

## Meeting Notes

# Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing (SOMAH)

## Advisory Council Meeting Q2 2022

June 23, 2022

## Attendees

### SOMAH Program Administrators

**Chris Walker** | SOMAH Program Director  
**Marisa Villarreal** | SOMAH Program Manager  
**Jae Berg** | SOMAH Program Manager  
**Rachael Diaz** | SOMAH Program Coordinator  
**Luke Ballweber** | SOMAH Program Coordinator  
**Sarah Salem** | SOMAH Program Manager  
**Sana Sheikholeslami** | SOMAH Program Coordinator  
**Peter Pierre** | SOMAH Program Manager  
**Brittany Chenier** | SOMAH Program Manager  
**Monica De La Cruz** | SOMAH Program Coordinator  
**Staci Hoell** | SOMAH Program Manager  
**Walther Perez** | SOMAH Program Manager  
**Minerva Defee** | SOMAH Program Manager  
**Adele Watts** | Communities for a Better Environment (SOMAH PA Partner) **Tyler Valdes** | California Environmental Justice Alliance (SOMAH PA Partner) **Sarah Lerhaupt** | California Public Utilities Commission

### SOMAH Advisory Council Members

**Agustin Cabrera** | RePower LA  
**Allan Rago** | Quality Conservation Services  
**Alma Marquez** | Independent Consultant  
**Andrea Barnier** | Self-Help Enterprises **Andres Ramirez** | People for Mobility Justice  
**Elizabeth C Elliot** | Northern Circle Indian Housing Authority  
**Jakobi Ewart** | The Niles Foundation  
**Kenneth Wells** | O&M Solar Services  
**Nicole Lim** | California Indian Museum & Cultural Center

## Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome & Introductions
2. Session 1: Update on Program Incentive Changes Proposal
3. Session 2: Increasing Tribal Participation in SOMAH
4. Session 3: Tenant Education Updates & Future Strategies
5. Wrap Up & Next Steps

## Meeting Notes

### Welcome & Introductions

*Marisa Villarreal, SOMAH Program Manager*

Marisa led a round of introductions, reviewed the meeting agenda, and shared the meeting goals:

1. To update the AC on PA's proposal to remove the annual incentive step-down and increase SOMAH's incentive rate, and get consensus and approval.
2. To update the AC on some of the challenges, barriers, and strategies for engaging tribes, and get feedback on some of the ideas, approaches for increasing tribal participation in the program.
3. To share recent tenant education survey trends and insights, and discuss future strategies to improve tenant engagement.

### Session 1: Update on Program Incentive Changes Proposal

*Jae Berg, SOMAH Program Manager*

Jae presented on the purpose of changing SOMAH's Incentive Structure, how the PA proposes to change it, what the PA is proposing to change, and when the PA plans to submit a Petition for Modification (PFM).

## Notes

- Background
  - Incentive rates have stepped down twice since opening of the program.
  - Program data, third party evaluation, and external market analyses indicate that multifamily solar PV costs are increasing while SOMAH incentives have decreased.
- Modification
  - 1) Eliminate the annual step-down methodology
  - 2) Restore incentives to year 1 incentive levels
- Stakeholder Feedback
  - One chance to request, should we consider higher rates?
  - Why are we requesting the Year 1 rate?
- Next Steps
  - 1) Looking into what higher rate would still ensure we can meet the 300MW goal in our allotted budget.
  - 2) Higher incentive rate is TBD and approach is not public yet.
- AC vote was supportive (JB and Elizabeth absent).

