

**Energy Affordability and Accessibility Collaborative**  
**October 20, 2021**  
**Meeting Chat**

Anne Armstrong - Operating with integrity includes open communication.

Will - I wonder if it might be helpful to brainstorm some examples of not operating with integrity?

Susan Lindson - Disclose any interests that may exist, to address and avoid the perception of conflicts of interest.

Yvonne K. Lewis - Anne, can we get a copy of the "cold weather kit" information.

Anne Armstrong - [armstronga3@michigan.gov](mailto:armstronga3@michigan.gov) to be added to the list for winter heating seasons outreach and education toolkit.

Charles Buysse - Will the Kit have information on Energy Efficiency Measures and Programs available to receive those measures at no cost like weather-stripping, thermostats, etc.

Anne Armstrong - Charles, I must check on that. Great point.

Susan Lindson - Good idea for that to have a separate subcommittee. we need to build a clear path to be able to help clients who need hot water and heat.

Anne Armstrong - Tim, can you email me to help us connect to FEMA?

Alison Lindburg - My understanding is that FEMA is also interested in resilience now, and energy efficiency falls into that.

Tim Skrotzki - [tim.skrotzki@elevatenp.org](mailto:tim.skrotzki@elevatenp.org)

Alison Lindburg - Speaking of heat pumps, does anyone have concerns with cold climate heat pumps as we go into the winter?

Briana Parker - <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rsfkxPxGcdkmLD9mfi3JKHNOA6vqFambO20VUUBZQ68/edit>  
Guiding Values Link.

Anne Armstrong - SER = State Emergency Relief

Elaina Braunschweig - Useful acronyms for this presentation:

- RIA: Residential Income Assistance (customer charge credit)
- LIA: Low Income Assistance (\$30/month credit)
- SER: State Emergency Relief
- HHC: Home Heating Credit
- SPP: Shutoff Protection Plan
- WPP: Winter Protection Plan
- CERA: Covid Emergency Rental Assistance
- MEAP: Michigan Energy Assistance Program

Martin Kushler - I would be very cautious about promoting cold climate heat pumps for low-income customers at this time. Unless the building shell efficiency for the home is first aggressively upgraded, operating costs will be

much higher than for natural gas, and there will likely also be comfort issues. Policy for LI should begin with aggressive building shell efficiency improvements.

Annika Brindel - Thanks Elaina! It would be great to have a cheat sheet handy online that also included a 1-2 sentence definition of each of these programs.

Will – Alison, My father-in-law has a heat pump system. It kept up well last winter, but I think it did struggle with the defrost cycle. He may have had to manually defrost it.

Anne Armstrong - Link to documents and resources page: [https://www.michigan.gov/mpsc/0,9535,7-395-93307\\_93312\\_93320-566302--,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/mpsc/0,9535,7-395-93307_93312_93320-566302--,00.html)

Anne Armstrong - Annika - we will follow up on that suggestion. Great idea.

Jamie Curtis - EAAC Suggestion Box: <https://www.research.net/r/W682HZV>

Alison Lindburg – Will, that is a very interesting anecdote. Thank you for that. Does your FIL live in MI? MEEA represents many cold climate states in the Midwest, so we are interested where the heat pump technology does and doesn't work at this time.

Alison Lindburg – Marty, +1 on the building envelope improvements first.

Andrew McNeally - UPPCO has a LI complex fully heated with cold climate heat pumps in the western Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The units were installed after shell measures were installed.

Heather Kapustka - If a customer gets assistance through DTE with the SER and are a Customer of another Utility as well, will DTE submit the SER for all utilities or just DTE?

Anne Armstrong - LSP is an affordable payment plan sponsored by DTE under the Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP).

Anne Armstrong - Sakinah, can you provide information on the virtual Customer Assistance Day in the chat?

Annika Brindel - Marty, LI households are going to be better off with heat pumps compared to electric resistance baseboard heat and there are plenty of those households to convert.

Annika Brindel - Of course we need to be cheerleaders for envelope improvements, too!

