

EAP Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
1/28/22

Present: Jeanne Agri (CAP Belknap-Merrimack), Amanda Noonan (DOE), Sue Corson (UES), Gary Cronin (DOE), Karen Emis-Williams (NHLWAA), Chris Vought (CAA EAP Program Manager), Jessica Arnold (Liberty), John Braswell (Eversource), Kenny Landry (CAP Belknap-Merrimack), Don Kreis (OCA), Stephen Tower (NHLA), Theresa Washington (Eversource), Robyn Sarette (NHEC).

1. Review of October 22, 2021 draft minutes.

Corrections: CAP reports all Community Action Programs use Empower including the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. NHLA corrected the word FRP to RFP and added the word not.

UES made a motion to accept the minutes with the corrections. NHLA seconded. All in favor.

2. Update on an online application for EAP

- CAA reports they have a meeting on 1/31/22 to discuss the EAP online application on how to implement and timeline. The majority of the EAP application has been worked on.
- NHLA asked what does the timeline and cost look like.
- CAA stated the implementation period is usually twelve months. It would be best to start between May and August in order to minimize interruption with their other programs. They will have a cost after the meeting next week.

3. Update on the status of an RFP to develop new software for FAP, WAP and EAP

- CAP is ready to cooperate with the state to move forward and support the RFP. OSI had previously issued an RFP. The most recent RFP received no responses. Strongly recommend to look for a system that can perform comprehensive reports. The current system is old.
- DOE supports creating a new RFP to support FAP and EAP. It does not appear it will be ready for the FAP for 2022. Inquired if the utility companies could provide internal assistance, as they are technical subject matter experts. The old RFP appeared to have been written to discourage bidders.
- Eversource will look into their ability to be able to provide this support.
- CAA recommends to include the weatherization program into the RFP.
- DOE states the weatherization program was always intended to be included in the RFP.
- NHLA asked how long will this take because it has been several years.

- DOE does not have a timeframe.

4. Update on cross browser compatibility for EAP/FAP system

- CAA rolled it out to all CAA programs successfully this past July/August. They use the Chrome and Edge browsers. They have to update it at times but with minimal disruptions.

5. Update on Town Square Media campaign for current year

- CAA has been in contact with Town Square Media and the length of time to approve the budget caused the delay. The budget is now approved, so they are able to move forward. Town Square Media is willing to present again to this board.

6. Continued discussion of triennial process evaluation

- NHLA reports PUC is looking for more clarity. The procedural manual needs to be updated, as it still references OSI.
- DOE also agrees with updating the manual.

7. Discussion of EAP Funds and ways to reducing the surplus

- DOE reports this board previously discussed using some of the EAP surplus funds on: RFP cost, consultant to evaluate the process, and software. EAP enrollments levels are low state and nationwide. The Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funds are being utilized first. Therefore, applicants may not be applying for EAP. The focus needs to be on finding ways to encourage enrollment i.e. outreach. There were previous discussions on using these surplus funds on arrearage forgiveness. As of now, however, the PUC has approved an arrears management program for Eversource, and Unitil has proposed arrears management programs in its electric and gas rate filings. The PUC could ask to suspend the collection of funds, but it is probably not the best idea.
- OCA reports we should not be looking for ways to spend these funds.
- DOE stated it is looking for the best way to spend the funds to benefit the lowest income individuals.
- Liberty reminded that Board that it had previously reviewed and calculated what providing a credit to EAP enrollees to spend down the EAP fund might mean to participants. At the time, the credit equaled approximately \$30 per customer, and the board agreed that the impact for participants was not significant enough to take this route over a hiring a consultant to review the program and updating the shared EAP/FAP software.

- NHLA reports the PUC does not think it is about just giving a credit. The PUC seems to be concerned that households are receiving the assistance without deserving it. There need to be concrete steps for the RFP, EAP online application, and cost. The focus is on the long-term benefits. The PUC would not agree to spend money just for spending it.
- DOE requested for CAA to inquire with Town Square Media about outreach ideas and cost.
- CAP the Town Square Media presentation did show the different levels of outreach with the cost. The phone and online application will increase applications. The ERAP application is less complicated.
- UES perhaps need to think outside of the box in order to encourage applicants i.e. paying agencies to encourage enrollment at Head Start, Employment Security, etc. Simplify the enrollment.
- CAP agrees that is great idea. CAP is in the process of rebranding and possibly using those ideas to increase enrollment.
- UES another idea to increase enrollment would be a commercial or ad.
- Eversource in CT it goes a long way when you hear the same message repeatedly.
- UES the surplus needs to be spent wisely but the media idea might help.
- CAP will work with Town Square Media to see what they recommend and media marketing. They should be able to do more with the media ad and provide cost.
- UES also reaching out to the school with their free lunch program but this would not include the seniors.
- Liberty reports people are not applying for the free lunch program because it is free for everyone. This is due to all of the federal funding in the state.
- Eversource reports their procurement department could look at the RFP.

DOE recap:

- Development of the new software.
- RFP for consultant and ensuring the work is done.
- Online application
- Increase outreach
- CAP will contact Town Square Media to inquire about the cost of outreach.
- The RFP currently does not have a projected cost

8. Discussion of how to move the June 2021 recommendation to the Commission regarding the issuance of an RFP to hire a consultant to review the EAP

- Liberty suggest to have another meeting to review the RFP for the consultant. They will also ask their attorneys for any ideas.

- DOE also agrees with another meeting in two – three weeks to review updates, wrap-up details, etc.
- UES inquired if the PUC should be provided with update on enrollment.
- DOE should ask the PUC for a pre-hearing conference order to get a better understanding of their questions and requests. They are still processing the information from yesterday's hearing.
- NHLA provide some excerpts from the hearing: the commissioners need a better understanding of the difference between FAP and EAP. Also, the different funding sources between both programs. The PUC also asked about operational efficiency and benchmarks. The questions were not clear.
- DOE reports this is why a pre-hearing conference order would be beneficial to better understand their questions and get it in writing.
- DOE will set up another date to meet and circulate an outline for an RFP based on the recommendations from June 2021.
- NHLA requesting an update on the RFP, software, online application with cost projections, timeline, etc.
- DOE does not make any promises about the RFP by the next meeting, which has been scheduled for Thursday 2/17 @ 2:30PM.
- DOE will try to send information about the consultant before the next meeting.
- DOE more EAP funds will be spent down during the winter due to higher energy service rates
- CAP hiring a new Director for the EAP program.

*NHLWAA responsible for the minutes.