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# Dissecting the True Meaning of comm

BY JOY DITTO, PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION



According to the New World Encyclopedia, the word **COMMUNITY** “is derived from the Latin *communitas* (meaning the same), which is in turn derived from *communis*, which means “common, public, shared by all or many.” *Communis* comes from a combination of the Latin prefix *con-* (which means “together”) and the word *munis* (which has to do with performing services).” The reference to *munis*, which is often the shorthand, albeit not all-inclusive, reference to public power, made me wonder about the etymology of the word **MUNICIPALITY**. According to Etymonline.com, the word **MUNICIPAL** is “of or pertaining to the local self-government or corporation of a city or town, 1540s, from French *municipal*, from Latin *municipalis* “pertaining to a citizen of a free town, of a free town,” also “of a petty town, provincial, from *municipium* “community, municipality, free town, city whose citizens have the privileges of Roman citizens but are governed by their own laws,” from *municeps* “native, citizen, inhabitant of a free town.”

# municipality

Cool, huh? Municipalities are free towns that have self-government and communities are characterized by everyone sharing in the freedoms and privileges enabled by such self-governance. Sometimes, words convey volumes. These concepts underpin who we are, or at least who and what we aspire to be, in public power. This idea that each community, literally powered by our not-for-profit, highly reliable and affordable utilities, has unique characteristics that require self-governance is such a foundational concept to public power. But at the same time, the community overlay invites this contradictory idea of collective benefits within each municipality (or service territory). What an interesting juxtaposition of uniqueness/freedom and public/common/shared by all. We straddle both in public power communities because we understand the benefits of both: one drives innovation and excellence while the other drives teamwork, collaboration, and shared outcomes.

What becomes a bit more challenging is when we band together in a larger community of communities – like we do via APPA – because we have to find the commonality while acknowledging the unique attributes every town, city, or service territory brings. Even more challenging is when we have to craft a state or federal law that acknowledges the bespoke na-

ture of each of our communities. That is so difficult, especially as we have sought to drive toward consensus on big-ticket items like federal climate change legislation. But we do it because we know that the nationwide public power community must come together around our commonalities to retain the important characteristics that distinguish us from for-profit utilities. If this sounds philosophical, it is. But it is also the reality of the situation – common goals help us retain local decision-making as much as possible because we can argue the need for it together.

I have visited many public power communities across the nation. In fact, traveling for APPA over the years helped me attain the goal of having visited all 50 states! No two public power communities are the same, but they are all similar. The similarity is in the knowledge that affordable, reliable, safe, and sustainable electricity underpins prosperity for each town/city/service territory and for all its citizens. As we advocate together, as a community of 2,000 public power communities across the country, we must continue to spread that knowledge back home and here in D.C. We appeal to both sides of the political spectrum, as I hope I have demonstrated, so you can even pick which argument to make to each. *Vive la difference! Vive la même chose!*

**Common** goals help us retain local decision-making as much as possible because we can argue the need for it **together**.

WOW!

Cou

BY JOHN EGAN, CONTRIBUTING WRITER





# entering Misinformation in Your Community

Did you  
hear...

There's no one-size-fits-all solution when responding to misinformation about the utility or its programs. But the utility's reputation can be a powerful asset.



**F**rom dubious claims about the benefits of privatizing a locally owned utility to outright lies that installing rooftop solar will mean the end of electric utility bills, utility messengers must counter and know how to respond appropriately to misinformation.

While the truth can be messy and complicated, the appeal of a lie, or a half-truth, is its simplicity. These days, communicators frequently experience a quip often attributed to Mark Twain: “A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.” The remark is also often attributed to Winston Churchill and has been traced back to Jonathan Swift. Regardless, it is a magnified truism in the social media age.

The solution is eternal vigilance and ongoing customer education that draws from the utility’s position of expertise about electricity, and that girds understanding about the benefits of public power.

### Constant Education

Kelley Porter, manager of customer and corporate communications for Nebraska’s Lincoln Electric System, shared how she deals with three categories of misinformation: those who make honest mistakes, those who shade the truth, and those who seriously misrepresent the truth.

Those who retweet or “like” social media messages about how rooftop solar will mean the end of utility bills are, for the most part, making hon-

**“Prevention is essential, because once the money’s gone, there’s no getting it back.”**

Kelley Porter, manager of customer and corporate communications, Lincoln Electric System, Nebraska

est mistakes. They are passing along incorrect information but there’s no harmful intent. It’s the originators of those messages who are shading the truth - and showing up on customers’ doorsteps with elaborate promises and a high-pressure sales pitch.

“We don’t want to come off as anti-solar, and I’m reluctant to use the term ‘solar scams,’ but we do have a group of people going door-to-door misrepresenting the facts in an effort to close a sale,” Porter said.

The developers in LES’ service area, which includes about 146,000 customers, are telling homeowners that installing rooftop solar panels means they’ll never pay another utility bill in their life. It sounds too good to be true and, of course, it is. Rooftop solar customers still pay a monthly service fee and, unless they shell out additional thousands for battery energy storage, solar customers have no access to self-generation after the sun goes down.

LES has a multi-faceted solar program that includes community solar, buying a share of the utility’s virtual net metering program, or installing solar panels on homes. The utility also works with a network of solar installers who go through a rigorous education campaign. Only those in the network can offer an LES incentive for solar.

“We work with solar installers who are reputable and honest about payback periods,” she said. But others misstate LES’ plans to raise electric prices, or incentive amounts, as well as a future with no utility bills, to get unwary customers to sign on the dotted line. “There’s only a small number of dishonest installers, but they pose a big threat to our customers, and they’re giving solar a bad name in our community.”

LES started to fight back last year with customer education fliers at the state fair, social media posts, news releases, and website resources. When the bad apples didn’t go away, the utility dialed up a more intensive campaign in 2022, with articles in the customer newsletter, earned media, paid media, an appearance on a sponsored radio show, and warnings on bill envelopes encouraging customers to check with LES before signing a rooftop solar contract.

The campaign’s key message: “Considering solar? Connect with LES to get the facts!”

Porter said the campaign is designed to be like white noise — an always-on effort to reach customers through multiple channels.

“I don’t think we’ll ever be done with this — it’s going to be like payment scams, always morphing with a new hook. So customer education on solar will always have to be an item on our editorial calendar. We’ve developed a ‘go bag’ of communications assets, like 10- and 15-second ads that can be rapidly deployed if we see this resurging.”

LES also is looking into partnering with the state attorney general’s office for added credibility. “Prevention is essential, because once the money’s gone, there’s no getting it back.”



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**“Some people are honestly misinformed, but others know they are wrong and they repeat falsehoods anyway. We’ve probably always had that small majority who willfully spread untruths, but social media allows them to do it fast and easy.”**

Todd Long, electronic content administrator, Huntsville Utilities, Alabama

users are charged for the electricity they use at public charging stations, they say, ‘Oh, I didn’t realize that.’”

“We have the facts on our side, but we know some people aren’t interested in the facts — because we’ve tried to correct them, but they keep repeating untruths.”

Rather than launch a broad customer education campaign, Huntsville has decided to try to keep the issue contained to Facebook. “Facebook is where the fire is, so that’s where we point the water,” he said.

He said the large silent majority in Huntsville either is indifferent to EVs or supports them. “I’m only going to worry about those whose minds I can change,” said Long.

## Using Allies

Fayetteville Public Works Commission in North Carolina has been fighting a battle with one arm tied behind its back for several years. It’s still winning.

PWC is the latest public power utility to draw the unsolicited interest of a private equity investment firm, Bernhard Capital Partners, headquartered in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Other public power utilities targeted by Bernhard include Lafayette Utilities System in Louisiana and JEA in Jacksonville, Florida.

Bernhard first approached Fayetteville’s mayor and City Council in mid-2019 with a proposal to help manage PWC, which serves about 119,000 electric, water and wastewater customers.

