

Background

The IESO Consumer Forum provides an opportunity for electricity users and their associations to provide their input on key electricity market initiatives and discuss matters of concern with the IESO.

The IESO met with consumer representatives to seek input prior to developing the terms of reference for the Consumer Forum. Input was provided from a cross-section of electricity consumers including representatives from large and small industrial, commercial, agricultural, residential and public service (municipalities, universities, schools, hospitals) sectors.

Following these discussions, the IESO published a draft terms of reference document describing the basis and scope of the Consumer Forum. A final version of the terms of reference was published following the comment period, with the expectation that the scope of the Consumer Forum will evolve as initiatives are implemented.

Overview

The Consumer Forum is being managed as a key component of the IESO's Consumer Outreach Program, a broad-based and proactive IESO initiative designed to engage the various sectors of electricity consumers. The Consumer Forum will complement existing stakeholder engagement mechanisms.

Objectives

- To engage and promote awareness of issues in the broader electricity sector, their potential consumer impacts, and the role and perspective of the IESO in addressing those issues.
- To educate electricity consumers in Ontario by providing pertinent information about electricity sector issues, potential consumer impacts, and the IESO's plans and activities to address these issues.
- To foster an environment conducive to open and candid dialogue between interested consumers and the IESO.
- To create a vehicle through which consumers can provide meaningful feedback and input into the IESO's plans as well as broader electricity market issues.

- To gain perspective on the specific issues and challenges faced by different consumer groups.
- To foster the development of the demand side of the market through proactive outreach with the consumer sector.
- To provide consumer representatives on the IESO's Stakeholder Advisory Committee with a mechanism to effectively and efficiently gather consumer input.

Target Audiences

The Consumer Forum is open to participation from all electricity consumer sectors in Ontario. Involvement is anticipated from the residential and commercial sectors, trade and business associations, consumer and ratepayer organizations, as well as high-volume and low-volume industrial customers.

As the Consumer Forum evolves, it may become desirable to split customers into sector- and region-specific sub-groups for discussion of specific issues and opportunities.

Consumer Priorities

The Consumer Forum is intended to be an inclusive forum for the exchange of ideas and information. However, consumers from different sectors have different information needs. Analysis of stakeholder feedback received to date suggests interest and participation in the Consumer Forum will depend heavily on the IESO's ability to identify consumer needs and manage content accordingly.

Activities and Initiatives

To meet the broad range of consumer needs with respect to Ontario's complex electricity market, the Consumer Forum will include multiple, targeted channels to engage and educate electricity consumers.

Ongoing initiatives may include annual general meetings; meetings between interested consumers and representatives of the IESO's Senior Management, Board of Directors and/or Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), as appropriate; structured feedback sessions or focus groups; issue-specific workshops; online surveys; and other direct outreach mechanisms as required.

The first general meeting is expected to take place in the first half of 2008.

Results and Reporting

The IESO will submit an annual report on the Consumer Forum to the Senior Management Team, the Board of Directors and the Stakeholder Advisory Committee. This report will describe activities undertaken; identify measurable results; highlight successes; provide an update on progress towards reaching the IESO's stated goals and objectives; and identify next steps.