



LIFE 2005 Regional Meetings

Conference Report: Troy

The LIFE 2005 Regional Meeting for the Capital Region was held on August 30, 2005 at the Commission on Economic Opportunity's Joseph L. Bruno Family Resource Center in Troy. Sixty-three individuals representing 38 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 Commission on Economic Opportunity. Sandra Sloane, Director of the Office of Consumer Services for the NYS Department of Public Service and Peter Lindley, Housing Director for the Commission on Economic Opportunity 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: Charles Wesley NYS Energy Research and Development Authority.*
- **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: Debbie Huber, Commission on Economic Opportunity and Minesha Payton, 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: Elizabeth Katz, 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: Peter Lindley, Commission on Economic Opportunity and Jennifer Forster Green, NYS Community Action Agency.*
- **A group discussion** rounded out the day, which focused on the challenges and opportunities facing low-income households in the Capital Region 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	Assistance Strategies (i.e. Short-Term)	Long-Term Solutions	Crisis & Concern
<p>1. Significance of word of mouth marketing and outreach</p> <p>2. Educate consumers who are eligible but don't know about programs (radio, TV, Rotary Clubs, senior meetings, newspaper, pamphlets)</p> <p>3. Have LIFE focus on a "low-income" audience</p> <p>4. Need for outreach sites in individual communities</p> <p>5. Raises consciousness among people, more people articulate message</p>	<p>1. Power of networking</p> <p>2. Need directory of services and glossary</p> <p>3. Structured networking at LIFE</p> <p>4. Internet directory of programs</p>	<p>1. Need more money for low-income family's heating costs</p> <p>2. Press release about what LIFE does and what needs to be done</p> <p>3. Utilities need to keep focus on customer representatives</p>	<p>1. Citizens Action Fuel Group – 20 counties, advertise yellow pages, word of mouth, kero-oil coop, fuel dealers bid on contract, set mark-up, members join, contact dealer in their area (Identified by Citizens Action)</p> <p>2. Involve accounts receivable from energy providers in LIFE dialog</p> <p>3. Get local government move involved with energy issues – we are in a CRISIS situation</p> <p>4. Stress conservation for ALL income levels</p> <p>5. See fuel dealers as allies</p> <p>6. Furnace repair program should be marketed year-round, do repairs in summer</p>	<p>1. Eligible households overcoming pride (rural customers)</p> <p>2. Access to Departments of Social Service</p> <p>3. Should be way to access emergency HEAP without termination notice</p> <p>4. Homeless moving to homes/apartments can't get utilities turned on because of past due balances and run the risk of eviction from their new home</p> <p>5. Lack of affordable housing</p> <p>6. Inefficient housing</p> <p>7. Landlord/tenant issues in court</p> <p>8. Family crisis vs. fuel/energy crisis</p> <p>9. Federal gov't must respond</p> <p>10. Say thank-you to members of Congress for LIHEAP</p> <p>11. Crisis is not a crisis of supply but of price</p>

