

# Very Small Utilities (VSU) Working Group - Touchpoint Meeting #1

## Meeting Notes

<b>Date:</b>	April 4, 2025, 2:00pm - 4:15pm
<b>Attendance:</b>	Atikokan Hydro Inc.: Jennifer Wiens Cornerstone Hydro Electric Concepts: Greg Van Dusen Electricity Distributors Association: Brittany Ashby Fort Frances Power Corp.: Joerg Ruppenstein, Marah Trivers Hearst Power Distribution Co. Ltd.: Jessy Richard Renfrew Hydro Inc.: Steve Head Tandem Energy Services: Manuela Ris-Schofield Vulnerable Energy Consumers Coalition: Bill Harper, Mark Garner Wellington North Power Inc.: Richard Bucknall OEB Staff: Tyler Davids, Donald Lau, Theodore Antonopoulos, James Sidlofsky, Pauline Shen

Utilities and intervenors generally found the VSU pilot process, which has been conducted for five cost of service applications, to be a success:

- Intervenors found that the 1-Day Issues Meeting, in which parties could ask informal questions off the record, reduced intervenor costs as formal interrogatories were not needed on all topics.
- Intervenors and utilities found the 1-Day Issues Meeting valuable as it allowed for more personable conversations and aided in reducing language barriers.
- Utilities found that while the lists of clarification questions, updates, and corrections mutually agreed to by parties were similar in form to interrogatories, the pilot process reduced the total number of questions received compared to previous proceedings.
- Intervenors suggested that the process should be extended beyond very small utilities and that the process not be limited based on a utility's customer count but rather focus on simple applications with few intervenors.

While the working group believes the process should continue, utilities and intervenors provided the following feedback:

- A utility noted that it completed its Distribution System Plan (DSP) in-house based on the DSP sample approved by the OEB for VSUs. The utility remarked that it did not receive many questions pertaining to the DSP, which brought up inquiries about the value of completing a DSP in-house. However, OEB staff and intervenors noted that the lack of questioning would indicate that the DSP was well-written.
- Although the OEB approved a normalized average user per customer (NAC) load forecast sample for use by VSUs, some utilities still prefer to outsource load forecasts as it is not in their area of expertise. Utilities requested that OEB staff provide frequent training on load forecasts to increase utilities' comfort with completing the load forecast in-house thereby reducing third-party costs.

- While some utilities appear unclear on the expectation of customer engagement for a cost of service application, OEB staff reiterated that customer engagement should be tailored to the utility's circumstances and that there is no requirement for distributors to undertake a formal survey. OEB staff noted that the OEB sees value in a utility attempting outreach, like a town hall, when preparing a cost of service application, even if very few customers attend.
- While a commissioner has been used as a facilitator on all five cases that have followed the VSU process, intervenors noted that they would prefer if an OEB staff member facilitate the settlement conference on future cases that use the process.
- The OEB is piloting a budget for intervenor participation on cost of service applications of \$20k per intervenor for cost of service reviews with fewer than 30k customers. Intervenors suggested that the OEB reconsider this budget, given that utilities do not have a known budget on regulatory costs to prepare their applications.
- Utilities suggested that immaterial variances between models or pass-through model updates be reconciled in one iteration prior to the settlement conference to avoid multiple model iterations throughout the cost of service process.