Austin Energy Workshop #3 Workshop Summary

Austin Energy Headquarters (4815 Mueller Blvd. Austin, TX 78723)
Thursday, Aug. 22, 2024 | 11:15 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Key Workshop Takeaways

- **Reliability is the community's top priority across the board.** In the survey responses, resource allocation tradeoffs exercises, and small group discussions, participants indicated that Reliability is the top community value to consider for the Resource Generation Plan.
- **Equity continues to be a major theme and discussion point throughout** the workshops. Participants have expressed the importance of keeping equity top of mind when considering the other community values.
- **The impacts of outages can be detrimental to vulnerable communities,** low-income families, and especially for the medically compromised who rely on power and automation for their homes and life-sustaining devices.
- **Austin Energy's environmental sustainability leadership should be applauded.** Stakeholders acknowledged Austin Energy's investments in clean energy, energy efficiency, demand response and more, and additional efforts should prioritize reliability and resilience.

Workshop Overview

Austin Energy hosted their third in a series of workshops on Thursday, Aug. 22, 2024, from 11:15 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Austin Energy Headquarters (4815 Mueller Blvd. Austin, TX 78723). The goals of Workshop #3 were to have participants explore trade-offs between affordability, reliability and environmental sustainability, and to discuss equity as it relates to how those three affect the most vulnerable. We have been talking about trade-offs throughout this series of workshops, and while it would be ideal to have 100% clean, 100% reliable and 100% affordable with truly equitable outcomes, the exercises and surveys featured in this workshop allowed participants to express their risk tolerances with real-world examples. This workshop was recorded and streamed live on ATXN. Due to technical difficulties, a Webex link was not available.

When attendees arrived, they were given their first survey, the Impact Survey, which asked questions regarding the effects of affordability, reliability/resiliency and environmental sustainability to them personally and for those who their organization serves or represents. To see a preview of the results of the Impact Survey, please see Page 2 of this report. Please see *Workshop #3 Results-Survey Responses Excel spreadsheet* for a comprehensive look at all the survey responses. After attendees spent time completing the Impact Survey, Rifeline provided a brief presentation to report out on the takeaways from Workshop #2. While the surveys provided during Workshop #3 were available through physical paper handouts, a QR code was available for each of the four breakout groups to scan and take the surveys online through a SurveyMonkey link.

The participants were then introduced to the Resource Planning Tradeoffs Exercise, titled A Game of Beans. The goal of the exercise was for participants to provide valuable feedback on how Austin Energy should prioritize tradeoffs among community values. Using finite resources, or beans, participants created allocations for the planning values as an individual, and as a group. This exercise provided insight into how participants viewed the tradeoffs between affordability, reliability/resiliency and environmental sustainability. To review the instructions of the exercise, the individual and small group allocation scores, and the small group report out takeaways, please see Page 3 of this report. Additionally, see *Workshop #3 Results-Survey Responses Excel spreadsheet* for a comprehensive look at the Resource Planning Tradeoffs Exercise scores.

Following the tradeoffs exercise, Ronnie Mendoza, Austin Energy's Manager of Customer Assistance Programs, gave a presentation on the Texas Energy Poverty Research Institute (TEPRI)'s report on energy equity and energy insecurity, which highlights values already echoed by what's being discussed in the workshops. The presentation also reviewed the policy recommendations TEPRI offered in their report. After the presentation, participants were handed a second survey titled, Most Vulnerable Survey. This survey asked participants to describe in more detail who they thought of when they considered those most vulnerable and how equity is applied to the three community values of affordability, reliability/resiliency and environmental sustainability. After completing the Most Vulnerable Survey, each breakout group facilitator guided their group members through those same series of questions. Each small group then reported out to the room on what their respective group discussed. To see a preview of the results of the Most Vulnerable Survey, please see Page 7 of this report. Please see *Workshop #3 Results-Survey Responses Excel spreadsheet* for a comprehensive look at the Most Vulnerable Survey responses.

Participants were handed a final survey titled, Objectives Survey. This survey had a list of three draft objectives under each community value of affordability, reliability/resiliency, and environmental sustainability. Participants were instructed to circle one objective that best aligned with their/their organization's perspective(s) out of each category or were given an option to write their own. All surveys were collected by the Rifeline team. The Objectives Survey responses have been included in the *Workshop #3 Results-Survey Responses Excel spreadsheet*; however, those responses will be further explored in Workshop #4, and therefore will be included in the summary report for Workshop #4. Closing remarks included letting participants know that Workshop #4 is scheduled for Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024. Participants were also informed that one of the agenda items for Workshop #4 will be to discuss the results of the Objectives Survey. There were 24 participants and five members of the public who attended Workshop #3 in person.

