



Maryland Energy Administration Customer Service Annual Report (Fiscal Year 2020)



Maryland
Energy
Administration

INSIDE FRONT COVER

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FY20 Highlights

As a result of the COVID pandemic, Governor Hogan issued an executive order in March 2020 directing state employees to transition to remote telework. Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) staff quickly adapted to this new work environment and, while working remotely, adopted two new tools to enable critical mission functions and improve operational efficiency.

- The Administration implemented DocuSign, enabling electronic document approval and signing for grants and other documents, both internal and external to MEA. Electronic signatures streamline the process for MEA and energy program participants, while also eliminating the environmental impact of paper routing.
- MEA was also able to start offering Virtru, an encryption platform that allows sensitive information to be submitted securely, to program participants that need to provide personally identifiable information (PII) to MEA as part of their program application.



MEA also proactively identified ways to assist our program participants with needs arising from the new operational and financial realities. With this in mind, the Administration launched a [centralized COVID-19 related agency information clearing house webpage](#). MEA proactively extended existing grant agreements to January 5, 2021 and provided payment relief to Jane E. Lawton Conservation loan program participants until the beginning of calendar year 2021 as well. Additionally, MEA has also developed a process to enable project inspections to continue to occur remotely.

Recognition Given to Employees

Recognition is given to employees that provide great customer service through the Maryland Energy Administration's Gold Star program. When Maryland Energy Administration employees are recognized by name in comments provided through a customer service survey, the employee is typically presented with a Gold Star to post on their wall, highlighting the date and the reason for recognition. During the COVID pandemic, Gold Star recognition is given out virtually during an agency-wide staff meeting.

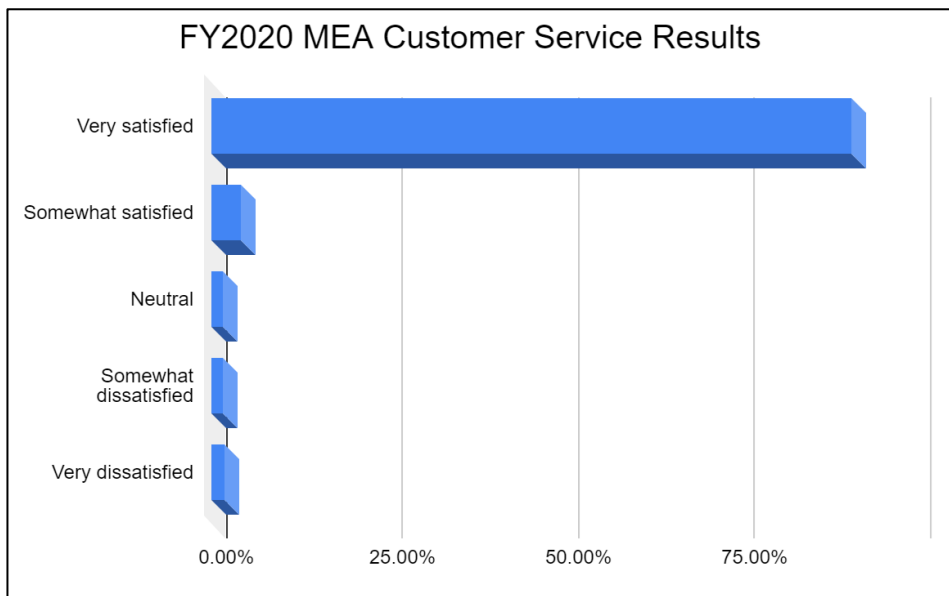
FY20 Leadership Analysis and Summary of FY21 Approach

In FY20, MEA was able to launch several new electronic tools to enable continuance of operations while working remotely. These tools provided additional options for

program participants to receive and share information with MEA in a more expedited manner. Looking forward to FY21, MEA intends to continue looking for new options that can help program participants more effectively participate in MEA’s program offerings via electronic means.

Detailed FY20 Results and FY21 Plans

In fiscal year 2020, the Maryland Energy Administration is proud to share that almost **95%** of survey respondents indicated that they were either “Very Satisfied” or “Somewhat Satisfied” with the customer service provided by Maryland Energy Administration staff. This result reflects an improvement of several percentage points over fiscal year 2019, and occurred in part during a period of work process transformation necessitated by the COVID pandemic.



Looking into fiscal year 2021, the Maryland Energy Administration plans to continue our focus on customer service to ensure that the majority of MEA survey respondents indicate that they are either “Very Satisfied” or “Somewhat Satisfied.”

Customer Service Survey Results

As noted above, the Maryland Energy Administration had a very high customer satisfaction rate of **95%** during fiscal year 2020. The Maryland Energy Administration’s goal for FY21 is to continue to maintain a customer service satisfaction rate exceeding 90%.

