



Regional Technical Forum

RTF PAC Meeting Minutes

March 28, 2023

9:00am – 11:00am Pacific

Meeting Participants:

Debbie DePetris, Clark Public Utilities (Co-Chair)

Ginny Burdick, Oregon Councilmember (Co-Chair)

Leann Bleakney, Council Staff Oregon

Alexa Bouvier, Idaho OER

Kary Burin, Cascade Natural Gas

Aaron Cahen, WA UTC

Ralph Cavanagh, NRDC

Melissa Cheesman, WA UTC

Jennifer Finnigan, Seattle City Light

Suzanne Frew, Snohomish PUD

Fred Gordon, Energy Trust of Oregon

Jeff Harris, NEEA

Emily Her, Idaho OER

Jamae Hilliard Creecy, BPA

Ray Johnson, Tacoma Power

Peter Keman, Oregon PUC

Jennifer Langdon, Cowlitz PUD

Jennifer Light, NWPCC, RTF Chair

Chad Madron, NWPCC

Mary Moerlins, NW Natural

Quentin Nesbitt, Idaho Power

Jimmy Nyanwapolu, WA UTC

Elizabeth Osborne, WA Dept of Commerce

Keith Quinata, WA UTC

Bill Saporito, Umatilla Electric

Cory Scott, PacifiCorp

Juan Serpa Muñoz, EWEB

Payton Swinford, WA UTC

Jason Talford, Idaho PUC

Laura Thomas, NWPCC, RTF Manager

Taylor Thomas, Idaho PUC

Bonnie Watson, BPA

Danie Williams, NorthWestern

Craig Patterson, independent

Alan Zelenka, Oregon DOE

Landon Snyder, Snohomish PUD

Key Outcomes:

At the Q1 RTF Policy Advisory Committee Meeting, members discussed the following:

- Laura Thomas reviewed the recent topics discussed in 2022 by the RTP PAC and lead a discussion about if the PAC should consider revisiting the conversation about the scope of RTF analysis on non-energy impacts given recent inquiries. She discussed next steps including the topics already planned for 2023 and that RTF and Council staff would further scope NEIs before bringing this topic back to the PAC.
- Thomas reviewed the [RTF PAC Dashboard](#), asking members to consider what information is useful. Thomas will plan to work with the RTF PAC to identify the right level of information for the dashboard going forward.

Discussion:

RTF PAC Co-Chair Debbie DePetris opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. PST by welcoming the RTF PAC to the Q1 meeting. Laura Thomas, RTF Manager called for introductions. DePetris asked if there were any proposed changes to the minutes from November 2022. There were none and the minutes were approved.

PAC Orientation and 2023 Discussion Topics

Jennifer Light, RTF Chair, noted that the RTF PAC charter was renewed in February and with all the new faces present thought this was a good time for a short, mini orientation. She ran through the history of the RTF and RTF PAC.

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Ralph Cavanagh, NRDC, jokingly recalled that he promised Light he would find out how the Regional Technical Forum got its ungainly name, even though he works for the even ungainlier-named Natural Resources Defense Council. He said the first public document came from BPA Administrator Randy Hardy in 1994.

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Jamae Hilliard Creecy, BPA, asked why the RTF PAC does not oversee the RTF. Light thought it had to do with keeping the RTF independent and connected to the Council. Jeff Harris, NEEA, agreed, stressing that technical independence was deemed most important. Cavanagh added that the RTF PAC was designed to give a voice to the RTF Funders without undercutting the independence of the RTF. Cavanagh said other regions do this differently and, in his opinion, not as well.

Recent and Upcoming PAC Discussion Items

Laura Thomas, RTF Manager, reviewed recent items and discussed future key topics. Thomas asked the body if anyone is considering or determining how to quantify non-energy impacts (NEIs) and if this is a topic the RTF PAC should consider continuing to discuss.

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Alan Zelenka, ODOE, said his group is doing this work and would like to see the RTF PAC grapple with the topic. He mentioned a recent letter on the Energy Efficiency Action Plan to BPA that included a basic outline. Zelenka said the Act is over 40 years old and there is a lot of new information, co-benefits, and non-energy impacts that are unique to energy efficiency and need to be accounted for.

