

PG&E PDP Outreach Plan

The Commission's Business & Community Outreach group (Outreach) proposes two primary approaches to outreach for PG&E's PDP rate plan for small and medium C&I customers. A combination of both approaches can help ensure that small businesses throughout PG&E's territory are engaged and knowledgeable about TOU and PDP. First, we recommend a mass media approach that will widely distribute information about TOU and PDP to small businesses through radio, television and newspapers. For instance, the new smart meter TV commercials seem very effective, because it is taking the voice of community leaders to ease the concern of a new technology and also to engage the customer to listen. However, the mistake was that these ads came after the deployment and installation; therefore, we recommend that the mass media approach begin well before the initiation of the new rates to ease concern and engage customers. Second, we recommend that this mass media approach be further supported by a grassroots campaign that will engage small businesses at a local level through local business organizations, local government, and community events.

Mini-survey of Small Businesses

The Outreach group's experience working with California small businesses suggests that multiple communication methods will be necessary to reach all of the small businesses in PG&E territory. We recently polled 15 small businesses in different areas of Northern California, and found (earlier we did the same type of survey using 100 small businesses):

- They varied in their preferred form of receiving information about their rates; most of the owners we spoke to indicated that they still prefer to receive information in the mail, while a few preferred email or online information
- None were members of their local Chamber of Commerce. Two were members of their local neighborhood association.

Based on these discussions, relying heavily on Chambers of Commerce and other medium/large business organizations to reach small business owners is not likely to be an effective means of engaging them in TOU/PDP. However, a grassroots approach can leverage small businesses' relationships with their local community by using local business associations and local government to help get the word out about TOU and PDP. By conducting a mass media approach as well, small business owners who are not involved in local groups can also learn about TOU and PDP during their work day through the radio and television, or by reading the newspaper.

Mass media approach

Through mass media, we can broadly get the word out that small businesses' will undergo a rate change to TOU and PDP-default. Using mass and local media to distribute clear, succinct, impactful messages can help ensure that small business owners hear about the rate change in a timely manner and through a medium that they trust and rely on regularly.

We recommend that PG&E take the lead with the mass media approach, as they have significant experience conducting mass media campaigns. Some of the tactics they should consider include:

- Newspaper articles
- Radio ads
- TV ads
- Major trade events
- Direct mail
- Clear, succinct messages that attract attention
- Possible coordinated message from all IOUs

Grassroots approach

While mass media can get the word out about the coming rate change on a broad level, small business owners will need to be provided with in-depth support and education to determine whether they should participate in PDP and how they should adjust their business to best take advantage of TOU. PG&E needs to provide educational support through their customer service representatives and online tools, but a grassroots campaign can provide additional support through trusted sources of information in their local community (e.g. neighborhood associations, SBDCs, local government) to further educate them and answer their questions.

The Outreach group can partner with PG&E to assist them in conducting grassroots efforts to reach out through local communities. Our outreach officers throughout the state have developed relationships with local community representatives and can leverage these to identify organizations, events and individuals and can reach out about TOU and PDP at the local level. The Commission's Outreach group can also take the lead on some of the grassroots events and will inform PG&E accordingly. Some tactics that should be considered include:

- Local community events
- Local business organizations, e.g. neighborhood business associations, Small Business Development Centers
- Local government
- Highlight local success stories
- Leverage influential community members
- In-depth, educational information
- Can grow exponentially through leads/recommendations from the community

The basis of our recommendation is that first PG&E has to engage the customer (i.e. mass media), and then to educate through town hall meetings and community events. Additionally, the Commission's Outreach group will assist PG&E in grassroots education to engage those that missed the mass media engagement. The concern is that PG&E should not emphasize grassroots over mass media, but rather use mass media to make the grassroots efforts more effective.