



LIFE

Low-Income Forum on Energy
George E. Pataki, Governor

LIFE 2000

LIFE (the Low-Income Forum on Energy) is a unique statewide dialogue which began in 1997 when the New York State Community Action Association urged New York State's Public Service Commission Chairman Maureen O. Helmer to sponsor an event that would bring diverse parties together to discuss the energy needs of low-income energy customers. A multi-party Steering Committee was convened to develop the LIFE Conference. The result was a conference attracting nearly 200 representatives from low-income advocacy groups, state agencies, energy services companies, local governments, and utilities. LIFE convened at the University at Albany on April 28-29, 1999.

Recognizing LIFE's success, Chairman Helmer asked that the LIFE Dialogue continue. A multi-party Steering Committee is guiding that effort for the year 2000 with a two-part approach designed to strengthen the range of voices included in the dialogue as well as the quality and depth of issues which could be addressed. The Spring Regional Meeting Series was completed in May, 2000. This will be followed in the fall with a statewide conference in Albany.

Details about the fall conference will be forthcoming. The agenda is expected to be developed based on the feedback received from participants at the Spring Series.

LIFE 2000 Spring Regional Meeting Series

A five-part regional meeting series was sponsored in April-May, 2000. More than 200 participants representing 110 organizations attended one or more of the regional meetings. Among these:

- Community Action Agencies and Weatherization
- State Agencies
- State Assembly and Senate Representatives
- Energy Cooperatives and Credit Unions
- Cooperative Extension
- United Ways
- Utility Companies
- Local Government Representatives
- Energy Services Companies
- Independent Living Centers and
- Nonprofit and Consumer Advocate Organizations

Each of the regional meetings was hosted by one or more organizations located in that community. Those are outlined below.

Date	City	Location	Local Host
4/25/00	Albany	University of Albany	NYSERDA and Consumer Protection Board
5/1/00	New York City	Consolidated Edison	Consolidated Edison & Assn. for Energy Affordability
5/3/00	Lake Placid	Hilton Hotel	Flat Rock Productions
5/8/00	Buffalo	Classics V	National Fuel Gas Corp. & Niagara Mohawk Power Corp.
5/9/00	Binghamton	Holiday Inn Arena	NYS Electric and Gas

While each of the five regional meetings featured a common agenda, some region-specific presentations were included. The common agenda included:

- Regional Update: Status of Competition and

Retail Access Participation in Local Utility Territories (Presentation)

- Energy Efficiency and Other Resource Opportunities (Presentation)
- Aggregation Roundtable (Presentation)
- Local Utility Programs and Issues (Presentation)

- Making Competition Work for Low-Income People (Work Group Session)

Without question, the most popular part of the regional meeting agenda was the interactive Work Group Session. That component divided participants into two or more groups to discuss the opportunities,

barriers, and challenges facing low-income New Yorkers in the competitive energy market. Notes from the workgroup discussions were compiled. Work group discussions revealed wide ranging concerns related to the energy needs of low-income families, the competitive market and the existing government and utility-funded low-income programs. The table below describes a cross-section of the dialogue which occurred:

Regional Meeting	Work Group Highlights
Albany	<p>We need to understand what happens when a family cycles off the “system” as a result of welfare reform. Sometimes they don’t understand that they are responsible for their bills-it may be the first time that they have been a direct energy customer.</p> <p>Will the low-income population be attractive to Energy Services Companies? What can be done to encourage this? Is the Low-Income population dramatically different than the general residential population? Do we really understand the hierarchy of needs that they have?</p>
New York City	<p>Is aggregation a viable option for all low-income customers? How are the HEAP vouchered customers different from the non-vouchered?</p> <p>How do we address the incorrect perception that all low-income people are poor payers?</p> <p>Energy/customer choice information should be simple, centralized and accessible as well as in multiple languages and formats friendly to the disabled.</p> <p>How can the market work for ESCOs? Do ESCOs have the resources and infrastructure to serve the residential (and especially the low-income) customers.</p>
Lake Placid	<p>How can energy resources be structured to benefit renters and that portion of the low-income population which is transient?</p> <p>Is there a way to aggregate employers who could then pass along some of the benefits to their employees?</p>
Buffalo	<p>How can we make energy use management education available to more people?</p> <p>How can we address the issue of Emergency HEAP and the difficulty in making it work effectively with utility programs to benefit the customer?</p>
Binghamton	<p>What can be done about suppliers refusing to serve the working poor and public assistance recipients due to poor credit (or the perception of it)</p> <p>How can we get landlords more involved in building effective solutions to the energy challenges of their tenants?</p>

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