

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

The concept of considering all actions, activities and planning through a lens of equity and diversity was prevalent throughout the Community Energy Workshop discussions. Regardless of the topic being discussed, the importance of acknowledging and addressing the varying needs of diverse populations was on people's minds. But, in addition to using that lens when designing new products and services, setting energy goals or planning for the future, there was also a strong message about how the concept of equity and diversity is seen as a critical piece of the fabric of MGE's role as a community energy company and as part of its own business practices.

This section includes an overview of some of the comments made that address recommendations and considerations participants offered for how MGE as an employer, a business partner and a community energy company can and should focus on operating equitably in a highly diverse community comprised of populations with different needs, capacities and goals.

Best Practices

At the very basic level, participants made several recommendations for bolstering MGE's business practices when it comes to hiring, training and engaging employees from different ethnic, cultural and economic backgrounds. There was also a recognition of the leadership role that MGE could and should play in discussions of racial differences and disparities. While some recognized MGE's current level of community engagement and equity and diversity efforts, others suggested a need for expanding those efforts to more accurately reflect the community.

- *"No reference where Madison is racially. How can MGE move the dial? Could MGE address how they can move the whole community forward?"*
- *"No talking about race problem because it produces division, what is MGE's role in the community?" Acknowledge racial divide. Are they solving problems or creating new ones?"*
- *"Two words important going forward: balance and equity. I bet we would find a chunk of this room that thinks we need to be 100% renewable. Another set would cheer moving the April 15th [winter heat moratorium] date up. Any conversation in Madison these days is about equity, and MGE needs to have that explicitly part of their conversation. We want to see it on the themes here."*
- *"Seeing the same people doing community outreach over the years. Not expanding."*
- *"Have MGE staff diversity represent that of the customers instead of a 'bunch of white guys...'"*
- *"Make sure that diversity in workforce does not mean that you have a large number of minorities working for MGE, but that they are only in the lower paying jobs. The middle level and upper paying jobs should be equally diverse. Will require investment and commitment and a new way of thinking from MGE."*
- *"Best service would be for poor – advocating on their behalf, including landlords."*
- *"The workforce of 2030 for MGE should look like the population it serves in 2030. MGE should look to invest in the populations that need extra training and assistance to gain the skills to provide the proper workers."*

Intentional Engagement

Advice and recommendations for how to reach diverse audiences were abundant from Workshop participants. Reaching out and engaging in culturally relevant practices, listening to a wide range of voices that come from many different perspectives and intentionally forming collaborations that would help ease racial, cultural and/or economic divides were all facets of the suggestions offered. And, in the discussions where participants recognized MGE's current level of commitment to these efforts and complimented or acknowledged their work, the suggestion to do more was a key message.

- *"Need to understand unique community values so the message works for that community. Do this by employees being ambassadors."*

- *"Of the things that I have learned in 20 years of engaging communities that few people engage with is that people learn best from people that look like them and come from the same place as them. MGE needs to take that to heart moving forward either in staff, hiring, videos. And it cannot just be a one-time thing, it has to be ongoing and move resources into those communities. e.g. translation, understanding different media outreach like YouTube, radio, pop culture, or folk tales with elders. Go beyond what you know, and invest in hiring other people and speaking the language of other communities."*
- *"Create employee resource groups/liaisons within MGE for various demographics so they can work on workplace and outside community engagement issues and make sure they would be a trusted face with communities of affinity."*
- *"Need to address young vs. old, educated vs. less educated, well-off vs. less well-off. The community is very diverse."*
- *"Need: How do we reach populations that are not at this meeting (transgender=0%, homeless, mental illness)? Those groups use energy, too."*
- *"Remember different communities have different needs and the same strategies may not work for all the same. Create task forces for each community to gather information and lead discussions in that group."*
- *"Make sure you step out of your comfort zone – don't keep asking the same small circle of minorities you know for their feedback."*

Implementation

Some of the discussion surrounding equity and diversity focused on the actual implementation of the Energy 2030 framework. Concern was raised about how all populations would be able to benefit from and contribute to efforts to meet the community's energy goals. There was a keen interest in bringing everyone along so they have a clear understanding of the goals, the individual and collective benefit of reaching those goals and the pathways to reach those goals.

- *"Ensure future moves are received well by all of the different people in the community – 'implement intentionally.'"*
- *"Madison's building growth must meet demographic changes. Is everyone going to have the same access to energy? Seniors shouldn't have to make difficult choices that affect their health in regards to energy."*
- *Equity is big issue; traditional energy has been tiring, but also afraid that people will be left behind by advances in tech and prices."*
- *"Seniors and young families, how they will be affected in the future?"*
- *"MGE progressive action for helping with vets, disabled, low-income people."*
- *"How the plan will impact low-income and Latino communities?"*
- *"How they can reach minority communities and educate communities about how these plans will work?"*