

I-REN Executive Committee

Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the I-REN Executive Committee was called to order by Chair Crystal Ruiz at 2:00 p.m. on March 21, 2023, at the WRCOG Office, Citrus Conference Room, 3390 University Avenue, Suite 200, Riverside.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Crystal Ruiz led the Committee members and guests in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

- CVAG:
 - City of Indio - Oscar Ortiz
- SBCOG:
 - County of San Bernardino - Curt Hagman
 - Town of Apple Valley - Art Bishop
- WRCOG:
 - City of Corona - Jacque Casillas*
 - City of Jurupa Valley - Chris Barajas
 - City of San Jacinto - Crystal Ruiz

*Arrived after Roll Call

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

5. CONSENT CALENDAR

RESULT: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED

MOVER: Hagman

SECONDER: Barajas

AYES: Ortiz, Hagman, Bishop, Barajas, Ruiz

A. Summary Minutes from the February 21, 2023, Executive Committee Meeting

Action:

1. Approved the Summary Minutes from the February 21, 2023, Executive Committee meeting.

6. REPORTS / DISCUSSION

A. I-REN Strategic Planning Update and Survey Results

Mindy Craig from Bluepoint Planning shared a presentation about the I-REN Strategic Plan and provided a timeline for the process of creating and implementing the Plan, which is expected to be completed by July 2023.

Bluepoint has created a strategic framework in the Business Plan, which is very specific to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and its funding. I-REN's vision is to connect residents, business, and local governments to a wide range of energy efficiency resources within the Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. Most of the effort is in the development of regional programs and technical assistance that will engage everyone in the entire region.

As a REN, I-REN will provide energy efficiency services, which is the key for a long-term resilient community by driving down demand for energy. Most program areas are divided equally and accessible to both counties, except the Normalized Energy Metered Consumption (NMEC) rebate programs, which will focus on reducing energy use with equipment upgrades on public buildings and be dependent on participation. A substantial amount of funding will be equally divided within the COGs to implement and deliver these programs for the next six years.

BayREN counties' primary role is to conduct marketing and outreach, and programs are run by third-party implementers or by a county which wants to lead it.

Committee member Curt Hagman pointed out that the Committee had previously asked to share the resources equally for each county, but now Bluepoint is recommending that programs are accessible to all, not specific to any area, and asked why this changed from previous discussions.

Ms. Craig explained that most of the funding for those programs are for the technical support, workforce and education, and marketing and outreach. The programs are not specific to one city, but are available for all cities to participate in if they choose to do so. The funds are equally available to any city that wants to participate.

Mr. Hagman is concerned that SBCOG will not get its fair share of resources because there are two COGs for Riverside, and only one for San Bernardino, which is the reason that SBCOG left the Los Angeles REN. I-REN is setting it up to be the same way by dividing resources equally by COG, with twice the resources going to Riverside County jurisdictions. There are also no guidelines for the projects.

Committee member Art Bishop stated that SBCOG had more than one-third of expenditure dollars, since it has a larger geographical area, population, and number of cities. Mr. Bishop is concerned that when the time comes to ask for additional funding to meet the needs of SBCOG, those dollars may not be available.

Committee member Hagman added that if boundaries are set semi-equally and work within those parameters, I-REN can avoid any potential downfalls later. Committee member Hagman does not want to compete against each other or have project money up for grabs.

Chair Ruiz asked if the two COGs in Riverside County are representing different people, or if there is

duplication.

Casey Dailey, WRCOG Director of Energy & Environment Programs, clarified that there is no duplication, but there are different member agencies within the COGs. It is not necessarily about representing, but rather about engaging the member cities, counties, and individuals that are involved in facilities. The programs will be designed, with the Committee's direction, to equally serve everybody without prejudice of jurisdiction.

Mr. Dailey added that in the summer of 2023, the I-REN team will conduct I-REN orientations in the smaller, far-outreaching communities of the two counties, such as the High Desert area, to provide information about available I-REN programs, resources, and services. The team would engage individuals from those jurisdiction for their input and establish a relationship with them to see how I-REN can support them.

Chair Ruiz suggested that instead waiting for cities to apply for projects / programs themselves, the I-REN team could actively educate and encourage the cities to apply.

