

# Survey

## State “Best Practices” to Mitigate High Energy Prices

The National Regulatory Research Institute

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2005, the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) Staff Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs solicited examples of consumer education strategies that state public service commissions have successfully implemented to address problems, challenges and opportunities that have arisen in the quest to mitigate high energy bills. Ten “best practices” were submitted and featured during the NARUC Staff Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Sept. 25, 2005. The best practices fell into three primary categories. Examples of each category are provided below:

- Stakeholder Meetings/Training
  - The Colorado Public Utilities Commission formed an educational taskforce to share information and convey uniform messages about natural gas prices.
  
- Grass Roots/Outreach Efforts
  - The Tennessee Regulatory Authority held a natural gas forum and statewide town hall meetings in the cities and communities of regulated natural gas utilities. The purpose was to bring awareness of the issues associated with rising energy costs.
  
- Media Campaigns
  - The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission and an affiliated nonprofit organization, the Council for Utility Choice, launched a statewide campaign to educate consumers about the rising cost of natural gas and to provide them with tips to lower their bills, winterize their homes and inform them about low-income programs.

The responses to the survey by the Staff Subcommittee are compiled here just as they were submitted.

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## INTRODUCTION

Exceedingly volatile natural gas, electricity and fuel oil prices in recent years have significantly increased the energy burden facing consumers. Call centers at state public utility commissions have witnessed increased traffic due to concerns over high home energy prices and issues associated with the inability of consumers to pay their energy bills. In response to these concerns state public utility commissions have recognized the value of consumer education as a viable tool with which to mitigate the impact of rising energy bills.

Within the arena of consumer education, there is much that commissions can learn from one another regarding innovative approaches to consumer education. Sharing “best practices” can provide others with a concrete solution to a problem, another perception on a solution to a problem or inspiration in their own quest for innovative excellence. What is a “best practice?” Generally speaking a “best practice” is a method which has been judged to be superior to other methods.<sup>1</sup> In this case the judgement is informal.

This publication represents a compilation of those best practices.<sup>2</sup> The primary audience for this publication is consumer affairs staff at state public utility commissions. It is our hope that this dynamic exchange of ideas will provide consumer affairs staffs with new insights regarding consumer education strategies with which to address the issue of rising natural gas prices.

In completing the survey, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions regarding the “best practice,” such as:

- Application
- Project description
- Primary audience
- Involvement of other organizations
- Implementation Process
  - Goals
  - Costs
  - Timeline
  - Number of consumers reached
  - Evaluation mechanism
  - Recommendations to others

Table 1 lists the contributing state public service commissions and the name of the contributing authors. Table 2 presents the application of each best practice and a brief description. Table 3 presents the primary audience of each best practice.

**TABLE 1  
CONTRIBUTING STATES**

State Commission	Contact
Colorado Public Utilities Commission	Barbara J. Fernandez
Florida Public Service Commission	Bev DeMello and Thelma Crump
Georgia Public Service Commission	Bernard Cameron and Cynthia Johnson
New York State Public Service Commission	Sandra Sloane
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission	Tom Charles
Public Utilities Commission of Texas	Mike Renfro
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Source: Author’s construct.

**TABLE 2  
APPLICATION OF EACH BEST PRACTICE**

State	Project Description	Application							
		Web-based	Print	Organization of stakeholder groups	Town hall meeting	Face-to face education	Media packets	PSAs TV or radio	Other
CO	Educational task force to share information and convey uniform messages about natural gas prices.			X					
FL	Original play based on the Energy Hog theme used by the U.S. Department of Energy, encourages students to think about their energy uses.								Educational Play
GA	Winter preparedness meeting — forum provided an opportunity for consumer advocacy groups to communicate to the commission how they would be able to assist in reaching citizens who could benefit from assistance during the heating season.			X					
GA	Train the trainer		X	X		X		X	
GA	Fostering partnerships — educate seniors citizens about commission rules that protect and provide assistance.		X			X			
GA	Radio PSAs							X	
NY	Grass roots outreach program involving staffing exhibits at over 75 events per year; partnering with other agencies/organizations; energy pledge program.		X						Mix of grass-roots activities
PA	Statewide consumer education campaign “Prepare Now for High Winter Gas Prices.”	X	X			X	X	X	Coordination with other state agencies
TN	Natural gas forum and statewide town hall meetings to bring awareness of the issues associate with rising energy costs.	X	X						Face-to-face radio and television interviews
TX	Power Partners Education Program educates Texans regarding their power to choose their electric provider.					X			

Source: Author’s construct.

