



## LIFE 2005 Regional Meetings

Conference Report: Kingston

---

The LIFE 2005 Regional Meeting for the Hudson Valley Region was held on August 23, 2005 at the Central Hudson Auditorium in Kingston. Sixty-nine individuals representing 29 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 hosts Central Hudson Gas and Electric Corporation and Dutchess County Community Action Agency. Sue Royce, Director of Consumer Outreach at Central Hudson and a member of the LIFE Steering Committee provided a local welcome.

### 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: Mike Mangi, Customer and Gale Thurst, Customer. 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. *Speaker: Sue Montgomery Corey, Community Power Network of NYS.*
- **A group discussion** rounded out the day, which focused on the challenges and opportunities facing low-income households in the Hudson Valley 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 two discussion groups that met during the regional meeting.

Outreach & Education	Information Clearinghouse	Long-Term Solutions	Crisis & Concern
<p>1. Outreach – how much are states getting word out?</p> <p>2. Consumer education of available programs</p>	<p>1. Energy issue tied into all other low-income issues</p>	<p>1. Local county energy round table discussions needed</p> <p>2. Entitlement vs. Enablement, helping people help themselves</p> <p>3. Pooling buying power</p> <p>4. Use higher income coops to subsidize low-income programs (Good Neighbor Fund)</p> <p>5. Senior rate for energy</p> <p>6. Best Practices – why do the government and local nonprofit agencies in Dutchess County work so well together and how do they do it?</p>	<p>1. Central Hudson bill/rental are main reason people seek help</p> <p>2. Counties are affluent and growing, low-income can't keep up</p> <p>3. Less emergency HEAP a concern</p> <p>4. What can customers do if Department of Social Services denies them and the Community Action Agency can't help?</p> <p>5. Environmental concerns i.e. Oil</p> <p>6. There need to be loud voices for low-income households</p> <p>7. Energy prices growing last 18 months</p> <p>8. Transportation costs are a problem. In some cases, the Department of Labor has been able to help</p> <p>9. Need to define “decent salary” and “poverty”</p> <p>10. Central Hudson has flex when customers are slightly over guidelines but most programs don't</p> <p>11. Need help for downsized employees</p> <p>12. New group of “low-income” who often do not know how or where to access programs and services. May need different outreach strategies for them.</p> <p>13. Inconsistency among the counties in how they implement state regulations and program rules</p> <p>14. Need more section 8 certificates and units</p> <p>15. Need public transportation in “sprawl” communities</p> <p>16. Lack of affordable daycare</p> <p>17. No entitlements for “working poor”</p> <p>18. Lack of programs that work with mobile homes</p> <p>19. Penalized for assets, but assets are what enable you to become self-sufficient</p>

\*\*No Assistance Strategies (i.e. Short-Term) were identified in group discussions. \*\*

