

2021 IRP: Stakeholder Interview Summary

05/18/2020

Background

In May 2020, in advance of the 2021 Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) process, the project team conducted interviews with 15 stakeholders who were past participants in the 2019 IRP process. The purpose of the interviews was to understand their experience with previous IRP's with Puget Sound Energy (PSE), their priorities, preferred methods of engagement for the 2021 IRP and gather suggestions for how to make the engagement process more inclusive for individuals and organizations interested in the IRP. A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A. The interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes each and included representatives from 14 different regulatory bodies, municipalities, non-profit advocacy groups and renewable energy groups, such as:

- CENSE
- City of Bellevue
- Climate Solutions
- FortisBC
- Invenergy
- King County
- Northwest Gas Association
- NW Energy Coalition
- Office of the Attorney General, Public Counsel Unit
- Orion Renewable Energy Group
- The Sierra Club
- Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC)
- Western Grid Group
- Vashon Climate Action Group

How PSE will use feedback from interviews

Feedback gathered from the stakeholder interviews will be applied to the 2021 IRP process in three primary initiatives:

1. Ensuring PSE engages with participants in an inclusive and convenient way that addresses and potentially removes barriers to involvement, which will result in robust participation from diverse groups that are representative of the communities PSE serves.
2. Preserving and improving upon positive stakeholder experiences in prior IRP processes.
3. Incorporating stakeholder perspectives into the objectives outlined in the Public Participation Plan developed for the 2021 IRP.

Interview summary

Topics of greatest interest

While interviewed stakeholders have different priorities for the 2021 IRP process based upon their professional roles and personal interests, the following topics were mentioned most frequently as areas of interest:

- Load and price forecasting
- Implementation of CETA (Clean Energy Transformation Act)
- Social cost of carbon
- Electrification and renewables
- Demand response planning
- Electric and gas transmission

Inclusive engagement of stakeholders

Interview participants recognized that stakeholders from previous IRP processes were a homogenous group of largely White individuals. When asked who was missing from prior IRP processes (either individuals or perspectives), interviewees identified the following primary groups:

- Representatives from tribes and indigenous communities
- Everyday ratepayers, particularly individuals from low-income and Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities
- Environmental justice advocates, specifically the following groups:
 - 350 Seattle
 - Energy Project
 - Front and Centered
 - Got Green
 - Mother Africa
 - Puget Sound Sage
- Land use planners from local municipalities

Almost all interviewees noted that many groups have limited policy staff and competing organizational priorities. Time and budget constraints often present a significant barrier to participation in the IRP. To mitigate this barrier, interviewees suggested PSE provide a monetary stipend for individuals or organizations representing marginalized communities. One interviewee clarified that to ensure participants can speak uninhibitedly, the stipend should come from a third party instead of from PSE directly. Interviewees also agreed with PSE's decision to shorten IRP meetings for the 2021 process to improve equitable participation. Finally, stakeholders thought umbrella groups such as Front and Centered may be able to participate more regularly if PSE is able to do outreach to their individual members and invite them to the process.

Preserving effective participation strategies

When asked what went well in previous IRP processes, stakeholder interviewees reported the following strategies resulted in effective engagement:

- **Sending materials at least one week in advance of meetings.** Many interviewees reported they spend a significant amount of time preparing for meetings by reading the shared materials.
- **Posting meeting details as far in advance as possible.** Stakeholders expressed a strong interest in planning their participation for the topics that most interest them.
- **An option to call into meetings.** For those who could not attend in-person, they appreciated the opportunity to dial into meetings and participate from their physical office spaces. Stakeholders expressed that PSE has consistently supported remote participation and ensured attendees were able to contribute and feel heard.
- **Providing engagement opportunities for less technical people.** Some stakeholders reported having a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and separate meetings for the public or less technical audiences showed good awareness that not everyone can feel comfortable or contribute when conversations are only technical in nature.
- **The right PSE staff presented.** PSE has gotten increasingly stronger at matching up the best subject matter experts to present on each topic. One stakeholder said they value when company leadership is on-hand during meetings, so stakeholders see how PSE involves its decision-makers in planning and analysis work.
- **Access to PSE staff.** The most engaged stakeholders feel they can call the IRP team and ask follow-up questions or make requests.

- **Independent facilitation.** Most stakeholders shared that an objective facilitator to manage the process, not the outcome, builds trust that communities and organizations will be heard.

