

**Discount Steering Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
February 24, 2014**

*In attendance:*

Michelle Akers (HACA)  
Kathleen Hopkins (Any Baby Can)  
Pat Macy (St. Austin Catholic Church)  
Tondalier Owens (Travis County HHS & VS)  
Linda Perez (Meals on Wheels & More)  
Angel Ramirez (Texas VFW Foundation)  
Ronnie Mendoza (AE)  
Sandra Castillo (AE)  
Melissa Davis (AE)  
Jessica Twining (AE)  
Irene Nemitsas (AE)

**Review of meeting minutes – February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

Approved as is.

**Discount Program Qualifier Numbers/Percentages**

- Mass Mailing
  - Austin Energy recently conducted mass letter mailing to 120,000 MAP recipients in targeted zipcodes, promoting open spots in Discount Program for MAP beneficiaries
  - Mailed about 2 weeks ago
  - Solix has noticed increase in volume of calls for applications – hopefully will help fill some of those open MAP spots
  - Linda from MoW requested a copy of the letter to be distributed to DSC so they can give to their clients
- Community Benefit Charge Fund Forecasting
  - Current 33,000 spots will still not utilize funding overage from FY2013
  - As such, spots have increased to 45,000
  - Initiated Friday, 2/21
  - Pending 11,000 enrollment into program
  - Even though understood that this number will have to be reduced back to 25,000 (though there will be some carryover into FY15)
  - Will just not re-enroll customers when their enrollment expires
  - But hoping City Council will see the need for the program and provide additional funding to keep at/close to 45,000
- Re-Evaluation of Current Formula
  - Currently 4,000-5,000 MAP openings – how do we equitably use these?
  - Is it ok to absorb into other programs? Committee agreed yes.
  - Using formula already created, if a program is not utilizing all allocated spots, after a period of 4 months (after beginning of fiscal year), use formula to disperse between top-three demanded programs. Then with new fiscal year, go back to original allocation
  - Right now top three programs are Medicaid, CHIP and SNAP

## Weatherization

- Reporting
  - Ronnie reviewed current numbers of CAP weatherization program
  - Goal is to weatherize 200 homes during FY14 (this includes carryover funds from FY2013 plus FY14 funding)
  - Numbers include:
    - Eligible customers (includes two priority 1 lists and one priority 2 list pulled since October 2013) = 967
    - Completed home visits = 123
    - Customers completing education class = 73
    - Customers pending education class = 20
    - Completed audits = 60
    - Pending audits = 7
    - Completed weatherization jobs = 3
    - Jobs with contractor = 8
    - Jobs awaiting contractor assignment = 34
    - Jobs pending final inspection = 4
  - Why is the completed weatherization jobs number so low?
    - Currently all contracts being bid out to contractors is going through Contract Management, who receives the work orders from AE then disperses jobs
    - Current process is taking longer than hoped at 30-60 days
    - Ronnie is planning on intervening because it is very important to reach target of 200 homes in order to utilize all funding
    - Weatherization report going to City Council on Monday, March 3
- Square Footage Formula
  - AE still currently working on creating a working formula for energy burden – working with business intelligence group
- Tampering
  - For CAP eligible weatherization customers who have tampering on their account, should they still be eligible for weatherization?
  - Ronnie gave background concerning recent changes in hearing regulations- previously tampering was a non-hearable issue, but City Council received numerous complaints
  - Effective 7/2013, tampering is now a hearable issue
  - Based on that, DSC decided to treat those accounts like any other:
    - CAP weatherization customers need to go through the same process. If they are held unaccountable then we can proceed with weatherization.
    - If they are held accountable and pay full restitution (any usage during tampering period + any fees associated with meter replacement), then they are eligible for weatherization.
- Referrals Out-of-scope, Structure, Cleanliness
  - For homes deemed out of scope due to structural issues with renters (not homeowners), having trouble finding an agency to assist – DSC was in agreement, and suggested landlord as possible avenue
  - Concerning cleanliness
    - If AE visits a home they deem is a safety hazard, need to contact CPS and/or APS
    - If resident is already receiving services from an agency, have them contact their case manager to see if they can assist in cleaning the home
    - If resident is not receiving services, give them 30 days to clean the home, then make a second home visit

- If they have not cleaned sufficiently, they will be deemed out of scope until their account possibly re-appears on a future list. Then can be re-visited.
- Letter/Call Process
  - AE proposed switching the current contact process back to 2 initial calls, followed by a mailed letter
  - This time mailed letter to include a deadline date to contact AE for more weatherization info
  - DSC approved change.

### **Arrearage Program Overview**

- Most DSC meeting attendees were present for 2/19 Consumer Advocates Meeting expressed concern that meeting got off track – focused more on program development rather than policymaking
- As such, the facilitator, Robena Jackson, requested DSC handle creation of arrearage program, then bring recommendation to CAG to discuss/react
- DSC agreed to create program outline.
- AE pulled arrearage program research for DSC to use as tools for program creation, including:
  - National Consumer Law Center report, plus abridged synopsis on “Helping Low-Income Utility Customers Manage Overdue Bills through Arrearage Management Programs”
  - Arrearage Program Design Matrix
  - Examples of other nationwide arrearage programs
  - 2014 Federal Poverty Income Limits
  - Fixed Income Pilot Project (AE pilot project)
  - Requested DSC to review the documents before the next meeting/working session
- How much will an arrearage program cost AE?
  - Preliminary unaudited numbers show that CAP discount customers owe \$2.8 million dollars
  - Numbers are still being pulled for all other residential customers, but Ronnie mentioned debt amount for this group is much higher
- Ronnie stated AE tried to pull comparisons from other municipally-owned utilities on their arrearage programs but could not find anything comparable
- Recommended issues to be tackled:
  - Need to be two programs – one for CAP customers and one for general “residential”
    - Residential customers will be referred/case managed by outside agencies
    - CAP discount customers will be managed by AE
  - Definition of exactly what “arrearage” debt amount is
    - Possibly debt over \$5,700? This is the amount an individual can get through other community services (\$1,500 Plus 1, \$1,200 CEAP, \$3,000 BSS+)
  - Also need to be careful not to “incentivize” customers to not pay their bills, in hopes of enrolling in program and receiving AE pledges to pay off their debt
- Recommended possible debt payment scenarios might include:
  - Graduate into percentage-based program – After six months of paying current bill, a certain percent of arrears is paid off by AE as a pledge, after another six months, another percentage paid off, etc.
  - Start immediately with percentage-based program – If customer continues to pay current monthly bill, from month one provide “pledges” to customer account

### **Next Steps**

Next meeting/working session set for Wednesday, March 5 from 10a-11:30a.