

Author: Allison T. Musvosvi, ILLUME Advising

Presentation Title: Breaking Down the Conflicts between Underserved Communities' Cultural Values and Utility Program Design

Abstract: This presentation will discuss two case studies with residential and small business commercial customers who identified as Black or African-American, Latinx, and Vietnamese/Vietnamese-American. The studies identified a conflict between community values and program design as well as utility marketing and program messaging. We discuss examples of these types of conflicts and offer suggestions for remedying them. One case study reveals conflict between conservation as a community value (i.e., use what you have until it runs out; fix vs. replace) and program designs that require replacing equipment early (before failure) or purchasing new products to save energy. Consumption culture is at odds with underserved groups of residential and small business customers. We discuss the tensions between values, program design, and messaging highlighting ways to bring the two into alignment. A second case study reveals a missed opportunity in marketing flat-bill rate plans to residential customers who value "giving back." Focus-groups revealed that customers view these plans as a way the utilities are 'giving back'. In this situation, utilities and program implementers can enhance program marketing to increase customer adoption of these rate plans and satisfaction. In this presentation, we discuss messaging gaps and demonstrate ways to enrich messaging efforts, especially those targeted to African-American customers.