



LIFE

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

LIFE 2001-2002 Regional Conferences

Conference Report: Potsdam

The LIFE 2001 Fall Regional Conference for the North Country was held on September 27, 2001 at Clarkson University. Thirty-nine representatives from twenty-eight organizations attended. LIFE was hosted locally by Community Energy Services, Inc. and the Community Power Network of NYS.

An overview of statewide energy and low-income information was presented by representatives of the Public Service Commission and the Community Power Network of NYS. A NYSEDA representative provided an overview of that agency's SBC programs during the networking lunch.

The regional meeting agenda included two panels. The first, addressing energy market issues in the region, included presentations by Agway, Niagara Mohawk and the Massena Electric Department. The second, addressing resource opportunities for low-income households, included presentations by Community Energy Services, ComLinks, and a representative of the Clinton County Dept. of Social Services HEAP Program.

Work Group Findings

Representatives from the Community Power Network and the Public Utility Law Project served as facilitators for the afternoon workgroups. NYSEG and the Public Service Commission provided recorders for each of the two work groups. Each group considered three themes:

- The role of community-based organizations and local government in the changing energy market
- The changing relationship between low-income energy customers and their energy vendors
- The way that resources for low-income households are changing due to the changing energy market

The work group discussions at this regional conference identified several issues that have become common themes at LIFE conferences: the need for consumer education, impact of increasing energy costs, and challenges in accessing resource programs-particularly emergency HEAP. The Potsdam Regional also revealed several unique issues:

- Limited staff resources and increased demand for resource programs such as HEAP are making it difficult for some counties to implement the programs. Creative solutions such as identifying volunteers have been tried in some areas but are prohibited in others due to union contract limitations.
- Program requirements (HEAP/WAP) on property ownership make it difficult for some households to access services that they really need. In particular, life leases, land contracts, and situations where the household owned a mobile home but not the property were identified as concerns.
- Minimum oil deliveries have increased which is making it difficult for oil customers to obtain the service they need since they can't afford the minimum delivery. Related to that is a concern that rural low-income customers may get blacklisted by all of the oil dealers in their area if they fail to pay one. Oil dealers do not have the same obligation to serve that other energy providers do.
- Municipal utilities, while they do not have the same Home Energy Fair Practice Act obligations as the investor-owned utilities, may have informal ways of helping payment-troubled low-income households and these should be explored.

- Housing quality and the availability of affordable, safe housing was a continuing theme at Potsdam. One of the housing issues raised was about lead stabilization. Lead stabilization requirements on housing rehabilitation may be important for long-term health and safety, but may in the short-term delay work and increase the cost of work on low-income housing.

Conference Evaluation Results

Each conferee was asked to complete a conference evaluation. Twenty-one of the thirty-nine participants completed the evaluation. The raw averages for the numerically scaled questions follow.

1. How well did the Regional Meeting meet expectations? *Conferees rated this at 3.71 of 5.0.*
2. Please rate the quality of the speakers overall. *Conferees rated this at 4.24 out of 5.0.*
3. Please rate the quality of the other aspects of LIFE.

Materials	<i>Conferees rated this at 3.48 out of 5.0</i>
Conference Facilities	<i>Conferees rated this at 4.24 out of 5.0</i>
Food	<i>Conferees rated this at 4.0 out of 5.0</i>
Parking	<i>Conferees rated this at 3.86 out of 5.0</i>
Conference Staff	<i>Conferees rated this at 4.14 out of 5.0</i>

Participation By Sector

Sector	Number Attending	Percent of Total
Utility	3	7.69%
State Government	3	7.69%
Local Government (6 Dept. of Social Services, 3 Office for Aging, 3 Other Local Government)	11	28.21%
Community Action/Weatherization	2	5.13%
Community-Based Organizations	13	33.33%
ESCO	2	5.13%
Other	4	10.26%
Legislature	1	2.56%

Organizations Represented at This Regional Meeting

Agway Energy Products	Northern Regional Center for Independent Living
ANR, Inc.	NYS Assembly
Canton Housing Authority	NYS Dept. of Public Service
Cerebral Palsy of the North Country	NYSERDA
Clinton County Dept. of Social Services	One Work Source
Clinton County Office for Aging	Public Utility Law Project
ComLinks	Rural Preservation Company of Clinton Co.
Community Energy Services, Inc.	St. Lawrence County Housing Council
Community Power Network of NYS	St. Lawrence County Office for Aging
Franklin Co. Dept. of Social Services	St. Lawrence County Planning Office
Franklin County Office for Aging	St. Lawrence Gas
Lewis Co. Office for Aging	Statewide Senior Action Council
Niagara Mohawk Power Corp.	Town of Massena Electric Department
North Country Legal Services	Town of Stockholm