



LIFE 2005 Regional Meetings

Conference Report: Brooklyn

The LIFE 2005 Regional Meeting for the New York City Region was held on August 24, 2005 at the Key Span facilities in Brooklyn. Sixty-three individuals representing 30 organizations attended the event. Martin Insogna, Chair of the LIFE Steering Committee and Utility Consumer Program Specialist for the New York State Department of Public Service served as Master of Ceremonies. Support for the regional meeting was provided by our local host, Key Span Energy Delivery. Joseph Guarinello, Vice-President of Energy Programs for HeartShare Human Services and Leonard Jordan, Director of Consumer Advocacy, Billing, and Service Centers for KeySpan provided local welcomes.

Agenda

The agenda for the regional meeting included the following sessions:

- **Session I: Energy Prices: Challenges to Affordability.** This session explored the impact that rising energy prices are having on low-income energy consumers. *Speaker: David Hepinstall, Association for Energy Affordability.*
- **Session II: The Low-Income Story: In Their Own Words.** This session provided an opportunity to hear directly from low-income consumers as well as the chance to discuss the barriers to participation, the difficulties that low-income consumers face getting assistance and the strategies they take to address their energy needs. *Speakers: Jillian Higgins, KeySpan and Tanya Brothers, HeartShare Human Services Moderator: Sue Montgomery Corey, Community Power Network of NYS.*
- **Session III: Everybody Has an Advocate; Everybody is an Advocate.** This session identified policy advocates working on low-income energy issues at the state level. Opportunities for public participation in energy policy development and the constraints that affect participants when utilizing these opportunities. Finally, the program provided an overview of the upcoming low-income policy development agenda. *Speaker: Ben Wiles, Public Utility Law Project.*
- **Session IV: Being a Smarter Energy Shopper.** This session explored some opportunities we all have to become smarter shoppers. It also discussed steps New York State is taking to get more bang for its HEAP bucks. *Speakers: Marty Insogna, NYS Department of Public Service and Peggie Neville, NYS Energy Research and Development Authority.*
- **Session V: Building Local Alliances.** One of the most important techniques for developing sustainable community energy solutions is the creation of local alliances. This session provided a close-up view of existing or potential alliances that may benefit the region. *Speakers: Mary Thompson Grassi, HeartShare Human Services and Chris Neidl, Community Environmental Center.*
- **A group discussion** rounded out the day, which focused on the challenges and opportunities facing low-income households in the New York City area and the impact that rising energy prices are having on those households. A summary of the group discussion comments is included here and is categorized into five areas: Outreach & Education, Information Clearinghouse, Assistance Strategies (i.e. Short-Term), Long-Term Solutions, and Crisis & Concern.

Discussion Group Summary

The following is based on one discussion group that met during the regional meeting.

Outreach & Education	Information Clearinghouse	Assistance Strategies (i.e. Short-Term)	Long-Term Solutions	Crisis & Concern
<p>1. Customers are stressed, 14% functionally illiterate in Suffolk County, need <i>clear</i> and <i>simple</i> information</p> <p>2. A lot of people have never accessed social services, need help doing this, need to bump into someone helpful or find out through word of mouth</p> <p>3. Low-income need to be able to understand contracts, need info that allows them to participate in deregulated market</p> <p>4. Advocates role, duty to get info out, if no vehicle for info, need to raise awareness, need tools</p> <p>5. Face to face, word of mouth critical, low-income want to talk to people, not read literature</p>	<p>1. Create central source about programs including non-energy programs that can help manage costs/income</p> <p>2. 211 collaborative?</p> <p>3. Get Energy \$mart programs don't connect with human services, would have benefits</p> <p>4. Can LIFE post resource information</p> <p>5. Dept. for Aging 311, HEAP/WRAP/EPIC/FS guide for seniors</p>	<p>None identified in group discussion</p>	<p>1. New technologies should be piloted in low-income neighborhoods</p> <p>2. Need to bring new technology into marketplace – advanced metering, etc.</p>	<p>1. Deregulation exposes all to market forces</p> <p>2. Bottom 4/5 of income pyramid left out – need to look at them as consumers with protections</p> <p>3. Market failure if low-income can't understand contracts and sometimes make uneconomic decisions</p> <p>4. Utilities used to have a lot of consumer advocates, now many fewer – overworked, can't help at the level they need</p> <p>5. Need more housing</p> <p>6. Need to understand how housing and energy affordability work together</p> <p>7. City has peak load problems, real time pricing needed, how can low-income advocates support real time pricing rates? How do we protect those who need extra load?</p>

