenji Spielman
Caryn Appler	Cody Kleinsmith
Sue Fletcher	Andi Nix
Mia Deonate	Maddie Norman
Elaine Prause	

Others attending:

Ezell Watson, Oregon Public Utility Commission	Eathen Swain, TRC
Quinn Parker, EnColor Consulting	Jessica Dover, AlmaLuna LLC
Lindsey Diercksen, LD Consulting	Beth Baxter, TRC
Lauren Rosenstein, Oregon Department of Energy	Ivonne Saed, Saedgraphic

1. Welcome

Michael Colgrove, Energy Trust executive director, convened the meeting at 9:04 a.m. The agenda, notes and presentation materials are available on Energy Trust's website at <https://www.energytrust.org/about/public-meetings/diversity-advisory-council-meetings/>.

Michael invited Aly'ce Brannon-Reed, a new senior program manager on the DEI services team, to introduce herself to the council. Aly'ce comes with over 10 years of community engagement experience in multiple sectors including nonprofit, government, cultural and philanthropy.

2. DEI program assessment

Topic summary

Quinn Parker of EnColor consulting firm presented on an assessment of Energy Trust's collective diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. EnColor is a national strategic consulting firm that helps organizations operationalize and prioritize equity within their internal and external work.

Quinn provided a brief overview of the assessment, which examined the current state of Energy Trust's DEI plan and how well the plan's goals and metrics are being operationalized within energy programs. The assessment was limited to an in-depth document review of planning, program and strategy documents with the goal of identifying opportunities and common threads between energy programs. The assessment also includes recommendations and key findings.

Discussion

Quinn led a discussion with the council members, inviting them to weigh in on questions that came up during the assessment. Questions included how Energy Trust could measure the readiness of its staff to engage with priority customers; how Energy Trust can better assess the quality of its built relationships; whether restorative justice should be a desired outcome of Energy Trust's work; what shifting leadership and power looks like in the context of Energy Trust's work and what could be some first steps toward that outcome; what would it look like for energy Trust to deeply engage with communities, and how could that be measured; and how can Energy Trust measure its transparency and accountability in a meaningful way.

The council asked if Energy Trust has already had conversations or trainings internally about restorative justice, stating that restorative justice solutions should be co-created with impacted communities, not in an organizational bubble (Lauren Rosenstein). The council said restorative justice is a difficult subject. For native people, the State of Oregon's adoption of land acknowledgements has been healing, but there may be opportunity to also acknowledge other communities and nations that helped build this country (Rhea S. Rock).

The council suggested to advance deep community engagement, Energy Trust should seek out pillars of the communities it wants to reach, such as leaders and advocates, and show up at events that are central to those communities. Deep engagement should be built on relationships between individuals (Terrance Harris). The council suggested deep community engagement could eventually include participatory budgeting. It is a huge shift to go from traditional budgeting to a collaborative and inclusive model, and it would need to occur across the whole organization. Energy Trust should provide meaningful opportunities for communities to weigh in on where spending occurs (Martin Campos-Davis).

The council said Energy Trust can advance supplier diversity by understanding the needs of diverse and small businesses, meeting them and soliciting feedback to understand barriers and looking for ways to bridge the gap even if the reasons are not within Energy Trust's wheelhouse (Martin Campos-Davis). The council said supporting BIPOC firms comes down to foundational relationships. Working

with these firms helps build trust with communities they belong to. In contracting with BIPOC firms, Energy Trust should give them the opportunity for them to showcase their work (Terrance Harris). The council suggested given the current state of the world, Energy Trust should consider making its DEI messaging more public (Indika Sugathadasa). It also said Energy Trust should lean on success stories and case studies to reinforce the works it is trying to accomplish (Martin Campos-Davis) and that it should make sure these stories are searchable using its own website's search function (Rebecca Descombes).

The council said the most important part of deepening relationships is following up on past engagements, whether it's with an individual or community. The follow-up ties the relationship together and provides a chance to find out how things are working out and Energy Trust's work is having a positive impact. Energy Trust should ensure follow-ups are built into its outreach strategy. For example, last year Energy Trust worked with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to install some energy-efficient upgrades but has not followed up to find out if the project is having a positive impact. Energy Trust should also consider creating stories about the longer-term impact of projects, not just about the installation (Rebecca Descombes).

The council said Energy Trust could follow up using exit surveys or polls, which are quick ways to measure engagement, and include space for respondents to provide suggestions on what could be improved (Terrance Harris).

Quinn posted a final question to the council members about what engagement means to them. The councils responded it means communication and participation in an activity for the purpose of a shared goal (Terrance Harris); having a personal connection with someone, such as having a person's phone number and the ability to reach out informally (Rhea S. Rock); and communication that is two-way and not extractive, meaning there should be space made for engagement outside of a specific goal or ask (Lauren Rosenstein).

Next steps

Council members were invited to share additional thoughts and responses after the meeting.

3. Equity Plan update

Topic summary

Staff gave an update on the development of an Equity Plan at Energy Trust. Energy Trust has always had some form of equity plan, but it has historically been embedded in its DEI plan. Since its first DEI plan was introduced in 2018, there have been two subsequent versions of the plan as Energy Trust's DEI strategy evolved to focus on community engagement.