Bernhard Capital Partners said its offer could give the city of Fayetteville hundreds of millions of dollars that could be used to make desirable capital improvements. The offer reportedly promised to keep PWC’s leadership in place, and assure that no employee would lose their job.

The PWC commission chair said he was not interested, but that did not deter Bernhard, which continued to contact elected officials and utility leadership. In mid-2020, the Public Works Commission said it was still not interested, but it signed a non-disclosure agreement to allow the parties to exchange confidential information so the commission could better assess Bernhard’s proposal. At the end of 2020, the commission once again said it was not interested.

The following spring, Bernhard began selectively leaking aspects of its proposal in an attempt to win over local stakeholders.

Elaina Ball, PWC’s CEO, told a local newspaper that the incomplete portrait offered by the private equity firm “may not give the public all of the information they need to understand what a deal like this could mean for their future and future generations.”

## Confronting Untruths

Huntsville Utilities, a three-service community-owned utility in Alabama with about 205,000 customers, has a squeaky wheel problem: the city has experienced sharp increase in demand for electric vehicles, but there are a small number of highly motivated people in the utility’s service area who vehemently oppose EVs, said Todd Long, the utility’s electronic content administrator. The opponents will use any pretext to make their views known, typically on Facebook.

Earlier this year, after Huntsville Utilities announced that Tesla installed 12 superchargers in the city’s new entertainment district, there was “misinformation and downright anger” in Facebook posts about EVs — “way more than what we expected,” he said.

And during the summer, when high heat and humidity caused the Tennessee Valley Authority to initiate an emergency load curtailment, snarky comments were posted to Huntsville’s Facebook page blaming EV owners for the power emergency, claiming they were charging their vehicles during the middle of the day.

“Some people are honestly misinformed, but others know they are wrong and they repeat falsehoods anyway. We’ve probably always had that small majority who willfully spread untruths, but social media allows them to do it fast and easy.”

Long said the utility answers what it felt were “honest mistakes” about electric vehicles — such as that all customers pay for the electricity discharged through public charging stations. “When we explained that EV



## COUNTERING MISINFORMATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Bernhard is no longer pursuing a deal with PWC, but the non-disclosure agreement remains in place, which limits what Carolyn Justice-Hinson, PWC's communications/community relations officer, can say.

But she did say this: "As soon as public discussions got into the media in the spring of 2021, we learned that Bernhard had hired local political consultants and an ad agency that had a previous working relationship with PWC, so they were, unfortunately, very familiar with our communications/outreach and stakeholders."

"PWC used general crisis communication methods to proactively reach out to employees, former leadership, vendors, customers and community stakeholders with a clear, consistent message that emphasized the value of public power and PWC's strong financial position," Justice-Hinson said. Because of the non-disclosure agreement, messaging had to be handled very carefully. "Press was given the statements, provided relevant information through FOIA requests, and directed to general public information. Employees and all other stakeholders received the statements and information at the same time, so they were prepared with facts if they were involved with anyone in the community."

PWC asked community stakeholders to be the utility's eyes and

**"Don't think it can't or won't happen in your community. Public power entities are well run and profitable targets for private equity firms. Do not take these firms lightly. They are experts in messaging, making deals, and working all angles to gain favor and remove resistance to their proposals."**

Carolyn Justice-Hinson, communications/community relations officer, Fayetteville Public Works Commission, North Carolina



## COUNTERING MISINFORMATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

ears so it could stay abreast of what Bernhard was saying in the community. The utility also leveraged relationships with several long-time media partners to help it monitor activities and help position itself favorably. Two local newspapers wrote op-eds early on warning of the proposal and supporting PWC and its current governance and operation, she said.

“PWC has had strong customer communications and community relations/outreach for over 20 years,” Justice-Hinson said. “Our commission and leadership for many years have followed public power’s best practices of explaining the benefits of public power. We support hundreds of organizations annually through sponsorships and in-kind contributions. We annually are the largest United Way campaign in the community. We have a customer newsletter, eblast, TV show, social media and podcast. We advertise and have strong relationships with more than 15 media organiza-

tions. We have a well-established customer advisory group and we actively engage with current members and alumni of the group.”

All of those connections, built over 20 years, have paid off as the community has rallied to PWC’s side.

Now that COVID-related shutdowns have eased, PWC has resumed its community outreach and education, Justice-Hinson said. “We look for new opportunities to educate the community on our leadership, public power, reliability, low rates and strong financial position. Our new strategic plan includes community engagement as a strategic priority to emphasize to our employees the importance of engagement and demonstrate how it can help our operations in challenging times such as the Bernhard event.”

She offered a warning for other public power utilities: “Don’t think it can’t or won’t happen in your community. Public power entities are well run and profitable targets for private equity firms. Do not take these firms lightly. They are experts in messaging, making deals, and working all angles to gain favor and remove resistance to their proposals.”

“Ongoing community engagement and helping build support and understanding about the benefits of public power and its value is tremendously important. If this isn’t a priority at your utility, it needs to be. We would have been at a huge disadvantage had we not had established engagement, relationships, and communications with community leaders over the last 20 years. We had allies that helped during this time. They helped rally others and be voices when we could not.”

## Respond Strategically

Before acting on misinformation or deceptive practices in your community, communicators first need to understand the scope of the problem. If it’s a small fire with a fringe population, best to follow Long’s advice and not overreact. But if the problem is broader and more far-reaching, a strategy with a broad approach is needed.

Before leaping into action, remember that customer responsiveness to utility issues typically falls along a bell-shaped curve: a small percentage, perhaps 15% at each end of the curve, have strong feelings — either positive or negative — about a utility. These segments either will believe everything a utility says, or nothing. Don’t spend a lot of time with those two groups. Instead, if the issue has broad importance to a utility, focus on the persuadable 70% in the middle.

If you give your customer-owners a fair shake, chances are they will stand up for you. For example, after yet another Facebook post from an EV opponent, a Huntsville commenter replied: “Why is it that folks who don’t have EVs, don’t talk to anyone who owns one or knows anything about them, are so confident about stepping up and making claims that were never true or became false long ago?”



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# Paying the Price

## How Rising Energy Costs Are Affecting Customer Communications

BY BETSY LOEFF, CONTRIBUTING WRITER







**A**s of June 2022, the consumer price index was up 9.1% year-over-year. Driving that overall inflation rate was the 41.6% rise in the energy index, which includes oil, gas, fuel, and electricity. This is “the largest 12-month increase since April 1980,” reported The Washington Post, and it’s been a source of concern for utilities and their customers.

At CPS Energy in San Antonio, Texas, fuel costs are 30% higher than the utility forecast, said Cory Kuchinsky, CPS Energy’s chief financial officer. That and higher usage driven by persistent heat waves in 2022 have resulted in 20% increases on utility bills.

Faced with rising costs, the Orlando Utilities Commission, or OUC, in Florida sought and received governing board authorization to raise rates. In June, residential electric bills went up about 10%, or \$5 to \$15 per month, based on usage.

For JEA in Jacksonville, Florida, fuel costs are up 44%. Recent price volatility prompted the utility to switch from annual to monthly adjustments of the fuel component of electric bills. “We used to have a fuel reserve fund we used to absorb normal volatility,” said Tim Hunt, JEA vice president of customer experience insights & digitization.

Fuel costs are also up 44% for Norwich Public Utilities in Connecticut. “To date, we have not seen any impact on our collections for at-risk customers,” said Chris LaRose, general manager for the utility.

Price increases this year have amplified the importance of actions utilities took in years past, and utility representatives are sliding mentions of those actions into communications to help educate customers about rising rates. CPS Energy, for instance, has had a prepaid, long-term natural gas deal in place for almost 12 years, which Kuchinsky said has provided about \$85 million in savings for customers. The utility also has increased its natural gas storage and has a hedging program that has saved customers about 10% on utility bills.