Committee member Jacque Casillas asked if the I-REN Executive Committee approves the programming, or if the consultants will approve.

Mr. Dailey responded that last month, the Committee awarded four contracts to companies and firms that will implement the programs. Next month, one of those firms will present the Public Sector Programs that are intended to be offered.

Committee member Casillas suggested having a two-step award process to accommodate San Bernardino County: first by population, and if there is still money left over, then everyone can apply.

Mr. Dailey responded that there is an entire section in the I-REN Business Plan which talks about goals and how to ensure that all 52 cities in the two counties are served equally. Out of the Normalized Meter Energy Consumption (NMEC) Program, there is a defined dollar amount, and there is nothing preventing the Committee from allocating a certain amount to each county.

Committee member Casillas asked if they could do the same for each program area.

Ms. Craig responded that each one is slightly different, but Bluepoint can create a framework to ensure equity across the region, especially when looking at targeted partners. There will be built-in mechanisms where the Committee can re-visit to continue to build and improve the programs and offerings in a way to best serve the COGs.

Chair Ruiz indicated that the Committee would divide the funds on a program-by-program basis, and consultants and staff should present a plan that is 50/50 between the two counties, when applicable.

Mr. Dailey stated that the funding would also depend on the demand, and used the Fellowship Program as an example. The budget is structured to allow for 27 fellows to be placed within the 54 cities each year; however, funding will only be allocated to those cities that request and host a fellow.

Committee member Hagman agreed that if cities do not participate, then they should not be rewarded,

and if the COG does not spend their share of the funds, then those funds should go back in the bucket.

Ms. Craig suggested that the Strategic Plan becomes the mechanism to help mitigate any disagreements.

Margaret Marchant from Bluepoint reported that the most important lesson to take from other RENs is to learn from their audience and listen to their input. Partnering with other programs can help reach audiences and benefit from shared objectives and activities.

Nancy Barba from Bluepoint emphasized that data collection is important to ensure that I-REN is serving its target communities, and share that data with evaluators. Sensitive data such as income and demographic data will serve to inform if the benefits and programs are accruing to the target communities. There are tools available, such as the CalEnviroScreen, to leverage to inform and target program participation.

Committee member Bishop asked if there is any intention to use I-REN funds to send representatives to participate in code hearings, and speak on / for against policies on behalf of the I-REN.

Mr. Dailey responded that the CPUC has regular proceedings, which I-REN can be a party to, and provide comments and rebuttals from the I-REN perspective. From a legislative standpoint, the use rate-payer dollars is out of the scope of those funds.

Ms. Craig added that BayREN and 3CREN have participated with local utilities on their state-wide Codes and Standards Programs. BayREN also worked with the University of California, Los Angeles to develop a data tool to understand where the energy usage is. Marketing and branding is a critical piece to raise awareness and raise I-REN's profile. It takes time and consistency, so that even if someone is not familiar with it, a consistent message still gets across the different platforms.

Ms. Marchant indicated that the best practices for building an I-REN budget involves building the budget from the bottom up, which is how I-REN's budget was set up. The CPUC will measure the success based on outcomes at the regional level, without regard to COG territories or county lines. It takes the entire combined region that the REN serves, but RENs can set their own targets and metrics to track their performance in addition to CPUC methods to ensure the REN reaches their region equally.

Ms. Barba indicated that one of the components of a successful REN is the ability to be flexible and adaptable. I-REN will be the first REN that has elected officials in the decision making process, and there will be other levels of operationalized decision making by staff and implementers. Evaluators will require certain data to be reported yearly to ensure that I-REN is working towards its Business Plan goals.

Ms. Craig discussed the stakeholder survey results, which focused on awareness and outreach, making the resources available to the region, and ways to make I-REN a success. Discussions also included strengths and weaknesses of I-REN, as well as opportunities to consider, and potential threats.

Goal areas include providing equitable distribution of benefits in the region, building accountability and transparency to demonstrate success, enabling a successful REN launch, and ensure an effective organization that optimizes relationships with members and partners.

Committee member Bishop indicated that in addition to the tribes and special districts, San Bernardino County also has Community Service Districts that he would like Bluepoint to add to the list of local governments.