## Discussion

- **AC Member:** The higher incentive would make it more feasible. Try the Year 1 approach, the smaller amount first, and see if we need to increase it more.
- **SOMAH PA:** It is unlikely we will go higher than what we request now.
- **AC Member:** Is there a specific number that the stakeholders gave in their feedback? Since we have once chance to increase the rate, what would the ideal amount be?
- **SOMAH PA:** Stakeholders did not specify an incentive amount that would make a project feasible. There are some mitigating factors (i.e. design) that decrease the incentive amount. Considering those factors, we have paid ~\$2 per watt. One option could be to keep the structure, figure out how much the incentive can change, and then change the rate. The incentives on the table are maximum rates that will likely not be reached due to the mitigating factors that also have to be considered.
- **AC Member:** Would we remove the step-down and add other language that states we can change the rate?
- **SOMAH PA:** SOMAH is not a market transformation program. These projects would not happen without the incentives. We will need to continue to provide robust incentives, but we will also keep requesting that costs are provided so that we can have a check on incentives/costs. We cannot bank on the costs to be continuously decreasing. We don't know what they will be in the coming years.
- **AC Member:** Can you get contractors or building owners to generate a letter of support?

- **SOMAH PA:** We can reach out to them as well.

### Next Steps

- The SOMAH PA will plan to submit the Petition for Modification (PFM) within July, noting that approval takes ~6 months (timing is TBD)
- The SOMAH AC will draft a Letter of Support to submit, once the PFM is submitted

## Session 2: Increasing Tribal Participation in SOMAH

*Marisa Villarreal, SOMAH Program Manager*  
*Rachael Diaz, SOMAH Program Manager Luke*  
*Ballweber, SOMAH Program Coordinator*

Marisa presented on the PA's goal of increasing tribal access and participation in the program, and challenges around tribal participation. Luke and Rachael presented on the PAs's strategies to increase tribal participation in SOMAH. Marisa facilitated a Q&A and requested feedback from the AC.

### Notes

- Increasing tribal participation is a priority in increasing program access, serving the community that drove the creation of this program. The CPUC has also stressed the importance of tribal participation.
- Total of 5 tribal applications:
  - 3 active applications close to closing out
    - 2 in Bishop Paiute, 1 in Round Valley
  - 2 canceled applications
    - 1 property applied twice, but its reg agreement is in review to try to re-enter pipeline
- Barriers include:
  - Lack of eligible affordable housing in tribal lands
  - Data may be missing properties due to discrepancies in maps identifying tribal land ownership
  - Misalignment in regulatory agreements (especially HUD Indian Block Grant) that do not contain information we need for eligibility compliance
- CalEnviroScreen 4.0 is updating DAC (Disadvantaged Community) status to include tribes, acknowledging that lands were wrongly excluded by gaps in data collection.

- Eligible multifamily affordable housing on tribal lands can now qualify for SOMAH through DAC rather than income requirements.
- The press release is planned to increase awareness.
- PA Strategies
  - *Internal*
    - Cultural competency training for all staff
    - Establishing a working group with AC member, PA staff and tribal housing experts
  - *Marketing, Education & Outreach*
    - Regional listening sessions and consultation
    - Adding tribal CBO partners
    - Co-marketing with tribal housing entities
    - Targeted outreach to tribal-serving JTOs
  - *Application and Regulatory Documentation Support*
    - Handbook updates to include flexibility for tribal regulatory documentation and tribal-specific technical assistance (TA) materials
    - TA and application support for tribes
    - Planning grants
    - Co-leveraging other existing programs for eligibility designations, possibly expanding eligibility for tribal housing to include different housing types that are more prevalent in tribal communities
    - Exploring other eligibility challenges
- The SOMAH PA is exploring the possibility of connecting with the Statewide Homekey program, which has funding for tribal lands.
- A SOMAH PA member noted there is a distinction between CBOs and the tribal governmental agency representing the people, as there have been instances in which the officially recognized entity is not in the same role as a community based organization.

## Discussion

- **AC Member:** I appreciate consulting the communities themselves rather than assuming their needs. It's exciting to see it making a real difference in participation. Additional support could go beyond TA to increase the single point-of-contact model, guiding them through every step of the process.
- **SOMAH PA:** The SOMAH PA wants to emphasize the role of TA and support services, understanding that this will be a process that will rely on the partnership of AC members.
- **SOMAH PA:** Is there a preference or a prioritization of PA strategies?
- **AC Member:** The SOMAH PA understands the importance of listening first and establishing connections with those we are consulting. It would be good for

Program Handbook updates to include flexibility to expand strategies as we learn what is most needed.