Kuchinsky also has infused messages about CPS Energy's diversified fuel base into communications. "From a generating perspective, natural gas is getting all the headlines and that's the fuel source that's going up the most, but we also have nuclear, coal, and solar that dampens the impact." This message was woven into a May 2022 newsletter piece touting the utility's ranking as #5 nationwide for solar production in city limits. "Diversity helps balance reliability, affordability, and sustainability," the utility reported to customers in its newsletter. "Natural gas prices are up 70%. If we were solely dependent on natural gas, we would have no way to mitigate massive fluctuations like what we are seeing in the natural gas market today."

OUC also mitigates energy price volatility with a fuel reserve fund and long-term contracts for natural gas, coal, and transportation, said Mindy Brenay, chief financial officer at OUC. "Between May 2021 and May 2022, we exhausted about \$100 million in fuel reserves," she said. "To balance the budget, we needed a fuel increase."

"We anticipated media coverage of the fuel rate increase and had just rolled out our Ways to Save and Hot Weather customer education campaigns," said OUC spokeswoman Michelle Lynch. "So, we were ready when a reporter attended the April finance committee meeting and picked up on pricing issues," she said.

OUC's message to customers is straightforward. "The fuel charge is a pass-through of the cost OUC incurs," said Brenay. "There is no return on that revenue. When fuel prices go down, we share those savings with our customers as well."

Norwich Public Utilities also is spreading that message loudly. Wholesale energy costs in New England are driven by the price of natural gas, which now is a global commodity, said LaRose. "It is impacted by supply chain issues and the war in Ukraine."

This was the message customers could read after clicking on a pricing alert that appeared prominently on the utility website this past summer. "Inflation is impacting every part of daily life and every industry in the global economy," it began. "NPU is not immune from these economic realities."

The announcement explained that prices for power and natural gas had increased significantly, as much as 50% in some markets. Then it explained how the utility strives to moderate price volatility with a power purchase agreement and a purchased gas adjustment, as well as rate stabilization funds and reserves, and these tools need to be supported with an increase in the local cost of electricity to NPU's customers. "It's difficult news to hear, but people have been understanding," LaRose said.

### Save or Pay

Of course, one of the ways to reduce electricity bills is to use less power. All of the utilities interviewed for this article have increased their media outreach efforts and publicity around conservation. JEA, for instance,

recently had a broadcast news reporter tag along on an energy efficiency audit, said Jay Magee, digital communications manager. These free audits spiked in popularity this summer, he said. "About a month ago, we could schedule an audit the same day or next day. There was no backlog. Currently, we're scheduling our efficiency and irrigation audits about 30 days out."

JEA also offers online consumption data in near real-time and it is looking for ways to help its 23,000 customers who prepay for electricity. The utility will address them with a targeted approach, Magee said. "They have to look at their consumption in a different way, and we're looking for ways to help them."

Similarly, OUC offers several programs to help customers better understand their consumption, including a usage dashboard where real-time, hourly usage information is available. Seeing how much they use can lead to better decisions. "We've really tried to educate customers about how much various appliances account for on their utility bills, the effects of radiant heat on your home, and, most importantly, why air conditioners consume more energy during hotter weather," said Lynch.

CPS Energy has launched a color-coded conservation program where the color of the day is linked to anticipated demand. A "green day" calls for everyday conservation efforts. Yellow means the utility anticipates high demand, so customers are encouraged to take extra steps, like setting thermostats higher, using fans and window shades to support indoor cooling or avoid using large appliances. Orange days call for limiting power usage because grid reliability is at risk. Red days may require rolling outages, during which customers are asked to shut off lights, air conditioning, and other household loads while the outage is underway. This campaign includes proactive media outreach, recurrent social media and other promotional efforts. "We've really ramped up communicating the importance of energy conservation," said spokeswoman Dana Soroodeh.

The same is true in Orlando and Jacksonville. "We push information continuously to our customers to let them know what they can do to help lower their bills," OUC's Brenay said. "We also suggest that customers schedule energy efficiency audits where our conservation specialists go into a customer's home and give recommendations that promote lower energy and water usage." Similar to JEA, OUC is seeing high demand for the audits and customers currently have a three-week wait for audits.

JEA's Magee and OUC's Lynch are sharing the same types of messaging through social media channels, websites, and email campaigns. "Our goal is to provide customers with tools and tips on how to take control of their consumption," said Magee.

### Amping Up Support

Along with information, Sheila Pressley, JEA's chief customer officer, constantly challenges her staff to look at ways to support low- to moderate-income customers. Consequently, the utility has "changes queued up

## PAYING THE PRICE: HOW RISING ENERGY COSTS ARE AFFECTING CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS

in anticipation of potential pain that customers may feel with rising fuel costs and those high summer month bills,” Hunt said.

Among the coming changes are elimination of credit and debit card fees, which added \$2 to \$4 to each payment. JEA also temporarily suspended disconnections to keep customers in safe conditions during peak summer months, a move also embraced by CPS Energy, OUC, and Norwich. Hunt said JEA is expanding payment programs, too. “We’re going to lower the thresholds of criteria that need to be met to qualify for payment plans,” he said. “Our goal is to make this option much more broadly available to our customers this summer.”

CPS Energy makes communication of energy assistance programs personal. Through its “customer outreach resource effort,” or “CORE” program, the utility targets customers with past-due bills that have not been responsive to other utility outreach. “We call people in our community just to see how they’re doing and check on them,” said DeAnna Hardwick,

CPS Energy’s executive vice president of customer strategy. Over the past two years, the utility has called some 91,000 customers and helped 100% of them find solutions for their bills.

“We have more than 100 partners we work with in the community to help get assistance for our customers,” Hardwick continued. “This year alone, we’ve identified about \$30 million in agency assistance, and we do everything we can to connect customers with that aid.”

With \$20 million available through American Rescue Plan funding, Hardwick said her team has been working with city staff to process applications for that funding before marking late-pay customers down for eventual disconnection. Utility staffers also walk door-to-door, often with San Antonio City Council partners, to reach out to customers with lower income. “So far this year, we’ve been in 50 neighborhoods and knocked on more than 2,500 doors,” she said. “Our goal is to do whatever we can to prevent customers from having to be disconnected.”

