



CARES Advisory Group Meeting Agenda
August 20, 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, Sylvana Sorrells
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. Follow-Up Items
 - a. CARES enrollment update (Dan)
 - b. Timeline for eliminating the CARES discount pause (Dan)
2. CBO report presentations (Shannon and agencies)
3. Open Discussion

Meeting notes:

- **CARES Enrollment Update:** Dan provided an update on CARES program enrollment, noting a slight increase to 16,918 customers as of July 31, 2025, and projecting further growth as the heating season approaches. Dan expects enrollment to remain lower for another month or two before increasing with the start of the heating season.

- **Timeline for Eliminating CARES Discount Pause:** Dan updated the group on the request to eliminate the CARES discount pause, explaining that the filing was made last week with the goal of making the change effective October 1st, and that internal IT preparations are underway. The Cascade team is awaiting placement on the Commission agenda, likely in September, to enable an October 1st effective date. Andrew Roberts, WUTC Staff, inquired about the docket number for the filing, and Daniel committed to retrieving and sharing it during the meeting. During the meeting Andrew provided the docket number in chat – 250618 - <https://www.utc.wa.gov/casedocket/2025/250618>.
- **CBO Quarterly Reports and Outreach Activities:** Shannon facilitated presentations from Kandi, Todd, Marie, and Sylvia on their respective agencies' second quarter CBO outreach activities, covering methods, partnerships, challenges, and demographic reach, with additional discussion on outreach materials and reporting.
 - **Kitsap Community Resources Outreach:** Kandi described outreach efforts including distributing CARES flyers at local fairs, stores, post offices, and senior centers, with challenges in obtaining permission to post materials and mixed interest from the community, particularly at tribal events where interest in Cascade Natural Gas was lower than for Puget Sound Energy.
 - **Northwest Community Action Center Activities:** Todd, representing Jose, reported on outreach activities such as migrant outreach, live radio shows, health fairs, and distribution of materials at medical clinics, emphasizing the importance of word-of-mouth in their community.
 - **Opportunity Council Partnerships and Events:** Marie, on behalf of Melissa, detailed partnerships with multiple CBOs and participation in various community events, including libraries, food banks, and festivals, with outreach materials provided in multiple languages and targeted mailers sent to neighborhoods.
 - **Demographic Reach and Materials:** Marie highlighted that outreach reached diverse populations, including Russian, Ukrainian, Asian, Latin, and Indigenous communities, with materials provided in several languages and requests for bilingual coloring books for future events.
 - **Reporting and Material Distribution:** Shannon and Marie discussed the status of CBO partner reports and clarified the process for distributing new outreach materials, including coloring books, with translation and agency-specific quantities to be coordinated upon Noemi Ortiz's return from vacation.
 - **Blue Mountain Action Council:** Sylvia summarized their partnership with Commitment to Community, focusing on outreach to low-income, senior, handicapped, and migrant families, distributing flyers and swag, and presenting at financial planning workshops, with some client applications processed as a result.
- **State LIHEAP Program Clarification:** Shannon requested clarification on the state LIHEAP program, and Michelle DeBell explained that the program assists with electric bills for qualifying customers, but does not cover natural gas charges.
 - **Eligibility and Coverage:** Michelle DeBell clarified that the state LIHEAP program is for customers who use electricity as a heating source, and while customers with both electric and natural gas service may qualify, the program only pays the electric portion of the bill.

Follow-up tasks:

- **CARES Discount Pause Docket Number:** Provide the docket number for the CARES discount pause request to Andrew after the meeting. (Daniel)
- **CARES Coloring Book Translation and Distribution:** Follow up with Noemi Ortiz regarding the status of the CARES coloring book translation and coordinate distribution to agencies once available. (Shannon)