

**Subject:** 20-80 NPA Community Focus Group Process  
**From:** NPA Framework Stakeholder Facilitators  
**Date:** September 27, 2024

## Overview

The Community Focus Group will examine the potential impacts of Non-Gas Pipeline Alternatives (NPAs) on communities in Massachusetts, with an emphasis on historically overburdened and marginalized populations. The focus group will seek to gain feedback from community members about how alternatives to natural gas infrastructure will impact their families, businesses, and communities. It will also identify considerations that enable the equitable distribution of anticipated costs and benefits from NPAs. The feedback from this group of stakeholders will help the Local Distribution Companies (LDCs) refine their NPA framework.

## Composition and Characteristics

The Community Focus Group will consist of up to 15 members who are knowledgeable about the day-to-day experiences of Environmental Justice Populations<sup>1</sup> and/or can provide input on how changes to energy-using technologies and energy costs may impact customers. Focus group members will be selected to provide geographic representation and a diversity of perspectives, with an emphasis on ensuring representation from multiple Environmental Justice populations. Applicants meeting the following criteria are invited to apply:

- Interest in learning about the impacts of a natural gas transition and providing input that will help inform NPA implementation and design.
- Member of an environmental justice population.
- Employee/Volunteer/Board Member at an organization providing services directly to Environmental Justice communities. For example, this may include, but is not limited to, individuals working at a community center, community group, community organization, church, faith-based group, place of worship, school, educational institution, Head Start Program, business, local institution, nonprofit or service provider.

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<sup>1</sup> The Commonwealth of Massachusetts uses “**environmental justice population**” to refer to a neighborhood that meets one or more of the following criteria: 1) **Income**: The annual median household income is not more than 65 percent of the statewide annual median household income. 2) **Race/ethnicity**: Minorities comprise 40 percent or more of the population. 3) **Language**: 25 percent or more of households are not proficient in English. 4) **Race/ethnicity and income**: Minorities comprise 25 percent or more of the population, and the annual median household income of the municipality in which the neighborhood is located does not exceed 150 percent of the statewide annual median household income. Environmental Justice Communities are also designated geographically using [this map](#).

- Ability to participate in Zoom meetings.
- Willing to commit to attending at least five of the six group meetings.

## Meeting Schedule

The Community Focus Group will meet six times between November 2024 and March 2025. All meetings will be held virtually using Zoom. Each meeting will last 90 minutes. The days and times of the meetings will be set based on members' availability and preferences.

## Application for Membership

Apply to participate in the Community Focus Group by completing the [Application Form](#). Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis and the application period will remain open until we reach the target number of participants. Once 15 Focus Group seats have been filled, all applicants will be notified by email and no more applications will be accepted.

The application form requests the applicants' name, contact information, the perspective they will bring to the Community focus group, the geographic areas they are representing, their interest in joining the group, and availability.

Please send any questions about the Community Focus Group application to [npaworkinggroup@apexanalyticsllc.com](mailto:npaworkinggroup@apexanalyticsllc.com) with the subject line "NPA Community Focus Group Application."

## Selection Process

Members of the Community Focus Group will be selected based on the information submitted in the Application Form. Apex staff may conduct additional research on the applicant's organization or geographic area. For all complete applications, the selection process will include the following steps:

- 1) **Group composition:** All applications advanced from the completeness review will be analyzed collectively to compose a focus group that balances a diversity of perspectives and provides sufficient overlap in available days/times. Specifically, reviewers will consider the following aspects in composing the group:
  - a. *Geography:* at least one member living in or providing services to people in each gas company territory
  - b. *Perspective and expertise:* members whose personal perspective or professional experience are diverse from one another
  - c. *Lived experience:* at least one member who is or has been part of an environmental justice community
  - d. *Personal characteristics:* members representing a range of ages, ethnicities, and primary languages

- 2) **Orientation discussion:** Once reviewers have composed a diverse group of potential focus group members, selected applicants will be invited to participate in a short (15-minute), one-on-one Zoom conversation with the focus group facilitator. In this conversation, applicants will be invited to ask questions about the focus group and will confirm their intent to participate.
- 3) **Final focus group composition:** The list of Community Focus Group members and the meeting schedule [will be published](#) by November 15, 2024.

## Compensation

Consistent with standard practice in evaluation and market research, Apex Analytics will pay an honorarium of \$600<sup>2</sup> to community members who request it. Participants are expected to attend at least five of the six focus group meetings and make alternative arrangements to provide input for any meetings not attended. The honorarium will be paid at the conclusion of the focus group process. For members participating on behalf of an organization, the honorarium will be paid to the organization.

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<sup>2</sup> The honorarium or incentive payment may be considered taxable income, subject to federal and/or state tax. The recipient is solely responsible for (1) understanding the tax implications of the honorarium or incentive payment; and (2) paying any federal and/or state tax applicable to the honorarium or incentive payment.