**TABLE 3  
PRIMARY AUDIENCE OF EACH BEST PRACTICE**

State	Project	Primary Audience					
		General	Low-Income	65+	Rural	English as second Language	Other
CO	Educational task force	X				X	
FL	Conservation energy play						Elementary school (grades k-5)
GA	Winter preparedness meeting						Specific target audience
GA	Train the trainer						Specific target audience
GA	Partnerships to educate senior citizens						Specific target audience
GA	Radio PSAs	X					
NY	Grass roots outreach program	X	X	X	X	X	Youth
PA	Statewide consumer education campaign	X	X	X	X	X	African-American and Latino
TN	Natural gas forum and statewide town hall meetings	X	X	X			
TX	Education program	X	X	X	X	X	

Source: Author’s construct.

## STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS/TRAINING

### Winter Preparedness Meeting

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#### Application

Organization of stakeholder groups.

#### Project Description

Winter preparedness meeting.

#### Primary Audience

Specific target audience.

#### Names of Other Organizations Involved

Natural Gas Marketers, Electric Distribution Company (EDC), Consumer's Utility Counsel and several consumer advocacy groups.

#### Describe the Involvement of Other Organizations

Forum was an opportunity for consumer advocacy groups to express to the Georgia Public Service Commission the ways in which their organizations would be able to assist the Commission in reaching citizens who could benefit from services provided by the Commission to help them (citizens) get through the heating season.

### Implementation Process

**How did the project originate:**  
Energy Education Team.

**What was the goal of the project?**  
N/A

**What was the total cost of the project? Please comment on staff time, production costs and any other associated costs:** Staff time and materials.

**What was the approximate number of consumers reached?** N/A

**Describe any barriers to implementation and steps taken to overcome the barriers:** Willingness of stakeholders to buy into initiative. (Was not a problem in Georgia).

**Timeline:** Continuing basis.

**Evaluation mechanism:** N/A

**How effective was the project in meeting stated goals?** Very effective.

**Next steps:** N/A

**Transferability:** Easy.

**Recommendations to others:** Bringing together stakeholders is a good way for fostering relationships with people who share common goals and are able to share in your vision.

## Educational Task Force

### Submitted By

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### Application

Organization of stakeholder groups.

### Project Description

The formation of an educational taskforce whose purpose is to share information and convey uniform messages about natural gas prices to inform ratepayers, media and the general public about gas cost adjustments, the trend of natural gas prices and why, how to obtain financial assistance to pay natural gas bills, and how to conserve energy.

### Primary Audience

General audience and consumers for whom English is a second language.

### Names of Other Organizations Involved

Representatives of all of the gas utilities in the state, the Office of Consumer Counsel, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) manager under the Department of Human Services, the manager of the Energy Savings Partner Program under the Governor's Office of Energy Management and Conservation, Energy Outreach Colorado, AARP and the Commission.

### Describe the Involvement of Other Organization

Representatives of the above-named organizations meet once a month or every other month to discuss natural gas issues, to share information and to develop educational materials.

### Implementation Process

#### **How did the project originate?**

When natural prices began its upward swing in 2003, the taskforce was formed. There had been media articles with conflicting information in them about whether prices were going up or down. We felt ratepayers were not well served by conflicting messages. In addition, the Commission's public information officer had been sharing information with each utility's public relations staff. We realized it would be a better use of time to bring everyone together to share the information. The natural gas messaging/issues taskforce was then formed.

#### **What was the goal of the project?**

The goal was to provide ratepayers, the general public and the media with reliable, accurate information about natural gas prices and the causes of price increases. Another goal was to ensure that the public knew the Commission processes concerning gas cost adjustments, and that the utilities were only passing through the commodity costs and not making a profit on the increases. A third goal was to ensure that ratepayers knew how they could obtain assistance in paying their bills, and how to conserve energy. Media messages were developed and shared among all of the companies and human service organizations. An educational flyer was developed and distributed to

ratepayers of all of the companies. The flyer was also translated into Spanish for use by all of the companies, the organizations and the Commission. Members of the taskforce also share information about disconnection and nonpayment issues, and funds available/distributed by LIHEAP and Energy Outreach Colorado.

**What was the total cost of the project? Please comment on staff time, production costs and any other associated costs:**

There has been no cost for the project. The meetings are held at the Commission once a month or once every other month during the winter months, and then an evaluation meeting is held at the end of the season. The group gets back together again every August and prepares for the next heating season. The meetings last about two hours. Every utility and organization contributes expertise to the development of the educational materials. The template is then given to each entity to use. For example, one of the utilities had someone who served as the Spanish translator, which enabled all of us to have educational materials available in Spanish.