Sakinah N Howard - Yes Anne, will do.

Martin Kushler - The folks at the Center for Energy and Environment in MN have done a lot of research on heat pumps in northern climates, including their own field studies. I highly recommend them as a source. Their conclusion: "Deep energy retrofits are essential for managing customer costs and grid reliability". See: <https://www.mncee.org/electrification-energy-efficiency-and-peak-demand>. Electrification, Energy Efficiency, and Peak Demand [www.mncee.org](http://www.mncee.org)

Heather Kapustka - Thank you! That is lovely! We had no idea you did this.

Heather Kapustka - Hello Gina Kostoff! Were you able to find out a reconnection process for IMP?

Sakinah N Howard - DTE can assist a customer in completing in SER for a different utility. For example, if they are a Consumers customer as well, if they provide that account number it gets included in the application.

Martin Kushler - Annika, yes, heat pump is an improvement over electric resistance baseboard. (& yes, should still get strong envelope EE).

Anne Armstrong - Correction: LSP is DTE's affordable payment plan under the Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP). Four utilities offer an affordable payment program under MEAP - Consumers, DTE, SEMCO and UPPCO.

Kate Hutchens - I'm a newcomer to these meetings, so apologies if this is widely known, during Zoe's presentation re: Consumers Energy, I heard I think the term "Dunning process," and I'm wondering if someone could say more about what that term refers to?

Martin Kushler - Curious why a 'rate' is called an "EWR rate"?

Maria E Christian - Dunning refers to the collection steps.

Annika Brindel - Is it a reduced SURCHARGE? Or a rate...?

Doug - Really appreciate everyone sharing the important work they are doing. These are all proactive and important processes. Have the utilities present today considered collaborating on outreach, targeting and qualification for programs?

Laura Goldberg - So a reduced surcharge? or a rate? and is there an example in the differences between the low-income surcharge and other surcharge.

Aileen Gow - Are they participating to get the rate? LI rate.

Doug - Thank you! I know how expensive mailers are. Could be interesting opportunities for cost savings to utilities as well as improved targeting.

Aileen Gow - Is it possible to require participation to get the LI Rate?

Martin Kushler - I would observe that the dollar value of getting a lower EWR surcharge is miniscule compared to the dollar savings of getting some good energy efficiency services.

Annika Brindel - People who participate in EWR programs are getting the highest benefits from EWR already. I'm not sure I understand the case to lower their EWR surcharge. After all, some households may have barriers to EWR and may never be able to participate (unwilling landlord, etc.) so they'll only ever get the system-wide benefits of EWR. Something to think about.

Jennifer Dennis - Regarding the participation in EWR as a requirement for the surcharge rate: It should be reiterated that all MAP enrollees are referred to our EWR program. Each is offered a home energy assessment and, if qualified, additional EE services.

Martin Kushler - I think the question is driven by the thought of looking for ways to help motivate customers to participate in EWR.

Karl Hoesch - There might be callers on the conference line waiting to be admitted to the meeting

Susan Lindson - Important to remember that customers may be motivated to participate but it may not fit into their schedules and/or they may not have the time for home energy assessments and other EWR program participation. Happy to talk more about that in a smaller group--we can do things to make it more possible for them.

**Niki Fanjoy, Division Director for Heat and Energy Programming TrueNorth Community Services – Bio**

This will be Niki's 7th year working closely with the MPSC, MDHHS and the other MEAP grantees to connect clients to emergency heat and energy needs as well as walking alongside them on their path towards self-sufficiency. Also helping with this presentation are Jacqueline Smith and Marissa Boerman, both part of the leadership team for the Heat and Energy program.

Anne Armstrong - Link to MIbridges - the MDHHS online portal to access all types of assistance:

[https://newmibridges.michigan.gov/s/isd-landing-page?language=en\\_US](https://newmibridges.michigan.gov/s/isd-landing-page?language=en_US)

Kristen Bolds - Question for TrueNorth, How long is the typical interaction? How do you overcome challenges with those in need, engaging in each interaction? What helps keep them motivated to stay engaged?

