Working Group Series for Participating Contractors and Industry Partners
Session #7 | November 18, 2021 8:30am-10:00am

Agenda

- Meeting Procedures
- Welcome
- Joint Management Committee (JMC) update and discussion
    - QA/QC
    - "School of Clean Heat"
    - Project cycle time update
    - OIT improvements and prioritization *(Dandelion Energy topic)*
    - Additional process improvements *(NY-GEO topic)*
- Resources, support, and next steps

Action Items/Commitments

Information in colored text throughout the document corresponds to the action items listed below.

- ICF will take an independent look at any incremental changes that can be made towards harmonizing the OIT platforms across utilities and will build those changes into IT sprints as they are able
- ICF will post the OIT Status Glossary to the OIT documents page and as a separate document on the NYS Clean Heat Resources webpage
- ICF will provide the schedule of School of Clean Heat webinars to NY-GEO to share with their constituents
- In the future, the JMC will provide redline versions of changes to program documents, after they have been filed in DMM, for ease of visibility
- A step-by-step guide for the OIT is available on the Help page of each utility's OIT tool
- ICF will provide additional guidance regarding progress on ACH payment communication

Welcome

- Program representatives on the call today:
    - JMC Co-Chairs: William Xia (Con Edison), Wendy MacPherson (NYSERDA)
    - JMC Members: Ray Cotto (Central Hudson), Ayomide Balogun (National Grid), Nicole Williams (NYSEG, RG&E), Mark Maloney (Orange & Rockland)
    - Implementation Team (ICF): Mike L'Ecuyer, Kenn Latal
    - Working Group Support Team (Concentric Energy Advisors): Ben Davis, Pieter Zwart, Clara-Ann Joyce

Working Group Series: Review of Typical Meeting Format

- As outlined in previous meetings, the intent of this Working Group Series is to create a forum for working meetings between participating contractors, industry partners, and other stakeholders with the NYS Clean Heat Program Administrators.
  - Emphasis is on the "working group" nature of these calls, with focus on clarifying issues, pain points, affected parties, and proposed solutions
- The JMC wants to promote dialogue and discussion with a focus on transparency and communication
  - The intent is to drive toward solution development
  - Emphasis here is on open communication with the industry. The JMC does want this to be a two-way process in terms of flagging and communicating issues.
- The hope is to have stakeholder-led presentations of pre-submitted topics in addition to updates from the JMC on topics discussed in previous sessions

QA/QC

Stakeholder Feedback – GSHP Response & Checklist

- The objective of the JMC QA/QC Working Group has been to continue to collaborate with and consider feedback from all stakeholders
- Beginning in the early days of the program, the JMC was in close dialogue with NY-GEO on refinements to the GSHP checklist, and received very productive feedback to help fine-tune processes and procedures over time
  - In the latest iteration of the GSHP field assessment checklist, the JMC has incorporated that early feedback as well as additional feedback from NY-GEO, the Quality Service Providers (QSPs) administering the field assessments, and the JMC
  - New changes will go into effect on December 1, 2021
  - Previous communications announcing this update have gone out in the past week or so via other channels
- Changes effective December 1 include:
  - A defined startup checklist and bore well/loop field design documents
    - These items will be collected during rebate application, so that QSPs can review upon selection for assessment
    - Requiring these documents up front will not impact response time for project applications
  - Redundant line items attested to in T's and C's, electrical code, and other program areas have been removed
  - Conditionally applicable items have been clarified
  - Line items requiring the manufacturer warranty document have been removed, since the warranty is tied to the serial number of the equipment
  - Confirmation of air filter installation will no longer be checked by the QSP in the field, and instead will be included in the startup checklist attestation
  - The overall scope of the checklist has been reduced from 40+ items to 21
- This is an evolving process – the JMC will continue to consider future items and additional concerns or feedback