Here is the recorded ATXN link for Workshop #3: https://austintx.new.swagit.com/videos/313139

Impact Survey: Recap of Responses

Question #1: What is the impact to you if you lost power for the following timeframes:

1 hour – minimal, inconvenience, annoying

8 hours – somewhat substantial, financial impacts, can't work, painful, pharmaceuticals at risk

48 hours – financial impacts, devastating, relocate, no work

Question #2: What is the impact to the people or companies served by the organization you represent loses power for the following timeframes:

1 hour – loss of revenue, damage to equipment, inconvenient, could endanger our residence due to depend on equipment

8 hours – loss of revenue, possible loss of customers, damage to equipment, disruption to care

48 hours – devastating, loss of revenue, damage, life-threatening

Question #3: What is the impact to you if your monthly electric bill increased by the following amounts:

$1-$5 per month: minimal, inconsequential, depends, if it gets compounded

$5-$10 per month: minimal, inconvenient, I would need to re-evaluate consumption

Question #4: What is the impact to the people or companies served by the organization you represent if their monthly bill increased by the following amounts:

$1-$5 per month: very little, modest, impactful when you look at scale, low-income already burdened

$5-$10 per month: impactful, significant, change spending habits

Question #5: When there is a day with high smog, on a scale of 1 to 5, how impacted are you? (Circle one and add any comments to describe the impact)

2 – Slightly affected, 1 – Not affected at all, 3 – Moderately affected, 5 – Extremely affected

Describe Impact: Limit outdoor activities, asthma can flare, allergies get worse which impacts my ability to work and exercise, can lead to getting a sinus infection, I worry about long-term health impacts

Question #6: When there is a day with high smog, on a scale of 1 to 5, how impacted are those served by the organization you represent? (Circle one and add any comments to describe the impact)

2 – Slightly affected, 3 – Moderately affected, 5 – Extremely affected

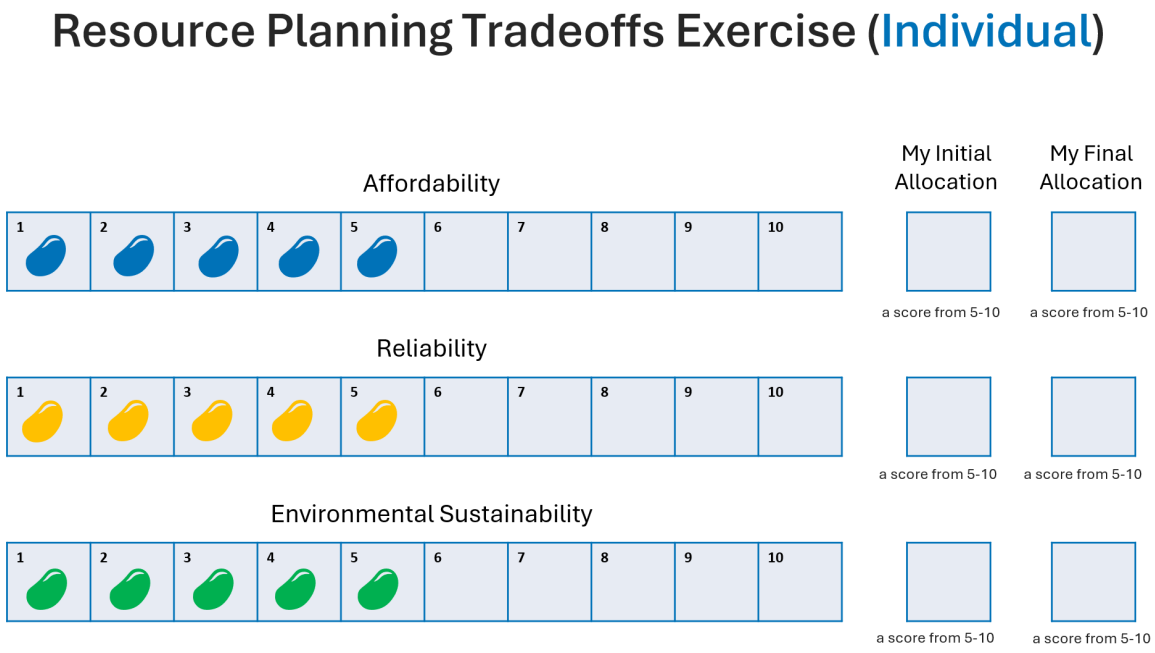
Describe Impact: Limit outdoor activities, the medically vulnerable with asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (CPOD), allergies, and long-term health problems, may mean higher medical costs

