

May 15, 2020

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL

Luly E. Massaro, Division Clerk
Rhode Island Division of Public Utilities Commission
89 Jefferson Boulevard
Warwick, RI 02888

**RE: Docket 5022 - COVID-19 Emergency
COVID-19 Emergency Bill Payment & Customer Assistance Program Plan**

Dear Ms. Massaro:

On behalf of National Grid,¹ I have enclosed for filing with the Division the Company's COVID-19 Emergency Bill Payment & Customer Assistance Program Plan in the above-referenced matter.

Thank you for your attention to this filing. If you have any questions, please contact Raquel J. Webster at 781-907-2121 or Jennifer Brooks Hutchinson at 401-784-7288.

Sincerely,



Raquel J. Webster



Jennifer Brooks Hutchinson

cc: Docket 5022 Service List
Linda George, Division
John Bell, Division
Leo Wold, Esq., Division
Cynthia Wilson Frias, Esq., Public Utilities Commission

¹ The Narragansett Electric Company d/b/a National Grid (National Grid or the Company).

The Narragansett Electric Company
d/b/a National Grid

**COVID-19 Emergency
Bill Payment & Customer
Assistance Program Plan**

May 15, 2020

Docket No. 5022

Submitted to:

Rhode Island Division of Public Utilities & Carriers
Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission

Submitted by:

nationalgrid

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**NATIONAL GRID'S BILL PAYMENT AND
CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM PLAN**

At an open meeting on May 6, 2020, the Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission (PUC) extended its emergency order prohibiting utility terminations and certain collections activities for residential and non-residential customers to May 31, 2020.¹ The PUC also directed the utilities, including National Grid², to provide the Division and the PUC with the utility's plans for recommencing collections when the PUC lifts the moratorium on utility terminations. The PUC directed that these plans include "outreach activities by which the utility shall remind customers of overdue balances, encourage customers to communicate with the utility, and offer sensible and flexible payment arrangements."³ In addition, the PUC required that the plans include information demonstrating that the utilities have sufficient employees and resources in place to make the necessary outreach to customers and handle the large volume of calls the utilities are likely to receive once the PUC lifts the moratorium on terminations.⁴ National Grid is pleased to report that since late April 2020, it launched a new bill payment and customer assistance program (referred to in this document as the Plan) and Program Management Office to help

¹ Pursuant to the PUC's Emergency Order No. 23786, the Company is prohibited from: (1) shutting off utility service to any customer for failure to pay a bill or any portion of a bill; and (2) certain collection activities, which include sending communications to customers that threaten to shut off gas or electric service for failure to pay a bill or any portion of a bill, and sending past due accounts to collections agencies. The Company may continue certain collections activities including billing, reminder notices, entering payment plans, and other activities not prohibited by this order.

² The Narragansett Electric Company d/b/a National Grid (National Grid or Company).

³ Order No. 23826 at 4 (May 8, 2020).

⁴ *See id.* at 4-5.

customers avoid insurmountable debt, while balancing the financial well-being of the Company's business.

The Plan is a proactive and targeted customer outreach program to all customer segments to help them find the resources they need to pay their bills, whether in full or through any number of payment assistance programs. The Plan consists of a four-phase approach, including initial efforts primarily focused on "bill health" messaging and assuring that customers are aware of the programs and services available to assist them with managing and paying their bills, and detailed payment plans. The Company will execute the Plan through a robust outreach strategy. The Company has also included a description of the resources it has to ensure that the Company is well equipped to provide sustained and effective assistance to customers especially when the PUC lifts the moratorium on utility terminations. The Company appreciates the opportunity to submit its Plan for the Division and PUC's review and looks forward to continued work with the Division, PUC, and other stakeholders to address the ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic (Pandemic).

