

Energy Assistance Committee Meeting Notes
Lincoln
June 14, 2007

Attending: Kate Ellrich, Judi Martin, Ardi Hoins, Cheryl Holcomb, Marge Fisher

Date Collection:

Energy Assistance Committee was tasked with developing a protocol of what data to collect and how it would be used. At the May NEAN meeting, it was agreed upon to begin collecting data from utilities. Need to clarify who is to collect, format of protocol and who will collect info.

Why are we asking utilities and others to gather data?

- Addressing poverty issues
- The “working poor” is facing housing costs that are raising and utility costs are become larger % of costs
- Assistance is a band-aid approach — need to look at whole system
- Different perspectives from agencies and utilities — common ground and collaboration is important
- Rates are impact by others including arrears and write-offs

How do we all communicate on same page?

- What is difference between arrears and write-offs?
- How long before goes to write-off and potential impact on customer
- Benefit of service causes problems
- Impact of utility policies impact clients agencies work with and impact homelessness

As NEAN begins to gather data- how should it be used:

- Education purposes — to educate customer about write-offs/collections and consequences. How to work with utilities closer.
- Industry use- compare to other states/communities
- With comparison to the Energy Burden studies done nationally by state and with the studies that NEAN will be involved with.
- Who will collect it? It needs to be a neutral party.
- Trust building between NEAN members — utilities and CAA and others working together
- Gather enough that is meaningful and able to use for comparison purposes but not that it will be detrimental to any one utility to be able to report
- Use state-wide averages — not by individual utility.
- Data would not be released until NEAN approves and there is consensus among members
- There are benefits of grouping data by elected districts
- Recognize there are differences in communities and not all areas are the same

Discussion on Energy Burden Study Symposium:

- It will be important when data is presented to explain what it means
- Create a conversational atmosphere at the symposium about what the data means
- Target landlords — housing stock problems as we discuss energy efficiency
- Unique issues to individual communities i.e., diversity of populations, rural vs. urban- highlight those differences
- How do you eliminate the need for energy assistance and dependency on assistance and other entitlements?
- Will we ever be able to reduce all assistance?
- Should we have a speaker that can discuss working with poor and changing behaviors
- Address those experiencing bumps in the road or “working poor” vs. chronic poor
- Can we — utilities, community action and other agencies/government solve these problems?
- If we can’t change, how do we change generational life styles/behaviors

Education/ discussion on working with those in need- our committee contribution and collaboration with NEAN members:

- Bridges out of Poverty- book — possible seminar format that could be part of Energy Burden symposiums or presentation at NEAN
- Ruby Paine- Extension Services does good workshop around understanding and working with those in poverty.
- Improvement of relationships between those in need and the service providers with the utility customer service staff.

Follow-up items from Committee meeting and NEAN meeting:

- Judi to send copy of On the Brink to Ardi
- Contact Roger Coltan on breaking down ON the Brink Burden Study by elected/ legislative districts
- Contact Roger Coltan and state of Michigan contacts concerning how they are handling their data collection.
- During NEAN meeting Mike Kelly asked for data from utilities on amount of arrears and number of households in arrears. Several of the NEAN utility members provided this data and Mike reported to DC as a state total. Will ask Mike to report at next meeting.
- Mary Beth Rathe offered to help pull together data on energy assistance dollars from the 9 CAA’s to add to the Energy Burden Study. Dollars received by source for 2005 and 2006 that was paid out in utility assistance.
- Clarify what data the utilities agreed upon collecting beginning in August.