Resource Planning Tradeoffs Exercise – A Game of Beans

Game Instructions

Each participant was given an individual gameboard and ten jellybeans. The gameboard shows three bars, or values, labeled: Affordability, Reliability, and Environmental Sustainability. Each of the three rows shows ten boxes, with five already shaded in with an image of a bean. These bars represent a range for an allocation, or score, from 1 to 10. There are already 5 shaded in jellybeans for each value, so participants were instructed to allocate their 10 jellybeans amongst the 15 remaining empty boxes. An allocation of 10 for any of the values represents a Generation Plan that achieves the highest possible performance for that value. For example, an allocation of a 10 for Environmental Sustainability might represent a plan with a 100% sustainable portfolio. However, this would mean the participant has less beans to allocate for the Affordability and Reliability values. Please see Figure 1 below for the Individual Allocation Gameboard:

Figure 1



Individual Allocation Results

Participants were instructed to do an initial individual allocation. To calculate the allocation for each value bar, every participant's allocation was added together and then divided by the number of participants who completed a gameboard (23). This calculation revealed the average for each

value bar. The score for the **Affordability value bar was 7.91**, with allocations ranging from 7 to 10. The score for the **Reliability value bar was 9.08**, with allocations ranging from 8 to10. The score for the **Environmental Sustainability value bar was 7.95**, with allocations ranging from 6 to 10. Out of the three value bars, **Reliability received the highest score** followed by Environmental Sustainability and Affordability, respectively. The Environmental Sustainability value bar received the widest range of allocations out of the three with a range of 6 to 10. As a reminder, please see *Workshop #3 Results-Survey Responses Excel Spreadsheet* for a comprehensive look at the individual gameboard results.

Breakout Group Allocations

After participants completed their individual allocation, each small group was instructed to complete a Group Gameboard. To complete this gameboard, every participant in that group shared their individual allocation, and a facilitator added them together. The total sum of each value bar was then divided by the number of participants within that group. Please see Figure 2 below for the Group Gameboard:

Figure 2

Small Group Allocation Results

Please see Figures 3-6 for each breakout group's allocation results:

Figure 3 – Red, Group 1

	Group 1 - Red	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Group Allocation	Reallocation
Individual Allocation	Affordability	10	8	7	9	9	43	8.6	8.6
	Reliability	9	8	9	10	9	45	9	9
	Sustainability	6	9	9	6	6	36	7.2	7.2

Figure 4 – Blue, Group 2

	Group 2 - Blue	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total	Group Allocation	Reallocation
Individual Allocation	Affordability	9	7	8	8	8	7	7	54	7.7	7.7
	Reliability	9	10	9	9	9	9	9	64	9.1	9.1
	Sustainability	7	8	8	8	8	9	9	57	8.1	8.1

Figure 5 – Yellow, Group 3

	Group 3 - Yellow	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	Group Allocation	Reallocation
Individual Allocation	Affordability	8	8	7	7	8	8	46	7.6	7.8
	Reliability	10	8	9	8	9	10	54	9	9
	Sustainability	7	9	9	10	8	7	50	8.3	8.2

Figure 6 – Green, Group 4

	Group 4 - Green	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Group Allocation	Reallocation
Individual Allocation	Affordability	7	8	8	8	8	39	7.8	7.8
	Reliability	8	10	9	10	8	47	9.4	9.4
	Sustainability	8	7	8	7	9	39	7.8	7.8

For every group, **Reliability was their highest allocated value bar**, the range being between 9 and 9.4. **Environmental Sustainability came in second** for three of the groups (Group 2, Group 3, and Group 4) while **Affordability was second for two of the groups** (Group 1 and Group 4). Environmental Sustainability had the widest range of scores from 7.2 to 8.2. After facilitators calculated each breakout group's scores, the facilitators asked participants within each group if they would like to adjust the group scores based on feedback they heard from their fellow group participants. As a result, Group 3 (Yellow) was the only group that adjusted their allocation, shifting points to increase Affordability and lower Environmental Sustainability. Group 3's Affordability score increased from 7.6 to 7.8, while their Environmental Sustainability score decreased from 8.3 to 8.2. This is reflected in the "Reallocation" column in Figure 5.