Energy Trust staff recently worked with Oregon Public Utility Commission to modernize its funding agreement, which included adding a requirement to develop a formal Equity Plan that addresses specific criteria. The internal DEI services team and DEI committee will work together to develop the plan, which will replace the DEI plan once completed.

Discussion

None.

Next steps

None.

4. Working Together Grants

Topic summary

Staff presented on the latest round of Working Together Grants awarded to community organizations. These are small grants of up to \$10,000 for organizations interested in helping diverse communities save energy or use renewable energy. This is the third round of the grants, and \$74,000 was awarded to 12 organizations. The selection committee for the grants included Energy Trust staff and Diversity Advisory Council member Terrance Harris.

Six of the 12 awardees had little prior experience with Energy Trust, so the grant provides opportunity to form deeper relationships. Energy Trust works with all awardees throughout the grant period and provides opportunity for awardees to form relationships and learn from each other about community needs and resources. Of the 12 awardees, eight serve BIPOC communities, 10 serve customers with lower incomes and six serve rural communities. The grants will enable these organizations to pursue activities including community listening sessions, energy workshops and resource fairs.

A fourth round of funding is in the works, looking to award by February 2025. There will be an informational webinar for prospective applicants.

Discussion

The council said Working Together Grants are a good example of how Energy Trust can provide opportunities for community organizations and build trust with them (Terrance Harris).

The council asked how grant funding opportunities are announced (Rhea S. Rock). Energy Trust sends an announcement to a list of the community-based organizations it has a relationship with and posts it on its website and on social media. Energy Trust also asks its stakeholders to help promote the opportunity to their networks.

Next steps

Staff is seeking a Diversity Advisory Council member to serve on the selection committee for the next round of Working Together Grants. Staff will follow up with several members who expressed interest during the meeting.

5. Transition to multiyear planning

Topic summary

Staff gave an update on Energy Trust's ongoing transition to multiyear planning and budgeting. Reasons behind shifting to a multiyear framework including time savings, greater flexibility and increased impact in future years. The building blocks of the plan include a five-year business plan, human resource plan, financial plan and a complementary funding strategy.

A draft multiyear plan will be publicly available by the beginning of August, and there will be a six-week public comment period. Energy Trust's board of directors will vote on adopting the plan in December 2025. A new rolling forecast process that is part of the multiyear plan will begin slightly earlier, in October 2025. Each step of the development process includes stakeholder engagement where staff will provide updates and solicit feedback along the way, including from the Diversity Advisory Council.

Discussion

The council asked if the recent election results might impact Energy Trust's complementary funding strategy (Rhea S. Rock). Michael Colgrove answered that Energy Trust will keep moving toward its goals despite the results. The organization has been through this administration before and has some idea of what to expect. Some things may fall more to the state level to address, and fortunately Oregon has a commitment to our work, so staff does not see that changing due to the election.

Next steps

None.

6. Draft strategic plan and consumer support

Topic summary

Staff provided follow-up information on one item of feedback the council provided in a previous meeting about Energy Trust's draft strategic plan. At its September meeting, some council members suggested consumer information and education should have a role in the strategic plan. There was also a trend in the public comments on the draft that there should be more resources and education for customers to help them feel comfortable in taking steps to manage their energy costs. These resources could help combat misinformation and ensure customers don't make energy decisions without fully understanding the impact.

The board strategic planning committee is considering revisions to the draft plan. Current thinking under discussion is that Energy Trust needs to learn more about what information and supports would help customers feel confident in making energy investments. Energy Trust should also increase availability of credible, relatable information through its communication and outreach channels. Finally, collaboration will be important in moving forward with this, as there may be aspects of this work that other organizations may be better positioned to address.

Staff noted it would be easier for Energy Trust to support customer information and education if it is explicitly called out in the strategic plan because it would allow us to create explicit goals and build capacity around it. Staff then asked the council to share its reactions to this thinking and how it would envision more information and education resources helping to increase customer participation.

Discussion

The council said the thinking sounds good and expressed appreciation for reflecting the council's input in this way. Often in the energy space, when we engage with customers, we have to approach them like children because the industry is so specialized. Taking things back to and conveying information simply will put us on the right path (Rhea S. Rock). The council also expressed approval for the current thinking, adding community input will be an important step in developing consumer education but it is hard to get input at this stage. Once something is implemented, Energy Trust should continue to use assessment tools to seek direct community input (Terrance Harris).

The council suggested in distributing consumer resources, Energy Trust should consider including physical media like flyers and post in community spaces like bulletin boards to create access for customers that do not have internet access (Terrance Harris). The council said more educational information would help communities access services and programs, especially if it could be directly relayed to community members. Underground representative communities could be a target audience for education (Dolores Martinez).

The council said there are some programs coming up, like Solar for All, that could result in misinformation being spread by bad actors in the market. Energy Trust should help with combating the misinformation so people can tell the difference between the real program and potential predatory programs that use loan structures (Lauren Rosenstein).

Next steps

Revisions to the draft strategic plan revisions are in progress, and the final proposed plan will be presented to the board at its December meeting. Staff will provide an update to the Diversity Advisory Council shortly after that.

7. Member updates and adjournment

Rhea S. Rock is involved in a project with Northwest Native Chamber that involves collecting data on home energy assessments and stated any meeting attendees who are interested are welcome to reach out.

The meeting adjourned at 11:21 a.m.