CASCADE NATURAL GAS
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In the Community to Serve®

CARES Advisory Group Meeting Agenda
June 18, 2025   2:00 – 3:00pm Pacific

Advisory Group Member	
Blue Mountain Action Council (BMAC)	Sylvia Schaefer
Benton-Franklin Community Action Connections (CAC)	Dalia Ochoa
Community Action of Lewis, Mason, & Thurston Counties (CACLMT)	Ester Castro, Stephenie Arnold
Coastal Community Action Program (CCAP)	Debbie Gregg
Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council (CDCAC)	Tom Bonwell, Sarah Brito, Alan Walker
Kitsap Community Resources (KCR)	Kandi Balandran
Lower Columbia Community Action Center (LCCAP)	Kathy Bates
NW Community Action Center (NCAC)	Jose Alvarez
OIC of Washington (OIC)	Heidi Silva, Casandra Ochoa, Candi Jaeger
Opportunity Council (OPPCO)	Marie Stanley, Melissa Gong
Community Action of Skagit County (SCCAA)	Misty Velasquez
Snohomish County Human Services Dept (SCEAP)	Constance Hockett, Traci Baugh
WUTC Staff	Andrew Roberts, Andy Sellards, Corey Cook, Jacque Hawkins-Jones, Keith Quinata
The Energy Project	Shaylee Stokes
Public Counsel	Kai Hiatt
NW Energy Coalition	Charlee Thompson
Department of Commerce	Michelle DeBell
Cascade Natural Gas	
Dan Tillis, Dir Customer Experience	Lori Blattner, Dir Regulatory Affairs
Teri Sovak, Mgr Customer Service, Credit & Collections	Noemi Ortiz, Mgr OR Conservation & Weatherization
Shannon Steed, Consumer Specialist	Jennifer Gross, Mgr Regulatory Affairs
Rodney Fowler, Business Analyst	

1. CARES enrollment numbers
2. Follow up item
    a. LIHEAP calculation method (Shay)
3. Collections process and communications
4. Open discussion

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Meeting notes:
  o **CARES Enrollment Numbers:** Dan shared the current CARES enrollment numbers, highlighting that 16,853 customers are enrolled in the bill discount rate program, which represents a 28% penetration rate of the estimated income-qualified population of 59,909 provided in the Low-Income Needs Assessment conducted in 2022/2023. This

data will be shared at the beginning of each meeting to keep everyone updated. Charlee congratulated the team on the progress, noting the increase from 22% in February. Daniel acknowledged this improvement and expressed optimism about reaching close to 30% by the end of June.

- **LIHEAP Calculation Updates:** Shaylee Stokes provided an update on the potential changes to the LIHEAP calculation, mentioning that no specific guidance is available yet, but she discussed the topic with Brian from the Washington State Department of Commerce and any changes would be recommended for the following season starting October 1st. Shaylee plans to have another conversation with agencies in July to finalize the details and requested to have the topic on the July Cares Advisory Group agenda for further discussion.
- **Credit Collections Processes:** Teri Sovak presented Cascade's credit and collections processes, explaining the three-path programming that determines the risk level of accounts and the various communication methods used to reach customers. The goal is to prevent disconnection and encourage payment arrangements.
    - **Three-Path Programming:** The three-path programming paths include low risk, medium risk, and high risk, each with different communication methods to reach customers and encourage resolution of the amount due.
    - **Communication Methods:** Teri detailed the various communication methods used to reach customers, including automated calls, reminder emails, friendly reminder letters, and disconnection notices. The goal is to prevent disconnection and encourage customers to make payment arrangements.
    - **Risk Assessment:** The risk assessment for accounts is based on factors such as the age of the debt, the number of days since the last payment, the amount of the last payment, and days in service at the premise. This assessment helps determine the appropriate path for each account.
    - **Feedback:** Shaylee Stokes appreciated the three-path programming and noted that it reduces the likelihood of cycling customers into crisis repeatedly. She highlighted the importance of not storing behavior scores, which differentiates Cascade from other utilities.
    - **Disconnection Process:** Teri described the disconnection process for high-risk accounts, including the steps taken before disconnection, such as automated calls, disconnection notices, urgent notices, and personal agent-led outbound calls. The process aims to provide multiple opportunities for customers to avoid disconnection.
    - **Automated Message Improvement:** Shay suggested revising the automated disconnection message to include references to affordability programs and discounts to encourage customers to explore assistance options.
    - **Disconnection Trends and Follow-Up:** Shaylee Stokes requested a follow-up conversation to review disconnection trends, including demographic characteristics, geographic trends, and multiple disconnections. She emphasized the importance of understanding these trends to improve the process and reduce disconnections. Dan suggested working with Hassan Shaban from Empower Dataworks to include this type of information in the updated energy burden assessment that should be completed by the end of the year. to include disconnect data and trends.

- **Open Discussion:** Dan opened the floor for open discussion, but no additional topics or questions were raised. He emphasized the company's goal to keep customers connected to their natural gas service and thanked everyone for their participation.

Follow-up tasks:
- **LIHEAP Calculation Update:** Schedule a meeting with Brian Sarensen of Commerce and the agencies to discuss potential changes to the LIHEAP calculation for the October 1st program year. (Shaylee Stokes)
- **LIHEAP Calculation Update:** Move the discussion on LIHEAP calculation changes to the July CARES agenda. (Shannon)
- **Disconnection Practices Review:** Schedule a follow-up meeting to review disconnection data, including trends, multiple disconnections, and demographic characteristics of disconnected customers. (Teri, Dan)