MULTIYEAR PLANNING COMMERCIAL STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Energy Trust held a virtual workshop March 13, 2025, for stakeholders interested in learning about and providing input on Energy Trust's energy efficiency programs and services for commercial customers for the next five years. Staff presented information on the organization's background and services, 2025-2030 Strategic Plan and the transition to multiyear planning, replacing its current annual budgeting process. The workshop content also included draft energy savings targets. Staff that manage commercial programs and services presented information on the sector's structure and offers and key strategies they plan to pursue:

- For existing building customers, employ customer-centric program design, use digital tools and utility coordination to increase customer engagement, develop offers for small businesses and prescriptive measures to serve priority customers

- For multifamily customers, develop tiered incentive structure and more technical assistance support, contract with community partners to serve environmental justice communities, coordinate with other funders to maximize benefits

- For new buildings customers, promote whole building design considerations, collaborate with regional and culturally specific professional organizations, and education design teams on new technology and utility demand response programs

Participants could ask questions and respond to information presented during full group question and answer breaks, in the Zoom chat, in a short poll, in small group discussions and in a follow-up survey after the workshop. Energy Trust and other attendees answered questions throughout the presentation and those responses are not included here. The following are themes that emerged from participants, including specific comments and questions:

Participants encouraged existing incentives, success stories and flexibility for specific circumstances when developing offers and to increase participation.
Discussion of requirements for certain programs or incentives that could limit participation. Some participants brought examples of unique circumstances that may disqualify commercial customers or discourage them from participating.

- *Timeframes for Energy Trust incentives given business planning horizon. Curious if multiyear planning from Energy Trust will result in longer timelines for incentives.*
- *Energy Trust incentives has enabled us to encourage K-12 schools to pursue incentives and efficiencies.*
- *Will incentives increase to keep pace with rate increases?*
- *Is there a plan to offer custom incentives for gas transport customers in the future?*
- *Standard incentives don't always fit our unique conditions. If incentives fit our circumstances, justification could be made for upgrades.*

Participants identified the need to further reach and serve the rental market and small businesses and engage property managers.
For rental properties, convincing property managers to support upgrades is difficult both due to disinterest and a possible lack of access. There would also be the possible unintended consequence of passing expenses onto renters. The need for Energy Trust to make connections outside the energy field was emphasized.

- *Outreach to property managers would be important. Also, in rural areas, building relationships is key, connecting over regional issues.*
- *For small business outreach engaging service providers (CPAs or attorneys, economic development) could be good nexus for them to notify customers of incentives. Connecting with folks that would be in touch with these customers and could promote Energy Trust.*
- *Lack of motivation to take the steps necessary to utilize the incentives is due to the barrier of upfront funding. Is there a way to partner with a green bank?*

Energy Trust should consider options for digital solutions to gather, utilize and disseminate information to reach a broader customer base.
Participants were interested in solutions to visualize and distribute information to customers and generating targeted recommendations and energy improvement plans. While we remain in the exploratory phase, new technologies could offer much in the way of both streamlining and promoting programs. Data security and the risks around AI are also important to consider. Participants shared some of their organization's technology and data practices.

- *Finance processes that can be automated for businesses adopting clean energy; long and tedious process can delay transitions. There are other tools that can help customers track their carbon footprint.*
- *We want to be able to quantify the carbon impacts, especially the time of use carbon impacts. We are much more grassroots, looking to see which organizations want support, and we are looking at a number of city buildings that are about to be constrained by the Building Performance Standards.*
- *When we were doing outreach, we look at geography and energy usage by building. We also do 1500-2000 models a year and share them with customers. Other streamline and outreach opportunities: enrollment forms, workshops, accessibility, headsets for simultaneous interpretation.*

POLL RESULTS

Which of the following barriers do you think has the greatest impact on energy efficiency projects in commercial buildings? (Respondents = 31)

- High project cost: 55%
- Workforce limitations (either staffing or training resource): 19%
- Low cash incentive: 13%
- Lack of information about energy efficiency options: 6%
- Program rules or requirements: 6%
- No incentive for my project: 0%

What are other barriers?

- Projects that get value engineered out.
- Some aging equipment does not fall in the standard range offered by Energy Trust (e.g. motors of too high HP, turndown ratios, limited lighting efficiency options) and custom incentives can be complicated.
- Insufficient access to success stories.
- Lack of gas savings incentives for transport customers.
- Other than cost, I would say lack of information about where to start or what can be done.
- Efficiency is not top-of-mind (or top-of-budget) for many managers.

- Reaching people: they don't know about programs, they don't believe it when they hear about them, they don't have the time/extra mental capacity to listen.
- Many buildings owners trying to meet building performance standards could create a bottleneck.
- Incentives scaled with potential to provide meaningful energy savings for public clients (K-12 schools.) Incentives can help provide payback periods that meet the needs of public clients.
- High project cost can be a close second depending on the project, especially for existing buildings.
- Lack of capital and motivation.
- OPUC requirements for cost-effectiveness calculations.
- Payback requirement to qualify the incentive due to high cost and low saving potential, particular for major equipment replacement.