**What was the approximate number of consumers reached?**

The information was given to all ratepayers of each gas utility.

**Describe any barriers to implementation and steps taken to overcome the barriers:**

At first the utilities were reluctant to share their information with others, especially the social organizations. Over time a trust has been developed among all because there has not been any breeches of confidentiality concerning disconnects or account receivables. Also, trust was developed when the

social organizations did not “bash” the utilities in the media for the price increases. The social organizations began using messaging about the reasons for the commodity increases. In turn, the utilities then began increasing their public messaging about how ratepayers could obtain assistance and conserve energy. This helped the social organizations since they had limited funds to advertise. In addition, the utilities realized that they were learning about other public relations ideas other utilities use.

**Timeline:** The group starts meeting in August and continues to meet once a month or once every other month through March or April.

**Evaluation mechanism:** At the end of the winter season, the group holds a luncheon and reviews what it has accomplished during the last heating season, and brainstorms ideas it would like to pursue the next year.

**How effective was the project in meeting stated goals?**

The group has been very effective. The media now seems to understand commodity pricing. Ratepayers may not be thrilled about the increases, but at least they now have information about what causes the increases. And, working relationships have all improved between the utilities, the government agencies and the social organizations.

**Next steps:** The group met on March 22, 2005 to discuss its goals for next year.

**Recommendations to others:** I think it is very important to have a diverse group of people participating in such a taskforce. Once information is shared among the various entities, the

utilities become aware of the issues of the social service organizations and those organizations become aware of how rates are set.

### **Train the Trainer**

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#### Application

Print materials, organization of stakeholder groups and face-to-face education.

#### Project Description

Train the trainer.

#### Primary Audience

Specific target audience.

#### Names of Other Organizations Involved

The Department of Human Resources and community action agencies.

#### Describe the Involvement of Other Organizations

Aforementioned agencies were trained to read natural gas bills and about commission rules related to billing and disconnection of service. After receiving the training, recipients were able to assist their clients with understanding their gas bills.

### Implementation Process

#### **How did the project originate?**

Collaboration of the Department of Human Resources and the Commission.

#### **What was the goal of the project?**

N/A

**What was the total cost of the project? Please comment on staff time, production costs and any other associated cost.** Staff and printed materials.

**What was the approximate number of consumers reached?** N/A

**Describe any barriers to implementation and steps taken to overcome the barriers:** None.

**Timeline:** Three, one-hour sessions held over a two-week period.

**Evaluation mechanism:** Nothing formal; has relied upon verbal feedback from participants.

**How effective was the project in meeting state goals?** Very effective.

**Transferability:** No difficulty.

**Next Steps:** Expand concept to include other organizations.

**Recommendations to others:** Since the cost is minimal, would recommend as an option for others to use.

## GRASS ROOTS/OUTREACH EFFORTS

### Natural Gas Forum and Statewide Townhall Meetings

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#### Application

Web-based, print materials, townhall meetings and face-to-face radio and television interviews.

#### Project Description

The Tennessee Regulatory Authority held a natural gas forum and statewide town hall meetings in the cities and communities of regulated natural gas utilities to bring awareness to the issues associated with rising energy costs.

#### Primary Audience

General audience, low-income audience and 65 and older.

#### Names of Other Organizations Involved

Piedmont Natural Gas/Nashville Gas, Atmos Energy and agencies that administer LIHEAP.

#### Describe the Involvement of Other Organizations

The natural gas companies represented provided an overview of the availability and supply of natural gas. The companies discussed the economics associated with purchasing natural gas and the exploration

and the storage of gas for future use. The companies also discussed whether or not special payment options would be extended to customers who had difficulty paying their billing statements.

Representatives from the various LIHEAP agencies discussed the scope of the financial assistance program and how consumers may apply to receive any needed assistance.

#### Implementation Process

##### **How did the project originate?**

The project originated shortly after learning of Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan's concerns about the nation's supplies of natural gas and his prediction that the nation would experience higher than normal energy prices to heat their homes and businesses.

##### **What was the goal of the project?**

The goal of the Commission's outreach efforts was to bring attention to the pending crisis to those with whom our agency interfaces and to provide substantive information on the, who, what, when, where and why of the nation's natural gas supply situation.

**What was the total cost of the project? Please comment on staff time, production costs and any other associated costs:** The project's total cost was approximately \$1,500 which included printed materials and catered refreshments.