- **AC Member:** What is meant by cultural humility? The National Institutes of Health (NIH) defines cultural humility as “a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique whereby the individual not only learns about another’s culture, but one starts with an examination of her/his own beliefs and cultural identities.”
- **AC Member:** Is there a relationship with the California Department of Housing & Community Development (HCD)?
- **SOMAH PA:** That relationship is still in development, but we want to expand the relationship with Homekey.

### Next Steps

- AC member Elizabeth Elliott will make an introduction with the tribal liaison at California Department of Housing & Community Development (HCD) to access their listserv.

## Session 3: Tenant Education Updates & Future Strategies

Sarah Salem, *SOMAH Program Manager*

Sana Sheikholeslami, *SOMAH Program Coordinator*

Sarah provided an overview of SOMAH’s tenant education (TE) requirements and services, and the importance of TE. Sana presented on how TE is being evaluated and the trends observed by the PA so far. Sarah presented a case study on a recent Continued TE workshop, shared future initiatives, and requested feedback from the AC.

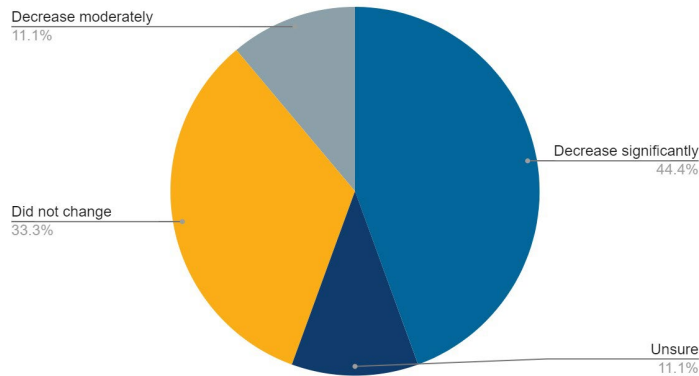
### Notes:

- The importance of tenant education:
  - The more educated you are about something, the more empowered you are
  - TE helps community be engaged so we can learn from them and improve our services
  - It helps tenants understand the value of solar and extra benefits (e.g. job training)
  - Tenant education ensures that solar installation is something happening with them and not “to” them
  - It reduces tenant confusion and discomfort

- Overview of SOMAH's tenant education requirements
  - Host customers must conduct tenant education 60 days or fewer prior to the start of construction via:
    - Direct delivery or USPS
    - Some other touch point (e.g. email, in-person workshop)
  - SOMAH PA has materials available in over 7 languages
- Overview of tenant education affidavit results
  - The SOMAH PA has collected data from 89 SOMAH projects (Track B only) with completed affidavits
  - Includes projects with signed tenant affidavits (and some projects that have completed TE requirements, but haven't gotten to signing affidavits yet)
  - Affidavit results:
    - 89.9% of projects are doing direct delivery.
    - 10.1% chose to mail required materials to residents.
    - Most 2nd TE requirements are being met by making hard copies of materials available in community spaces (68/89), followed by email (11/89).
      - These are more passive forms of meeting the requirement. Residents have said that the more robust person-person interactions where they can get questions answered worked best.
    - "Host Customers" are completing TE requirements, often with contractor support.
  - By leaving the 2nd TE requirement open-ended, we find projects are using the least effective way of ensuring tenants are aware of what's being done to their property. While meeting qualifications, they're not doing anything to ensure tenants are engaging with the materials.
- Tenant education survey results
  - In an effort to better understand the effectiveness of SOMAH's tenant education materials, the SOMAH PA started a survey pilot consisting of mailed surveys sent to 30 units in a single property in San Luis Obispo County, who are seeing bill credits.
  - The goal was to understand which materials they received, how helpful they were, and what changes to their bill looked like.
  - Received 10 out of 30 surveys back
    - 7/10 residents received and reviewed at least 1 SOMAH TE material.
    - 9/10 residents would like to learn more about topics related to SOMAH and solar (e.g. utility bill savings, learning how solar works, and job training opportunities).
  - Utility bill changes

- The majority of tenants saw their bill credits decrease significantly or moderately. See graphic below:

How did your utility bill change with SOMAH bill credits?