Status of Customer Service Training

The Maryland Energy Administration has hired several new team members over the last year who need to complete customer service training. While MEA's previous customer service training was completed during an in-person session, MEA will now need to pivot and complete customer service training remotely.

Customer Inquiry Response Times and Overall Time-to-Resolution

Timeliness of Responding to Customer Inquiries

Maryland Energy Administration staff are aware of the need to respond to customer inquiries as quickly as possible, balanced with providing accurate and well-informed information.



Best Practices

To reflect the current COVID-19 working environment, the staff directory on MEA's website has been updated to provide the general public with staff cell phone numbers. Status updates have been placed on the webpages of each of MEA's active energy programs, providing updates on how program processes may have been adjusted, or otherwise impacted, due to staff working remotely. In this way, MEA has assisted visitors to MEA's website quickly identify the best ways to interact with MEA during the extended telework period.

Plans for Improvement

MEA has created several ad-hoc working groups to focus on ways to improve internal processes, starting with the electronic grant routing and signature process deployed for the first time in fiscal year 2020. As fiscal year 2021 begins, MEA is initiating a work group to identify ways to standardize and improve grant award templates.

Call Center Data

As a relatively small state agency, the Maryland Energy Administration does not have a dedicated call center.

Improving the Customer Experience from Multiple Perspectives

Making Agency Services Available Online

MEA accepts electronic application submissions for competitive energy programs, some technologies incentivized through the Clean Energy Rebate Program, and the Energy Storage Tax Credit program. Beginning in fiscal year 2020, MEA was able to offer program participants the option for electronic signature of agreements, as well as a way to securely email personally identifiable information via encryption.

Processing Times for Customer Transactions

The Clean Energy Rebate Program is the Maryland Energy Administration's highest volume program, based on the number of participants. MEA has a weekly meeting to review program performance data, as well as to identify and seek resolution to any issues that may arise. Between fiscal year 2019 and fiscal year 2020, the MEA team was able to decrease by over (8) eight days the amount of time between when an application is first received by the Maryland Energy Administration and when the application has been found eligible and approved for reimbursement by programmatic staff.

After being approved internally by MEA programmatic staff, applications then need to be entered into the State's financial system for payment. The Administration is now working to find ways to help mitigate delays sometimes encountered in this part of the process. In particular, MEA is trying to find ways to minimize name inconsistencies, such as when an applicant lists an abbreviation of their name, rather than their legal name, on an application. Such a scenario can result in the application not being able to be processed initially for payment and requires MEA to reach out to individual grantees to request additional documentation. In FY2021, MEA is making adjustments to the application documents to help emphasize that the application requires their correct legal name, with the goals of reducing the need for application follow-up and improving the amount of time it takes for applicants to receive payment.



Solar in action at Dog's Day Farm, a participant in MEA's Clean Energy Rebate Program.

Adjusting Hours to Meet Customer Demands

Unlike some other state agencies, the Maryland Energy Administration does not interact with the general public through “walk-in” type transactions. Instead, the majority of interactions are handled by the subject matter expert in a given area of energy expertise, via phone or email. Contact information for the Maryland Energy Administration’s subject matter experts, including work cell phone numbers, is available 24/7 at

<http://www.energy.maryland.gov/Pages/InsideMEA/staffdirectory.aspx>.

MEA has already implemented administrative staff schedules to answer the main phone line during normal business hours. During COVID-19, this phone number is checked remotely every hour of each work day. Any calls are then directed to the appropriate subject matter expert.

Social Media Usage to Improve the Customer Experience

MEA leverages social media to disseminate information about individual energy program launches throughout the year. Social media is also used to highlight MEA-funded projects via staff visits and “photo tours” to help educate the public about different types of energy technologies, and how program funds are being used across the State. Finally, social media is used to help disseminate energy-related news and tips.



To help drive participation in social media, the MEA also posts information on timely topics. For example, MEA has been posting Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) options for parents and kids during the COVID-19 pandemic. MEA has also incorporated posts about preparation for extreme weather events, as well as reminders about the importance of the 2020 Census.

MEA has also expanded educational online content with more videos and blog posts highlighting program changes. In addition, team members have begun to publish more articles online and via LinkedIn to amplify outreach to energy stakeholders and industry professionals.

Leveraging Website to Improve the Customer Experience

MEA has made new additions to our website to amplify online outreach during the pandemic. MEA has added a dedicated COVID-19 webpage, accessible via the homepage, to track all actions MEA has employed to better help Maryland businesses, nonprofits and local governments manage their economic recovery.

MEA has also created a Marketing Communications Outreach page featuring a speaker request form where groups can request a virtual MEA subject matter expert for their conference or webinar.