**What was the approximate number of consumers reached?** An approximate number of consumers reached is difficult to calculate. However, our gas symposium and the subsequent town-hall meetings were sufficiently



covered by the area's major daily newspapers and television and radio outlets.

**Describe any barriers to implementation and steps taken to overcome the barriers:** There were none. At our town hall meetings, we arranged for one-on-one interviews with radio, newspaper, and television personnel to ensure that the message was communicated to consumers who were unable to attend the meeting.

**Timeline:** It is not uncommon for Tennessee to maintain its warmer climates well into late October, forestalling the need for consumers to use their heating units. As a result, we were able to begin our outreach efforts in early September and conclude by the first of November, long before the cold weather arrived.

**Evaluation mechanism:** N/A

**How effective was the project in meeting stated goals?** The overall goal of the effort was to promote awareness of the issues surrounding rising natural gas costs and the steps consumers could take to prepare themselves. From media exposure perspective, our efforts generated over 20 separate statewide newspaper stories, approximately nine television interviews and three radio interviews.

**Next steps:** N/A

**Recommendations to others:** Along with our face-to-face approach via the town-hall meetings, we leaned heavily on the various city/town media outlets to assist us in carrying the message we wanted to communicate. We also careful to support our communicated message with information posted on Commission's website. We

also partnered with the regulated utilities to ensure that the appropriate information was made available and communicated to their customers. Information such as the reasons behind rising energy costs, whether or not companies offered extended billing plans, and information about a company's disconnection policies.

## **Power Partners Education Program**

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### Application

Face-to-face education

### Project Description

Through our Power Partners Education Program, we have educated thousands of Texans about their power to choose their electric provider. Since electric competition was introduced in Texas three years ago, more than 200 community-based organizations (CBOs) have signed on to help in this effort.

### Primary Audience

General audience, low-income audience, 65 and older, rural audience, consumers for whom English is a second-language.

### Names of Other Organizations Involved

Various social service and civic organizations and homeowners' and neighborhood associations have joined as Power Partners.

Describe the Involvement of Other Organizations

Power Partners give presentations and distribute literature about Texas Electric Choice. They receive “Power Tools” kits containing a presentation in three formats: PowerPoint, videotape and transparencies for an overhead projector. They also are provided with an Internet “tool” they can place on their group’s Web site that allows them to link with the Public Utility Commission of Texas Power to Choose website where they can type in their zip code and review all the offers from retail electric providers in their area. In addition, we participated in some “Town Hall” meetings and several workshops for social service agencies, where we sat up tables with literature and had staff available to answer questions.

Implementation Process

**How did the project originate?**

After the funding for the Texas Electric Choice education campaign was drastically reduced, Commission staff needed a cost effective way of getting the word out. We developed a grassroots plan of enlisting CBOs as partners to help educate Texans on how to shop and compare retail electric providers.

**What was the goal of the project?**

To spread the word about Texas Electric Choice through partnerships with CBOs, thus eliminating the cost of paid advertising.

**What was the total cost of the project? Please comment on staff time, production costs and any other associated costs:**

This year we have a total budget of \$195,000 for outreach and partnership development. We have a staff of four available to work on the project, although they have

many other duties as well. We also contract with a marketing company.

**What was the approximate number of consumers reached?**  
Approximately 50,000.

**Describe any barriers to implementation and steps taken to overcome the barriers:**

1. To deter people from throwing away our materials without even opening them, we began stamping the envelopes with “Official State Business” and the state seal
2. To further encourage people to respond to the packet of materials we make follow-up calls on Wednesday evenings
3. To encourage people to pick up the phone when follow-up calls are made, our marketing company person makes the calls from the Commission offices so “Caller ID” will say “State of Texas”

**Timeline:** This is an ongoing program.

**Evaluation mechanism:** A survey was conducted in late 2004 as a follow-up to research previously conducted.

**How effective was the project in meeting stated goals?** Program has proven to be extremely effective. Results of the 2004 survey indicated that both “awareness” and “degree of awareness” of Texas Electric Choice had continued to rise, despite the lack of paid advertising.

**Next steps:** Continue to make contact with homeowners’ associations, neighborhood associations and large churches to enlist them as Power Partners.

**Recommendations to others:** We recommend this grassroots approach be used in conjunction with paid and earned media or alone, as budget dictates.

### **Fostering Partnerships to Educate Senior Citizens**

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#### Application

Print materials and face-to-face education.

#### Project Description

Fostering Partnerships. Educate senior citizens about commission rules that protect and provide assistance (discounts).