Stakeholder Feedback – Assessment Insights

- The QSP providers for the upstate and downstate portions of the NYS Clean Heat program are TRC and Steven Winter Associates. A representative from TRC joined the call to speak about the field assessment process.
- The field assessment process is a bit more necessary on the ASHP side than the GSHP side, since there are many more new entrants in ASHP installation. Many of the GSHP installers have been in the field for a longer time, and correspondingly there are very low nonconformance numbers on the GSHP side.
- Two items on the assessment checklists are inherently subjective:
  - Safe access: Verify that safe access to the site and associated equipment has been provided
  - Equipment and piping supports: Verify all exposed equipment and pipe supports appear to be properly secured
- Field agents are looking for significant issues, within the control of the installing contractor, that would lead to a dangerous situation for the field agent, homeowner, and/or future service professionals when trying to access the system, or installations with a high probability of failure due to non-secured elements of the heat pump system
- Every judgment call made in the field by the inspector is double checked and confirmed by a manager at the QSP
  - If a contractor feels that the wrong call was made, they are encouraged to bring it up and contest it. Contested nonconformances can and have been a good opportunity for both the QSP and the installing contractor to learn.
- Photo examples of safe and unsafe access are included in the presentation slides
  - Zero safe access failures have been recorded on the GSHP side. 10 have been recorded on the ASHP side (out of 800 assessments).
  - Many passes are issued – almost every install passes
- Photo examples of secure and unsecure equipment are included in the presentation slides
  - 1 secure equipment failure has been recorded on the GSHP side. 11 have been recorded on the ASHP side (out of 800 assessments).
    - The GSHP failure ended up being rescinded after conversation with the contractor
  - Common issues seen include unsecured duct lines, use of duct tape rather than sturdier fasteners, uneven/unstable surfaces outside
  - Most of the time, installs pass without any issue
- The JMC does plan to present more content like this periodically. They will be in constant communication regarding learnings from the QA process and assessments in the field

Contractor Support – School of Clean Heat

- The JMC is striving to provide more resources to support contractors and drive participation. Many have already taken advantage of these resources.
- ICF is hosting a weekly interactive School of Clean Heat webinar led by account managers
  - Separate registration links for upstate ASHP, downstate ASHP, and GSHP are provided in the presentation slides

- The School of Clean Heat is an opportunity for contractors to get a refresher on program practices, walk through application submissions, and ask questions
- About 130 attendees have joined since kickoff in October

Online Intake Tool (OIT) Status Glossary

- ICF has put together a glossary defining project statuses that appear on the OIT. Some statuses of note include:
  - Processing Application – This indicates that the application is under review. If more information or clarification is needed on a particular part, the contractor will receive an Attention/Action Required email notification.
    - After that additional information is received, the status will change to Application Update Received
    - If no response is received within the 90-day window, the status goes to Application Rejected. If the contractor sends in the updated information, the project can still be salvaged from this status.
  - Final Review – This indicates that ICF has completed all the steps within their purview and has passed the application on to the utility for final approval
  - Potential Program Transfer and Transferred Program – These statuses do not come up often. They apply primarily to projects such as large multifamily buildings that ICF does not handle, and which are passed on to a different processing team.
- Some statuses appear outside of the OIT:
  - Ready for Rebate – This status was designed to be shown internally to ICF's systems. It will show up in the OIT as Processing Application. It indicates that ICF has completed its review and is sending the application over to the utility. This appears just before the Final Review status previously mentioned.
  - Flawed – There are a number of internal flawed statuses used to determine which teams need to be giving attention to certain nonconformances. "Flawed" language has been removed from contractor-facing pages and has been replaced with "Attention/Action Required."

Process Cycle Times for Completed Projects

- Previously, ICF has reported this information out on a quarterly basis. Information presented in these presentation slides has been refined to report on a monthly basis.
  - In Q3, process cycle times were 58 days for projects requiring action and 28 days for projects not requiring action
- In the short run, the focus has been on processing older projects, which increases overall process cycle times. As older projects are cleared through, the trend is expected to start going down.
- ICF has been ramping up staffing by adding additional account managers and more processors
  - September and October have posed some challenges, with about 1/3 of all applications for the year being processed in these two months. A crush of applications came through this Fall. This is indicated by the slight rise in process cycle times for projects not requiring action.

