



## 2020-2021 Bill Payment Assistance Program Administration Requirements

### **Introduction**

Energy Outreach Colorado's (EOC) Bill Payment Assistance Program helps low-income individuals and families afford their home energy costs through a network of assistance agencies. Payments are made directly to energy vendors on behalf of customers. The qualifying energy sources are electricity, natural gas, coal, firewood, kerosene, propane, oil, and pellets. EOC bill payment assistance is available no more than once per energy source (up to two energy sources) during the program year, which runs from October 1, 2020 through September 29, 2021.

### **Eligibility**

- Gross monthly household income (i.e. income before taxes or deductions) at or below 80% of area median income (AMI). Refer to the table on the [Partner Login](#) page to determine applicant's percentage of AMI.
- At least one day past the due date on utility bill or low on bulk fuel (coal, firewood, kerosene, propane, oil or pellets).
- The bill being paid must be for energy consumed at the participant's home address.
- Applicants must be directly responsible for the energy bill. However, the applicant does not have to be the account holder.
- During the [Low-Income Energy Assistance Program \(LEAP\)](#) season (November 1 - April 30) all eligible applicants are required to apply for LEAP before receiving EOC funds. If the applicant has not yet applied for LEAP, the agency may assist with that process and EOC at the same time.
- Applicant has not received EOC bill payment assistance for the same account within the current program year (October 1 to September 29).

### **Process**

- Participants must complete the paper EOC application. The application must include the applicant's signature and date of application.
- Applicants must sign the Consent to Disclose Utility Customer Data form if they are requesting assistance with one of the four regulated utilities: Atmos Energy, Black Hills Energy, Colorado Natural Gas, and Xcel Energy. *Note: Only the primary account holder may sign the Consent to Disclose. If the primary account holder is not available,*

*you may not request account data from the utility. In that case, use the information on the most current bill and make a note in the database explaining why the form was not signed.* If the applicant is not requesting assistance with a regulated utility, the consent on the EOC application is sufficient.

- Applicants must provide a photo ID to be copied for their file. The ID does not need to be government-issued and expired is OK.
- In cases where the participant or a member of the household is not the account holder, proof of responsibility for the bill must be provided.
- Your agency must either obtain written verification of application for LEAP or obtain verification via HEAT HELP's LEAP verification line at 800-787-1824. If you use HEAT HELP, make a note in the database of the date, phone number you called from and the name of the representative with whom you spoke. *Note: This phone number is for agency use only; do not give it to participants. The participant help number is 866-432-8435.*
- If the applicant has not yet applied for LEAP but is eligible for the program, you may assist with the process. Retain a copy of the sent email/fax as written documentation of the LEAP application's submission.
- If the applicant doesn't qualify for LEAP, (s)he does not need to apply. In that case, make a note in the Case Worker Notes section of the database indicating the reason that the applicant doesn't qualify.
- Enter applications into the Energy Assistance Database as soon as funds are committed to the energy vendor. The database is a critical tool that allows EOC network agencies to determine eligibility as well as collection information for reporting purposes.
- Contact the vendor by phone or email to verify current amount owed and commit funds based on the guidelines in the Payments section of this document. Current balance can also be verified through the utility's online portal if it is an Atmos, Black Hills or Xcel account.
- Your organization must offer energy saving information and education to all Bill Payment Assistance participants. At a minimum, agencies are required to review the Energy in Action guide with participants. In addition, energy education may include review of the Energy Savings Guide, workshops, referrals to energy efficiency/weatherization programs, etc.
- If your agency is unable to assist an applicant, s(he) must be referred to another EOC partner agency. **Do not refer applicants directly to EOC.** To find another agency, visit <http://www.energyoutreach.org/get-help/find-local-agency> or call 866-432-8435.
- If your agency pays vendors directly, include a copy of the Payment Details Report, or other listing of participant accounts and amounts be credited, along with the check.
- Complete the Utility Payments process within two weeks of entering participant applications in the database if your agency pays vendors directly.

## **Payments**

### **All Energy Sources**

- The maximum allowable assistance is \$500 per energy source. Participants who pay a combined gas and electric bill may receive a maximum of \$1000 in assistance. If the participant is seeking assistance with a bulk fuel, provide the amount of assistance specified below.
- Payments must guarantee service for at least 30 additional days from the date funds were committed. If you are not sure whether your payment will guarantee 30 days of service, contact the vendor.
- Payments must be for actual amounts owed. EOC assistance cannot create a credit in the applicant's account.
- Payments must go directly to energy vendors. They cannot be made to individuals or landlords.
- EOC funds cannot be used to pay any fee that may be returned to the participant, such as deposits. It also cannot be used for optional insurance coverage.

### **Energy-Specific Documentation & Payment Requirements**

Depending on the type of energy assistance the participant needs, there are different requirements for documentation and payments. Below is a description of those requirements broken down by category.

#### **Electricity and Natural Gas**

##### **Documentation:**

- Participant must provide the most recent bill for an active utility account that is at least one day past the due date.
- If the participant does not have the most recent bill, written verification that the account is at least one day past the due date and total amount due must be obtained from the utility. A printout from the utility's energy assistance portal is an acceptable form of written verification. The following utilities have energy assistance portals: Atmos Energy, Black Hills Energy and Xcel Energy.

