

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Community Energy Workshop participants were particularly insightful when asked to provide MGE with some input and ideas on how to engage and partner with the community. Community leaders and others who play vital roles in community development and engagement weighed in on the importance of engaging in authentic and transparent partnerships; the value of demonstrating a commitment to the partnerships through multiple, two-way exchanges; and the importance of "meeting people where they are" by engaging in a variety of community partnerships and building a strong network of partnerships.

Engage With Authenticity

A priority consideration offered by Workshop participants when discussing successful community engagement and partnerships was the level of perceived authenticity each participant brought to the relationship. Several factors were identified for gauging the validity of the engagement, including how personalized the interaction was, the level of trust between/among those involved and the roles and expectations of each party. Participants suggested maintaining and nurturing healthy and mutually beneficial relationships would require ongoing commitment and engagement, transparency and accountability.

- *"Use the local community to carry the joint agenda. Must have the end game in mind, not just the process, recognition is important, how to efficiently create relationships with people, because so hard to reach people's attention."*
- *"Have different communities come together for dinner, and they've had people give information directly to them. It feels more personal to be targeted in person. Media is great, but more one-on-one contact they get more out of it."*
- *"Utility company is local, there is sense of pride, trust needs to be there."*
- *"Act as a possible connection point between communities on projects that could effect multiple neighborhoods."*
- *"More employee lunch and learns at businesses to reach end consumers about issues that impact their personal energy use (meet them where they are – at work!)."*
- *"There is a large variety across age, education, race, their level of technology usage. How do you reach all these group in the most useful way – manage, different strategies?"*
- *"MGE should keep in mind different communities and how to take into account different aspects. Take into account the culture of the client; understand the culture; go to them where they are."*

Acknowledge the Importance and Value of Engagement

Workshop participants reminded MGE that community engagement was a two-pronged effort, requiring both sharing and collecting input and feedback. One factor for successful, ongoing engagement, as described by many participants, was the acknowledgement that the input – and the effort to provide the input – was valued and valuable. Ongoing, evolving collaboration and communication were suggested as keys to ensuring long-term success in community engagement.

- *"Demonstrate the impact of the input. MGE should show consumers they were listening and responded and that people have been heard. That way, people will be more willing to engage again."*
- *"Listening is step one, be accountable respond to what is heard."*
- *"There is a difference between asking for input and taking that into consideration, and collaborating. MGE should be clear in terms of their expectations of what they are looking for from the community regarding engagement."*
- *"Talk about who benefits. Goals have to be about more than energy. If you are engaging community. Community expects change."*

Build a Strong Network of Partnerships

Building a broad and diverse network of community partnerships was advice that came through loud and clear from Workshop participants. Establishing mutually beneficial and supportive relationships with a range of groups and organizations was seen as a necessity for reaching the community's shared energy goals. Participants recommended partnerships with specific public and private groups and organizations as well as with a range of populations from various demographics. Regardless of the kind of specific partnership that was formed, participants recommended the engagement be authentic and "meet people where they are" rather than expecting them to be exactly where MGE is.

- *"Use the power of the Madison neighborhoods and the non-profits as we are well known for the strengths of both in this community. Getting messages out and then actions. Use other groups like the Clean Lakes Alliance to get coalescence around key issues...used 50 stakeholder groups, scientific approach to see the key contributors to the pollution etc. Use that model to engage different groups of people to actually take the action to meet the goals."*
- *"Identify community validators and leaders, ask them to become role models in energy efficiency instead of traditional 'community outreach.'"*
- *"City, United Way, County – Partner with them."*
- *"Do renewable energy ball. You must come up with some creative event that MGE sponsors to bring creative minds together. Ramp up information and education in a fun way. Attract young people."*
- *"Green challenge initiative is good project to build upon. Nothing should be seen in isolation. Don't just talk about energy but incorporate other needs of the community: waste, schools, etc. Bring in other industry leaders and agencies to create connection to the community."*
- *"What does MGE not do well? Could they outsource those areas and allow those other organizations be the experts? They don't have to be one size fits all."*
- *"Lots of events and student organizations on campus...campus leadership could get more involved in MGE partnerships."*

Continue to Invest in the Community

MGE has a long history of investing in and supporting the community. Workshop participants not only acknowledged and commended the utility for that role, they also pointed out the opportunities that that kind of community immersion and support offers for creating authentic, valuable community change. With this groundwork well laid, participants offered several suggestions to MGE for building upon that foundation as the community works together to reach the Energy 2030 goals as well as other shared interests.

- *"MGE's philanthropic efforts help the community."*
- *"Community event sponsorship is viewed as a definite positive."*
- *"MGE should put down its roots with each different cultural community. It is a mutual benefit between producer and consumer."*
- *"MGE already gives back to the community but keep it up and even do more as MGE makes even more money they should give even more back like they did for the Boys and Girls Club."*
- *"Good model is the American Family Dream Bank, very visible and powerful. Make sure what is done is visible to get community recognition. Happy to be [MGE's] residential and business customer, because what I witness in the community as MGE's partnerships, feel proud to be their customer."*