



Regional Technical Forum

RTF PAC Meeting Minutes September 15, 2023 9:00am-11:00am Pacific

Meeting Participants:

Debbie DePetrus, Clark PUD (Co-Chair)
Ginny Burdick, Oregon Council (Co-Chair)
Kary Burin, Cascade Natural Gas
Jennifer Finnigan, Seattle City Light
Jeff Harris, NEEA
Jamae Hilliard Creecy, BPA
Mark Jerome, CLEAResult
Jennifer Light, RTF Chair
Amy Milshtein, notetaker
Mary Moerlins, NW Natural
Quentin Nesbitt, Idaho Power
Elizabeth Osborn, WA Dept of Commerce
Craig Patterson, independent

Matthew Tidewell, PGE
Laura Thomas, RTF Manager
Danie Williams, NorthWestern Energy
Alan Zelenka, ODEO
Leann Bleakney, NWPCC
Aaron Cahen, WA UTC
Sarah Castor, Energy Trust of Oregon
Ralph Cavanagh, NRDC
Rachel Clark, Tacoma Power
Cory Scott, PacifiCorp
Chad Madron, NWPCC
Kevin Smit, NWPCC

Key Outcomes:

At the Q3 RTF Policy Advisory Committee Meeting, members discussed the following:

- Development of a modeling tool for the DOE IRA program. The PAC expressed interest in RTF involvement but indicated the need for more scoping and determination of funds from the DOE before moving forward.
- 2024 RTF Work Plan and unanimously approved for recommendation in support to the Council.

Discussion:

RTF PAC Co-Chair Debbie DePetrus, Clark PUD, called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. She introduced Co-Chair Ginny Burdick, Oregon Council Member, and welcomed the body to the Q3 meeting. She then asked Laura Thomas, RTF Manager, to call for introductions.

DePetrus asked if there were any proposed changes to the May 24, 2023 minutes. There were none and the minutes were approved.

Management Updates

Thomas presented second quarter RTF accomplishments and planned work for the rest of the year.

Slide 9

Ralph Cavanagh, NRDC, approved of the RTF Efficient EV work. He pointed to a joint study by NRDC and the Electric Power Research Institute that will be published in late November, saying he will share results. Alan Zelenka, ODOE, asked for more detail.

Cavanagh called efficient EVs the largest energy efficiency potential seen in years due to the size of the sector, the dramatic variance in performance, and significant, untapped efficiency gains. He reminded the room that this is a national assessment and will not have any policy recommendations.

Slide 12

Jeff Harris, NEEA, asked if the RTF Gas Pac Measure work is aware of the NEEA Efficient RTU modeling, in the chat. Thomas answered yes. Harris approved as he did not want to duplicate efforts.

Slide 14

Mary Moerlins, NW Natural, called the dashboard a really helpful visual, thanking Thomas for her work, in the chat.

DOE Inflation Reduction Act Update

Slide 20

Sarah Caster, Energy Trust of Oregon, asked how the DOE-proposed solution would reduce costs. Thomas first noted that Danielle Walker, DOE, was not present to present DOE's position. She then related that DOE believes that the model pathway, which calibrates to individual homes, will garner more accurate savings than the measure pathway, which requires a year of metering followed by an assessment. Thomas acknowledged that modeling has more upfront costs.

Thomas then said that DOE is hoping that calibration will allow them more flexibility to reduce costs. She offered to follow up more with Walker.

Zelenka said this work seems like a natural fit for the National Labs if they could find time in their schedule. Thomas agreed.

Rachel Clark, Tacoma Power, found it baffling that the DOE acknowledges that the Labs do not have time or resource for this work but thinks that the RTF does. She wondered how the Contract Analysts can fit this huge undertaking into their schedule. Thomas couldn't speak to the Labs' workload but said DOE is trying to identify options.

Jamae Hilliard Creecy, BPA, agreed that any tool produced should be made available free of charge.

Jennifer Light, RTF Chair, asked Thomas to talk more about how the Contract Analyst Team could fit this into their schedule. Thomas said she has scoped the work out and thinks there could be time to do this with some shuffling of priorities.

Clark acknowledged that the Region regularly develops public data, but this seems bigger and more widespread. She asked at what point is it fair for the NW to take on Federal work. Thomas agreed that funding is an important piece but the question for the PAC is it worth it to the NW. Thomas noted that funding could come from many sources, including the DOE.

Thomas stressed that, while the rest of the country could access the data, the tool would be for the four states in the Region.