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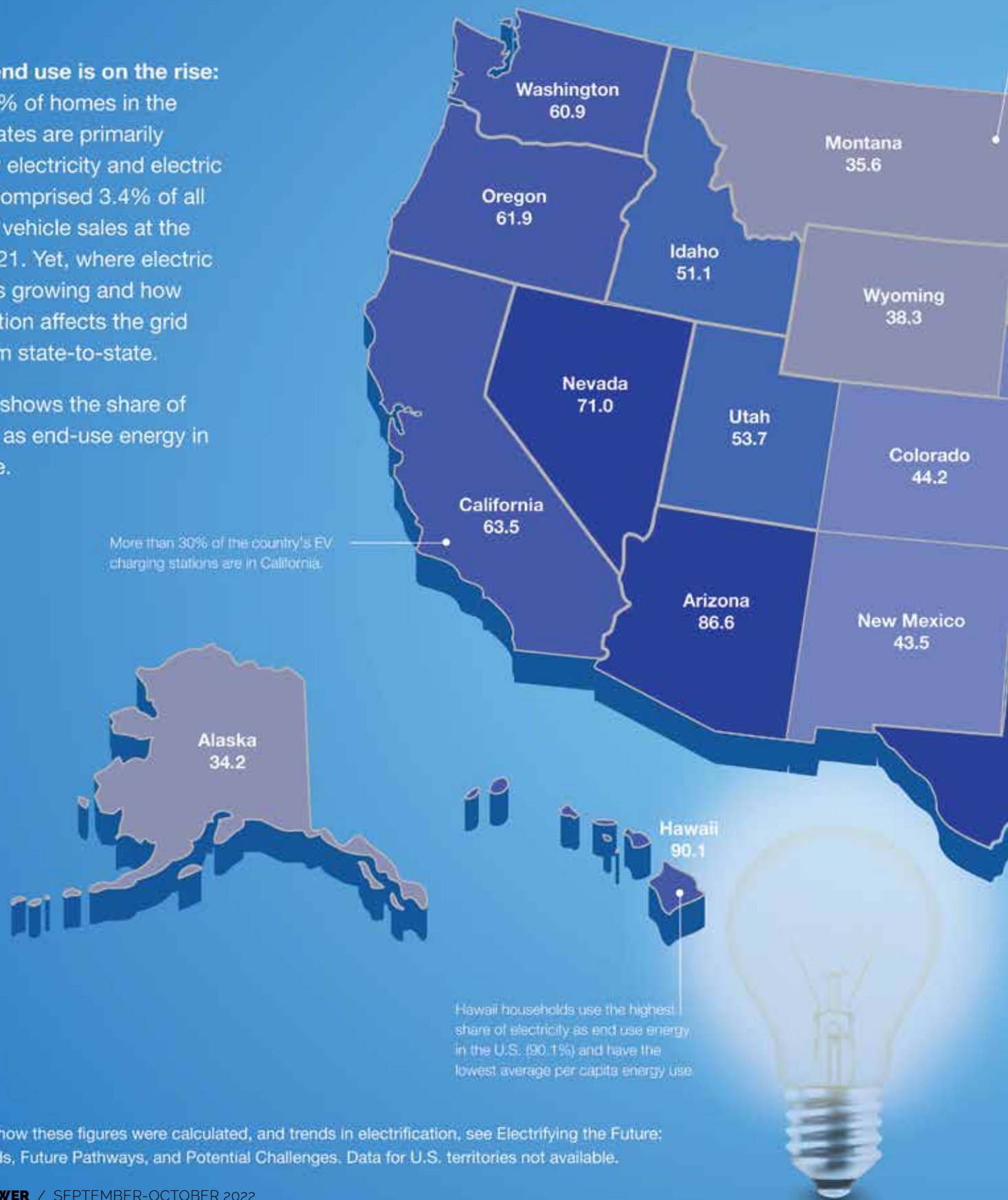


# THE ELECTRIFIED

## Electric end use is on the rise:

Nearly 40% of homes in the United States are primarily heated by electricity and electric vehicles comprised 3.4% of all light-duty vehicle sales at the end of 2021. Yet, where electric demand is growing and how electrification affects the grid varies from state-to-state.

This map shows the share of electricity as end-use energy in each state.



For more on how these figures were calculated, and trends in electrification, see Electrifying the Future: Current Trends, Future Pathways, and Potential Challenges. Data for U.S. territories not available.



# STATES OF AMERICA

The most energy-intensive states are those with colder climates: the three states with the highest per capita energy consumption are North Dakota (103.3 million Btu), Montana (98.8), and Wyoming (92.9)



Share of Electricity End Use

> 70%

60-70%

50-60%

40-50%

< 40%



# Serving Our Communities

## Public Power Utilities Walk the Talk

BY JIM PATERSON, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



In Black River Falls, Wisconsin, older residents get groceries and meals delivered and their sidewalks shoveled during winters, when temperatures hover in the single digits – thanks in part to the Black River Falls Municipal Utilities. Students at the local high school earn utility-sponsored scholarships and work on robots with tools and material the utility donated, while veterans at American Legion Post 200 cook meals on appliances that the public power utility helped provide.

The Salt River Project in Phoenix, serving customers throughout the very different landscape of central Arizona, also prides itself on its service to those in need.

SRP works diligently to reduce the number of drownings in the many swimming pools in the region and in the utility's several reservoirs. Students and teachers throughout the region get various types of support, including scholarships, classroom materials and special grants when the National Football League's Arizona Cardinals score a touchdown. SRP also supports several charities that help struggling customers. Arizona's first Hispanic American Legion Post, in one of Phoenix's oldest neighborhoods, gets the attention it deserves now with a new mural that the utility helped bring to life as part of an ongoing concerted effort to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Volunteers show groceries to be delivered as part of a Black River Falls Municipal Utilities effort. Photo courtesy Black River Falls Municipal Utilities.





Tara Gleash, a Touchdown for Teachers winner, in her classroom. Photo courtesy Salt River Project.

The work in the community by these two utilities is part of a steady stream of community service that public power utilities of all sizes in all parts of the country undertake, much of it creative and attention-getting. Since 1990, the Sue Kelly Community Service Award has recognized 199 endeavors, celebrating and honoring the many ways public power entities support improved quality of life for their community members. The utilities recognized by the American Public Power Association as winners of the award in 2022 included the Kansas City Board of Public Utilities in Kansas, Kissimmee Utility Authority in Florida, Lincoln Electric System in Nebraska, Tullahoma Utilities Authority in Tennessee and Turlock Irrigation District in California.

Ranging from traditional service work and efforts to help struggling customers with their bills to supporting educational light shows, organic farms, and Little League baseball teams – here is a snapshot of the myriad ways public power utilities lift the communities they serve.

### Recognizing Need

“As public power utilities, we are connected to our communities in many ways” said Casey Engebretson, general manager of Black River Falls

Municipal Utilities. “When you have that connection, you want to be involved. We really look to effectively help our neighbors and build our communities.”

The utility in Black River Falls partners with the Jackson County Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers to support senior citizens. The interfaith group does what Engebretson calls “amazing work” with a few staff members in a cramped office in a local church. The utility and other local supporters are contributing funds and expertise to build the organization a new home in its own building.

“The work they do affects so many people. By supporting them and helping them build a new facility, we can have an impact throughout our service area,” Engebretson said. The utility has also provided direct support for the organization’s various programs, including a grocery delivery service.

In partnership with its wholesale supplier, WPPI Energy, BRFMU did extra work in the community during the pandemic to help businesses and individuals with their bills. It also helped local schools by providing laptops for remote learning.

SRP also stepped up community involvement with the onset of the pandemic. The public power utility provided \$1.35 million to assist residents, including \$500,000 to nonprofits like the United Way and the Arizona Community Foundation, which supports education, the arts, community development, health initiatives, and environmental concerns.

SRP also spends \$1.3 million a year on education initiatives, including about \$200,000 in direct classroom grants. One popular program provides two teachers with \$500 grants each time the Arizona Cardinals football team scores a touchdown. The utility donated to the American Legion Post 41 to create an 18-by-45-foot mural that tells the story of the historic Grant Park neighborhood, where the Post is located. The community boasts a rich Latino culture and history.

Immediately following World War II, Latino veterans were shunned and “not truly welcome or treated in a friendly manner at other American Legion Posts in the Phoenix area, despite their military service to their beloved country,” said Louis Olivas, senior commander at the American Legion Post. In 1946, Latinos created American Legion Post 41, the first Hispanic Post in Arizona and a hub for community events.

“This mural tells a story that no other Post can reflect on. If you are veteran, you are going to be touched, even if you didn’t grow up in this barrio,” said Olivas. “I went to SRP and asked for help because in my experience as a community activist, SRP has one of the strongest social conscience perspectives in our community.”

“At SRP, we have the privilege and duty of providing water and power to our community, along with the honor of supporting communities that are underserved,” said Erika Castro, SRP’s community engagement senior strategist. “The mural shows and tells the hard, beautiful and resilient story of a neighborhood that has often gone unseen or unheard.”



The issue of children drowning is critical in Arizona, where the rate of drownings is twice the national average. It is the leading cause of death among children from age one to four, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Along with a program that provides fences around pools, SRP is working with Phoenix Children's Hospital to develop a drowning education program through medical providers in the state, said Regina Lane Haycock, SRP's water safety community engagement strategist.

"As the largest provider of water to the Valley, SRP understands the importance of water safety. Most drownings take place in swimming pools and can occur silently and swiftly, which is why we work closely with cities and agencies around the Valley to help our community partners educate families about the importance of water safety," she said.