## Conference Evaluation Results

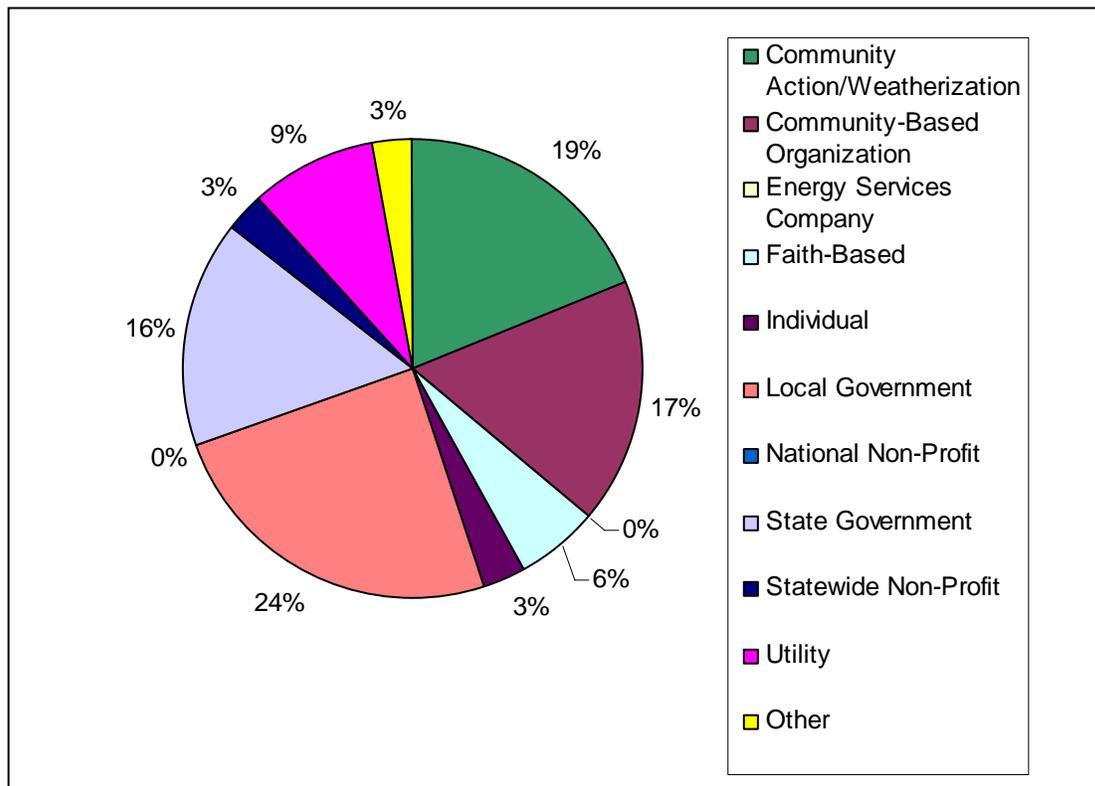
Each conferee was asked to complete a conference evaluation. Thirty-three participants completed evaluations with the following results.

1. How well did the Regional Meeting meet your expectations? *Over 90% of the 32 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. *Over 93% of the 33 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 V: Building Local Alliances*
  - b. *Session II: In Their Own Words & Session III: Everybody has an Advocate; Everybody is an Advocate*
  - c. *Session I: Energy Prices: Challenge to Affordability & Session IV: Being a Smarter Energy Shopper*
4. When asked “do you plan to attend future LIFE Regional Meetings” *over 83% of the 30 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. *Network with others with shared interest – 69.70%*
  - b. *Receive valuable information & Gather a list of people/organizations to contact for further discussion/questions – 60.61%*
  - c. *Have a venue to discuss the issues facing the low-income households in your region – 54.55%*
  - d. *Identify new ideas that can assist you in your work – 51.52%*
  - e. *Have an opportunity to ask questions & Compare your region to other regions in New York State – 48.48%*
  - f. *Identify additional issues in your region – 39.39%*
  - g. *Provide input for future forums – 21.21%*

## Unique Regional Issues

- The region is facing urban “creep” as urban “sprawl” moves north from New York City.
- The high cost of living in this region (especially high housing costs) makes it difficult for low and low-moderate income families to meet their basic needs.
- Outreach strategies need to adapt to reach traditional low-income consumers and new low-income consumers – especially the newly poor and downsized.
- There is a correlation between the working relationship between heads of government programs, community-based organizations, and utilities and the success of and access to programs for low-income consumers. The state should encourage best practices in organizational relationship building.
- Underground oil tanks are a problem that is looming on the horizon. Often they are linked to low-income and substandard housing. Removing them is an expense and a liability that is far beyond what low-income households can afford and well-beyond what existing state and federal programs can address.

## Participation by Sector



## Organizations Represented at This Regional Meeting

- Association for Energy Affordability
- Astor Early Childhood Program
- Catholic Charities
- Central Hudson Gas & Electric
- Columbia County Department of Social Services
- Common Ground Community
- Community Power Network of NYS
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Dutchess County
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Orange County
- Dutchess County Community Action Agency
- Dutchess County Department of Social Services
- Greene County Department of Social Services
- Mid-Hudson Energy Smart Communities
- Newburgh Community Action Committee
- NYS Assembly
- NYS Department of Public Service
- NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal
- NYS Electric & Gas
- NYS Energy Research and Development Authority
- NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
- Orange County Department of Social Services
- Orange County Rural Development Corp.
- Public Utility Law Project
- Rural Ulster Preservation Company
- The Salvation Army
- Sullivan County Department of Social Services
- Sullivan County Office for the Aging
- Ulster County Community Action
- United Way of Ulster County