#### Primary Audience

Specific target audience.

#### Names of Other Organizations Involved

DeKalb County Housing (DCH), Project Healthy Grandparent (PHG), DeKalb and Fulton Economic Opportunity, Inc. (Fulton EOA), EDC and natural gas marketers.

#### Describe the Involvement of Other Organizations

DCH – advised seniors of low interest rate loans or grants (does not repay) that are available to help bring their homes up to code; PHG – made seniors aware

of a support group for grandparents raising children (includes medical care); DeKalb and Fulton EOA – talked about energy assistance that's available and weatherization programs; and EDC encouraged seniors to conserve energy; gas marketers talked about special rates available for senior citizens.

#### Implementation Process

**How did the project originate:** Stakeholders.

**What was the goal of the project?** N/A

**What was the total cost of the project? Please comment on staff time, production costs and any other associated cost.** Staff time and printed materials.

**What was the approximate number of consumers reached?** N/A

**Describe any barriers to implementation and steps taken to overcome the barriers:** Participation by service providers (has not been a problem in Georgia).

**Timeline:** None.

**Evaluation mechanism:** N/A

**How effective was the project in meeting stated goals?** Several participants indicated that the information was very helpful.

**Transferability:** Relatively easy.

**Next Steps:** Deliver additional materials (Commission brochures) and talk briefly with center directors to see what assistance the Commission may provide.

**Recommendations to Others:**

Would be a worthwhile project for others.

**Grass Roots Outreach Program**Submitted By

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Application

Print materials, face-to-face education and a mix of activities that comprise a “grass roots” program.

Project Description

Grass Roots Outreach – Our grass roots outreach program is an economical and effective method for reaching out to, as well as gathering information from, a diverse group of consumers. There are a number of components and features that make the program particularly effective.

Brief descriptions of the basic components of our grass roots program follow:

1) Staffing exhibits at more than 75 shows/events across the state each year. The booth/exhibit configuration is designed to be particularly flexible to meet the needs of the widely varying venues – outdoors/indoors, day/night/, small audience/ large audience, captive audience/casual audience, etc. and to reflect the topics we are focusing on during a particular period or at a particular event, or even during a particular part of a given show or event. We use a variety of “pull-up” scroll type exhibits that

can be mixed and matched to fit the need and situation. They are easy to handle, and the message(s) can be changed very simply, even midway through a conference or meeting to match a particular session or speech.

2) Partnering with other agencies, departments, local governments, institutions, and organizations. The number and type of partners we work with is large and quite varied. We look for organizations that deal with the public on a regular or frequent basis, preferably with a social service or educational focus and frequently visited public locations. Partnerships with these organizations enable us to expand the reach of our information distribution vastly and raise public awareness of our programs and messages to a much greater degree. Among those organizations we partner with are Cornell Cooperative Extension, New York State (NYS) Library Association, NYS Thruway Authority, a variety of county, town and village governments, Chambers of Commerce, AARP, scouting groups, selected school districts, a variety of state agencies, social service organizations and as well as many “community leaders.” Approximately five times a year we mail publications, posters, educational materials displays and a prepaid order form to our approximately 4,000 partners. We have found that large heavy-duty plastic bags branded with our messages are one of the most effective tools for raising awareness of our programs. We have offered them, free-of-charge to our partners and to a wide a wide range of other outlets, including ski areas, food banks, good will outlets, nature centers, museums, green houses, farmer’s markets, thrift stores and many different types of fairs and celebrations. The bags

prominently display our messages, are seen many times over, and are used repeatedly.

- 3) A third extremely effective component of our grass roots outreach program is our energy pledge program. There is both an adult energy pledge and “Kids Can Make a World of Difference” Energy Pledge. The individual making the pledge commits to taking one or more of the energy conservation actions and then signs their name to the pledge. There is a tear off section that they can give back to us if they want to be included in a drawing for a prize such as a branded earth ball or a compact fluorescent bulb. The remainder of the pledge with their commitments and signature is given back to them to take home and post on the refrigerator as a reminder of their commitment. The children post them because they like the certificate look of the pledge and are proud of their commitment. The adults tend to keep and post their pledges because they include space for important telephone numbers serving another useful purpose, while reminding them of their commitment. The pledge process guarantees that the material is read, understood and remembered.

Our pull-up exhibits, publications, branded educational items and pledges are all done in Spanish as well as English. With New York City’s (NYC) Spanish speaking population growing swiftly, the need to provide Spanish publications and develop Spanish exhibits is increasing. With all of our grassroots tools we are able to tailor and mix and match our materials, exhibits, and publications for a given mailing or specific event to the mix of Spanish and English speaking consumers in

the target audience. Similarly we try to use and emphasize publications specifically printed in large print for senior events.