Conference Evaluation Results

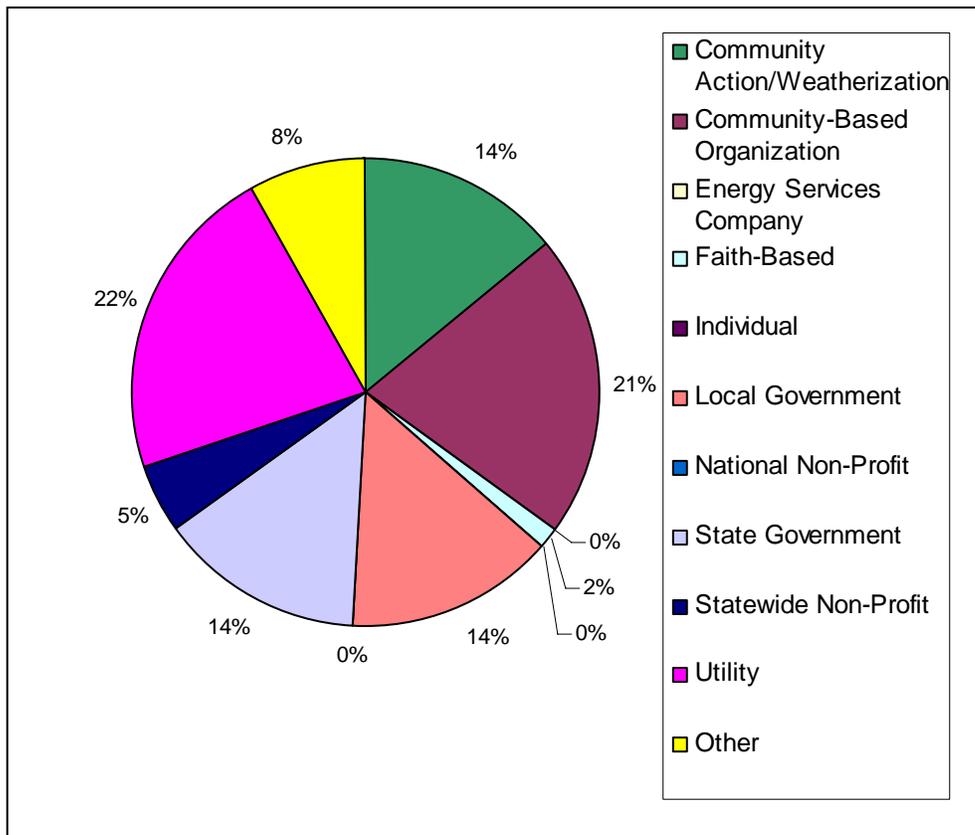
Each conferee was asked to complete a conference evaluation. Twenty-six participants completed evaluations with the following results.

1. How well did the Regional Meeting meet your expectations? *One hundred percent of the 26 attendees who responded to this question indicated that the conference overall met or exceeded their expectations.*
2. Please rate the quality of the speakers overall. *One hundred percent of the 25 attendees who responded to this question indicated that the quality of the speakers met or exceeded their expectations.*
3. Participants were asked to identify what three sessions included in the conference would most help them in their work. Based on these responses, all five sessions were ranked as follows:
 - a. *Session I: Energy Prices: Challenge to Affordability*
 - b. *Session V: Building Local Alliances*
 - c. *Session IV: Being a Smarter Energy Shopper*
 - d. *Session II: In Their Own Words & Session III: Everybody has an Advocate; Everybody is an Advocate*
4. When asked “do you plan to attend future LIFE Regional Meetings” *over 95% of the 24 attendees who responded to this question indicated that they would.*
5. Attendees were given a list of possible benefits of the conference. The following are ranked according to the percentage of participants who indicated that they found each item helpful:
 - a. *Receive valuable information – 88.46%*
 - b. *Identify new ideas that can assist you in your work – 69.73%*
 - c. *Network with others with shared interest – 65.38%*
 - d. *Gather a list of people/organizations to contact for further discussion/questions – 57.69%*
 - e. *Have a venue to discuss the issues facing the low-income households in your region – 53.85%*
 - f. *Identify additional issues in your region – 38.46%*
 - g. *Compare your region to other regions in New York State – 34.62%*
 - h. *Have an opportunity to ask questions – 30.77%*
 - i. *Provide input for future forums – 15.38%*

Unique Regional Issues

- Literacy, especially in a multi-lingual environment is a barrier to energy education and access to resource programs for low-income customers.
- Kings County is the fifth poorest in the nation; the other four counties are in Texas, along the Mexican border.
- Word of mouth messages that can be conveyed from caseworker to customer as well as from neighbor to neighbor rather than relying on written literature, are an important part of conveying program information and should be recognized as such.
- Utilities have reduced the number and availability of consumer advocates. This is particularly difficult for low-income consumers who may need help in understanding and communicating with their utility company.
- Understanding how housing and energy affordability impact low-income consumers is critical.
- Renters in this region often do not see the benefit of HEAP because their access to it is limited as utilities are factored into rent.
- The number of renters in multi-family buildings creates unique challenges in the implementation of the resource programs and in outreach and education.
- Real time pricing and peak load issues are critical for New York City.

Participation by Sector



Organizations Represented at This Regional Meeting

- Association for Energy Affordability
- Boro Park Jewish Community
- Central Jewish Council
- Common Ground Community
- Community Environmental Center
- Community Power Network of NYS
- Consolidated Edison of NY
- Consumer Power Line
- Councilman Leroy Comrie's Office
- Crown Heights North Association
- Energy Smart Communities, Pratt Institute
- HANAC, Inc.
- HeartShare Human Services
- Honeywell DMC Services
- Housing Conservation Coordinators, Inc.
- Human Resources Administration
- Inc. Village of Freeport Electric
- KeySpan Energy Delivery
- Long Island Power Authority
- Long Island United Way
- Margert Community Corporation
- Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp.
- NYC Department for the Aging
- NYS Department of Public Service
- NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal
- NYS Energy Research and Development Authority
- Orange and Rockland Utilities
- Public Utility Law Project
- South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corp.
- Town of Greenburgh