Puget Sound Energy
Equity Advisory Group Meeting
Meeting Summary
Monday, June 16, 2025 | 5 – 7 p.m.

Meeting Objectives:

- **Distributed Energy Resources (DER) EmPOWERment Pilot** – Review pilot process and outcomes, consult with EAG to provide feedback on proposed guiding principles developed from EmPOWERment pilot
- **Language Access Plan** (LAP) – Understand PSE's current efforts on language accessibility, understand PSE's LAP approach and timeline, provide EAG for input into the needs assessment
- **Solar Grant** – Learn about the Solar Grants, seek members for the next grant cycle review panel, help to share the 2025 grant opportunity with eligible applicants in their community

Agenda

5:00 p.m.   Opening
5:20 p.m.   Distributed Energy Resources (DER) EmPOWERment Pilot Update
5:50 p.m.   Break
5:55 p.m.   Language Access Plan (LAP)
6:25 p.m.   Solar Grant
6:55 p.m.   Public comment
7 p.m.   Next Steps

Meeting summary

The June 2025 EAG meeting focused on expanding equity in energy access and engagement through reflection, planning, and updates from key Puget Sound Energy (PSE) initiatives. Topics included the recently concluded Distributed Energy Resource (DER) Empowerment Pilot, the early development of PSE's Language Access Plan, and an overview of the 2025 Solar Grant Program.

Opening

- The meeting opened with a safety moment by PSE Energy Equity Program Manager – Community Partnerships, Shakisha Ross, on **extension cord safety**, emphasizing proper voltage use, dry storage, and avoiding damaged or loose connections.

- Ishmael Nuñez acknowledged **Pride month and Juneteenth**.
- Participants worked through brief technical issues before moving into presentations.
- Dennis Suarez, EAG member, shared an equity moment, focusing on restorative justice, bringing forward equity in an organization using five pillars: internal education, policy changes, employment, investment, and advocacy.

DER Empowerment Pilot Topic

Ray Outlaw, Manager, Communications Initiatives, Clean Energy Communication presented findings and lessons learned from the **DER Empowerment Pilot**, which involved in-depth community engagement with four groups: Skagit County, Bremerton, Kent, and the Suquamish Tribe. The pilot is concluded at this time. PSE had a condition from its Clean Energy Implementation Plan (CEIP) to engage at the empowerment level of the IAP2 spectrum.

PSE formed these focus groups based on understanding where PSE held strong relationships with Community-Based Organizations that would bring community members together and identify places with strong opportunity to engage with deepest need customers.

The original plan was to design a program to allow the groups to select from 2-3 options, which PSE would then pursue through the regulatory process. However, through focus group discussions, PSE learned they weren't keen on building a new program. Instead they wanted to learn more about PSE's existing programs, how are they're designed to meet their needs, how they can find out more information on PSE's website, and how they can sign up easily. PSE pivoted, focused on accessibility in program design. Overall, PSE met with each group 8 times over 6 months. The engagement was tailored to each group—for example, meetings with Spanish-speaking agricultural workers in Skagit were conducted fully in Spanish, with locally catered meals.

Fourteen concepts emerged from group participants; examples include:
   - Community Energy Ambassadors *and* Tribal Energy Liaisons
   - Program Enrollment Workshops *and* Community Pop-Up Events
   - Program Navigation Tools *to simplify access*
   - Language Access Improvements *and* Expanded Resources for Renters
   - Battery Microgrids *and* Income-Eligible Community Solar
   - Utility tax exemption dissemination - tribal members who live on tribal land in Washington are exempt from not utility tax. We've built a fact sheet to help them sign up for the tax exemption and have rolled out to other tribes to ensure that resource is available to them.

PSE is assessing how to incorporate these 14 concepts into its program development, regulatory planning, and internal practice. Empowerment groups will be updated and, where possible, continued.

Some key community priorities included:

- Customers want **help to reduce energy costs**, not just more programs.
- Make programs **more accessible** —customers often don't know what to look for.
- Trust is built through **responsive and localized engagement**, not pre-scripted approaches.
- Empowerment requires **designing with**, not for, the community.

