



LIFE

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

LIFE 2001-2002 Regional Conferences

Conference Report: Syracuse

The LIFE 2001 Fall Regional Conference for the Syracuse area was held on October 3, 2001 at the University Sheraton Hotel in Syracuse. Forty-four individuals representing 26 organizations attended the event which was hosted locally by Niagara Mohawk Consumer Advocates, United Way of Central New York/Volunteer Center, Oswego County Opportunities, PEACE, Inc., American Red Cross of Cortland County, and Cortland County Area Agency on Aging.

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

The regional meeting agenda for this area evolved from feedback gleaned through a discussion group conducted by Niagara Mohawk with local community-based organizations in early summer. The agenda focused heavily on networking and collaborative approaches to addressing the energy needs of low-income customers and included presenters from local collaborations. A panel discussion guided by Niagara Mohawk with representatives of Cortland Area Agency on Aging, Syracuse United Neighbors, Niagara Mohawk, and JobsPlus addressed the challenges of communicating with low-income customers about energy issues and customer choice.

Work Group Findings

Representatives from Oswego County Opportunities, the United Way and Westcott Community Center served as facilitators for the afternoon workgroups. Niagara Mohawk provided recorders for the workgroups. Each group considered three themes:

- What challenges do we face in talking to low-income consumers about energy "choice"?,
- What is there about the low-income experience that must be kept in mind in order to effectively communicate to them regarding the new energy market?, and
- What do agency staffs need in order to be able to effectively inform their low-income clients about the energy marketplace?

The work group discussions at this region 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 Syracuse Regional also revealed several unique issues:

- The need for an impartial mechanism that can help residential customers compare the products and services available to them in the changing energy market;
- The value of collaboration and networking in linking low-income customers to services and education as well as in building the capacity of community-based organizations and others to address the energy needs of low-income customers;
- The need for clear contract language that low-income customers can understand;

- The need for education about choice that is at an appropriate level of information and language for low-income customers.

Conference Evaluation Results

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

1. How well did the Regional Meeting meet your expectations? *Conferees rated this at 4.19 out of 5.0.*
2. Please rate the quality of the speakers overall. *Conferees rated this at 4.57 out of 5.0.*
3. Please rate the quality of the other aspects of LIFE.

Materials	<i>Conferees rated this at 3.87 out of 5.0</i>
Conference Facilities	<i>Conferees rated this at 4.23 out of 5.0</i>
Food	<i>Conferees rated this at 4.0 out of 5.0</i>
Parking	<i>Conferees rated this at 4.16 out of 5.0</i>
Conference Staff	<i>Conferees rated this at 4.42 out of 5.0</i>

Participation By Sector

Sector	Number Attending	Percent of Total
Utility	4	9.09%
State Government	3	6.82%
Local Government (5 Office for Aging, 6 Dept. of Social Services)	11	25%
Community Action/Weatherization	13	29.55%
Community-Based Organizations	10	22.73%
ESCO	0	0
Other	2	4.55%
Legislature	1	2.27%

Organizations Represented at This Regional Meeting

AIDS Community Resources
 American Red Cross of Cortland County
 Christopher Community
 Community Action for Madison County
 Community Power Network of NYS, Inc.
 Cortland County Area Agency on Aging
 JOBSPlus!
 Lewis County Opportunities
 Madison County Dept. of Social Services
 Mohawk Valley Senior Resource Center
 Niagara Mohawk Power Corp.
 NYS Assembly, Assemblyman William B. Magnarelli
 NYS Dept. of Public Service

NYSERDA
 NYS Office for Aging
 OCM BOCES
 Oswego County Dept. of Social Services
 Oswego County Catholic Charities
 Oswego County Opportunities
 PEACE, Inc.
 Public Utility Law Project
 RLS Career Center
 Seneca County Dept. of Human Services
 Syracuse United Neighbors
 United Way of Cental New York
 Westcott Community Center