The Future of Energy

A Working Communication Guide for Discussion

EEI
Edison Electric
INSTITUTE

maslansky
+partners

Current as of April 12, 2016

Is our language getting in the way of our success?

As an industry, we share common goals to help bring about an energy future that is smarter, cleaner and stronger.

Yet we do not speak with a common voice.

The purpose of this handbook is to help our industry communicate our vision of the future with a common language that is…

+ plainspoken, so the average American can understand

+ personal, so customers understand the value of our actions

+ positive, by emphasizing what we are for, not against

While you're likely already using some of this recommended language, this handbook serves as a single resource across the industry to underscore the importance of speaking with one voice.

By sharing one voice, we can build awareness, understanding and support for our efforts.

How the handbook is organized

four areas of insight

> the basics

> the future of the energy grid

> leading the way on clean energy

> fundamentals of rates

what's included

Each of the four substantive areas has a dedicated section that addresses key concepts including:

+ Recommended terms and definitions
+ Language to use and to avoid
+ Additional context from consumer research

where it comes from

The recommendations are derived from extensive lexicon research

+ Conducted on a national scale
+ Using a mix of emotion-based qualitative and statistically significant quantitative measures

how to read the recommendations

current term

what to call it:

recommended term

how to define it:

recommended definition

what matters:

most important takeaway

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	recommended language to use	*why it works*
🟡	language you might consider, less ideal than recommended language	*reasons it works sometimes but not others*
🔴	language to lose	*why it doesn't work*

communication context +

All good communication starts with an understanding of our audience

what does the customer think about our industry?

I don't think about you often, and when I do…
+ I have a problem
+ I have to pay my bill
+ I am trying to make sense of my bill

I don't care about what you're doing; I care about what I'm getting…
+ I want safe, reliable, affordable energy
+ I don't care about innovations unless they're going to help me
+ I want to know you care about my needs and are doing everything possible to better serve me

I don't see you as an innovator because…
+ I see more wooden poles than solar panels
+ I see tech companies as the real innovators

How to Tell Our Story

We have a strong story to tell. To gain traction, we need to tell it in the right way.

Based on the customer mindset, language that resonates does the following:

focuses on consumer benefits

Customers care most about what this means for them, so we need to remind them of the benefits every step of the way

stays future-oriented

Customers see energy is changing, so we need to show we are leading that change and delivering greater value

gives tangible examples

Customers won't take our word for it, so we need to show them the value we're providing

EEI

maslansky +partners

the basics

Even at its most basic level, the terms we use to describe ourselves and our industry vary widely. What matters most is that we communicate consistently so that stakeholders can start with a basic understanding of who we are and what we do. Then we can build additional concepts on this foundation.

core terms

We are in the **energy** business…

+ (not electricity)

We are **energy companies**…

+ (not utilities or advisors)

That operate the **energy grid**…

+ (only when you can't say "**smart grid**")
+ (not the grid, power network, or energy highway)

To **efficiently deliver**…

+ (emphasizing what the energy grid *does* not what it *is*)
+ (focused on our core role today)

Affordable, reliable and **safe energy**…

+ (connecting the energy grid to core customer benefits)

To our **customers**

+ (not ratepayers, users, or purchasers)

summary: the basics

from	to
electricity	**energy**
utility	**energy company**
grid	**energy grid**
ratepayer	**customer**

We are an energy company that operates* and uses the energy grid to efficiently deliver affordable, reliable, and safe energy to homes, businesses, and communities.

*When talking about your individual company, adjust this language accordingly (e.g., owns and operates).

EEI

maslansky
+partners

electricity

what to call it:

energy

what matters:

elevate your language beyond the status quo

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	energy	*all-encompassing*
🟡	electricity	*clear, but also reinforcing the old*
	power	*clear, but not as effective*

---

utility

what to call it:

energy company

what matters:

focus on what you give customers

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	company	*all-encompassing, commonly used*
	provider	*the role you play with customers*
🔴	advisor	*overreach*
	utility	*doesn't convey benefit; can reinforce monopoly tag*

grid

what to call it:

energy grid

how to define it (when it isn't a smart grid):

it **efficiently delivers reliable and safe energy** so you always get the power you need

what matters:

customers need to know that the grid = delivery of energy; focus on what it does (efficiently delivers energy) as opposed to what it is (e.g., wires, substations)

NOTE: Our future is built on a smart grid (see page 18), but we know we can't use that term in every case. Where we can't, use this term.