Katy Burin, CNGC, stated that NEIs are a difficult conversation and asked if there are other bodies doing this work that we can adopt as a best practice. She pointed to criteria around the Inflation Reduction Act or other funding that might be using a laundry list of NEIs could be adopted and elaborated on for our region. Light agreed that duplicating effort should be avoided. Light then pointed to the Council frame of looking at energy efficiency as a resource which limits efforts.

Light posed the heart of the question: what are areas that might be useful to your jurisdictions and what research might be leveraged. She recalled that opinions around need were very mixed

last time this was discussed and asked for clear definition about specific needs, impacts, and benefits that could provide direction.

Jennifer Finnigan, Seattle City Light, shared via the Chat that City Light is cautiously interested in learning more about NEIs. We are in the early stages of incorporating NEIs into our cost effectiveness practices and wishing to leverage regional/IOU resources.

Mary Moerlins, NW Natural, noted in the Chat that NW Natural is also interested in learning more about NEIs. There is enormous value in shared understanding/vocabulary/measures in assessing regional energy needs and priorities.

Harris observed that electric utilities in WA are required to have an established NEI framework. He asked WA UTC staff to talk more about that. Harris said this framework was a collaborative project and could serve as a starting point. Harris then said the RTF is funded by some RTF PAC representatives in the room and if the RTF PAC wants more detailed information, it would be reasonable to fund the effort.

Cavanagh stated that he follows Tom Eckman, formerly with the NWPCC and RTF, conservative view that the Council should focus on resource value. Cavanagh expressed sympathy for Zelenka, agreeing that the body has been narrower than necessary when it comes to defining resource value. He said energy efficiency has the ability to deliver when the grid needs it most and while he doesn't want to lose the frame of resource value, Cavanagh was open to being more flexible as the region learns more.

Harris expressed agreement with Cavanagh via the Chat and added that energy efficiency has disproportionate value during extreme events than during "average" conditions. ELCAP proved this point in detail.

Creecy agreed, saying we should look at Non-Energy "Benefits." She thought it appropriate to scan other work and then frame up exactly what we're trying to answer. Creecy urged that the body should be moving forward.

Fred Gordon, Energy Trust of Oregon, reiterated that analysts want to analyze but the work is only useful if it reduces uncertainty. He pointed to many NEI studies that contradict each other and others that "pick a number." Gordon said research should focus on areas where we can learn something, pointing to Energy Trust's work that focuses on utility costs as an example. Gordon then said there many things that people want to quantify that don't actually matter because they are small. He said people have been urging us to estimate things that don't change any outcomes. Gordon stated that the Oregon PUC tells utilities to count what you can count, and they will consider what can't be counted. He called this a sane approach, and pointed to finding some moderate, low-income health benefits. Gordon asked for help on this as those benefits might be fungible. Gordon concluded by saying the main focus is trying to find money to get things done, calling that the real problem.

Burin expressed agreement with Gordon via the Chat.

Light offered to help Thomas with scoping what this could look like. She thought some things could be captured in the modeling. Light said she will also help find areas where the RTF can meaningfully quantify impacts.

Cavanagh agreed with Gordon, noting there is a lot of data available about what happens to wholesale electricity costs when the system is under severe stress. He called the results quite spectacular.

Harris stated the volatility of markets and grid impacts have gotten substantially higher over the last five years. He touched on the actual human life impacts of these events, pointing to deaths due to the heat dome of June 2021 and the cold snap in Texas. He said these low probability events have catastrophic outcomes and while they are hard to quantify, they are significant. Because of this, Harris suggested looking at the impacts of low probability/high impact events. He added that some Council Monte Carlo analytic tools produce extreme events, and suggested looking at those results to consider economic and human life value. Light said recent resilience work starts to address this question.

Finnigan shared a link to a [NYT article](#) via the Chat and noted the article is on heat dome deaths has stuck with her.

Gordon added in the Chat that there is some question of whether the impact of extreme weather on life and health is something to quantify or a fundamental complimentary policy goal that should be considered separately and funded.

Harris responded to Gordon in the Chat noting this was a fair point. He said that even if we can't fully quantify these effects, there may be good reasons to set policy recommendations. I will point to the 10% credit in the Act as an example.

Cavanagh commented in the Chat that wherever you come out there, though, the impact of extreme weather on system costs and reliability is squarely within the traditional "resource value" paradigm for energy efficiency under the Regional Act.

Danie Williams, NorthWestern Energy, shared in the Chat that NorthWestern is reviewing NEB as part of our CPA work. We are looking for those that can be quantified.