Kary Burin, Cascade Natural Gas, said her impression is that programs have been a robust solution for the Region and asked for a summary of what the DOE thinks a modeling tool would provide. Thomas agreed that there is a large portfolio of RTF programs but much of that low-hanging fruit has been achieved. She noted that there is now a shift to looking at holistic, whole system/whole building approaches on the commercial side and DOE is trying to prompt that approach for the residential side.

Thomas acknowledged that doing this kind of work for the residential side will be challenging and it may not be the right path for the RTF, so she is looking for PAC guidance. She said there is the potential for lots of money to come into the Region and state offices would like to leverage that money and develop a tool. Thomas said a tool like this could also be used by a utility to develop a residential efficiency program. She concluded by saying right now this is driven by the DOE and the IRA, but there could be a lot of future potential opportunities for such a tool.

Burin thanked her for the helpful summation. She then asked if the conversation could be about BTUs saved instead of kW or therms, calling it more holistic language. Thomas agreed, saying she heard this in subcommittees as well.

Hilliard Creecy said the PAC should agree on guidance today. She said if the answer is: this would be a great tool but responsibility for development belongs to DOE, we should be direct. She worried that staff would spend a lot of time talking about the what ifs and not sending a clear signal to DOE that we will help but they own this.

Cavanagh stated that the IRA and other Federal enactments created big pools of money dispersed via software tools. He observed that there is a tremendous amount of money for PAC utilities that could stand in for ratepayer money. Cavanagh confirmed that this program is for all-fuels, BTUs savings. He agreed that they need to get DOE to focus on needs for modeling tools in multiple contexts to unlock funding. He said that DOE most certainly has funds to pay for that work.

Cavanagh suggested reaching out to Jeremiah Baumann, DOE, and say we would love to help but it seems odd that the RTF would do all the heavy lifting for the multifaceted problem of dispersing hundreds of billions of dollars.

Thomas said there are two questions: is this something the RTF should be involved in and how does it get funded. She believed there is room for a conversation about DOE funding all or parts of the work. She agreed this is very different scale than the RTF taking on measures and DOE would have to be a partner.

Cavanagh pointed to section 179D of the federal tax code to illustrate his point about software, calling it a work in progress.

Matthew Tidewell, PGE, noted that people throw around the \$4.5 billion allocation but wondered how much of that total would go to the individual states. Zelenka estimated that Oregon would receive \$57 million. Tidewell called that important but not “an unlimited spigot of funds.” Thomas added that not all of that budget has to go to the modelled approach.

Mark Jerome, CLEAResult, RTF Co-Chair, said there are commercially available tools that meet BPI2400 standard but there is a cost for these tools, in the chat.

- Harris asked, can you name these tools for us? And are these tools linked to other necessary infrastructure that would be a part of the retrofit implementations (e.g., RemRate?), in the chat.
- Jerome replied, we are exploring Hancock right now, but there are several others SnugPro comes to mind. The issue is a higher cost for states and implementers of the IRA programs, in the chat. He added a link to [this website](#).

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Elizabeth Osborn, WA Dept of Commerce, said WA Commerce staff are leaning towards a model approach for residential and approved of more exploration.

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Burin stated that auditors are difficult to find right now and wondered about any potential impact on rollout. Thomas said the DOE requires an auditor for this program path. Harris noted that the requirement of an auditor is a major challenge, in the chat.

Slide 26

Harris voiced skepticism about the length of any Federal funding after seeing the 2009 ARRA stimulus eventually “drop off a cliff.” He thought they should account for the reasonable expectation that Federal funding will eventually end and build something that could be used with regional programs that have existed for four decades.

Harris then addressed security issues around an Excel spreadsheet-based tool. He wondered if the RTF could be held liable if there is a security breach. Thomas said these are great questions, but she did not want to investigate more until the PAC decides to explore further.

Slide 30

Light appreciated the earlier comment about leaving today’s meeting with some clarity around next steps. She said she is not hearing clear direction yet and at some point, a decision will have to be made.

Hilliard Creecy said tools would be beneficial but referenced the first bullet on [Slide 28] that says there is no guarantee of funding. She said DOE needs to put out a statement of work and

fund the project. She would agree to participate in that statement of work and possibly bid on that. She said DOE has defined the “what” but is struggling on the “how.”

Hilliard Creecy continued, saying that DOE has a lot of technical expertise to develop these tools and if they need more support there is a simple, contractual path. She also suggested talking to other people at the agency besides Walker.

Burdick agreed. She sees the advantage of a model but did not think the RTF should fund the work. Burdick said the advantage of doing it within the RTF is the ability to bring in the utilities and structure the tool so it could bring regional value in the future. She said the region prioritizes energy efficiency so having a DOE template would bring ancillary value.