Suggestions to build trust and transparency

- **Ensuring transparency in all aspects of the 2021 IRP process.** Nearly all interviewees mentioned transparency as a key component to involvement in the IRP process. Stakeholders communicated a strong desire for PSE to share the data used in the models and the questions and answers submitted during meetings. In past experiences, stakeholders reported feeling as though the IRP process was “a black box” where the inputs, including stakeholder feedback, were unknown or not clear to participants. To manage the proprietary nature of some of the data, one stakeholder suggested involving a third-party reviewer to analyze the inputs, under the conditions of a non-disclosure agreement.
- **Acknowledging what was challenging in prior IRP processes and closing the loop on unfinished agenda items from the 2019 IRP.** Some stakeholders described disappointment that the 2019 process did not result in an IRP filing. Outstanding meeting topics from the 2019 process, including the social cost of carbon inputs as well as data and assumption sharing for forecast models, still feel unresolved and resulted in an unsatisfying public participation experience. Many stakeholders were receptive to the idea of PSE acknowledging these components and presenting a different approach in the first public webinar.
- **A desire for more opportunities to Collaborate with PSE.** Many interviewees shared familiarity with the public participation spectrum and other best practices regarding public participation. Stakeholders are interested in more opportunities to Collaborate, rather than operate at the Inform level as they have with aspects of past IRP processes. Stakeholders expressed a strong preference to have insight into IRP development and be in conversation with PSE throughout the process. Several stakeholders said, “We want to see the sausage being made.” One stakeholder shared an observation that one-way dialogue (e.g. listening sessions) strains relationships with participants. Most interviewed stakeholders reported they expect to spend significant time engaging with the 2021 IRP process, but participation for some may decrease if they don’t see their input being considered by PSE.
- **Establishing expectations for feedback processes.** Almost all interviewees agreed PSE needs to demonstrate how stakeholder feedback was used at iterative points in the IRP process. In addition, stakeholders are asking for more clarity in when PSE is seeking feedback and when the results of the feedback would be shared back to stakeholders. These two improvements may help participants feel more heard and would prepare them in advance for the topics where PSE is asking for input.
- **Inclusive engagement and equitable participation is a priority for many stakeholders.** Stakeholders are very attuned to representatives and groups who are missing from the existing IRP audience, and many are working to implement more equitable practices in their own professional environments.
- **Making it easy to see where stakeholder feedback is or is not incorporated in analyses.** If feedback is considered at iterative points, stakeholders requested clear updates that explain what PSE did with the input received.
- **Democratizing the use of time during public meetings.** Many stakeholders reported that in past meetings, some stakeholders dominated the space, which resulted in insufficient time for some IRP topics and left other stakeholders feeling as though their perspectives were not represented in the 2019 IRP. Interviewees suggested establishing and communicating meeting

protocols to ensure all participants have an opportunity to share their perspectives and ask questions.

- **Improving accessibility to non-technical audiences.** Stakeholders agreed that the IRP process is technical in nature and ensuring accessibility to non-technical audiences would improve equitable participation. Interviewees agreed that including technical and non-technical audiences in discussions together was also important from an equity standpoint. Offering information in different formats (e.g. print, digital, in-person) also helps make content more accessible to everyone.
- **A strong desire for PSE to show leadership in implementing the Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA).** Many interviewees want to see PSE working directly with community-based policy leaders in implementing the new clean energy directive.

Engagement tools in a COVID-19 environment

Interviewed participants acknowledged that PSE is beginning the necessary and important 2021 IRP process during the unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholders understood the need to convert public meetings to a virtual setting and reported a strong willingness to participate in webinars, meetings and workshops related to the IRP process. Interviewees agreed that an updated website would be a helpful way to share information but expressed a strong desire to receive relevant content via email, or at least an email notification when new documents are posted to the website.

Appendix A: Stakeholder interview questions

1. Motivations

What is important to you about integrated resource planning?

2. Understanding reaction and attitudes to the 2019 IRP public process

Thinking back to the 2019 IRP process, what components of the TAG and public involvement process went well? Went poorly?

Did PSE make any adjustments during the 2019 IRP which helped increase your participation on the TAG, or helped you feel heard? (such as the webinar option, the in-person meetings, confirming your availability in advance, etc.)

What was one thing do you think would have improved the 2019 IRP public process?

3. How stakeholders prefer to be involved

How much time and effort do you anticipate spending on reviewing and providing input on the 2021 IRP?

Given the new environment we are in with COVID-19, what would be the preferred method of sharing information with you regarding the 2021 IRP (email, in-person, website, webinars, etc.)?

What are your thoughts on providing input on the IRP through GoToMeeting? Webinars? Workshops?

4. Primary interests with the 2021 IRP

Which components of the 2021 IRP are you most interested in, and why?

For topics you are most interested in, would you be interested in participating in workshops webinars and remote meetings?

For topics you are less interested in, would you still want to use your time and expertise to provide input to PSE?

5. Equity

Who is missing from the IRP process (a person or a perspective)? What ideas or resources do you have to reach those individuals most effectively?