



# LIFE 2002 Statewide Conference Final Conference Report

## *Accessing Affordable Energy*

The Low-Income Forum on Energy (LIFE) 2002 Statewide Conference convened at the Albany Marriott Hotel on November 7 and 8, 2002 to continue New York's statewide dialogue on the energy needs of low-income energy customers. The Forum, sponsored by the New York State Public Service Commission and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, brought together 136 participants representing 70 organizations from across New York State. Participants in the dialogue included representatives of community-based organizations, utility companies, ESCOs, state agencies, local government, statewide nonprofit organizations, community action/weatherization agencies, and businesses.

Several critical themes emerged during the two-day event. Among them:

- The energy burden for low-income energy consumers is increasing due to higher energy prices and the national economic downturn which is significantly impacting low-income households. While middle income households often spend 3-8% of their income on energy, low-income households typically spend 15-25% which forces them to make critical trade-offs between paying their energy bills and buying other essential items such as food or medicine.
- Coordination of federal, state, local and private resources is essential to addressing the energy needs of low-income energy consumers. No single source can adequately address those needs. The quality of the relationships between the resource organizations is critical to providing quality services to low-income households.
- Integrating multiple programs to serve a low-income household is often difficult due to regulatory and institutional barriers.
- The new energy market may require a greater degree of flexibility for resource programs that was previously the case. Some may require statutory or regulatory adjustments in order to achieve more flexibility to meet the needs of low-income households.
- A one-stop-shop approach which allows households to have one point of contact for resource programs with an integrated intake system can be effective, but is often difficult to achieve.
- Effective solutions to addressing the energy needs of low-income households must include the low-income households directly. The household members are in the best position to understand what their needs are.
- Targeting energy resource programs is essential due to the fact that low-

income energy customers are a diverse group with diverse needs.

- Aggregation and other energy buying strategies are essential to make the new energy market work for low-income and other residential customers.
- The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) will be reauthorized in 2003 and may face challenges to the funding formula from warm weather states which may negatively impact the resources available for New York's HEAP Program.
- HEAP has tremendous market power and should explore statewide oil buying strategies to improve access that low-income households have to affordable home heating oil.
- New York should review the benefits structure for its HEAP program. The program currently includes a regular benefit. If a household receives a shut-off notice, they may receive an emergency benefit. Households which do not receive a shut-off notice because they pay their energy bill but don't pay another critical bill (such as food or medicine) cannot qualify for an emergency payment.

The 2002 Statewide Conference marked the third statewide conference sponsored since LIFE's inception in 1998. Participants were welcomed by Public Service Commission Chairman Maureen O. Helmer and by Peter Smith, Vice-President of the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. Dr. Patricia Pine provided opening remarks on the State Office for Aging's Project 2015. Michael Corso, Chief of Residential Advocacy for the New York State Dept. of Public Service, served as Master of Ceremonies throughout the conference.

The conference keynote address was provided by Susan Hager, President and Chief

Professional Officer of the United Way of New York State. Ms. Hager discussed the United Way's 211 collaborative which will create a statewide 211 telecommunications system linking individuals to human services programs that will help them to address their needs. Ms. Hager also provided a brief overview of the United Way's efforts to encourage results-oriented programming to help families and communities.

The focal point for this third statewide LIFE Conference was a series of six briefing papers prepared by members of the LIFE Steering Committee. The papers were distributed with the participant's confirmation packets and were designed to provide LIFE participants with a common background on a range of issues relevant to the energy needs of low-income customers. Plenary sessions were held on each paper topic. The papers and plenary panelists included:

- *Ensuring Access to Affordable Energy Services for Low-Income Consumers* (prepared by Jack Ziegler of Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation)

Panelists: Jack Ziegler/Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation, David Hepinstall/Association for Energy Affordability, Martin Insogna/New York State Dept. of Public Service, Ben Wiles/Public Utility Law Project, Peggine Neville/New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, and Sue Montgomery Corey/Community Power Network of NYS.

- *Using HEAP and Other Funding to Access Affordable Energy* (prepared by David Hepinstall of the Association for Energy Affordability)

Panelists: David Hepinstall/Association for Energy Affordability, Meg Power/Economic Opportunity Studies, Rick Gerardi/New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, and Bruce Bowdy, New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.