- 4) A final basic component of our grass roots effort is our participation in “non-traditional events.” We have found that participation in events such as “for-profit” or commercial street fairs in NYC help us reach a new audience eager to be exposed to our information. While the average attendee at a street fair is there to make purchases, and partake in the array of food available, we find that large numbers of people are more than pleased to spend a few minutes asking us questions or reading our exhibits and publications. We stand out because of our free useful information among a sea of people selling a variety of goods.

#### Primary Audience

General audience, low-income audience, 65 and older, rural audience, consumers for whom English is a second-language and youth.

#### Names of Other Organizations Involved

Included are Cornell Cooperative Extension, NYS Library Association, NYS Thruway Authority, a variety of county, town, and village governments, Chambers of Commerce, AARP, scouting groups, selected school districts, a variety of other state agencies, social service organizations, agencies and groups, as well as many “community leaders.”

#### Describe the Involvement of Other Organizations

Partner with them for the distribution, display, and dissemination of information; organization, hosting, and promotion

of meeting and hearings; gathering and communicating issues, concerns, questions, and information between the New York State Public Service Commission staff and NYS's consumers

### Implementation Process

**How did the project originate?** Our grass roots outreach program has been in place since 1982 but is constantly evolving. Grass roots efforts, when compared to mass media advertising, are much more cost effective and more flexible. It provides two-way communication and tends to be more effective in eliciting permanent behavior changes that can offset higher energy prices. The use of partnerships allows us to reach large numbers of individual consumers through trusted intermediary groups. The pull-up exhibits, pledges, and participation in nontraditional events such as the NYC Street Fairs have been developed through experience and the realization that achieving understanding and getting a commitment are the keys to changing behavior. The more people know about energy, how energy is produced, what the alternatives are, how prices are set, etc., the more likely they are to take actions to reduce or alter their energy use habits and patterns.

### **What was the goal of the project?**

Increase awareness and understanding of energy issues including choice, energy efficiency and energy conservation, energy cost, green power and how to use energy wisely.

### **What was the total cost of the project? Please comment on staff time, production costs and any other associated costs:**

Staff time is the largest commitment, however our grassroots outreach program

is managed and implemented by a staff of nine with some assistance in staffing events from other office "volunteers." The budget is approximately \$ 125,000 for event registrations, exhibits, pledges and prizes, mailings and associated costs.

### **What was the approximate number of consumers reached?**

A review of the 2004 grass roots program carried out by a contractor specializing in advertising, public relations, market analysis, and program promotion recently completed a review and evaluation of the grass roots program and determined that over 2.7 million people were reached.

### **Describe any barriers to implementation and steps taken to overcome the barriers:**

The effort is staff intensive; therefore we look to other offices within the Commission and partner with other agencies. We make every effort to maintain staff interest, involvement and enthusiasm through training, support, leadership, acknowledgement and recognition. Since we are competing with many other agencies, programs, and potential partners, partners need to be repeatedly involved and made to feel important.

**Timeline:** Ongoing.

### **Evaluation mechanism:**

An evaluation of the reach of the program was carried out under contract by an advertising, survey, and public relations company. In addition, there is almost constant anecdotal feedback from the partners and the public as the nature of the effort means there is lots of direct contact.

**How effective was the project in meeting stated goals?** The project was/is very effective, however, there is no limit to its expansion.

**Next steps:** We will continue with the program, frequently changing our exhibits and publications. We will continue to look for underserved areas and populations. We will print our publications in additional languages and increase the number of publications we print in large print. We continue to explore non-traditional events, and while fostering the relationships we have with our existing partners, we will continue to expand our partnership efforts.

**Recommendations to others:** N/A

## Conservation Energy Play

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### Application

Conservation education play.

### Project Description

Thelma Crump and Bev DeMello wrote an original play, *Turn It On; Turn It Off*, based on the Energy Hog theme used by the U.S. Department of Energy, which encouraged students to think about their energy uses. Ms. Crump and Ms. DeMello worked with the Principals of two local elementary schools to schedule school assemblies and to cast the students from both schools who would perform.

The program was developed with a focused energy conservation theme. The play was performed in October for Brevard and Ruediger Elementary Schools in Leon County. Leon County School Board Member Maggie Lewis, Leon County School Superintendent Bill Montford, and Florida Public Service Commission Chairman Braulio Baez spoke at the assemblies. Certificates were presented to school administrators and students, too.