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	energy grid	*simple, clear, innovative*
	reliable, safe, secure	*core benefits they care about*
	efficient	*doing more with less*
🟡	grid (alone)	*simple, but less specific*
	power grid	*understood, but not as innovative*
	energy network	*simple but longer, and less commonly used*
	energy delivery system	
🔴	resilient, robust	*lower priority, less clear benefits*
	energy highway	*unclear, overreaching*
	wires, equipment, transmission lines, substations	*clear, but sounds old-fashioned and outdated*

EEI

maslansky +partners

ratepayer

what to call it:

customer

what matters:

no other term comes close to "customer" as the way we should refer to the people we serve

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	customer	*familiar, focused on me and my needs*
🔴	ratepayer	*unclear, focused on the fact that I pay you*
	purchaser	*impersonal*
	user	

the future of the energy grid

Though every energy company is at a different stage, all are investing in the future. Communicating about the value of these investments is critical. The language used to date is remarkably diverse – and often confusing. The following recommendations are designed to help make communications about the future of the energy grid clear and consistent.

keys to an effective conversation

You win when you…

+ Focus on what customers are getting: reliability, affordability, safety, peace of mind
+ Emphasize continuous improvement & progress
+ Stay future-focused

obstacles to an effective conversation

You miss opportunities when you…

+ Sound like a **traditional utility**, by focusing too much on wires and poles
+ Sound **too risky**, by trying to be at the bleeding edge of technology
+ Sound **too company-focused**, by talking about updates and innovations without customer benefits

EEI

maslansky
+partners

summary: the future of the energy grid

from	to
evolving distribution system	**building a smarter energy infrastructure**
advanced grid	**smart grid**
utility of the future	**next generation energy company**
advanced meter	**smart meter**

building a smarter energy infrastructure
The future of energy is changing, and we're changing with it, starting with the energy grid.

Thanks to new technological innovations, we're building a smarter energy infrastructure…one that will allow us to respond to outages more quickly, to seamlessly connect with cleaner energy sources, and better secure the energy grid against attacks.

A smart grid means you get more control, greater flexibility, and more choice. And it is just one of many innovations we will introduce as we work to become your next generation energy company.

smart meters and other advances
Customers want tools to help them use energy more efficiently. That's why we're working to ensure every customer has a smart meter. These innovative new energy meters make the energy grid more secure and more dynamic and give customers more control over how they use their energy.

what to call it:
building a smarter energy infrastructure

how to define it:

investing in new technologies to deliver the benefits of a **smart grid** to customers

what matters:

"smart" is perhaps the single most positive word for the industry to own – talk about "smarter" when referring to the evolution of the industry

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	advanced energy delivery system	*innovative; suggests progress that matters*
	continuous improvement	*progress*
🟡	modernizing the grid	*progress, but lacking detail about what I get*
	transforming the grid	
🔴	evolving distribution system	*confusing and intangible*

EEI

maslansky +partners

advanced grid

what to call it:

smart grid

---

how to define it:

a **more dynamic and more secure** energy grid that…

+ gives customers more control, greater flexibility, and more choices
+ responds to outages more quickly, seamlessly connects with cleaner energy sources, and better secures the grid from attacks

---

what matters:

meaningful innovation must be tied to specific customer benefits

NOTE: Again, this should be used instead of "energy grid" where appropriate

---

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	smart, dynamic, secure	*most important attributes of the smart grid*
	control, flexibility, choice	*preferred benefits of the smart grid*
🟡	integrated, connected, interactive	*positive, but not preferred, attributes*
	advanced grid	*clear, but less resonant*
	next generation grid	*costly upgrades every few years*
🔴	21st century grid	*too little, too late; it's already 2016*
	two-way grid	*unclear to customers*

EEI

maslansky
+partners

utility of the future

next generation energy company

how to define it:

committed to **improving the way energy is delivered** using **new technologies** that benefit customers

what matters:

emphasize your commitment to improvement without straining credibility

note: terms like "next generation grid" don't resonate, but "next generation" is a positive when it comes to the service you provide

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
	next generation energy company	*future-focused energy company*
🟢	new technologies	*what drives improvements in every industry*
🟡	innovative energy provider	*different from the average utility, but might strain credibility*
🔴	trusted energy advisor	*overreach; evokes skepticism*
	utility of the future, utility of tomorrow	*almost an oxymoron*

EEI

maslansky +partners

what to call it:

smart meter

how to define it:

an energy meter that gives customers
more information and **control** over
how they use their energy

what matters:

most customers don't think they already have one of these, so focus on how it improves what they're used to today