- Next steps for surveys include deploying surveys on a larger scale, continuing to analyze the results, and using results to inform how to update TE requirements.
- Tenant education services
  - The SOMAH PA offers free TE support to help customers reach their TE requirements (workshops, “train the trainer”, and 1:1 calls).
  - Have marketed these in different ways (direct email, PowerClerk reminders, webinars, quarterly trainings) to slow uptake.
  - Have received 7 requests since launch in Feb 2021.
  - Have started conducting TE Wellness Calls (direct outreach to contractors and property owners) - intended to build relationships with program participants and support them in navigating TE requirements.
- Continued education services
  - The SOMAH PA has also started offering continued education services, which is tenant education for residents living in buildings that have gone through the SOMAH program, who didn't receive robust TE the first time, or are new to a building
  - The SOMAH PA also continues to monitor and promote the tenant hotline to ensure tenants have a place to have their questions answered.
  - The SOMAH team recently conducted a continued education workshop at a property called Emerald Cove in Huntington Beach. The onsite property manager called the tenant hotline and proposed an in-person workshop.
    - Workshop included an overview of SOMAH, how solar works, utility bill changes, and how to save energy through a new interactive material.
    - Asked questions pre- and post-workshop surveying their knowledge and familiarity of SOMAH.



- In-person interactions help us understand and support the community we're trying to serve - people are the heart of this program, and while it may feel like an administrative burden, equity doesn't happen on its own and it requires us to hold this program and its participants accountable.
- Future initiatives
  - Onsite property manager training (required or optional)
  - Creating specific material for onsite managers
  - Tenant ambassador programs (paid opportunities for tenants interested in being the on-site experts)
  - Handbook changes (regulatory effort informed by TE surveys, focus groups and interviews)

### Discussion

- **AC Member:** TE is important to increase awareness of sustainability and what solar is. People weren't getting the material that helped them understand how they can save on their energy bills through simple actions. Did any of them share how they received their materials?
- **SOMAH PA:** Direct delivery, fliers, or other touch points, but not through workshops.
- **AC Member:** People want to learn how to get involved with solar and job training. Workshops seem like the only way of making sure tenants have a sense of what is going on. Community centers for the projects we're working are often blocked out as a non-use space at the moment due to COVID.
- **SOMAH PA:** We had the opportunity to look at SOMAH projects and interview tenants. Tenants we interviewed didn't recognize the SOMAH logo. This signifies we are not meeting the intention of the program. We care about tenants and tenant education, but the way our requirements are designed are not meeting our goals.
- **AC Member:** What can we do for property owners to fulfill their obligation in an impactful way?
- **SOMAH PA:** Although affidavits show that host customers are fulfilling the requirements, it is often actually contractors who are fulfilling the requirements, and property owners may not know the importance or intention of TE. Potential actions we can take are around making program changes where we're seeing gaps, or we can hold incentives back if they really aren't even meeting the requirements.
- **AC Member:** Question about the link between ESA (Energy Savings Assistance Program) and SOMAH - as an ESA contractor, I don't know if I've ever received a referral from SOMAH to do ESA weatherization, so I'd like to think about how to connect the two programs better. I like the idea of the ambassador program for tenants. It's great to have a local champion speak to

others in the building about the program and its benefits. How long after the project was completed did you do the survey? Months after the solar is installed, the tenant might be more apt to go to a workshop on how to read their bill. Regarding questions that were asked by the tenants, have you turned those into FAQs to include in your educational materials?

