

Low Income Research Questions – *DRAFT*

Cost Questions

1. Please provide a breakdown of direct and indirect costs of the program.
FY15-16 Budget
Low Income Discount - \$1.9 million
Vouchers - \$375,000 (water only; sewer would be about the same amount)
Safety Net - \$100,000
Fixture Repair - \$60,000
Administrative Costs - \$304,000 (salaries for Program Coordinator, 2 CASI's, etc.)
2. Please provide estimates of expanding the program to the (A) 25,000 eligible single family households and (B) 13,000 qualified low income renters. As discussed in the meeting, reaching certain portions of the customer classes may be more costly than others.
Providing estimates, particularly for expansion to renters, is not easily achieved. In large part, it depends on the scope or size of expansion, administration of the program, and the development and necessary coding changes to our Customer Information System (CIS). Comprehensive analysis has not been done to come up with concrete numbers, as that analysis would need to come after, or be done in tandem with specifications on a program for renters. We can say that changes to our billing system, or CIS, would be costly and take up a significant amount of time from resources working on other critical tasks. Expansion of the program for single family households may involve some increased staff time, expected to be no more than 1 FTE in the current structure, additional costs for the actual discount and printed materials.
3. How much has been spent on program outreach in each of the past five years? How might this amount change?
Costs for outreach supplies were as follows:

FY 14-15	\$8,991
FY 13-14	\$7,527
FY 12-13	\$9,570
FY 11-12	\$9,973
FY 10-11	\$9,900

Costs of those materials will be negligible. Greater cost will be spent on staff time involved with outreach, under Administrative costs.

Shutoffs

4. What are the fees assessed on account that has been shutoff?
Carrying Charge – 1%
Reminder Notice - \$5.00
Pre-shut Off Notice - \$15.00
Last Chance Notice - \$15.00
Shut-Off - \$71.25

5. Of the shutoffs, what percent and how many customers were enrolled in the low income discount program?
In FY 14-15 there were 5,069 disconnects, and 1,118 were LINC accounts. That equates to 22% of the accounts being in the low income discount program. Of the 5,069 disconnects only 3,848 of those were distinct accounts – some customers were shut off more than once in the year. Of the 3,848 distinct accounts, 806 were on LINC. That equates to 21% of the accounts being in the low income discount program.
6. Please provide a breakdown of shutoffs by zip code. (Map attached of shutoffs by neighborhood association).
7. How many people in a shutoff situation would benefit from participation in low income discount program?
Presumably anyone who is unable to pay their bill would benefit from a discount program. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that all customers in a shut-off situation would qualify for the low income discount program. We have no way to know whether accounts that have been shut off and aren't participants in the low income discount program would or would not qualify for it.

Other

8. Are there any studies that look at the efficacy of having people enroll in low income programs? (City Budget Office is working on the answer)
9. How is the City changing current practices to expand the current program?
We know there is an array of reasons why persons do not enroll in available public programs such as LINC. Some persons do not perceive themselves to be in need of assistance. Some persons believe that, given limited government funds, other persons or households would be "more in need" than they are. Some persons do not believe the amount of assistance available is "worth the effort" that it takes to enroll in the program. Some persons do not wish to be seen as taking advantage of "welfare" benefits. Many of these reasons involve either a lack of need, or a lack of desire to participate in the program. Aside from the reasons for participation, there are other reasons for nonparticipation which involve a variety of personal and institutional barriers which prevent enrollment in the LINC program.
 - **Lack of effective knowledge:** The lack of effective knowledge is one such barrier. While customers may indicate an awareness of assistance, their knowledge may not be sufficient to allow them to act.
 - **Lack of program awareness:** Many elderly do not know of, and thus do not use, existing intervention programs designed for their benefit. Since no intervention program, such as LINC, can be effective unless it is known and used, the degree to which eligible customers are aware of and utilize this program is important.

- **Access to program offices:** For persons who are homebound or socially isolated, getting to an office may be nearly impossible. Even though our intake offices make exceptions to serve these customers, either by a home visit or through the mail, again the lack of knowledge by the consumer is a barrier to them receiving benefits.
- **Misperception as to eligibility:** Many eligible non-participants have misperceptions regarding their eligibility for the program. These households might, for example, mistakenly believe that their income or assets are too high to entitle them to receive assistance, or that some other program requirements precludes their participation.

Our past methods have been to get program information out to as many agencies as possible that work with low income customers. We have relied on staff at these agencies to assist us in promoting our program. We have run articles about our program in community newspapers/newsletters.

We will continue to leave information with various agencies or places low-income customers may visit. We will make a stronger presence with Neighborhood Associations, especially areas with a higher number of lower incomes families and neighborhoods with a higher percentage of shut offs. We will make presentations to these associations or write an article for their Neighborhood paper/newsletter.

We will expand our outreach to more Faith Based organizations as well as agencies that work with non-English speaking clients.

We have always relied on customers going to an agency to fill out an application and be screened for income verification. Even though some agencies will do the application by mail we feel this may be a barrier for some customers receiving benefits.

Our biggest change will be to eliminate the application process for some clients. This will be accomplished by working with agencies that currently provide safety net services to low-income customers. We have completed this process with Home Forward and have started working with REACH Community Development. The goal is to have their clients sign a release form that will give permission to the agency to share the clients name and address with us. The agency has already verified that these clients are under our income guidelines so we would use their verification to automatically enroll the client in our program and skip the application process.

Since Multnomah County serves a large number of clients through many programs, they will be our first priority. We will see if we can get information for those clients they have already served, but the minimum goal is to come up with a process to get future clients in our program without the client needing to go to another agency to apply. To be successful we have to create a process that will have minimal impact for County and City staff. Most already use an intake form, so we will try and add a line giving the County permission to release the customer's information to us. One of the top priorities within the County will be Aging and Disability Services.

Another large agency to focus on is Oregon Department of Human Service.

We need to be cautious of the Red Flag rules for privacy but we will look for ways to work within the rules with minimal impact on the agencies that would supply the information. If we make it a big burden on their staff it won't work.

10. How much funding may be possible through a donation program based on other programs?
(City Budget Office is working on the answer)

11. Does the Water Bureau administer its crisis voucher program or is this program administered by the County/nonprofit?

The crisis voucher is a piece of the financial assistance program and is administered internally by customer service. If a customer has been approved for our financial program and is currently receiving the bill discount, the customer may be eligible for up to \$150 in crisis assistance every 12 months. The crisis voucher is to be used for crisis situation to prevent a customer from having their water shut off. The customer service representative will make the voucher part of a payment arrangement.

For customers that are not in our financial assistance program but are in a crisis situation, we will pre-qualify them for the financial assistance program. Once it is determined the customer will qualify, we refer the customer to one of the 9 agencies to apply for our financial assistance program. We set the customer on a payment arrangement and issue a crisis voucher pending approval for the financial assistance program. Once we receive the approved application we post the voucher to the customer's account.