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
	smart meter	*technologically advanced*
🟢	gives customers more information and control	*end benefit*
🟡	advanced meter	*improvement over current meters, less resonant*
🔴	two-way communication	*communicating information about me*
	next generation meter	*a new device every few years*

EEI

maslansky
+partners

summary: leading the way on clean energy

One of the key challenges in communicating about the industry's approach to clean energy is significant skepticism and a wide gap between how the industry and its customers view the world.

communication gaps to keep in mind

your truth		customers' truth
We support clean energy		*You seem fundamentally opposed to it*
We've made huge strides to make our energy mix cleaner	**The Gap**	*I haven't seen it – and absent examples I won't believe you*
We want to help customers save money with EE		*You make money by selling more energy*
Renewable energy is limited by cost and reliability		*We should use more renewable energy and stop using fossil fuels*
Net metering shifts costs to non-solar customers		*Rooftop solar customers deserve to get a return on their investment*

keys to an effective conversation

You win when you…

+ Align yourself with your audience
  - You're committed to providing more clean energy, delivered more reliably and more affordably than ever before
+ Support positive statements with clear examples, stories and facts
  - They are skeptical you support clean energy…so you need to prove it at every opportunity
+ Stay future-focused
  - Speak about clean energy goals before talking about balancing your energy mix to get to those goals

EEI

maslansky +partners

summary: leading the way on clean energy

from	to
de-carbonization	**reducing carbon footprint**
fuel mix	**balanced energy mix**
low-carbon energy	**clean energy**
green energy	**renewable energy**
intermittent sources	**variable sources**
utility-scale solar	**universal solar**
rooftop solar	**private solar**
solar installation	**solar power plant**
distributed generation	**private generation**
net metering	**private solar credits**
wholesale rate	**competitive rate**
baseload generation	**24/7 power sources**
generation capacity	**power capacity**

EEI

maslansky
+partners

summary: leading the way on clean energy

balanced energy mix
We're committed to delivering reliable, affordable, safe, and clean energy to our customers. To do that, we are building a bridge to a clean energy future by utilizing a balanced energy mix. This all-of-the-above approach integrates clean and renewable resources with traditional energy sources that help us deliver affordable and reliable power.

universal solar
Part of our commitment to an efficient and reliable energy future means making more renewable sources of energy accessible to all of our customers. Private solar has played an important role in helping some Americans generate solar for their individual homes through the use of rooftop panels. Moving forward, our goal is to significantly expand access to solar power in the most cost-effective way possible. Right now, we're investing in universal solar so we can bring the benefits of solar energy to all American homes, businesses, and communities without sacrificing affordability and reliability. Every customer can benefit from universal solar.

EEI

maslansky
+partners

what to call it:

balanced energy mix

---

how to define it:

an **all-of-the-above approach** that **combines clean and renewable energy** sources with **traditional** ones

---

what matters:

stay positive by emphasizing the need for a mix of sources (clean, renewable, and traditional)

if you have to talk specifics, focus on increasing solar and wind, as well as "cleaner coal" and "safer nuclear" to maintain credibility

---

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	bridge to the future	*demonstrates the need for balance*
	traditional source	*neutral, still necessary to the mix*
	balanced	*inclusive, well considered*
	all-of-the-above	*all available resources*
	cleaner	*continuous improvement, credible*
	solar, wind, hydropower	*clean*
🟡	clean**er** coal, saf**er** nuclear	*more credible, but still a red flag*
🔴	clean coal, safe nuclear	*not credible*
	fuel, fuel mix	*outdated, fossil fuels*

EEI

maslansky +partners

what to call it:
clean energy

how to define it:

energy from sources that
help reduce our environmental impact

what matters:

where possible only talk about renewable energy sources and "traditional" energy
sources, don't directly call out cleaner coal, natural gas, or safer nuclear

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	clean energy	*demonstrates the need for balance*
	reduce environmental impact	*neutral, still necessary to the mix*
	traditional energy sources	*neutral, doesn't raise concerns*
🟡	advanced fossil fuel technology	*improved from the past, but raises some credibility questions*
🔴	low-carbon energy	*unclear, negative*

EEI

maslansky
+partners

what to call it:

renewable energy

how to define it:

energy produced entirely from **natural resources**, like **solar, wind, and hydropower**, which are **constantly replenished**

what matters:

spelling out the various renewable resources (e.g., solar, wind, hydro) helps paint a positive picture, so be specific

