

**Docket Number:** GE20-002  
**Subject Matter:** Second Data Request  
**Request to:** NorthWestern Energy (NWE or Company)  
**Request from:** South Dakota Public Utilities Commission Staff  
**Date of Request:** June 2, 2020  
**Responses Due:** June 16, 2020

2.7 Refer to the Company's response to DR 1-9b. Please explain how NorthWestern chooses which customers receive a bill credit to help keep them current with their bills. As we discussed in our response to DR 1-9b, the Company offered two separate Community Support Plans that were funded through shareholder dollars. The primary focus of both plans was small business assistance. However, in the first plan, we also made available dollars to assist residential customers.

For the first plan that was rolled out on April 1, 2020, the Company issued a press release announcing the Plan. We also utilized social media and our Company website to inform customers of this opportunity. For the small business portion of the Phase One Plan, the criteria used to determine a customer's eligibility included:

- Must be a customer of NorthWestern Energy,
- Must be a locally-owned, stand-alone business,
- Must be a customer that was impacted negatively by the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- Must be actively working with the Company to plan for the future (Arrangements, etc.).

The program was administered by the local contributions committees and/or Community Relations Managers. The available dollars (\$30,000) were allocated proportionally to our major communities, and the dollars were available to businesses throughout each area. A brief application form was available on the NorthWestern Energy website. The application included the customer name, address, account number, and the manner in which they were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The application was an executable form that was directed to the appropriate review committee. Once approved, the customer received an email and a personal telephone call indicating their approval and thanking them for the service they provide.

The portion of the program that related to residential customers was administered through our Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) and Customer Associates (CAs) along with their Supervisors. For that program, if a residential customer contacted the Company to establish payment arrangements and/or identify other resources that may be available to assist with the COVID-19 impacts, the Company representative could recommend the grant to the Supervisory group. They then reviewed the account and made the final determination. Once approved, the customer received an email and a personal telephone call to inform them of the forthcoming bill credit grant.

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2-7. NWE Response Continued:

The Phase II plan was rolled out on May 21, 2020. This plan is completely focused on small businesses. These grants will be in an amount up to \$250 per customer and will also be managed as a bill credit on the customer's account. The criteria used to determine a customer's eligibility include:

- May not have received a Phase One grant,
- Must be a customer of NorthWestern Energy,
- Must be a locally-owned, stand-alone business with 20 or less employees,
- Must be a customer that was negatively impacted by the COVID-19, and
- Must have established credit arrangements with the Company and have a likely opportunity for long-term sustainability.

The program is being administered by the local contributions committees and/or Community Relations Managers (CRMs). The dollars are available to businesses throughout each area. We developed a report that will identify business accounts that meet the above criteria. The CRMs will review the accounts in their area and determine if the customer should receive a grant in an amount up to \$250. Those businesses selected should have a likely chance for sustainability. Once approved, the customer will receive a personal call indicating their approval and thanking them for the service they provide.

In addition, we have identified a pool of money (\$7,000) that will be used as for a special bill credit program. Briefly, when a small business customer interacts with our CSRs or CAs and exhibits negative impact as a result of COVID-19, the Representative/Associate may recommend a bill credit of an amount not to exceed \$250 for that customer.