- *Universal Service in New York-An Overview* (prepared by Ben Wiles of the Public Utility Law Project)

Panelists: Ben Wiles/Public Utility Law Project

- *Advances in Energy Technology* (prepared by Peggie Neville of the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority)

Panelists: Peggie Neville and Rick Gerardi of New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

- *Using Coordination and Collaboration as Tools to Access Affordable Energy* (prepared by Sue Montgomery Corey, Community Power Network of New York State, Inc.)

Panelists: Sue Montgomery Corey/Community Power Network, Patricia Boynton/NYSEG, Tina Zerbian/Cattaraugus Community Action, Mike Colgrove/New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

- *Competitive Markets and Access to Affordable Energy* (prepared by Martin Insogna, New York State Department of Public Service)

Panelists: Martin Insogna/New York State Dept. of Public Service, Michael Meath/Agway Energy Products, and Jonathan Gruchala/National Fuel Gas.

New York State's Lieutenant Governor, Mary O. Donohue, was the featured speaker at the conference luncheon on November 7. The Lt. Governor recognized the importance of the LIFE dialogue in bringing together the resources and organizations that can address the energy needs of low-income consumers.

Lisa Wood, Senior Consultant with the Brattle Group was the featured speaker at the conference luncheon on November 8. Ms. Wood offered perspectives on encouraging residential customers to switch to new suppliers in the competitive energy market. She noted

that market-based standard offer service is an important element to helping residential customers overcome the inertia that sometimes prevents them from switching suppliers.

In addition to the plenary sessions, LIFE participants had the opportunity to choose from among five break-out sessions on special topics. These sessions are summarized in the following sections.

#### *Community Investment In Affordable Energy*

This session explored ways to build community investment in local solutions to providing affordable energy to low-income customers. The presenters included a local community action agency working with a credit union to develop the State's first Individual Development Account for the energy needs of low-income households and a community loan fund which uses investments from individuals to make loans to low-income small businesses and housing projects.

- Peggie Neville, Moderator  
New York State Energy Research and Development Authority
- Earl Hicks,  
Tompkins Community Action
- Robert Radliff,  
Capital District Community Loan Fund

#### *Aggregation*

This session explored the potential for group buying or aggregation for low-income customers. The presenters represented three very different aggregation efforts: one serves low-income multi-family buildings, one serves municipalities and low-income residential customers, and the third provides oil service to low-income households. Each is at a different stage in its development.

- Lea Ann Rosenthal, Moderator  
New York State Dept. of Public Service
- Stuart Stein,  
Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance

- Michael Bobker,  
Association for Energy Affordability
- Tony Figueroa,  
Regional Economic Community Action  
Program

### *Consumer Protection*

The evolving competitive market creates many new challenges to New York's consumer protection requirements. This session provided an update on consumer protection in New York.

- Martin Insogna,  
New York State Dept. of Public Service

### *Aging and Energy: New York State Office for Aging's Project 2015*

At the request of Governor Pataki, the New York State Office for Aging has been working with many state agencies to identify the needs of New York's aging population and how the service delivery system will need to change to meet those needs. Project 2015 refers to the fact that by the year 2015, the Baby Boom generation will be a significant share of the senior population. The expectations and needs of that group are expected to have a huge impact on service providers at the community level as well as for the state. This session provided an opportunity to hear what Office for Aging has learned and to share with them ideas and concerns about the energy needs of New York's aging population.

- Marshall Sues, Moderator  
New York State Office for Aging
- Jennifer Rosenbaum,  
New York State Office for Aging

### *Consumer Education*

Consumer education is key to helping low-income customers participate effectively in the changing energy market. This session explored consumer education strategies used to provide

residential customers with the information that they need to make informed decisions about their energy service.

- Cherie Gregoire, Moderator  
New York State Energy Research and  
Development Authority
- Rich Gifford,  
New York State Dept. of Public Service

## Next Steps For LIFE

The LIFE Steering Committee has proposed the following activities for 2003:

- Regional discussion groups over the spring and summer to better incorporate the perspectives of low-income consumers in the LIFE Dialogue
- Regional Meetings in the Fall to bring together the LIFE stakeholders to discuss regional and statewide energy policy issues which impact low-income consumers
- Development of Regional Profiles which will document the trends, challenges and opportunities facing low-income households in each region
- Continued development of the LIFE website (<http://www.lifenynews.org>)

Looking ahead to 2004, the LIFE Steering Committee hopes to hold a statewide LIFE Conference in the spring.