Harris said the states are the administrators of this money, so we need to gauge their appetite for this tool versus a prescriptive measure approach. He said he’s heard that the states are overwhelmed by all the different elements of the IRA, reiterating that they are the ultimate clients. Harris stressed that if the region should pick this work up it should be designed for the long-term. He pointed to the NW’s long history of going our own way with energy simulation tools for residential, adding that now the Contract Analysts are moving towards tools like EnergyPlus.

Zelenka said in absence of a tool they would just go with whatever other options are available. He reiterated that Oregon will only get \$57 million a year, \$114 total, calling it not that much money. He agreed there may be other funding available.

Zelenka then asked what work would not get done if the Region took on this project. Thomas said she would have to reprioritize projects, get more input from the RTF and the RTF PAC, and weigh that against delays. She thought it might lead to fewer electric measures and a delay of some other planned tool work.

Zelenka asked how the DOE responded to Thomas saying we would develop a tool for the Northwest. Thomas said they understood that position and as long as a tool meets their minimum requirements it was okay. She said they are waiting to see what the states want. Zelenka referenced absorbing pages and pages of what’s coming out of the federal programs, saying the state will probably look towards the path of least resistance.

Jennifer Finnigan, Seattle City Light, did not have a quick easy answer to Harris’s earlier question about the utilities really using this. She said it’s because they have not invested much in residential EE in the past few years, although electrification goals may require a new approach as not a lot of homes get 20% savings. She was not sure if this tool is the right answer.

Caster wrote, I’m not in favor of RTF working on this, not because of qualifications, but because this was DOE’s requirement, and it needs to be on them. I am not in favor of modeling programs; we’ve run them in the past, they added cost and did not result in more, or more precise, savings. And they are potentially inequitable because of the auditor requirement, in the chat. She then wrote, and I think the other work the RTF already has planned is valuable and not worth pre-empting.

Clark admitted to being on the fence. She agreed there may be some value in this, but it seemed premature to agree to development without more scoping. Clark was still confused by why DOE couldn’t hire this work out to a consultant as they could require the tool be publicly

available. Thomas clarified that DOE could require the tool be open source but worried that there could still be costs to use the tool. She said they also worried that some parts of a tool developed by consultants would not be transparent.

Quentin Nesbitt, Idaho Power, was not in favor of moving forward without federal funding but if funding does become available, he is okay with discussing the project further.

Cavanagh implored the utilities to think about this collectively as there are tens of billions of federal dollars potentially available to expand utility energy efficiency programs. He added that the 179D tax credits are permanent and will not go away, while others have a 10-year runway. Cavanagh called this a competition among the states for the money, and it will go to the best organized. He hoped this region could do that and thought the RTF could play a role in unlocking billions of dollars for the utilities.

Hilliard Creecy suggested a message to DOE could include that the region understands the need to develop tools and there are mechanisms for them to escalate that work. She suggested they create a statement of work, put out an RFO, see what comes back, and go from there. Hilliard Creecy again stressed that this is coming from one, staff-level person at DOE and suggested a higher-level conversation.

Moerlins thought there is a role for the RTF to play here but there are enough unknowns to ask for more information. She said the moneys are not yet flowing in a fluid manner and understood the desire to facilitate that, but wanted a better understanding of what work would be displaced.

DePetrus noted that the agenda item was running long and asked Thomas if she got what she needed. Thomas summarized that she heard that there is interest in RTF involvement but there needs to be more scoping and determination of funds on their end before moving forward. She will communicate this to the DOE, track and monitor their movements, and bring back updates as needed.

2024 RTF Work Plan

Thomas was seeking recommendation from the RTF PAC to the Council for approval of the RTF's 2024 work plan.

Slide 34

Light explained the process adding that if the Council approved less funding, they would figure out ways to spend less.

Slide 56

DePetrus asked if there are any questions or comments. Light praised Thomas for her robust, excellent work in building on years of information that she basically held in her head.

Cavanagh moved to vote on the 2024 RTF Work Plan. Zelenka seconded. (Harris thirded.)

There was no discussion. The RTF PAC verbally voted to pass the Work Plan budget unanimously. (Caster wrote, I will need to go soon, but Energy Trust supports the work plan, noting that it's a lot of work and may be challenging to complete it all. It will be important for members/funders to provide a high level of engagement and participation in committees to support good decision making, in the chat.)

DePetrus thanked the RTF PAC for their work, reminded the group about the next meeting on November 8 and adjourned at 11:00 am.