Doug - This is a great overview. This looks like a linear process, but utilities mentioned users must apply annually to programs. Are there other feedback loops or cycles that are considered?

Jamie Curtis – Doug, We will hold this question until the other speakers have presented if that is okay.

Martin Kushler - Comment for TrueNorth, Sounds like a great service. My sense is that you would have very helpful information about how best to encourage and motivate customers to participate in EWR. What are the barriers and challenges, what techniques work best, what EE services help the most, etc. I hope that someone follows up with you folks about that.

**Angela Sterner, MSW Salvation Army – Bio**

Angela has worked at The Salvation Army for more than ten years serving in various positions within energy assistance. Since April 2018 she has been in the role of the Energy Assistance Services Director. Angie participated in the Michigan Public Service Commission workgroup that revised the utility billing rules to provide protections for vulnerable customers. serves on the National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition (NEUAC) Board and on the executive committee of Michigan's Coalition to Keep Michigan Warm.

Kristen Bolds - Great presentation!

**Sean Scane, Program Director for MEAP and CERA Operations United Way for Southeastern Michigan – Bio**

Sean has worked in various roles at United Way within the utility assistance department over the last 6 years and has helped strengthen and innovate the program to increase their impact. Sean oversees the MEAP program at United Way and ensures they are connecting their clients to opportunities for long-term outcomes.

**Tasha Ball, Data and Performance Manager of 211 United Way for Southeastern Michigan – Bio**

Tasha oversees the performance of 6 counties with the largest population of people in Michigan. Her background at United Way started in the utility assistance program and later moved to manage the 2-1-1 department. As the Data and Performance Manager of 211, she works to ensure UWSEM's data integrity and quality, as well as managing the day-to-day operations of the contact center.

Anne Armstrong - During the initial months of the pandemic, MDHHS made changes to the SER approval process to reduce the turnaround time for decisions and to make it easier for customers in the application process. These

include increasing the material and non-material asset limits from \$500 to \$15,000 and not requiring an interview with a caseworker (although an interview may still be requested).

Annika Brindel - It seems to me that the core problem is that energy is unaffordable. And we have built up a whole system (staffed by passionate, dedicated people!) to respond to that and try to help people deal with that initial problem of unaffordable energy. But wouldn't it be much more efficient, less stressful for families, and less likely to leave people behind... for utilities to just offer affordable energy to low-income customers in the first place?

Maria E Christian - Annika, to that suggestion, I would offer that we are working through collaborations like this to define what affordable is and find the most effective ways to deliver affordable energy to our low-income customers. I welcome any ideas you have in that space to assist in reaching that goal that we all really want.

Aileen Gow - From my observations, it is mainly not affordable due to poor housing stock and behavioral practices.

Kasey McNeally - I don't seem to be seeing slides changing. It's still on MEAP Application Process for me.

Anne Armstrong - A16 services are self-sufficiency services that are paid for through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Anne Armstrong - There does seem to be a lag time for some. The current slide displaying is MEAP Success Planning.

Kristen Bolds - I agree. Approaching long-term planning during a crisis is definitely a challenge. I like the approach of resolving the crisis first and then engaging in the longer-term plan.

Anne Armstrong - That is a good reminder that the legislative intent for MEAP is to help customers toward self-sufficiency. There are households that may never be self-sufficient - for example those who are on fixed-incomes.

**Mary Wilkins, Program Consultant, The Salvation Army – Bio**

Mary is a social service professional with more than 30 years' experience serving the needs of low-income households. She earned a bachelor's degree in Philosophy from Hope College and a Master's in Social Work from Western Michigan University. For more than half her career she has been directly involved with The Salvation Army's state-wide Energy Assistance Services in Michigan as well as overseen housing, SUD treatment, financial assistance, food security and other programs as a Divisional Social Services Director. During Mary's tenure she had been an active participant in the Coalition to Keep Michigan Warm, participated in Senator Caswell's low-income energy work group, and most recently has served on the executive committee of the National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition (NEUAC). Mary currently serves as a Program Consultant for The Salvation Army from her home in northern Michigan.