Kissimmee Utility Authority in Florida also was a recipient of the Sue Kelly Community Service Award for having participated in 17 community events in 2021 despite the pandemic, along with offering a successful Good Neighbor Round Up Program, scholarships to local students and operating its 40-square-foot "Big Grill" at school, church, and community events.

## Reinforcing Employee Efforts

SRP's historic commitment to community service also is evident in its President's Volunteer Spirit Awards, said SRP President David Rousseau. The awards recognize staff members for their service and provide \$2,500 to their respective nonprofit partners. Last year, SRP employees and retirees volunteered more than 35,000 hours to nonprofit organizations.

The staff members receiving the award this year backed youth sports, a women's support group that provides "education, mentoring and professional development skills necessary for women to obtain economic security for themselves," several social service organizations, and an effort to build a hospital in an underserved area.

Turlock Irrigation District in California formed Team TID, which now has become a nonprofit "employee giveback program with a mission of empowering employees to create meaningful change in the communities they serve through volunteerism, community development activities, and charitable contributions." It was one of the reasons the utility received the Sue Kelly Community Service Award in June 2022.

Team TID participation has benefited American Red Cross blood drives, local students by providing school supplies, breast cancer research,

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Artists Jose Andres Giron and Roman Reyes painting the American Legion Post 41 mural. Photo courtesy Salt River Project.

and local families with gifts and meals during the holidays. Since its inception, more than 500 employee volunteers have participated in activities that have benefited the community, raising more than \$15,000 in funds.

The Kansas City BPU encourages employees to support community causes and charities. Staff members volunteered for more than 5,000 hours, serving 6,000 area children through the employee foundation. BPU also provides meals to needy families at Thanksgiving, puts on a community Easter egg hunt for area children, and backs an ethnic festival, a Black Achievers Award, a back-to-school fair, and other local activities. BPU also undertook numerous initiatives to help customers impacted by the pandemic, including flexible payment arrangement options and waiving late payment and reconnection fees.

## Explosive Fundraising

City Utilities of Springfield, Missouri, raised nearly \$10,000 for United Way of the Ozarks with an explosion. Five generators at the utility's James River Power Station were set to be retired and the utility decided to hold a raffle for the opportunity to detonate the explosives to demolish the four towering stacks. City Utilities dubbed the event "Blasting for the Better."

Other City Utilities community projects include a "Halloween Hustle" running event and a fundraiser during the holidays where those donating receive holiday lights. The utility also works closely with a local

high school to keep students in school, learning life skills and transitioning to the workforce.

Along with receiving APPA's Sue Kelly Community Service Award, the Kansas City Board of Public Utilities was recognized locally as a "Corporate Champion" at a Philanthropist of the Year awards sponsored by Ingram's magazine and nationally with the American Business Awards for the "best corporate communication and corporate responsibility program." It also was the top winner in PRNews' 2022 Nonprofit Awards for social responsibility.

"As a nonprofit, public utility, BPU is customer-owned. We measure ourselves by how much money stays in the community, how we can provide reliable/dependable power and water, and the obligation we have to help our neighbors," said Bill Johnson, general manager at the BPU. "All BPU employees live and work in the community – we recognize that our efforts to improve, better, and assist our community benefit everyone."

A community golf tournament sponsored by the utility raised \$40,000 (\$680,000 since its inception) and its grants to a summer youth program help provide job skills training and mentoring to 1,500 youth each year. It also offers a Customer Hardship Payment Assistance and Utility Assistance program that provided \$250,000 in assistance in 2021 and \$2.5 million over the life of the programs.

Another Sue Kelly Community Service Award winner, the Lincoln Electric System, has raised more than \$1 million for local parks, libraries,

## SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES: PUBLIC POWER UTILITIES WALK THE TALK

programs for seniors and other underfunded community organizations. Lisa Hale, vice president of customer services for LES, said the fundraising is one of several ways the utility is involved locally.

“LES believes in investing in the communities where we live and serve. It starts with providing safe, affordable, and reliable power, but extends into our employee giving, customer utility assistance program, educational opportunities, civic engagement, energy programs, and public events. We’re truly local people serving local people,” Hale said.

### Enhanced Education

LES offers a wide range of financial support for struggling residents and holds an EV Ride + Drive event, which educates customers about electric vehicles and gives them an opportunity to drive one. Additionally, 2022 marks the 20th anniversary of LES’s collaboration with local social service agencies to broaden its Energy Assistance Program. It also cosponsors, with the local zoo, a holiday light show – one of the largest light shows in the Midwest. That event provides a platform for educating the public about electricity and energy conservation.

Hetch Hetchy Water and Power and the San Francisco Public Utility Commission have provided six acres of land for The Hummingbird Farm, a community farm that teaches residents about water conservation and sustainable food practices and produces hundreds of pounds of organic food each year. It is staffed by local residents and serves as an education center and a place for community celebrations.

Another of the award winners, Tullahoma Utilities Authority in Tennessee, supports area families with a round up program and holds special events to encourage residents to drink tap water and use light tubes. A special Home Uplift Program is designed to support low-income customers whose residences may be older and less energy-efficient, providing funds, matched by the Tennessee Valley Authority, to help finance the cost of home energy efficiency upgrades.

Tullahoma Utilities and TVA also help fund STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) learning projects in local schools, with utilities employees frequently visiting schools to assist, learn what the students are doing, and discuss utility careers.



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# Finding Value in Utility Data

BY BETSY LOEFF, CONTRIBUTING WRITER





Utilities have an abundance of data available to them, yet few are unlocking the full value of this data through analysis that can help utilities forge stronger relationships with customers, enhance reliability, foster efficiency, and more. As public power utilities find ways to tap into a wealth of data to make informed decisions – or help customers do so – they must also think critically about how such decisions can alter energy efficiency and demand.

## Look Outside the Average

More than half of public power providers in the United States have advanced metering infrastructure that can deliver data in hourly intervals or even smaller timeframes, according to researchers from Guidehouse.

That kind of consumption data – segmented by the hour or more frequent intervals – is powerful in the hands of someone like Pasi Miettinen, CEO of Sagewell, a software company and consultancy specializing in analytics for utilities. Among other things, his company helps utilities create data-driven programs that target specific types of customers for the greatest possible program adoption and utility gain.

“Program design without looking at meter data first is almost always a mistake,” Miettinen said. “The reason for that is that utilities are used to looking at data in averages, such as the average load shape. When you look at individual customers, they are astoundingly volatile. They don’t look like the averages at all.”

Miettinen pointed to a utility his firm works with that discovered 20% of customers made up almost 50% of the coincident peak consumption. These customers were concentrated geographically and were not the biggest, most expensive residential properties. Sagewell analytics identified a group of homes in the 1,200-square-foot range that had an 11-kilowatt coincident peak on average, with very little consumption the rest of the year. “They just happened to use their air conditioning systems and other large end uses a lot during the coincident peak,” he said.

This finding reveals the power of customer segmentation and target marketing. “If you assume that all customers are alike and you design programs based on an average customer, you may overlook an enormous amount of low-hanging fruit,” Miettinen said.

Along with finding the customers who use the most power, utilities can use analytics to disaggregate consumption data and identify large loads within a household that could be schedulable, such as electric vehicle chargers and pool pumps. This is valuable because having those loads operate in off-peak hours is less disruptive for consumers and more likely to be adopted.

Utilities also can use meter data to plan marketing programs that support the utility now and in the future. A case in point is the peak-season flip many southern utilities have seen in the past 20 years. When Miettinen started his career as a load forecaster at a southern utility more than two decades ago, the utility's peak occurred in the summer, and it was due to air conditioning load. Now, many utilities in the region are winter-peaking.

"Heat pumps installed in the South turned out to be very inefficient for winter heating," he said. When temperatures drop low enough, those inefficient heat pumps switch to auxiliary resistance heating coils, a big power drain. Utilities in the Northeast, where Miettinen lives now, tend to have performance requirements for heat pumps, and the one in his Boston home is good to minus-17 degrees.