- There are variations in timing for each utility. Some utilities have been trending down steadily, with times well below 20 days in some months for projects not requiring action.
- The downward trend is assisted by everyone's aggregate experience – both sides are getting more familiar with the processes and common pitfalls

OIT Improvements

- The industry has expressed a desire for more transparency into progress in updating the OIT, project cycle times, etc.
  - The JMC is committed to providing these updates periodically
- A representative from Dandelion Energy, who is also a member of NY-GEO, submitted a series of slides to this effect
  - The JMC was able to review these slides to get updates in prior to the meeting
- Last month, ICF proposed a series of changes to the OIT in response to stakeholder-raised concerns. After a review of what was presented, it seemed as though the order of items addressed perhaps did not consider the priorities of what stakeholders wanted or needed most. NY-GEO wanted to make sure this was clear to program representatives.
- NY-GEO conducted a survey of AS and GS contractors across the state for their perspective on how these items should be prioritized
  - A diverse selection of contractors participated in the survey – both AS and GS, small outfits and large contractors, etc.
  - NY-GEO took each line item from last month's presentation and requested respondents to label the priority of the items as high, medium, or low
- The item that was highest priority among most respondents was to make the OIT identical across all utilities
  - In the previously shared timeline, this was scheduled to be complete by Q2 of next year. Recognizing that certain elements are heavy IT lifts, the stakeholders would like to emphasize that this is high priority for the industry. Whatever can be done to get there incrementally is appreciated.
  - ICF noted that they are certainly working to make this a reality, but as with any software, some things are harder to do than others. Nothing that is achievable would ever be delayed because it is not a priority. In fact, some things are done earlier because they are readily achievable.
  - The ultimate objective is to get to one common platform across all utilities, which will be accomplished next year. That accomplishment requires more harmonization across utility programs.
  - ICF will take an independent look to see what incremental changes can be scheduled into IT sprints. If any of these incremental changes are higher priority, please communicate that to ICF.
    - NY-GEO noted that application fields being in a different order between utility applications is a big one that might be a simple adjustment
- The survey returned less consensus on which items were highest priority after the first two. The results displayed in the presentation slides bulk together high and medium responses to gain more insight.

- Filtering of the OIT dashboard was discussed as a pain point. Filtering capability has been there for some time, but it does not seem to work beyond the first page of applications.
  - ICF noted that after this item was brought to their attention, they have run a few tests and filtering appears to affect all projects. This may be a change that was requested earlier and implemented fairly recently.
  - It will take some time for an Excel report to be available by simply clicking an "Export" button, but there is a way to copy the entire table so that it can be pasted into Excel.
    - The steps are not intuitive. Please feel free to reach out to your account manager for assistance with this. It may also be covered in a subsequent School of Clean Heat webinar.
- ICF thanked NY-GEO and the other stakeholders for their feedback and their patience. They have gone to their IT teams with many things that sound like they should be simple, and they are not.
  - ICF will continue reporting on these items in subsequent webinars

Verbal Question – NY-GEO

- Where will the OIT Status Glossary be posted for reference? Also, I attended a School of Clean Heat session, and it was helpful and of interest. Where will the schedule be for that? I would like to share with other NY-GEO members.
- ***Response:*** ICF will work on getting a written schedule distributed to NY-GEO. In the meantime, the links provided in the presentation slides and meeting chat feature a drop-down menu that will let the user view and select the particular sessions that are scheduled.
  - In terms of the OIT Status Glossary, this will be posted on the NYS Clean Heat Resources [webpage](#) in such a way that it can be updated periodically. It will also be posted on the front end of the OIT.

OIT Update Considerations
- Regarding IT project timelines and resources, many times it seems like some of the requested changes should be easy to implement fairly quickly.
- However, in the context of the way in which utilities are expected to handle data privacy and personally identifiable information, things become more challenging
  - .NET development has high standards for data security and protection of personal information
    - Legal requirements are in play here, and security is a top priority for utilities
  - "In-flight" development adds additional challenges of ensuring consistency and functionality
  - All changes are important, but some involve a much larger development effort than others

Additional Process Improvements
- NY-GEO had submitted a series of requests to formalize some previous requests and raise additional new ones
- Request 1: Redlines of documents such as the Program Manual to be made available when revisions are filed