- **SOMAH PA:** In regards to ESA, we give tenant information to the IOUs, and the IOUs are supposed to follow up with ESA savings information. We've heard that the IOUs have been unresponsive, so it could be they're not getting that information. The IOUs are required to give us information twice a year on how many new people have enrolled in ESA.
- **AC Member:** Let's talk offline about ESA and connecting it with SOMAH.
- **AC Member:** For ESA and our properties, they have to go to each tenant, but have to get approval from the property owner as a whole and that's a larger discussion.
- **SOMAH PA:** This is a good point, because while folks want to take advantage of ESA, they might not be able to make changes to their homes as renters.
- **SOMAH PA:** With regards to timeline - we've built out a timeline that allows for flexibility. We know that it can take anywhere from 6-10 months from interconnection to when they start seeing bill savings. We're in discussion with IOUs to figure out why these delays are happening. And people have varying bills - some are TOU (time of use rates), some are fixed rates. What we continue to learn is that people are really paying attention to their bills. One person had a spreadsheet at home and is over-budgeting because they're worried about missing their payments. There is a real need to know what is happening. The reason we have a requirement for tenant education to happen within 60 days or fewer is because we want to avoid scenarios where they don't know what's happening. Timing is hard because if the most we can do is one workshop, it's hard to know whether that workshop will be most beneficial prior or post-installation and bill savings.
- **SOMAH PA:** We're also conducting focus groups in Spanish, Cantonese and English to get feedback on tenant education materials and will receive those results in July. The questions in those surveys are also looking at accessibility and youth education.
- **AC Member:** I'm unaware that the contractors are typically the ones that are managing and conducting tenant education. I suggest the SOMAH PA try to find tenant associations and partner with those. How long did you envision the follow up/surveying process to be with the tenants?
- **SOMAH PA:** For the surveys we're aiming to do them once a year. We won't be able to survey 100% of tenants, but we want diverse representation, so we're finalizing our methodology, but will be doing an annual deployment.

- **AC Member:** I recommend promoting the tenant hotline and getting that contact information out there.
- **AC Member:** I would like to talk with the PA more offline about TE and engagement, what our goals are and what we've seen. Some of the challenges and shortcomings we've seen in our outreach include: 1) We deliver the tenant education materials and calls, but it's hard to track the calls we get and when those calls develop into one-on-one conversations, 2) Even as we send information out, it's not until they see the effect on their bills, that's when they say, "Oh this affects me now". Other barriers include capacity - as a property owner (as one of the larger ones), I'm the only one dedicated to tenant education and it can be really challenging.
- **SOMAH PA:** We do have a tenant education webinar required for property owners and contractors. We've been trying to get tenant education services used more by participants.
- **AC Member:** It's often the inundation of information that's hard. Still thinking about the cost of providing materials and printing. Additionally, many tenants don't have emails, so it's hard to know what approach is best. Workshops are a hit and miss - it takes a lot of staff time to put on a workshop.
- **SOMAH PA:** The SOMAH PA could look into printing stipends or direct support for owners who need it.
- **SOMAH PA:** It would make a lot of sense for owners to include some subset of the TE materials in new tenant welcome/lease packets, given turnover and the fact that the systems will be installed for 20 years.
- **AC Member:** I love the idea of including the tenant education materials in the lease packets!
- **SOMAH PA:** Should we be reaching out more often to the onsite managers?
- **AC Member:** Yes, it just comes down to whether they will have the ability to become more involved.
- **SOMAH PA:** At Disney, the most training they give to their staff are the people that clean up at the end of the day - we talk about educating property owners and property management, but maybe it's the onsite staff that need to be educated because they're the ones with more access to onsite tenants.

### Next Steps

- SOMAH PA staff Sarah, AC members, Allan and Andrea, and stakeholder team to talk offline about ESA and SOMAH connections.

## Wrap-up & Next Steps

*Marisa Villarreal, SOMAH Program Manager*

- SOMAH AC to draft a Letter of Support for PFM proposal
- Select a Q3 meeting date