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pandemic has impacted every segment of the global and U.S. economies. Many of the Company's customers have been laid off, furloughed from their jobs, or had to take significant pay cuts. In addition, some of the Company's commercial customers have been forced to close their businesses or reduce their brick and mortar presence. Consequently, many of the Company's customers are now unable to pay their bills, including their utility bills. The

Company provides a critical service to customers and recognizes that it is uniquely positioned to assist customers in need, which remains the Company's primary focus. During the last month, the Company experienced a significant decrease in receivables compared to the same period last year. This is a clear indicator that customers need the Company's help and the Company recognizes very clearly that we are all truly in this together. In many ways, the Company is looking to mirror how the virus itself is being managed – by flattening the curve and avoiding an uncollectable bill balance apex, which, left unmanaged, would be incredibly challenging for customers to recover from over time. The Plan, which is still a work in progress, addresses the important issues the PUC raised at its Open Meeting on May 6, 2020 regarding the Company's preparedness to assist and communicate with customers once the PUC lifts the moratorium on utility terminations. As such, the Company will continue to evaluate its options and adapt its program offerings and strategies based on customer feedback and deep market insights. The Company is confident that it is prepared and has an effective strategy for addressing customers' needs, especially when the PUC lifts the moratorium on utility terminations.

Section II of this document includes a description of the four phases of the Plan. Section III includes details regarding the flexible payment plans the Company is currently offering to assist customers. Section IV includes details regarding the Company's communications strategy and resources.

II. THE FOUR PHASES OF THE PLAN

The Company is developing and implementing strategies to first support the needs of its customers while balancing the financial well-being of its business. The Company is currently focused on a proactive and targeted outreach program to all customer segments to help them find the resources they need to help manage usage, avoid insurmountable debt, and pay their bills, whether in full or through any number of assistance programs. The Company is undertaking a four-phased approach to resume cash collections. Please see Attachment 1, which is a high-level summary of the four phases. Phase 0 of the Plan focuses on customer awareness and education; Phase 1 involves soft collections activities; Phase 2 involves the restart of collections; and Phase 3 refers to business as usual. The timing for transitioning between these phases will be determined by key triggers based on regulatory feasibility, including the status of the PUC's current order in Docket No. 5022 prohibiting utility terminations and certain collections activities, the severity of pandemic conditions, customer sentiment, organizational preparedness, and customer financial position. The approach will be customized by each jurisdiction. The Company will measure progress within each phase and continue to evaluate and adapt its program offerings and outreach strategies based on customer feedback, deep market insights, and behavioral analytics.

The Company is still refining the Plan, including the development of the key triggers for transitioning between the phases. The Company believes that it will likely be appropriate to allow for different customer segments to move through the phases at different times. For

example, it may make sense to move commercial and industrial customers through the phases at a different pace or timeline than income eligible customers. The Company is also developing a predictive model to best understand customer behaviors. The Plan's proactive and segmented communications strategy, which focuses on customers' needs, will enable the Company to assist customers and provide them with options to assist them with paying their bills.

A. Phase 0 – Customer Awareness and Education

The Company is currently at Phase 0, which is the first phase of the Plan. The focus of Phase 0 is customer awareness and education. Many customers who were not previously on any payment plans or other payment assistant programs may now need such support due to the Pandemic. Therefore, it is critical that the Company educate its customers on the wide variety of programs and resources available to help them manage their usage and costs and pay their bills.

i. Areas of Focus in Phase 0

Through digital communications and outbound calls, the Company will focus on the following areas through its outreach in Phase 0:

- **Bill Health:** The Company's Bill Health initiative will focus on helping customers find the resources they need to help manage their usage and pay their bills, whether in full or through any number of assistance programs. Whether the solution takes the form of flexible payment options, energy savings programs, or other bill help programs, the Company's goal is to find solutions that work best for each customer.