### Primary Audience

Elementary school (grades K-5).

### Names of Other Organizations Involved

Leon County School Board.

### Describe the Involvement of Other Organizations

The Leon County School Board and the Leon County Schools were very supportive of the Commission's educational pilot program.

### Implementation Process

#### **How did the project originate?**

The Commission's Outreach team met with Leon County School Board Member Maggie Lewis, who encouraged the Commission to do a pilot program for the Leon County Schools that would offer a lesson on energy conservation. She put staff in touch with Iris Wilson, Deputy School Superintendent of Leon County Schools, who then introduced us to the principals of the participating schools. We worked through the principals on logistics and script approvals, as well as casting of the play and rehearsal schedules.

**What was the goal of the project?**

To raise awareness about energy conservation among school children using drama as the creative element.

**What was the total cost of the project? Please comment on staff time, production costs and any other associated costs:**

The Commission used the services of the Commission's Art Department and Outreach Team for necessary props and set pieces made from foam-cord boards. The Outreach team spent at least six hours a week for six weeks with the elementary school students in the play for rehearsal time.

**What was the approximate number of consumers reached?**

The play was performed for 500 students at Brevard Elementary and 500 students at Ruediger Elementary School. The Tallahassee Democrat covered the event, so the Commission and the energy awareness event received additional media attention.

**Timeline:** At least three to four months of lead time is needed.

**Evaluation mechanism:** Ms. Crump and Ms. DeMello held a subsequent meeting with Leon County School Board Member Maggie Lewis and with the principals for the schools to discuss the pilot program and ways to build on the partnership.

**How effective was the project in meeting stated goals?**

The School Board was happy with the partnership, and the school administrators were pleased with the students' performances, as well as the assembly program.

**Next steps:** The Commission has been approved to partner again with the Leon County Schools for the

2005-2006 school year in a program to promote energy awareness during the U.S. Department of Energy's National Energy Awareness Month in October and a program to promote water conservation during National Drinking Water Week in May.

**Recommendations to others:** For the National Drinking Water Week Program in May 2005, Ms. Crump and Ms. DeMello acquired the assistance of the Chiles High School Drama team to perform an original play, *Water Wiser*, for two Leon County middle schools. It was less time on staff to use the high school students to perform the water conservation play than to direct students themselves, as we had done with *Turn It On; Turn It Off*. We were able to concentrate on developing the actual program for the assembly and preparing remarks for invited officials.

The Commission would be willing to share the play scripts with other public utility commissions wanting to adopt them for their use.

## MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

### Statewide Campaign to "Prepare Now for High Winter Gas Prices"

Submitted By

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Application

Web-based, print materials, face-to-face education, media packets, PSAs for TV or radio and coordination with other state agencies.

The National Regulatory Research Institute



Project Description

In September 2003, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission and an affiliated non-profit organization, the Council for Utility Choice, launched a statewide campaign, “Prepare Now for High Winter Gas prices.” The focus of the campaign was to educate Pennsylvania consumers about the rising cost of natural gas and to provide them with tips on ways to lower their bills, winterize their homes, and find out about low-income programs.

Primary Audience

General audience; low-income audience; 65 and older; rural audience; consumers for whom English is a second-language and African-American and Latino.

Names of Other Organizations Involved

The Commission and the Council for Utility Choice.

Describe the Involvement of Other Organizations

The Council for Utility Choice worked in conjunction with the Commission on the campaign.

Implementation Process

**How did the project originate?** In September 2003, the Commission presided over a special public hearing where it heard testimony from utilities; consumers groups and government officials on current and projected natural gas prices; the forecasted supply and demand, programs to help consumers and ways to increase consumer awareness related to gas prices for this winter. Based on testimony given during the hearing, the Commission and the Council for Utility Choice launched

the “Prepare Now” campaign to raise awareness about potentially high natural gas prices and inform gas customers about programs to help them pay their bills.

**What was the goal of the project?**

To raise awareness about potentially high natural gas prices and inform gas customers about programs to help them pay their bills.

**What was the total cost of the project?**

Please comment on staff time, production costs and any other associated costs: The Council for Utility Choice – affiliated with the Commission – allocated \$60,000 for the campaign. Most of the work was conducted by commission staff in association with a contract-consultant already working on behalf of the Council for Utility Choice.