Action:

1. Received and filed.

B. Workforce, Education & Training Sector Update: I-REN Energy Fellowship Program

Tyler Masters, WRCOG Program Manager, reported that last month the I-REN Executive Committee directed staff to continue working with CivicSpark to see what the program would look like. I-REN's application was approved in early March 2023, and after direction from the Committee, staff will develop a list of energy programs to choose from and begin having conversations member agencies. After confirming host agency participation, recruitment would begin in May 2023 to give host agencies ample opportunity to interview potential Fellows, and the Fellowship Program is set to officially begin in September 2023.

Community colleges have been informed of this opportunity, and staff met with the President and Dean of Barstow Community College.

Committee member Art Bishop suggested that staff reach out to the high schools, as this would carry through to the community colleges.

Mr. Masters explained that host agencies would be required to provide a location for fellows to work, provide the necessary equipment, and have a site supervisor committed to the Fellow's professional growth. Mr. Masters provided three options to consider on how to split the Fellows within the I-REN territory: 1) first come, first served 2) allocation by county, and 3) allocation by COG.

Action:

1. Authorized the WRCOG Executive Director, upon review by WRCOG legal counsel, to enter into an Agreement with CivicSpark to support the I-REN Energy Fellowship and to identify, recruit, and place up to 27 Fellows within the I-REN service territory in the fall of 2023.

RESULTS: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED

MOVER: Hagman

SECONDER: Bishop

AYES: Ortiz, Hagman, Bishop, Casillas, Barajas, Ruiz

C. I-REN Regulatory and Reporting Update

Due to time constraints, there was no presentation on this item, but Committee members voted on this item.

Action:

1. Authorized WRCOG, on behalf of I-REN, to provide comments on CPUC proceedings that I-REN is a party to, when the required deadline to provide comments does not allow sufficient time for presentation to the IREN Executive Committee, and report the comments at the next meeting of the I-REN Executive Committee.

RESULTS: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED
MOVER: Hagman
SECONDER: Barajas
AYES: Ortiz, Hagman, Bishop, Casillas, Barajas, Ruiz

D. I-REN Participation in U.S. Department of Energy Resilient and Efficient Codes

Due to time constraints, there was no presentation on this item, but Committee members voted on this item.

Actions:

1. Approved I-REN's participation as subrecipient in the California Energy Commission application to the U.S. Department of Energy for funding of SolarAPP+ and CodeCycle projects under the Resilient and Efficient Codes Implementation Program.
2. Authorized the WRCOG Executive Director to sign Partner Commitment Letters to the California Energy Commission and other ancillary documents in connection with the application to Department of Energy.

RESULTS: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED
MOVER: Hagman
SECONDER: Barajas
AYES: Ortiz, Hagman, Bishop, Casillas, Barajas, Ruiz

E. Discussion of I-REN Executive Committee 2023 Meeting Location Schedule

Casey Dailey, WRCOG Director of Energy & Environment Programs, reported that AB 361 rules are no longer in effect, so the Committee will revert to either the old rules (the Brown Act) or AB 2449. Going forward, the Committee must choose where the next meeting locations will be.

Committee member Curt Hagman suggested that Committee members could rotate between both COGs.

Mr. Dailey added that Committee members will be given a mileage reimbursements, and parking will be validated.

Staff will ensure that a location is available in WRCOG's office. If a Committee member would like to attend remotely, WRCOG must be notified at least 10 days prior to the meeting date so that the remote location can be added to the agenda, pursuant to Brown Act Rules. A meeting location schedule is yet to be determined.

Action:

1. Received and filed.

7. REPORT FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Chair Ruiz pointed out the pamphlets in the WRCOG lobby and encouraged members to take one.

8. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

Committee member Art Bishop requested an agenda item for clarification regarding the distribution of funds within I-REN. It was agreed that it would be explained through the Strategic Plan process in the upcoming months.

Committee member Bishop also indicated that there is a concern for increasing natural gas prices, which is a big issue in his area.

Mr. Dailey said he would do some research and provide some information.

9. GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no general announcements.

10. NEXT MEETING

The next I-REN Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for April 18, 2023, at a location yet to be determined.

11. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.