##### **Payment:**

- Pay up to \$500 for a single energy source or up to \$1000 for combined gas and electric accounts.
- If the maximum payment of \$500 per energy type will not restore service or continue service for 30 days, do not approve.

## Prepay Electricity

### Documentation:

- Participants must provide proof of having a low balance (within 5 days of running out) or being out of funds in their account.

### Payment:

- Multiply the average monthly usage of the applicant by three and pay that amount or up to \$500, whichever is lesser.

## Propane, Fuel Oil and Kerosene

*Note: The smallest size tank EOC can provide assistance with is 100 gallons.*

### Documentation:

- Applicants must indicate the Emergency Type on their application for assistance: running low on fuel (30% or below) or empty tank.
- Invoice from vendor to be paid.

### Payment:

- **If participant qualifies for LEAP:** Call the vendor to find out how much fuel is needed to fill the tank in a single delivery, up to \$500.
- **If participant does not qualify for LEAP:** Call the vendor to find out how much fuel is needed to fill the tank in a single delivery, up to \$750.

## Firewood, Pellets and Coal

### Documentation:

- Participants must indicate the Emergency Type on their application for assistance: running low on fuel or out of fuel.
- Invoice from vendor to be paid. If the fuel is delivered, a delivery receipt must also be provided.

### Payment:

The maximum payment for firewood, pellets and coal is \$500. Refer to the table below for minimum and maximum allotments.

<b>Fuel Type</b>	<b>Minimum Allotment</b>	<b>Maximum Allotment</b>
Firewood	One Cord	Two Cords
Pellets	Half Ton	One Ton
Coal	Half Ton	One Ton

## **Documentation**

**All applicant files must be retained for 3 years. They can be stored in hard copy or electronically and must contain at a minimum:**

- A completed paper application
- The bill or invoice that was paid
- Signed Consent to Disclose Utility Customer Data if applicable (see p. 1)
- Copy of the participant's photo ID
- The LEAP letter of approval or denial or other written proof of application from LEAP if during LEAP season (Nov. 1 – April 30). Verbal verification may be substituted if obtained through HEAT HELP's LEAP verification line (800-787-1824). In that case, the date of the call, phone number from which the caseworker called and the HEAT HELP representative's name must be noted in the database Case Worker Notes section.
- A copy of the check to the energy vendor must be made available in case of audits unless EOC writes the checks on behalf of your agency. It does not need to be kept with the participant's application.

## **EOC Assistance for Agency Network Staff, Volunteers and Board Members**

Agency staff, volunteer and board members are eligible to receive EOC Bill Payment Assistance as long as they meet the same requirements as all other program participants, as outlined in this document. However, agencies receiving Bill Payment Assistance funding may not assist their own staff, volunteers or board members with EOC funds. Those applications must be referred to Discover Goodwill via email at [LEAPHELP@discovermygoodwill.org](mailto:LEAPHELP@discovermygoodwill.org). Applications should be reviewed by the agency's EOC Program Liaison for completeness before submission and must include:

- EOC paper application
- Copy of the bill or invoice to be paid
- Copy of the applicant's photo ID
- Signed Consent to Disclose Utility Customer Data if a regulated utility (see p. 1)

**Emails sent to Discover Goodwill should use the following format:**

Subject:       ATTN EOC Team: Agency Staff Application.  
Message:       Please forward the attached application to the EOC team for processing.

## **Program Liaison**

Energy Outreach Colorado (EOC) requires each agency awarded a Bill Payment Assistance funding to designate a Program Liaison. This person should be an agency staff member who administers the EOC program or directly oversees its administration. The liaison does not need to be a manager and, in most cases, it is most effective if someone other than the executive director fulfills this function. The Program Liaison is expected to:

- Serve as the agency's in-house expert on the Bill Payment Assistance program, its administration and database.
- Respond to caseworker questions on program administration and the database.
- Attend annual Training and Orientation.
- Communicate with EOC regarding issues and questions that cannot be resolved internally.
- Be responsive to program-related communications.
- Read and understand the Program Administration Requirements prior to using the database and administering the EOC program and confirm that all caseworkers have done so as well.
- Understand how to use the Energy Assistance Database regardless of whether (s)he uses it for entering participant applications or other purposes on a regular basis.
- Ensure timely and accurate data entry of online participant applications as well as Utility Payments (if applicable).
- Ensure that all database users complete and sign the Energy Assistance Database Access Request form. A copy must be submitted to EOC via email or fax and the hard copy should be retained with the agency's program files.
- Inform EOC immediately of any program-related staff changes. This includes changes at the Executive Director and program levels. In the event that the Program Liaison leaves the agency or no longer works on EOC, a new liaison must be designated and a new Program Liaison form must be submitted to alert EOC of the change.
- Alert EOC in advance of change of address.

## **Questions?**

If a situation arises that is not covered in this document or clarification is needed, your agency's Program Liaison can reach the Energy Assistance staff at [energyassistance@energyoutreach.org](mailto:energyassistance@energyoutreach.org).