Individual Reallocation Results

The final stage of the Resource Planning Tradeoffs Exercise included instructing all participants to go back to their Individual Allocation Gameboards and complete the "My Final Allocation" column on the far right of the page (see Figure 1). The purpose of this column was to see if, based on the conversations participants had within their small groups, anyone wanted to change or adjust their individual allocations. For the Affordability value bar, two participants raised their scores (indicated by green highlight) and two participants lowered their scores (indicated by yellow highlight). For the Reliability value bar, two participants raised their scores to 10. For Environmental Sustainability, four participants lowered their score, and one raised their score. To review the specific scores, please see *Workshop #3 Results-Survey Responses Excel Spreadsheet*.

Texas Energy Poverty Research Institute (TEPRI) Report Presentation Takeaways

- TEPRI's report on energy equity and energy insecurity highlighted values which echo those already being discussed in the workshops: energy affordability, energy reliability and resilience, clean energy access (sustainability).
- The following results show the percentage of respondents who ranked each value as their top priority:
    - Priorities for LMI households from highest to lowest—
        - Affordability- 50%
        - Resiliency- 27%
        - Sustainability- 17%
        - Reliability- 8%
- TEPRI offered policy recommendations:
    - Enhance access to energy assistance programs through education and outreach, programs, and financial incentives
    - Address reliability/resilience through infrastructure investments, supporting community resilience hubs, and public awareness
    - Promote clean energy adoption through education and outreach programs

Most Vulnerable Survey

Question #1: When you think of equity and/or those experiencing energy insecurity in Austin Energy's service territory, who or what demographics do you think of specifically? Please describe.

- Fixed incomes, elderly, those with medical needs, those with disabilities, those dependent on electric medical equipment

- Low income, $30,000/year or less or $50,000 or less for a family at or below 60% Median Family Income (MFI), residents in the Eastern Crescent, Black and brown communities generally, students housed in higher education facilities, the unhoused, non-English speakers, the working poor, new immigrants, single-family households
- Small businesses
- Tenants without a say in energy efficiency

Question #2: When you think of equity, how do you relate it to the community values outlined in Austin Energy's Mission?

Affordability –
- Give more discounts to lower-income residents
- Provide equitable access to service that is not a privilege, but rather a right
- Austin Energy's higher-income individuals should help reduce the energy burden for those with low-income
- Income-based tiered rate structure
- Rebates and incentives targeted towards LI households, renters and multifamily owners

Reliability/Resiliency –
- Provide dependable access to resources, year-round, with ever-increasing environmental climate
- Transparency and communication to better protect medically vulnerable and elderly
- All areas and neighborhoods should have the same assurance that their power will remain on, this could be life or death for some
- Focus on those that need it most

Environmental Sustainability –
- Equity should be considered not just among Austin residents but with a global perspective, providing access while remaining conscientious of long-term environmental impacts
- Neighborhoods near Austin Energy's assets
- Austin Energy is already doing an excellent job, should be a focus, but not at the expense of affordability and reliability
- Low-income and communities of color bear the impact of pollution
- Fine particulate matter and atmospheric oxidizing capacity pollutants have direct and meaningful health impacts
- It's a balance, help with low-income solar and tenants' access to clean energy

Question #3: If we were looking at equity, which one of Austin Energy's mission pillars should be prioritized the most? (Circle one)

Reliability/Resiliency – 10 selections

Affordability – 5 selections

Environmental Sustainability – 3 selections

Additional comments:

- We should prioritize all things that help with equity
- We can have it all, we shouldn't prioritize

Question #4: Do you have any other advice regarding equity for Austin Energy?

- Provide equity awareness to the public, improve communication
- Have a separate consideration for equity in each category so it is always front and center
- The "always be prepared" mantra puts an undue burden on individuals
- Invest in battery storage technology like (base power) for low-income residents where Austin Energy controls it just like a thermostat
- The carbon-free approach, while eliminating fence line pollution, jeopardizes affordability and reliability by limiting dispatchable generation assets. Without assets, the utility minimizes black start capability, voltage support, rolling brownout pollution and exposes itself to load-zone price separation
- Higher base rate so rebates for low-income areas become possible
- Metrics/state of Customer Assistance Programs should be made public – measure true success of the program
- Automation of life sustaining equipment