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	renewable energy	*clean, good for the environment*
	constantly replenished	*unlimited, good for the environment*
	solar, wind, and hydropower	*good for the environment*
🟡	green energy	*clean, good for the environment, but less specific*
🔴	carbon-free energy	*more technical, less desirable*
	low-impact energy	*unclear what the impact would be on*

de-carbonization

what to call it:
reducing carbon footprint

how to define it:

making the generation of power **cleaner** and **more efficient**

what matters:

keep it clear, positive, and credible

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	cleaner	*clear, credible, where they want to be headed*
	reducing carbon footprint	*clear, continuous improvement, actionable, positive*
🟡	lowering greenhouse gases	*clear, actionable, but slightly negative*
🔴	low-carbon economy	*unclear*
	de-carbonization	*unclear*

EEI

maslansky
+partners

intermittent sources

what to call it:

variable sources

---

how to define it:

energy sources that only produce power in
certain conditions

---

what matters:

stay straightforward and positive

---

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	variable	*not consistent*
	certain conditions	*practical limitations*
	intermittent sources	*unreliable, negative*
🔴	fluctuating sources	*unclear, negative*
	sometimes-on sources	

EEI

maslansky
+partners

what we support:

universal solar

---

how to define it:

the **most cost-effective** way to **increase the use of solar** and bring its benefits to **all** American homes, businesses and communities

---

what matters:

stay positive about solar by emphasizing the ultimate benefit: solar for all

---

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	universal solar	*solar for all*
	the most cost-effective	*core benefits*
	available to all American homes, businesses and communities	*core benefits*
	increase the use	*shows our commitment*
🟡	community solar	*benefit focused, but potential confusion with 3rd-party solar efforts*
	cloud-based solar	*unclear*
🔴	utility-scale solar	*utility control*
	a fraction of the cost of rooftop solar	*insulting rooftop*
	even for those with limited income, income blind	*divisive message*

EEI

maslansky +partners

rooftop solar

what to call it:
private solar

how to define it:

private energy generating sources that provide power to **individual homes and businesses**

what matters:

clear contrast with universal solar

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	private solar	*clear, straightforward*
	individual homes	*for some people*
🟡	rooftop solar	*familiar term, but no contrast with universal solar*
🔴	not continuously available, don't generate around the clock	*negative toward solar*

EEI

maslansky
+partners

solar installation

what to call it:
solar power plant

how to define it:

large source of solar power that helps energy providers deliver **universal solar**

what matters:

when you need to talk about where universal solar comes from, this is the best term to use

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	solar power plant	*powerful, large-scale, provider-owned*
🟡	solar farm	*lots of solar panels, could be a 3rd-party provider, could take up a lot of outdoor space*
🔴	solar installation	*unclear, could be rooftop*
	solar field	*takes up a lot of natural space*

EEI

maslansky
+partners

distributed generation

what to call it:

private generation

---

how to define it:

small energy generating sources serving a
limited area

---

what matters:

when speaking to customers about this technical topic,
shift from jargon to clearer explanations

---

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
	private generation	*power generated within a limited area*
🟢	limited area	*only for a small area*
🟡	customer-generated power	*customer-focused, resonant, but less technically accurate*
🔴	distributed generation	*unclear*

EEI

maslansky
+partners

Communicating effectively about the future of net metering

Net metering is a complicated subject.
Its current structure is unsustainable, but opposing the policy comes with the real risk of being perceived as anti-solar.

As a result, it is critical to talk about what we support before highlighting the limitations of current policy.

- **Step 1: Start with what you support**
  "We're leading the way on renewable energy. We're working toward universal solar with the goal of bringing the benefits of solar to all American homes, businesses, and communities. We also support policies where private solar customers can sell back their excess energy at a competitive rate."

- **Step 2: Why you support it**
  "When priced competitively, these 'private solar credits' encourage and support the sustainable growth of renewable energy."

- **Step 3: What needs to change**
  "We believe it's important to balance the needs of all customers. A fair system means paying private solar customers the same, competitive price we pay for other solar power, instead of above-market rates that result in higher costs for all customers."

- **Step 4: All customers need to support the energy grid**
  "We know that some private solar customers may choose to separate from the energy grid. And we agree they shouldn't have to pay for the energy grid if they don't use it. But if they continue to use the energy grid – for back-up power and to earn credits for selling energy back – then they should share the costs of operating and enhancing that energy grid like all other customers."