- In addition to Company program solutions, the Bill Health initiative will also actively direct residential and commercial customers to government aid programs offered through the CARES Act and encourage customers to apply for programs such as the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The Company will seek to understand where the opportunities are to assist customer in any way possible before having to turn, as an action of last resort, to collections or turn-offs. Based on the Company's discussions with small and medium business customers, although approximately 75% of customers are aware of programs such as the CARES Act, unemployment benefits, and the Company's deferred payment options, many customers are still in the process of navigating and seeking out aid and are not aware of all the options available to them. The Company will review the results of its Bill Health initiative and continue to review all customer, billing, and financial data and adjust its approach as needed to help customers during these challenging times.
- **Comprehensive benefits outreach:** The Company is helping to create awareness for customers around internal National Grid programs but also state and federal programs for which customers may be eligible.
 - **Education and awareness regarding payment assistant programs:** The Company will provide information to customers regarding the payment assistant programs that are available to help them pay their bills. Examples of such payment assistant

programs include: budget billing, more flexible payment plans, discount rates, LIHEAP, and the Arrearage Management Program (AMP).

- **Energy Savings programs and tips:** There are a myriad of energy saving tips available to customers. As part of Phase 0, the Company will promote energy efficiency programs through virtual energy assessments and share information on how customers can conserve energy to lower their bills.
- **Flexible payment solutions:** The Company will increase awareness of flexible payment plans through targeted outreach. Upon a customer's request, the call center representative will offer a flexible payment option that best suits the customer's needs. See section III below for a description of the payment plans the Company offers to customers. More customers are now taking advantage of payment plan options, and the Company will assist customers with selecting the best plan based on their needs.
- **Education to customers regarding phone scams:** During the Pandemic, there has been an increase in scam calls. During these calls, customers are told that the person calling is from National Grid and asked to make payments and share their National Grid and personal bank account information. The Company has used media channels, including social media, to warn customers of phone scams and further educate customers about the Company's payment policies. Please visit the following link for

an example of a video the Company made warning customers of scam calls:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPoqErIjkLs>.

As the Company connects with customers during Phase 0, the Company will ensure that customers know that the Company's outreach is not a collections call. Consistent with the PUC's current order prohibiting utility terminations and other collections activities, during Phase 0, the Company will not apply late payment charges to non-residential customers,⁵ send disconnection notices to customers, send accounts to third-party collection companies, or engage in any other collection activities.

ii. Customer Outreach During Phase 0

- **Customer Segments:** The Company is approaching its customer outreach by targeting various customer segments to ensure that the Company has a good understanding of customers' specific needs during this phase. The Company's goal is to focus its efforts on information and assistance that is most valuable to customers. The four customer segments are: (1) Residential; (2) Income Eligible; (3) Small & Medium Business; and (4) Large Commercial & Industrial. The Company has divided these four segments into sub-segments within the framework of the Company's Bill Health efforts:

⁵ Under the applicable general terms and conditions of the Company's gas and electric tariffs, interest for late payments are only charged to non-residential customers. Currently, the Company is not charging interest on past-due payments.

- First time in arrears: A customer who, for the first time, misses one or two monthly payments.
- Regular in arrears: A customer who misses its monthly payments regularly, independently of the current ongoing crisis.
- On time: A customer who has been able to maintain bill payments during the Pandemic.
- **Messaging**: Phase 0 messaging is focused on Bill Health and staying connected in order that the Company can continue educating customers on the various programs available to them. To meet customers' expectations, the Company has adopted core communication principles. A cross functional communications team, which meets regularly, ensures that these principles are constant and consistent across all communication channels, such as the Company's website, contact centers, and any outbound communications. The core communication principles are to:
 - Reinforce the Company's service commitment: The Company remains committed to providing safe and reliable service to customers and doing its best to protect the communities in which we live and work.
 - Ease customer concerns: The Company will take steps to ease customers' financial burdens through suspensions of collections activities and other measures.
 - Demonstrate the Company's commitment to the health and safety of our customers and employees: The Company will reinforce that it is doing all it can to ensure the health and safety of customers and employees through changing the way the Company works during the Pandemic.
 - Be consistent, open and direct with timely information to customers: The Company will take efforts to notify customers in a timely manner when it makes changes that affect customers.