Elaina Braunschweig - If you have any specific recommendations for organizations and community agencies to reach out to for us to spread the word on low-income assistance, please let us know Aileen Gow.

Susan Lindson - Agreed, Aileen. Important to remember that to most vulnerable do not have smart phones, transportation, and/or internet access.

Susan Lindson - talking with faith-based orgs in our service area to get the information out--they are trusted sources. there are a lot of scams and people are justifiably cautious.

Aileen Gow - Have other utilities closed their customer lobbies? This could also be making an impact.

Zoe E. Ahlstrom - CE Direct Payment Offices are open.

Susan Lindson - Thank you, Ben. This helps build trust.

Charles Buysse - Community Action Agencies that distribute EE Kits could put informational flyers in the Kits to direct people to multiple Energy Assistance Resources.

Martin Kushler - Under the category of brainstorming, my primary recommendation is the need **to greatly increase the priority and funding for energy efficiency and weatherization to be closely linked to energy bill assistance efforts.** I make this point for two reasons. First, it makes no sense for anyone (the customer or other customers/taxpayers through various assistance programs) to pay for energy waste that could be avoided through energy efficiency. Energy efficiency can and should be a key part of making energy bills affordable.

Second, I would like to emphasize is how this issue intersects with Governor Whitmer's strong executive order and executive directive (e.g., ED 2020-10) establishing climate-related goals to reduce carbon emissions. If those policy directives are to be taken seriously, every aspect of state action relating to energy use should take those into consideration when making policy and program decisions. In the case of this energy affordability workgroup, there is a clear connection and opportunity. Simply stated, there is absolutely no way to accomplish those aggressive climate goals without widespread and major improvements in the energy efficiency of homes in Michigan. Why not make low-income homes a top priority? **Since energy efficiency and weatherization help with both energy affordability and with carbon reduction goals, those services should be a high priority for emphasis by the EAAC.**

Bethany Stutzman - This is already being worked on the MEAP workgroup but creating buckets for different clients (such as those on disability, the elderly, high consumption, etc.). My next thought related to this process is doing things like not making those who are on fixed income or elderly go through the process every year or every two years, but to be sensitive to the fact that their needs aren't going away, allow them to stay on programming longer.

Ben Dueweke - Thanks Marty, couldn't agree more.

Geoffrey Bierbower - Add to this: mandates and incentives to landlords to comply. Frequent comments by clients indicate landlords don't care much about the utilities if they are the tenant's responsibility.

Aileen Gow - What he said!

Robin Lisowski - Keep saying it, Marty!

Kristen Bolds - To add to Geoff, I was thinking of adding incentives to landlords to make energy efficient upgrades to homes. Perhaps as a condition of receiving Sec. 8.

Ben Dueweke - Statewide benchmarking requirement for Multifamily Buildings

Susan Lindson - Also some landlords don't want us in the home because we would see it is not a safe place to live. Not sure if municipal building inspection depts have the capacity to help us identify registered rentals that can use EWR help.

Geoffrey Bierbower - If there is ever a govt intervention to the housing crisis affecting pretty much the whole state, these mandates could be part of that legislative initiative.

Angela Sterner - Housing upgrades, energy waste reduction education and reduced rates for income qualifying households would be most impactful.

Charles Buysse - Where can we find the recording?

Amy Rittenhouse - EAAC Suggestion Box: <https://www.research.net/r/W682HZV>

Elaina Braunschweig - [https://www.michigan.gov/mpsc/0,9535,7-395-93307\\_93312\\_93320\\_94834-558075--,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/mpsc/0,9535,7-395-93307_93312_93320_94834-558075--,00.html)

Amy Rittenhouse - Affordability, Alignment and Assistance Subcommittee update [here](#).

Geoffrey Bierbower - Thank you!

Andrea Maloy - Thank you!