## For More Information

If you would like to receive information about any of the upcoming LIFE activities or for more information about the LIFE 2002 Statewide Conference, please contact: Michael Corso, Chairman/LIFE Steering Committee at [Michael\\_Corso@dps.state.ny.us](mailto:Michael_Corso@dps.state.ny.us) or 518/474-4686 or Sue Montgomery Corey, LIFE Manager at [suenc@capital.net](mailto:suenc@capital.net) or 518/251-2525.

## LIFE 2002 Attendance

<u>Counties Represented</u>		
<u>County</u>	<u># Participating</u>	<u>% of Total Attendance</u>
Albany	50	40%
Bronx	1	0.7%
Broome	1	0.7%
Cattaraugus	2	1%
Clinton	2	1%
Cortland	1	0.7%
Dutchess	3	2%
Essex	4	3%
Erie	4	3%
Franklin	3	2%
Jefferson	1	0.7%
Kings	5	4%
Madison	1	0.7%
Monroe	1	0.7%
Montgomery	1	0.7%
Nassau	1	0.7%
New York	11	8%
Oneida	3	2%
Onondaga	6	4%
Orange	2	1%
Queens	2	1%
Rensselaer	1	0.7%
Rockland	1	0.7%
Saint Lawrence	3	2%
Saratoga	3	2%
Schenectady	2	1%
Schoharie	2	1%
Suffolk	1	0.7%
Sullivan	3	2%
Tompkins	5	4%
Warren	1	0.7%
Washington	3	2%
Other States		
Pennsylvania	1	0.7%
New Jersey	1	0.7%
District of Columbia	4	3%
Louisiana	2	1%

<u>Attendance By Sector</u>		
<u>Sector</u>	<u># Participating</u>	<u>% of Total Attendance</u>
Community Action/ Weatherization	24	17.27%
Community-Based Organization	11	7.91%
Faith-Based	1	0.72%
ESCO	1	0.72%
Utility	26	18.71%
Local Government	18	12.95%
State Government	44	31.65%
Independent Living Centers	1	0.72%
Statewide Nonprofit	3	2.16%
National Nonprofit	1	0.72%
Other	10	7.19%

## Organizations Registered For LIFE 2002 Statewide Conference

1st Rochdale Cooperative, Ltd.  
Affordable Energy Solutions  
Agway Energy Products  
Association for Energy Affordability  
Bronx Community College: CUNY  
Capital District Community Loan Fund  
Catholic Charities  
Cattaraugus Community Action  
Central Hudson G & E  
Citizen Action Fuel Group  
Clinton County Office for Aging  
ComLinks  
Commission on Economic Opportunity  
Common Ground, The Aurora  
Community Development Corp. of LI  
Community Energy Services, Inc.  
Community Power Network of NYS, Inc.  
Conservation Services Group  
Consolidated Edison of NY  
Cortland County CAP  
Couch White, LLP  
Dutchess Co. Community Action  
Dutchess Co. Office for Aging  
Entergy Louisiana  
Essex Co. Department of Social Services  
Franklin Co. Office for Aging  
Housing Conservation Coordinators, Inc.  
KeySpan Energy Delivery  
Long Island Power Authority  
Madison County Dept. of Social Services  
Margert Community Corporation  
Montgomery Co. Office for Aging  
Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance  
National Community Action Foundation  
National Fuel Gas Distribution Corp.  
Navigant Consulting  
Niagara Mohawk  
Northern Manhattan Improvement  
NYC Human Resources Administration  
NYS Department of Public Service  
NYS Div. of Housing & Community Renewal  
NYS Energy Research and Development

NYS Office for Aging  
NYS Office of Temporary & Disability Assist.  
NYSAAAAA  
NYSEG  
NYS-OMRDD  
NYSWDA  
Office of the People's Council  
Oneida Co. Office for the Aging and Continuous Care  
Oneida County Office For Aging  
Operation Hope  
Orange and Rockland Utilities  
Public Utility Law Project  
RECAP, Inc.  
Related Management Co., L.P.  
Rochester Gas and Electric  
RoperASW  
Rural Preservation Company of Clinton Co.  
Saratoga Co. Options for Independent Living  
Schenectady Co. Office for the Aging  
Schenectady Community Action Program  
Schoharie Co. Community Action Program, Inc.  
St. Lawrence County CDP  
Sullivan Co. Dept. of Social Services  
Sullivan Co. Office for the Aging  
The Brattle Group  
Tompkins Community Action  
United Way of New York State  
Washington Co. Office for Aging  
Washington County DSS  
Washington County EOC