Ray shared **Guiding Principles**, which included:
- Communities already have power—PSE should work in service of their choices.
- Relationships are strategy—trust and continuity matter.
- Embrace diversity and design for emergence—every community has unique needs.
- Prioritize lived experience and strive for **transformational, not transactional** engagement.

These guiding principles came from many bodies of knowledge and practice, from long-standing community power-building.

PSE acknowledged that it took a lot of lessons learned and EAG input from the development of the equity forum events to truly meet people where they are – ensure sure there is childcare, meals, in-language accessibility, and alternative transportation.

There was robust discussion and the EAG provided extensive and actionable feedback to the team. More specific feedback can be found in Attachment B: Q&A and Feedback Report

Language Access Plan

Theresa Burch, Manager Billing and Payment Operations, and Yvonne Wang, Manager, Energy Equity Compliance, presented PSE's approach to its **Language Access Plan (LAP)**, a compliance requirement from PSE's 2024 general rate case. Language accessibility has been an important concept/priority brought up by some of the DER empowerment groups. PSE also recognized the EAG's ongoing interest in raising this topic in previous EAG meetings and advocating for language accessibility.

Demographic Context
Theresa mentioned ~131,000 PSE customers do not speak English as their primary language. Approximately 52,000 of these customers are estimated to be income-eligible. Top languages spoken by customers include Spanish, Mandarin, Russian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Hindi. Yvonne showed a map that geographically displays where customers with limited English proficiency and language diversity are found in PSE's service territory. This map helps to understand where the customer language needs may be and where PSE may need additional language support.

Current Language Services

Theresa provided an overview of current language services that PSE provides, including the following:

- o PSE's website is available in seven (7) languages, ensuring accessibility for a diverse audience.

- o Customer language preference was launched in 2024.
- o Bill assistance applications in English & Spanish, multilingual support at workshops.
- o Call center services are available in over 140 languages.

Language Access Plan Development Approach
PSE is currently conducting needs assessment to understand language needs, challenges and potential solutions. PSE is gathering input from internal departments, advisory groups, and DER empowerment groups. Yvonne provided the current scope, including billing, website, disconnection communications, outreach, and customer service. PSE is targeting to complete the development of the LAP by the end of 2025, followed by implementation of the plan, evaluation and continuous improvement.

Yvonne reviewed best practices and gaps identified from the needs assessment thus far and asked for EAG feedback on additional best practices and gaps.

Some **Best Practices** included:
- o Use **plain language and visual infographics**.
- o **Contextualize translations,** don't mimic messages word-for-word.
- o Designate plan lead, internal staff training, and metrics for success.

Gaps Acknowledged
- o Inconsistencies in languages PSE supports across programs and channels.
- o Limited collateral available beyond the top languages
- o Translated content may be technically correct but **inaccessible** to lower-literacy customers.

EAG provided the following general feedback. More specific feedback can be found in [Attachment B: Q&A and Feedback Report](#)
- o Members suggested broader **plain language training for all staff**, modeled after other agencies like the Dept. of Ecology.
- o Members also recommended proactive outreach and better integration of language preferences into customer systems.
- o Translate for context, not word for word.
- o The EAG highlighted the importance of **dialect differences**, not just languages.

Break

The group took a break from approximately 6:10 to 6:20 p.m.

2025 Solar Grant Program Topic

McKenzie Martin, Clean Energy Product Manager- Equity, Customer Clean Energy Solutions, presented on the **Solar Grant Program**, which provides up to $100,000 for solar installation projects for community-based organizations, tribal governments, and local agencies. Each year, interested EAG members participate in this process to help PSE decide which projects get funded.