- o This request recognizes that there is a specific format needed for DMM filing with the Public Service Commission. Separate from that, several stakeholders had a difficult time parsing through the changes in the most recent Program Manual update. The listing of changes provided separately seemed opaque.
  - o In the future, the JMC is able to share a redline version of documents that compares the new version with the previous version, after the DMM filing has been made, for ease of visibility
- Request 2: A written process for securing electronic payment and timely notice when ACH applications are flawed
  - o This process has been a bit baffling for some that haven't seen a written response or electronic payment showing up
    - ▪ Some aspects have gotten better than in the past, but a new issue is that some ACH payments are arriving as a lump sum without any specifications on which projects are being paid. This can cause some bookkeeping headaches for those that have a large number of installations.
  - o ICF is working on tweaking an internal document outlining the written process for setting up ACH payments so that it can be shared publicly
    - ▪ There have not been many, if any, incoming ACH applications that have been flawed
    - ▪ ICF is also looking for an alternative method to putting project numbers on ACH payments. Part of the issue is that per constraints of the ACH system, only a limited amount of information can be included as part of an ACH transaction
    - ▪ Account managers can quickly pull a list of projects that have been paid. Filtering in the OIT by payment issued may be a workaround as well.
    - ▪ Payment is coming out of the bank ICF uses rather than from ICF directly. Payment status is not really visible to ICF until about a day or so later. ICF has been brainstorming ways to better automate and implement this communication.
    - ▪ The JMC will keep NY-GEO and other interested stakeholders in the loop on this topic between meetings
- Request 3: Defined criteria for required photos in the Clean Heat application and field assessment process
  - o Photos included in the School of Clean Heat webinar were clear and helpful. NY-GEO will try to get word out to other folks that this is available.
- Request 4: Monthly invitations to be sent to all past participants in the stakeholder sessions, as well as NYSERDA's Heat Smart programs
  - o The JMC already has practices in place to include these parties on the distribution list each month. If there are individuals who are not being included, please let the JMC know.
- Request 5: Provide QA feedback, such as a webinar and subsequent recording, on common field assessment issues and solutions/available training
  - o This was touched on a bit today with the photo examples of safe access and secure equipment. It was interesting to note that most nonconformances were coming from AS projects and that GS seems to be doing well.

- o The JMC plans to include similar content in future webinars, based off of feedback received and data analyzed from the field assessment program
  - o Recordings may be a bit difficult based on what is needed to have those ultimately posted and approved. The JMC provides meeting minutes, presentation slides, and additional notes to serve as reference.
  - o The JMC notes stakeholders' request to post the agenda in advance if QA topics will be included, as some contractors may participate specifically for those kinds of sessions
- Request 6: A glossary that describes terms ICF uses in the application process so that contractors can clearly see next actions required
  - o The glossary shared today is very helpful. ICF will pull this document out and post it on the NYS Clean Heat Resources page and the OIT documents page.
- Request 7: This request relates to Request 6 above *(please see the presentation slides)*
- Request 8: Contractors have too frequently been getting "flawed" ratings for correct applications, reflecting inexperience and lack of knowledge from ICF's reviewers. Is there an option where someone more experienced within ICF could review a change before release? Would this slow things down?
  - o ICF noted that these situations have arisen from a combination of several details: Due to the exponential increase in application volume in the past year, there is a lot of new staff that has onboarded with ICF. The process as it stands now is in fact multilayer – if a Tier 1 processor flags something as flawed, it gets reviewed by a Tier 2 processor. This is happening constantly and has slowed down the review process.
    - ▪ Training is occurring on an ongoing basis, and the account management team is in constant communication with the processing team
    - ▪ ICF is working diligently to get all staff up to speed and to work out the kinks. They thank the stakeholders and contractors for their patience.
    - ▪ The key issue here is that the volume of applications is still quite large at the moment.
  - o The issue of process cycle time will come up every month – the JMC will continue to discuss this with stakeholders

Resources, Support, and Next Steps

- There will be one more meeting before the end of the year, on Thursday, December 16
- Links to helpful resources, as well as contact information for the program-wide inboxes and utility program representatives are available in the presentation slides

Many thanks to everyone for joining the meeting this morning. Have a happy and healthy Thanksgiving holiday.