Conference Evaluation Results

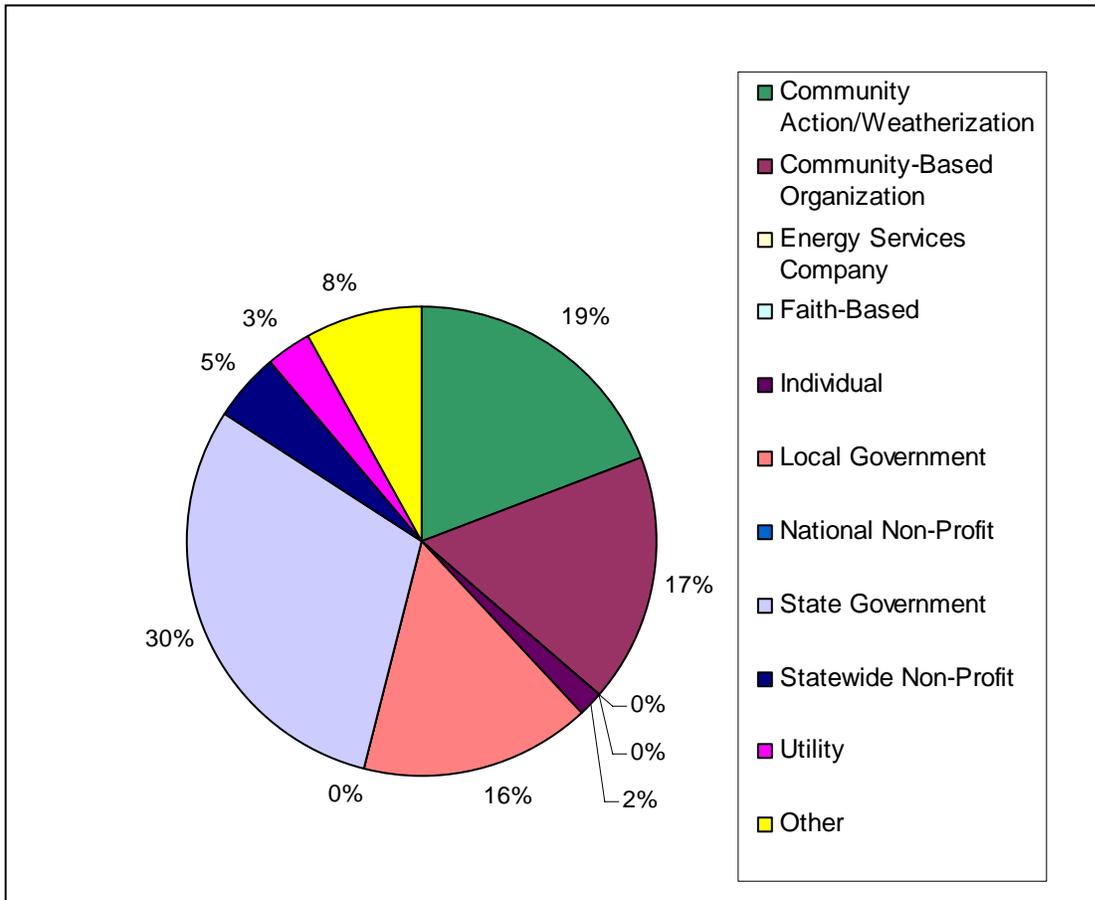
Each conferee was asked to complete a conference evaluation. Twenty-six participants completed evaluations with the following results.

1. How well did the Regional Meeting meet your expectations? *Over 96% 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 III: Everybody has an Advocate; Everybody is an Advocate & Session IV: Being a Smarter Energy Shopper*
 - c. *Session V: Building Local Alliances*
 - d. *Session II: In Their Own Words*
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 – 91.67%*
 - b. *Gather a list of people/organizations to contact for further discussion/questions – 83.33%*
 - c. *Network with others with shared interest – 79.17%*
 - d. *Have a venue to discuss the issues facing the low-income households in your region – 50.00%*
 - e. *Have an opportunity to ask questions & Identify new ideas that can assist you in your work & Compare your region to other regions in New York State – 25.00%*
 - f. *Identify additional issues in your region & Provide input for future forums – 20.83%*

Unique Regional Issues

- Service providers are urged to examine the accessibility of their service sites, including handicapped access, parking, and public transportation.
- Over 30% of attendees in this region work for state government. Proximity to state agencies resulted in a different dynamic than other regional meetings.
- Lack of affordable housing is a significant issue in this region.
- Past arrears, even if recently paid off can make it difficult for low-income customers to establish utility service in a new residence.
- The perception that assistance programs represent a “handout” is a barrier for many customers in accessing service. The message may need to be adjusted especially for rural customers for whom the pride issue may be more significant.
- Local governments need to be more involved with energy issues and their impact on low-income customers.
- Energy conservation must be stressed across income levels.

Participation by Sector



Organizations Represented at This Regional Meeting

- Albany County Cooperative Extension
- Albany County Department of Social Services
- Albany County Rural Housing, Inc.
- Broome County Department of Social Services
- Citizen Action Fuel Group
- Commission on Economic Opportunity
- Community Action Partnership of Madison County
- Community Power Network of NYS
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Albany County
- Delaware Opportunities, Inc.
- Environmental Business Association of NYS
- Governor's Office of Regulatory Reform
- Honeywell, Inc.
- Otsego County Department of Social Services
- Public Utility Law Project
- Rensselaer Organizations United for Senior Endeavors
- Schenectady County Office for the Aging
- Schenectady Community Action Program
- Schoharie County Community Action Program
- Saratoga County Independent Living
- The Adirondack Trust Company
- Town of Bethlehem
- Town of Colonie Senior Resource Department
- USDA, Rural Development
- Washington County Office for the Aging
- Washington County EOC
- Irishtown Heat
- Legal Aid Society of Northeastern NY
- Montgomery County Office for the Aging
- Niagara Mohawk
- NYS Community Action Association
- NYS Department of Public Service
- NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal
- NYS Division of the Budget
- NYS Weatherization Directors Association
- NYS Electric & Gas
- NYS Energy Research and Development Authority
- Opportunities for Otsego, Inc.