Program Goals
The program helps applicants offset electricity costs and reinvest savings into community programs. PSE prioritizes organizations that had no previous grant awards, serve deepest-need populations, and projects with workforce development components

Mackenzie reviewed the annual solar grant process where it starts with identifying improvements to incorporate into the grant process. Based on EAG member feedback, this is second year PSE is offering free bid procurement and grant writing assistance through Spark. Applications close in August, interviews are scheduled with applicants, and a review panel (a combination of PSE and EAG members) review and score applicants. The review focuses primarily on the community impact of the project, the organization's commitment to equitable and inclusive access, and the unique education outreach tactics they may employ to educate their communities about solar.

PSE made **application enhancements** to increase accessibility to the program, including:
- Simplified and shortened application.
- Option to submit **video/audio narratives** instead of written responses.
- Turnkey education session offering now available.
- *New* - Free grant writing and bid procurement through Spark.
- In the next round, PSE plans to address language accessibility

Past grant recipients can be found at https://www.pse.com/solargrant along with the community impacts. Mackenzie encouraged EAG members to view the 5-minute Burlington Lutheran Church's application video, a review panel favorite.

Mackenzie encouraged EAG members who've participated in the grant process to share their perspectives. EAG members shared the following:

- Serving on the review panel was rewarding and impactful.
- It's something they look forward to participating in.
- Mackenzie is great about incorporating their feedback
- Appreciate the program continues to improve each year.
- There's an equal balance between EAG members and PSE staff in the review process.
- Past applicants—ranging from small nonprofits to tribal entities—have shared powerful stories of how solar helps their communities.

Call to Action: Request for opportunity for EAG member participation in upcoming 2025 round. Mackenzie invited EAG members to join the 2025 panel by July 9. PSE will follow up with outreach materials for EAG members to share with potential applicants.

Mackenzie discussed the expectations and time commitments, including:
- o Review panel orientation: August–September
- o Review and scoring: Fall 2025
- o Stipend: $50/hour (average 20 hours total)
- o Evening meetings to align with EAG availability

Many EAG members expressed interest in participating in the solar grant review process.

Next Steps

PSE will:
- Continue integrating the DER concepts and building on empowerment relationships.
- Return to the EAG in the future to share the action plan and roadmap from the **Language Access Plan**.
- Involve interested EAG members in the 2025 **Solar Grant review panel** and promote grant opportunities in the community.

Adjournment

The meeting concluded around 7:00 p.m. Participants were thanked for their contributions and encouraged to reflect on how these learnings can be applied to utility-wide equity efforts.

Attachment A: Meeting Attendees

Equity Advisory Group members

1. Jenny Harding, GSBA and New Chapter Weddings and Events
2. TJ Protho, Community Advocate
3. Dennis Suarez, Community Advocate
4. Megan Walsh, Community Advocate
5. Demeco Walters, Community Advocate
6. Xi Wang, Community Advocate
7. Karia Wong, Chinese Information and Service Center (CISC)
8. Monica Guevara, Emerald Cities Collaborative
9. Glenda Duldulao, Asian Pacific Cultural Center
10. Amy Nichols, Community Advocate
11. Betsy Baffa, African Community and Housing Development

Puget Sound Energy

12. Troy Hutson, Director Energy Equity
13. Yvonne Wang, Manager, Energy Equity Compliance
14. Shakisha Ross, Energy Equity Program Manager – Community Partnerships
15. Ray Outlaw, Manager Communications Initiatives, Clean Energy Communication
16. Theresa Burch, Manager Billing and Payment Operations
17. Mackenzie Martin, Clean Energy Product Manager- Equity, Customer Clean Energy Solutions
18. Kara Durbin, Director, Clean Energy Strategy
19. Virginia Winslow, Communications Initiative Consultant
20. Jessica McColgin, Manager Customer and Community Outreach

Consultant Staff

21. Andrés Mantilla, Partner in Charge, Uncommon Bridges
22. Ishmael Nuñez, Lead Facilitator, Uncommon Bridges
23. Ariam Ford, AICP, Co-Facilitator, Uncommon Bridges
24. Carson Bridges, Project Associate Uncommon Bridges
25. Bridget Mullins, Triangle Associates
26. Will Henderson, MFA