EEI

maslansky
+partners

net metering

what we support:

private solar credits

how to define it:

a system that allows private solar customers to sell back excess energy at **competitive rates**

what matters:

focus on what you DO support rather than beginning by highlighting what's wrong with the current system

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	competitive rates	*fair rates*
	credits	*clear, incentives*
🟡	wholesale rate	*lower than the market rate*
🔴	net metering	*unclear, undefined*
	contract rate	*legal agreement*

EEI

maslansky +partners

wholesale rate

what we support:
competitive rate

how to define it:

the **same price** we would pay another supplier for the same amount of [renewable] energy

the price that **balances the needs** of private solar customers with all other customers

what matters:

competitive has a positive spin whether you support higher or lower net metering rates

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	competitive rates	*fair price*
🟡	market rate	*widely accepted price*
	wholesale rate	*lower then market value*
🔴	contract rate	*legally required rate*

baseload generation

what we support:

24/7 power sources

how to define it:

energy resources that can **consistently** generate **reliable** energy

what matters:

shift from jargon to clear, benefit-focused explanations

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
	24/7 sources	*always available*
🟢	reliable	*core benefit*
	consistent	*positive contrast to renewables*
🔴	baseload sources, baseload generation	*unclear*

EEI

maslansky +partners

generation capacity

what to call it:

power capacity

how to define it:

the **maximum amount** of electricity a power plant can produce at any point in time

what matters:

eliminate jargon whenever possible

summary: fundamentals of rates

Most customers know very little about how their rates are set or what the various charges on their bill mean. So it's up to you to let them know about regulations and their bill in clear, consistent language.

communication gaps to keep in mind

your truth		their truth
Regulators must approve rates	**The Gap**	*Utilities set rates to make the most profit possible*
We go out of our way to make their bills clear		*I still don't understand what makes up my bill*

keys to an effective conversation

You win when you…

+ Let them know that independent regulators, who represent customer interests, must approve all rate changes

+ Use simple, straightforward language to talk about the pieces that make up their bill

EEI   maslansky +partners

summary: fundamentals of rates

from	to
rate case	**regulatory rate review**
rate	**rate or bill**
demand response	**smart usage rewards**
distribution charge	**energy delivery charge**

rate reviews

Getting safe, reliable energy at a fair price is important to all of our customers. And we want to make information about how your rate is set available to anyone who wants it.

Understandably, some people think energy companies determine the rates that customers pay, but that isn't the case. Rates are determined through something called a regulatory rate review. It's a public process where independent state commissions determine what customers pay.

This independent, public process helps ensure transparency and fair rates for all customers.

EEI

maslansky
+partners

rate case

what we support:
regulatory rate review

how to define it:

a **public process** where
independent state commissions
determine energy rates

what matters:

emphasize the independent and public nature of this review at every turn

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
	review	*careful deliberations*
	determine	*regulators have the final say*
🟢	regulatory, independent state commission	*a neutral third party*
	public process	*transparent*
	legal process	*publicly inaccessible*
🔴	approve	*a rubber stamp*
	rate case	*unclear*

EEI

maslansky
+partners

rate

what to call it:

rate or bill

---

what matters:

keep terms familiar and straightforward whenever possible

---

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
🟢	bill	*familiar, what customers pay every month*
🟡	rate	*more jargon-y, but understood & appropriate in some circumstances*

EEI

maslansky
+partners

demand response

what we support:

smart usage rewards

---

how to define it:

an energy program that allows customers to **save money by reducing their energy use** during periods of peak demand

---

what matters:

shift from charging heavy users to rewarding careful users

---

language to use and lose when talking about it:

	you say	they hear
	smart usage rewards	*a credit for saving energy*
🟢	energy reduction incentives	*an incentive to save energy*
	reducing energy use	*reducing energy waste*
	high demand reduction	*unclear*
🔴	demand response	*unclear*
	demand charge	*an extra charge*

EEI

maslansky
+partners

distribution charge

what to call it:

energy delivery charge

how to define it:

the **cost to deliver** energy to your home or business

what matters:

makes clear it is about delivery

NOTE: may have to retain "distribution charge"

What's changed since our initial version?

Based on feedback we've gotten and additional research, a number of recommendations in this document have been updated since the March 17 version. Below is a rundown of what changed – and WHY.

- **Grid → power grid → energy grid**
  - WHY: Based on further research, we found that "energy grid" is seen as more innovative than power grid.

- **Distributed generation → local generation → private generation**
  - WHY: To help support the "private solar" language and maintain consistency.

- **Net metering → private solar generation credits → private solar credits**
  - WHY: Simpler.

- **Rate → rate → rate or bill**
  - WHY: To give communicators greater flexibility when the term "bill" does not fit the context.

EEI

maslansky
+partners