"The equipment that utilities encourage sometimes has significant impacts on the load shapes of the future," he said, adding that small, ductless systems – used primarily for air conditioning – don't replace much fossil fuel consumption in the winter. Alternatively, high-efficiency, whole-home heat pump systems are what he calls customer- and utility-friendly. "They're cost-effective for the customer to operate and also generate good margins for the utility, which lowers the cost of electricity for everyone," Miettinen said.

"A key insight from data analysis is that there are technologies that are beneficial for both customers and utilities," he said. "Finding the intersection of the two is good program design."

## Knowledge Brings Savings

For big power users like university campuses or municipal facilities, data can reveal issues with power use and facilitate conservation. In New York, state facilities are under executive orders from the governor's office to cut back energy use and meet specific efficiency targets. Fortunately, organizations with big loads can learn more about energy consumption at their facilities through the New York Energy Manager, a web-based service offered by the New York Power Authority, the nation's largest state public power organization.

The Energy Manager, based in Albany, consolidates data from more than 20 different sources, including meters, submeters, and building management systems, said Emilie Bolduc, NYPA's vice president of distributed energy resources. With the building management systems, arrays of sensors collect data about interior building conditions like humidity, temperature, and carbon dioxide levels.

All data get analyzed and come back to facility operators in the form of information-rich reporting that shows consumption down to metered appliance levels, usage trends, savings and operational recommendations, and the estimated savings that can be attained from adopting those recommendations. Currently, the Energy Manager platform includes more than

16,000 facilities and has collected some 600 million data points.

"Our customers use NY Energy Manager to identify operational savings," Bolduc said. "It's also become a compliance tool because the system demonstrates how much usage was reduced over time."

At one state university, the system revealed HVAC issues. "They asked us to submeter the air handling units in a recreation center because they were having humidity and odor problems," Bolduc said. "The building was also consuming way more energy than initially designed."

The NY Energy Manager team found that mechanical dampers within the unit were not opening to their design settings, causing a ventilation imbalance. "That was one of the problems identified, which saved the university a significant amount of money once the economizers were fixed," she said. Economizers combine return and outdoor air to cool and ventilate buildings.

The university also learned from NY Energy Manager reports that air handling units were running full force all day even though the building was not occupied 24/7. Once facility managers set up a schedule for ramping the units up and down, they saved an average of 168 kilowatt-hours per day per unit.

Because Energy Manager also consolidates consumption from other utilities – water, wastewater, and gas – Bolduc's team has been able to help with savings in those areas, too. Using Energy Manager, a bus depot operator found a water leak in a bus-cleaning station. "The operations lead told us they would not have noticed the leak until they got their bill, and it would have been around \$6,000 by the time it came," Bolduc said.

## Knocking Opportunity

The value data offers when it comes to targeting or helping customers is matched in the operational arena, where utilities are using data to enhance system performance and reliability. Still, there is some low-hanging fruit that remains untouched by many, said Tao Hong, professor of Systems Engineering and Engineering Management at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte and director of BigDEAL, the Big Data Energy Analytics Laboratory.

Hong is an expert on system forecasting and renewables integration. Asked the key to balancing power supply and demand with intermittent generation, he said: "First, you must understand your demand."

Doing that effectively requires accurate data, Hong said.

A Guidehouse consulting team estimated that 55% percent of public power utilities have advanced metering infrastructure installed and can access frequent-interval consumption data, which may be recorded every 15 minutes or even every 5 minutes. Even if utilities do not have AMI, most (80% to 90%) have SCADA (supervisory control and data acquisition) all the way down to distribution substations, so they could at least be looking



## FINDING VALUE IN UTILITY DATA

at system data on an area-wide basis, Hong said.

“Most utilities do not use that data for load profiles,” Hong said. “Many are using old meter data that delivers one number per month.” But SCADA data could provide frequent-interval visibility all the way down to distribution system feeders. “That’s way better than what they’re using today.”

Using this type of data for load profiling could help utilities with renewables integration, where system planners must understand demand to have the right supply available for balancing renewable intermittency. Right now, Hong said, many utilities do not have sufficiently accurate load profiles. They also do not know when someone installs rooftop solar because many systems are sold and managed by third parties, and the utility is not involved.

Another area where Hong believes utilities are missing out is in outage prevention. If utilities correlate past outage data with the weather, Hong estimates utility staff could probably figure out the cause for 30% to 50% of outages, then take preventive measures. For instance, simply correlating vegetation-related outages with tree-trimming schedules could have sig-

nificant impact. The eReliability Tracker, from the American Public Power Association, allows subscribers to track outage causes, but utilities would need to analyze this data against other information to take proactive measures.

So could analysis of voltage and current changes that happen right before and after a fault. Seeing this incipient data – the power surges that accompany lightning strikes – may reveal places where lightning arresters would be of value. These devices give the electricity a path to ground for the over-voltages and power surges that may accompany a lightning strike and cause a fault on the system.

Although Hong sees opportunities that are being missed, he also knows why. “Smaller utilities cannot afford the people who can do this analytics work,” he said. “A town might pay \$120,000 in compensation for a mid- or senior-level manager, but that’s not enough for a data scientist.”

Luckily, Hong sees another opportunity public power utilities could embrace. “Ten or 20 utilities could work together and share resources,” he said. “They could hire some data scientists to work for all the utilities together. That’s a business model they might want to try.”



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# Five Best Practices for Reaching Your Community

BY TOBIAS SELLIER, SENIOR DIRECTOR, MEDIA RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS,  
AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION

**N**o two public power communities are the same. When it comes to communicating with customers, successful methods will vary. There are, however, some principles that can guide your tactics and help you deliver critical messages to customers and other stakeholders.

Here are five best practices for effectively reaching your community.

## 1. MEET YOUR CUSTOMERS WHERE THEY ARE

The demographics and preferences of your community will dictate which platforms and forums are most appropriate for reaching your customers. Social media have emerged as a dominant way to converse in our modern society. But in some communities, this may not be the case, and face-to-face interaction is preferred. You likely know your community's preferences, but it can be helpful to consider metrics to guide your efforts. Are you seeing engagement on social media platforms, or do your posts not generate customer interaction? Are your in-person events well attended? Are customers conversing with the utility?

Ocala Electric Utility in Florida operates an in-house speakers bureau that offers presenters to local civic clubs, agencies, youth groups, homeowners associations, and other groups to share information, answer questions, and address concerns. Last year, the utility took part in almost 300 events and presentations.

## 2. MAKE IT A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION

Local decision making is one of public power's strengths. The utility is an extension of the community and, therefore, should operate arm-in-arm with its customers. Think of your communication with customers as a conversation, not a bullhorn.

Fayetteville Public Works Commission relies on a community advisory group made up of a cross-section of customers in North Carolina. The utility uses this group to discuss current services and programs as well as future plans. Members of the advisory group, who rotate annually, also get an inside look at PWC, touring its facilities and meeting the staff. The group's feedback helps the utility better understand how customers and the community at large are impacted by various operations and what the utility can do to improve service.

This principle can be applied to social media as well, which is — by its nature — a platform for conversing. When you post, look for opportunities to listen. This can be done by asking questions or posting polls.

## 3. THINK OUTSIDE THE (ICE) BOX (AND THE BILL)

Get creative with your messaging. Bill stuffers are a tried-and-true method for reaching customers via their mailed bills, but many utilities have adapted that practice by adding messaging to the outside of the envelope. This practice, referred to as “sniping,” can be an effective way to reach your customers with key messages in the few seconds it takes them to sift through their mail and open their bill.

Silicon Valley Power in Santa Clara, California, has used sniping effectively for more than a decade to deliver messaging on topics including



## FIVE BEST PRACTICES FOR REACHING YOUR COMMUNITY

electric vehicles, rebates, electrical safety, and energy efficiency. The messaging often teases more detailed content found inside the envelope in a bill insert.

The Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority — as part of its “Our Local Power” campaign — offered member utilities a variety of tools for conveying messages on the benefits and importance of local power. While the toolkit included more traditional offerings, including window clings, ads, and social media content, at least one utility used the attractive campaign elements to wrap a commercial ice machine with key messages.

### 4. BE PROACTIVE DURING ‘BLUE SKY’ TIMES

Communicating with customers during major events like outages is a given, but public power utilities should also invest time and resources in proactive messaging to customers so they can help themselves (and the utility) when the time is right. This should involve thinking about things like how many clicks it takes to get to critical information on your website.

Remind your customers regularly how to report an outage and how the power restoration process works, so you do not have to explain in the middle of a crisis. When a storm occurs, you should have messaging and graphics ready to deploy. Be mindful of seasonal events for which you can pre-plan messaging (such as the winter holidays and graduation season).

This way of thinking should extend beyond outages and safety. GEUS in Greenville, Texas, shared a positive story about rising costs. “At a time when costs are rising across America, GEUS has been able to limit electric price increases in the Greenville, Texas, community,” the utility said in a recent press release. “Our diverse mixture of generation resources is no accident. GEUS

proactively maintains diversity to hedge against cyclical price spikes like we are currently seeing in the natural gas market,” said Alicia Hooks, GEUS’ general manager.

You do not need to reinvent the wheel. Free resources and content are available from organizations like the American Public Power Association and the Electrical Safety Foundation International.

### 5. KEEP ALL OF YOUR CUSTOMERS IN MIND

Keep an eye on diversity, equity, and inclusion in all of your communications efforts.

Make sure your communications include imagery that is representative of your community’s demographic makeup. Consider looping in utility staff from outside of the communications department to review customer-facing materials before they go out. This could provide valuable perspective and will almost certainly improve your communications products.

Your community’s demographics may be changing. You may need to communicate with customers in multiple languages, which might require hiring staff members who have the language and skills to help you reach one or more of your community’s minority populations.

Consult experts to be sure your website meets accessibility regulations, including the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

Most public power utilities have been a part of their communities for decades — if not more than a century — and are a deeply rooted component of local life. But as communities evolve and change, the way people think about power and their electric utility changes as well.

To continue doing what you do best — keeping your community powered — be attentive to the need to update messages to your customers, who are also your friends and neighbors.



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# Celebrating Public Power

BY MICHAEL PELLIS, DIRECTOR, DIGITAL AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION,  
AMERICAN PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION



## CELEBRATING PUBLIC POWER

**F**or the past three-and-a-half decades, the American Public Power Association and our members have celebrated Public Power Week during the first full week of October. It is a time to highlight the unique attributes and benefits of not-for-profit, community-owned electric utilities. During Public Power Week, publicly owned utilities find special ways to celebrate with their communities, including parades, barbecues, festivals, rides in bucket trucks, safety demonstrations, community service projects, and customer appreciation events. Public Power Week is focused on the customers and communities served by public power utilities across the nation. Efforts also reach local, state, and regional government officials, local news, and community influencers. The idea is to promote an understanding and appreciation of how the residents of these communities can better engage with their community-owned utility and benefit from all its offerings.

The key messages of Public Power Week are that public power utilities:

- Provide excellent and responsive customer service in their communities.
- Care about local jobs and supporting the local economy.
- Are uniquely accountable to their communities due to local governance (typically utility boards or city councils) and not distant shareholders.
- Focus on the specific needs of their communities.

### An Amplified Message

In 2021, we focused the celebration around “the people behind public power” — utility employees who work tirelessly to keep their communities running 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We wanted to give attention and appreciation to the always-on, first-response nature of the work our members and the public power workforce perform. Their efforts were especially notable as utilities successfully kept the power flowing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, balancing the safety and health of employees with the needs of customers.

Afterward, APPA President and CEO Joy Ditto lauded “the incredible level of participation in Public Power Week. You embraced this year’s theme ... and celebrated Public Power Week in your communities on a scale larger than we’ve ever seen before! ... Thank you for everything you did to make this year’s Public Power Week one of the best!”

The large scale of member participation was evident as utilities from across the country joined in the festivities. Participating utilities represented communities of varying sizes, from small towns such as Princeton, Minnesota, with less than 5,000 people, to small cities like

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## CELEBRATING PUBLIC POWER

Richmond, Indiana, and Lakeland, Florida, to large cities like Austin, Texas, and Los Angeles, California.

In measurable terms, the social media metrics demonstrate the breadth and depth of participation. On Twitter, 295 organizational and individual accounts engaged using the #PublicPowerWeek hashtag, including 168 different member utilities. Most of the social engagement came from public power utilities but also included posts and retweets from the U.S. Department of Energy, many mayors, state lawmakers, the governor of Missouri, and a commissioner of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

This year, the focus is energy education for the next generation of public power customers in schools and throughout the community.

### Create Your Own Spin

The variety of ways that public power utilities celebrate demonstrates the myriad and highly localized preferences of each community they serve. This local focus underpins the history and inception of public power — local communities deciding to take their economic future into their own hands by providing electric service.

### No Starting from Scratch

Many members avail themselves of the sample resources and templates APPA provides to co-brand and spread the word and help celebrate in their communities. Visit [www.PublicPower.org/PublicPowerWeek](http://www.PublicPower.org/PublicPowerWeek) year-round to view these resources, which are typically updated in late summer for the upcoming Public Power Week. Materials include:

- Videos
- Press release templates
- Sample op-eds
- Sample proclamations for local governments
- Coloring sheets
- Sample social media posts
- Graphics and logos

Joy Ditto also hosted a video and podcast in November 2021 featuring representatives of Okanogan County PUD in Washington state and Greenville Utilities Commission in North Carolina who discussed their Public Power Week participation and how to engage customers and communities year-round.

APPA also shares what member utilities post on our Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts, providing a national platform to amplify local messages. We email monthly social media resources to our members, including safety tips, seasonal tips, holidays, public power milestones, and other content to help you engage your customers. Email [Info@PublicPower.org](mailto:Info@PublicPower.org) to subscribe.

On any given day, Bay City Electric Light & Power [Michigan] powers countless connections. We power the charger that allows families to FaceTime, the refrigerator that keeps the kids' lunches cool, and the 'open' signs at local businesses. Most days we don't see the results of our hard work as a Diamond-designated Reliable Public Power Provider. That's why we savor the smiles and appreciation our community provides on Public Power Day! Over the years we have welcomed thousands of community members to our Service Center — taking them for rides in a bucket truck, making them wide-eyed with our safety demonstration, giving them a tour of our peaking plant, and educating them about ways to save energy. While our Public Power Day events are designed to give back to our community, in the end, we all win. Public Power Day is a great reminder of why we climb a pole when it's zero degrees outside, why we are constantly working to trim trees near power lines, and why we answer the call for a power outage at 2 am. Our family, friends, and neighbors power us!

JEA, in Jacksonville, Florida, developed its "YOUtility" campaign to educate customers — both residential and commercial — about all the ways that the community-owned utility serves their needs through customer programs, investments in the community, and sustainable operations. The campaign provided a personal look at the ways customers experience the JEA service offerings across five topics: economic development, community impact, customer solutions, environmental sustainability, and reliability. The multi-channel campaign told real stories from customers, employees, and partners to demonstrate real-life examples of how customers can benefit from a deeper relationship with the utility.



## CELEBRATING PUBLIC POWER

### Public Power All Year Long

It's never too early or too late to celebrate public power in your community. Here are just a few ideas for campaigns throughout the year.