Attachment B: Q&A and Feedback Report

Question or Comment	PSE Response
Topic: Distributed Energy Resources (DER) EmPOWERment Pilot	
There are a lot more people using propane generators on the peninsula—inefficient and dangerous.	PSE acknowledged regional differences in needs; battery microgrids were identified as a potential solution in rural, outage-prone areas like the peninsula.
Can this pilot's impact go beyond distributed energy resources?	Yes. Many of the 14 concepts address affordability, access, and outreach broadly, not just DERs. The pilot also informed internal equity strategies.
Really excited about the respect for tribal rights. Many tribes want energy independence. Excited to hear more about these developments and whether there's educational/outreach events when it comes to tribes in the state.	Thank you for your feedback
Appreciated the relationship building. Appreciated the guiding principles.	Thank you for your comment.
It's important to co-create educational materials that are linguistically and culturally relevant.	This aligned with empowerment group requests. PSE noted plans to continue collaborating with groups for accessible materials.
Recognize and address barriers *with* communities.	PSE's outreach staff were tasked with doing this locally. Empowerment groups helped shape program delivery methods.
There should be a means to ensure long-term follow up. Longevity is going to firm up the foundation that's built long term. The relationship should continue regardless of staff or leadership changes on either side	PSE confirmed of its commitment and responsibility and intends to return with updates. One of the group leaders mentioned this conversation is great, but PSE should realize they're leaving here with more responsibility than they came in with.

For the PSE employee who helped conduct engagement in Skagit county, what is PSE's thoughts on scaling this approach to other locations?	PSE has a team of 8 outreach managers throughout our service area whose role it is to engage with our customers in named communities to understand their barriers to participation in our programs. Then they design tactics to overcome those barriers to help ensure those customers are aware of our programs and can participate. They maintain a lot of those relationships throughout our service area.
The pilot reflects principles of accessibility, affordability, and advocacy.	Thank you for your feedback.
Be transparent about acknowledging the groups who provided input to PSE at the forefront, provide credit to them, and how PSE has used the feedback.	Thank you for your feedback. PSE agrees and emphasized continued transparency with groups and communities.
Topic: Language Access Plan	
What is the area outlined in black on the map?	The black outline represents "Equity Investment Zones". They're communities PSE has identified that may be in need of specific attention, have a unique social network, and require unique engagement needs. They allow PSE to view communities from a human-centric standpoint rather than lines on maps (e.g., PSE's Named Communities map)
Does language access include deaf, hard of hearing, and blind customers?	Yes, this is part of the scope for PSE to assess.
What about using pictures to convey messages? Use infographics for better communication. What's the message you're trying to convey?	Supported by multiple members; PSE acknowledged need for visual tools in communication.
Who at PSE gets plain writing training? It would be helpful for everyone to take training.	There is internal recognition at PSE that our external communications can be more simple. PSE recognizes the need for training and plain language communications.
Consider regional language variations and dialects.	Supported by staff and included in translation strategy discussions.

Written and spoken language may differ—design access accordingly.	PSE agreed; informed its multilayered outreach plan.
Translate for context, not word-for-word. Some energy terms don't translate well (e.g., "weatherization"). Avoid idioms or phrases that don't translate well ("on the clock").	Thank you for your feedback. Recognized by PSE; emphasized the need for contextual rather than literal translation An example: PSE rolled out its bill forgiveness program to customers in fall 2024. Industry-wide, this program is called arrearage management program. After polling customers, we learned quickly that arrearage is not a good term; customers suggested naming the program "past due".
Bills and bill portals should be easy for non-tech-savvy users.	Thank you for your feedback. PSE will look into this.
Families may not feel comfortable self-identifying for language help. Is it optional for customers to provide their language preference to PSE?	PSE's current online preference center, where customers identify if they want a text or email, and their language preference, is not fully built out. While PSE is seeking this information from customers so we can help them. It's optional, not required.
Trusted messengers matter—people trust relationships, not just language	PSE emphasized the need for community-based outreach staff and messengers.
Interpretation/translation isn't a full solution—meaning can be lost.	This nuance was supported and incorporated into PSE's evaluation criteria.