Zelenka supported moving forward and reminded the room that there are categories where EE outperforms other resources.

PAC Dashboard

Thomas walked through the PAC Dashboard and asked the RTF PAC to consider if these metrics are useful and should continue to be tracked. She asked the body to consider what other metrics might be useful and what could be dropped.

Gordon observed that at the beginning of the RTF PAC there was great interest from some members who are no longer here in keeping an eye on many metrics. Gordon says interest has eroded over time and new members should pinpoint exactly what information they really want.

Finnigan asked if and how meetings changed due to going remote. Light answered that it has been mostly seamless with transparent voting. She admitted that you can't read faces or body language when remote, but some people are more comfortable writing their comments or getting in a queue to speak. Light added that every other meeting is now in person, but more people remain on the phone. Because of this, Thomas is scheduling the more difficult agenda items for in-person meeting days.

Harris added that another in-person benefit, besides the free turkey sandwiches, is the ability to gather, consult, and work out issues during breaks.

Cavanagh asked to what extent the RTF relies on empirical data for measure performance in the field. Light answered very much and when we don't have enough, we create a Planning measure.

Gordon commented in the Chat that personally, he has been more interested in whether studies that are planned are completed and presented and whether measures are updated and created as planned. He thinks that if there are process problems that this group can help solve, they come out of RTF member's experience and communication with PAC members, not from PAC review of the dashboard. Some of the ancillary info like contributions is interesting. He also noted that the planning measures are a great tool for pointing out where the data is not yet good. But the leverage to get the studies done to turn planning measures into well-supported measures is limited.

Cavanagh asked if we maintain a technical library of that data. Light said it is available but baked into measure workbooks and sources. She said each workbook has a reference tab. Cavanagh called for a reference or blog that summarizes how the RTF uses and tracks empirical data.

Harris cautioned that finding the empirical data is not easy to find, even though its importance grows as more extreme events are examined. He said the challenge comes from the inherent limitations of the program, self-selection bias, geographic context, and more. Thomas said she talked to the CATs about needed details and how to easily access them.

Cavanagh in the Chat express that he would love to see a note on the RTF site summarizing the role of empirical data in the RTF process. Harris' overview was very helpful (including his reminder of the long history of regional investment in data gathering).

Harris noted past investments in building science research and the new end-use load research happening now but lamented that there are still unexplored areas of research. He said this matters because the RTF uses models to derive savings, but the models are calibrated to old data and the region is not investing in whole building energy use calibration like before. Harris thought this would be important for future work around extreme events.

Light noted that BPA ties their evaluation work to RTF Guidelines.

Harris asked how the prioritization process works for the RTF versus the RTF PAC. Light answered that the RTF PAC does not typically play a role in the prioritization process but does play a role in creating the work plan and flagging areas of interest. She said they use sunset dates to help prioritize work and every workplan has room for new measures. Light noted that Thomas will manage this work, giving precedence to big or fast-changing measures but said the PAC's role is in creating the higher level workplan.

Harris called the dashboard impressive saying the effort is about more than just dollars. He said resource includes time for the RTF and subcommittees to meet. Harris asked that everyone keep this in mind when talking about resource allocation. Zelenka agreed that time allocation is perhaps more valuable than dollar allocation.

Harris commented in the Chat that perhaps there needs to be a third category that falls between "small savers" and "large potential" measures to help provide guidance to the RTF and Admin in allocating resources. There is a wide range of importance in the current category of "everything not classified as small saver."

Thomas said they do track meeting and subcommittee time for each agenda item, using Non-Residential Lighting as an example. She said items are divided by decision and non-decision. Thomas said she would email a link to the dashboard so the RTF PAC can further contemplate which parts are useful.

Gordon noted in the Chat that he wondered if some of the issues of interest like time spent and role of committees are good to review once a year, but not quarterly. He thought it is useful for RTF management to track some of these things to do their job. Harris agreed with Gordon in the Chat.

Creecy messaged in the Chat that she appreciated the dashboard overview.

DePetris thanked Thomas and Light for leading the discussion. She praised the conversation on Non-Energy Impacts/Benefits. Ginny Burdick, RTF PAC Co-chair said she looked forward to hearing more about NEIs. She also praised the opening presentation saying she wished she had the same when she signed on as Co-Chair. DePetris ended the meeting at 11:00am.