**Anniversaries.** Because public power has been around for a long time, a lot of public power utilities are hitting major anniversaries these days, in-

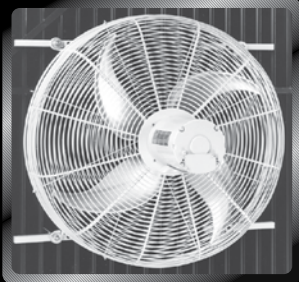
The city of Lompoc [California] is proud to provide electricity for our community. Many of our award-winning electric division employees grew up in Lompoc and have deep ties to this area. Our electric employees take a great deal of pride and care in the work they do, and we wanted to convey this pride to the community during Public Power Week 2021. We showcased employees working in different capacities to provide power services to our city. From an office staff assistant to apprentice and veteran line workers and a conservation coordinator, we highlighted the important ways our electric employees serve the community. This outreach was accomplished through a social media campaign on our city's Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts that drew likes, shares, and supportive comments during Public Power Week 2021. Each day, we shared a different employee's photo and story, with quotes from the employee about their favorite part of the job. We are proud to provide public power and proud of our electric employees, and it was great to connect with the community over that shared appreciation.

Marshfield Utilities [Wisconsin] has celebrated Public Power Week in a variety of ways over the years, but but most recently held a public gathering with many hands-on activities. When the COVID pandemic began, we knew we needed to come up with something different that eliminated potential exposure but still engaged the public. We decided to take part in the popular activity of painting and hiding rocks at local parks, which exploded during COVID as it is a safe, family-friendly activity. Our community has an online group for posting and sharing. We painted three rocks, hid them at local parks that had a connection to the utility, and put out clues on social media. We then invited people to post pictures of themselves with the rocks. Participants received gift certificates that could be used at any business in town, putting money into the local economy at a time when local businesses were hurting. The event was very well received.

cluding the 75-year and 100-year mark of being founded. An anniversary is a perfect time to remind customers of where and why your utility began operating, who were the people behind the founding of your utility, your progress and growth, and how you continue to benefit your community.

**Holidays and Seasons.** There are 11 federal holidays plus many recognized unofficial days we celebrate, including Super Bowl Sunday, Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and the Day of Giving. There are the starts of Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. In addition, there are more general seasons like spring break, summer vacation, and back to school. You get the idea. They all add up to a lot of opportunities to tell your story and relate it to what your customers are experiencing and – in the case of the holidays – celebrating.

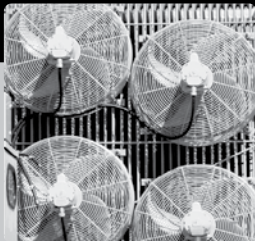
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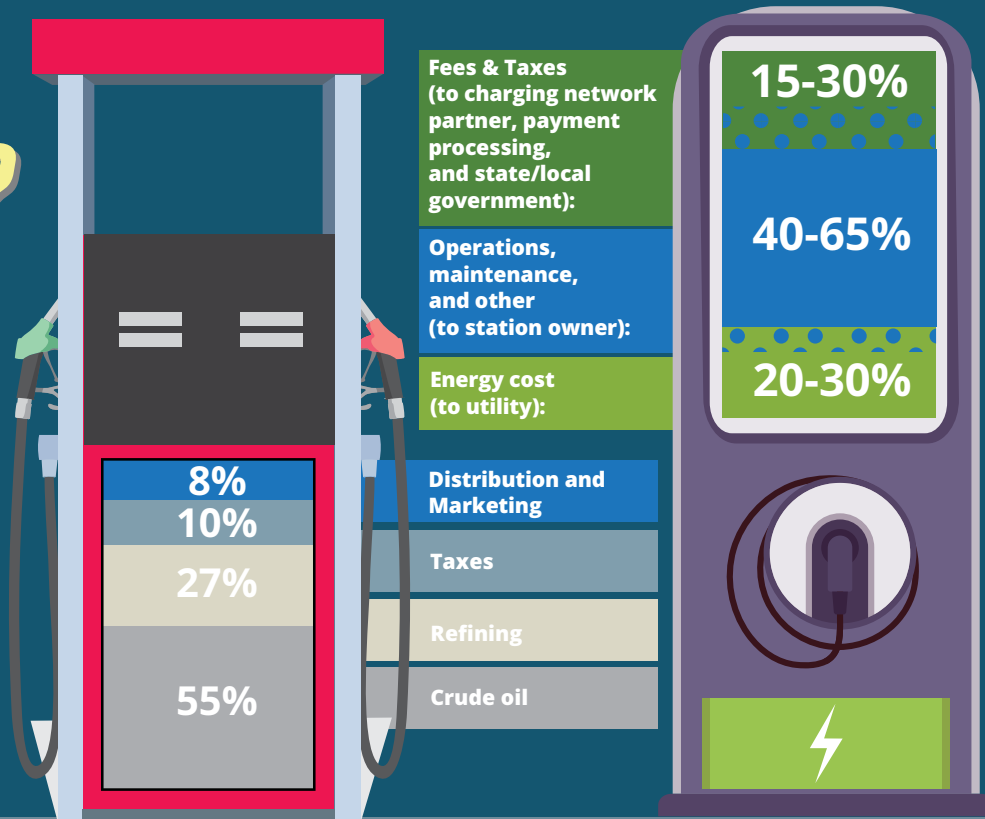
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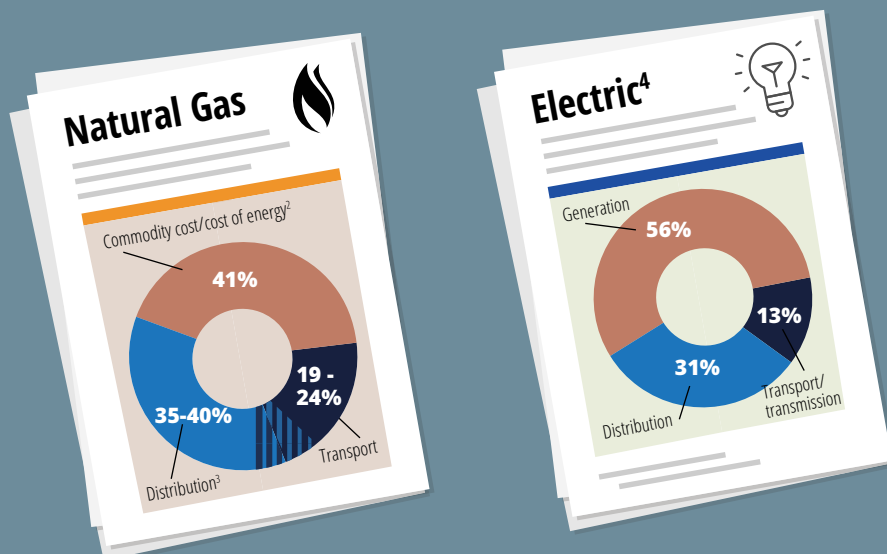
Switching to more electric uses isn't just about using less energy overall – it is also about whether your energy costs reinvest in the community. Whether fueling your car or powering your home, choosing electricity means choosing to buy local.

When you buy gasoline from local stations, less than 10% of your purchase goes to the gas station.<sup>1</sup>

Public EV fast chargers have different ownership and pricing models, but can be locally-owned, keeping more of the cost within community.



The average utility bill varies widely from state to state, depending on factors such as which resources are available in the area.



If more of your electricity is generated locally, then more costs benefit local sources.

And with public power, your electric bill stays local – not to shareholders across the country or owners across the globe.

As community-focused, not for profit, utilities, **public power invests 20% more in the communities they serve** than investor-owned utilities.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Energy Information Administration. July 2022. <https://www.eia.gov/petroleum/gasdiesel/>

<sup>2</sup> American Gas Association, "Natural Gas Utility Rate Structure: the Customer Charge Component," May 28, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Ohio Consumers Council, "Guide to Understanding your Natural Gas Bill" <https://www.occ.ohio.gov/factsheet/guide-understanding-your-natural-gas-bill>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/electricity/prices-and-factors-affecting-prices.php>

<sup>5</sup> Public Power Pays Back, American Public Power Association. May 2022. [www.publicpower.org/resource/public-power-pays-back](http://www.publicpower.org/resource/public-power-pays-back)

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