**What was the approximate number of consumers reached?**

The two primary outreach tools of the campaign were the creation of a website and informational brochure. Since its inception in November 2003, the “Prepare Now” website has seen nearly 800,000 hits. In addition, nearly 20,000 informational brochures were distributed to consumers across the Commonwealth at a variety of venues. In addition to the website and brochure, radio sponsorships and print ads ran across the state.

**Describe any barriers to implementation and steps taken to overcome the barriers:**

The “Prepare Now” campaign was embraced by the Council for Utility Choice – made up members of the Commission, the Pennsylvania Rural Development Council; the Governor’s Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs; the Governor’s Advisory

Commission on African-American Affairs; the Pennsylvania Office of the Consumer Advocate; state utility associations; public education and community-based organizations., the Commission, other state agencies and statewide media outlets. No serious barriers were encountered during the campaign.

**Timeline:** The campaign will be reintroduced to the public each year before the onset of cold weather.

**Evaluation mechanism:** Since its inception in November 2003, the “Prepare Now” website has seen nearly 800,000 hits and nearly 20,000 informational brochures were distributed at a variety of venues to consumers across the Commonwealth. In addition, Commissioner Kim Pizzigrilli – along with the Pennsylvania Office of the Consumer Advocate and the Energy Association of Pennsylvania – participated in a statewide radio “infomercial” to raise awareness of increased natural gas prices. The radio spot aired on stations across the state. Further, Commissioner Pizzigrilli also participated in a television interview – geared toward senior citizens – on the topic. The interview was shown statewide. Finally, several utilities included “Prepare Now” inserts in their monthly statements to consumers.

**How effective was the project in meeting stated goals?** Overall, the campaign has been very successful in educating Pennsylvania consumers. In addition, the program was effective in bringing various state agencies together so that common goals could be achieved through collaborative efforts.

**Next steps:** To further expand the “Prepare Now” outreach efforts, in November 2004, the Commission welcomed the world’s most famous weatherman, groundhog Punxsutawney Phil, to the program team. By adding Punxsutawney Phil, to the program the “Prepare Now” campaign expanded its education efforts to reach both adults and children. Punxsutawney Phil joined the Commission and the Council for Utility Choice in urging Pennsylvanians to prepare now for the winter by weatherizing their homes, conserving energy, and learning about private and public programs to help them cope with colder weather and pay their utility bills.

**Recommendations to others:** Importance of including utilities, consumer groups, and other state agencies in initiating such programs. Shared interests can result in multi-faceted campaigns that all can support and assist all consumers, particularly the most needed.

**Update:** The Commission at its Sept. 9, 2005, Public Meeting directed electric, natural gas and water utilities to coordinate with the Commission, consumer advocates and organizations to educate Pennsylvanians about changes in the law dealing with utility shut-offs. This will be called a “Prepare Now” campaign similar to the Commission’s activities over the past two winter heating seasons. While the focus will be Chapter 14, information also will be concluded about conserving heat and energy, budget billing, home heating safety and low-income assistance programs. The Commission’s Office of Communications will design and disseminate material to continue

educating consumers about Chapter 14. The Commission directed utilities to work with the Office of Communications to coordinate any additional educational efforts it plans to undertake to ensure that their customers understand the new rules of the road.

## Radio PSAs

### Submitted By

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### Application

Radio ads (PSAs).

### Project Description

Effort was to encourage consumers not to wait to the last minute to get gas restored and to manage their natural gas account via budget billing or subscribing to a fixed rate plan.

### Primary Audience

General audience.

### Names of Other Organizations Involved

None.

### Implementation Process

**How did the project originate?**  
Energy Education Team  
**What was the goal of the project?**  
N/A

**What was the total cost of the project? Please comment on staff time, production costs and any other associated costs:** PSAs were funded through an education fund maintained by the EDC. Cost: \$37,500 for 50 spots.

**What was the approximate number of consumers reached?** N/A

**Describe any barriers to implementation and steps taken to overcome the barriers:** Getting approval from executive staff could be a barrier, although we did not experience this in Georgia.

**Timeline:** September through October

**How effective was the project in meeting state goals.** Appears to very effective. Number of contacts regarding requests to get connected decreased.

**Transferability:** Should be relatively easy.

**Recommendations to Others:** Would recommend as a way to reach a larger portion of the population.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Andersen, Contract Services, Control Self-Assessment Technique, Center for Virtual Organization and Commerce, as quoted in Vivian Witkind Davis, *A Compilation of "Best Practices" to Implement the Telecommunications Act of 1996* (Columbus, Ohio: The National Regulatory Research Institute, 1999), 1.  
<sup>2</sup> All Best Practices are printed as submitted. The compilation contains the original language of the authors.

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