To keep a pulse on its customers, the Company is working with its Market Insights team to further understand customers' needs. The Market Insights team conducted research in April 2020 and learned that customers feel anxious, scared, stress, frustrated, and helpless. Customers' top concerns are the economy, their family's physical health, and the government's ability to function effectively. Customers want to know that the Company will maintain safe and reliable service for customers, take safety precautions to protect customers, employees, and the public, and provide bill flexibility during and after the Pandemic.

Key Focus areas for continued customer outreach

The Company's outreach strategy continues to evolve and will focus on the following key areas for customers:

1. Addressing Billing Services, Credit and Collections: The Company will provide guidance to customers on changes made to credit and collections procedures and help customers use their energy more efficiently.
2. Safely Providing Electric and Gas Services: The Company will ensure customers that the safety of the Company's customers and employees is paramount. This includes, the safe and reliable delivery of electricity and natural gas. The Company will focus on how it is meeting those commitments during the Pandemic by taking additional precautionary measures.

3. Support for Customers and Communities: The Company will ensure customers that the Company is absolutely committed to supporting its customers and communities the Company serves.
4. Demand Side Management and Energy Efficiency: The Company will take efforts to help customers use less energy. To effectively implement this strategy, the Company has created Customer Outreach incident command services teams dedicated to the above noted priorities.

Please see Attachment 2 (COVID-19 Customer Outreach Update), which is a summary of the Company's customer outreach efforts during the week of May 11, 2020 and a summary of the upcoming customer outreach efforts for the week of May 18, 2020.

iii. Data to be monitored for Phase 0

The Company measures customer sentiment in several ways at the Company. Two primary metrics are: (1) Trust, a measure of customers who trust the Company's advice; and (2) Customer ease (does it require low effort to do business with the Company?). In April 2020, the Company achieved the highest monthly Trust and Ease scores in several years. For Rhode Island, the Trust and Ease scores were 64.1% and 65.6%, respectively. Notably, the Company received high marks for the Company's commitment to the community and the Company's communication practices.

The data that the Company will monitor for this phase are as follows:

- Uptake on assistance programs;
- Percentages of successfully payment arrangement versus defaults; and
- Financial metrics such as Daily Cash Impact; Days Sales Outstanding;
- AR; % Bad debt against baseline revenue.

The Company continues to further evaluate this data; however, early results indicate that the Company's outreach is driving increased enrollment in flexible payment options and support programs.

iv. Outreach Completed to date in Phase 0

The Company has already started re-engaging customers. The Company's first outreach was to small and medium business (SMB) electric and gas customers. The Company attempted to reach 6,287 business customers, who had 500 or fewer employees and were in arrears over the last several weeks. The Company also connected with nearly 2,000 business customers. The outreach focused on ensuring that customers had visibility to federal and state support programs and the Company's existing and enhanced payment plans. Awareness of federal programs such as the CARES Act, was very high; however, fewer than 30% of customers have applied or plan to apply for assistance. Knowledge of the Company's programs was high, with 73% percent of SMB customers having awareness of the programs. Through the Company's outreach, 61 SMB customers entered into new payment plans on the spot, and nearly 160 additional customers said they planned to apply for a payment plan in the future. During the Company's discussions with

SMB customers, the Company learned that many business customers remain uncertain about their financial future.

In addition to SMB customers, the Company has launched a digital campaign to raise awareness for income eligible customers of LIHEAP benefits, discounted rates, and other Company programs.

B. Phase 1 – Soft Collections Activities

i. Areas of Focus in Phase 1

Phase 1 follows Phase 0 and is the soft collections phase. In addition to any activity from Phase 0, the Company will engage in the following soft collections activities during Phase 1 as it continues to focus on bill health and provide customers with the knowledge, tools, and resources necessary to pay their bills:

- Missed payment notifications: The Company will send missed payment notifications to customers. These notifications will be sent primarily through digital means. Notwithstanding the late payment reminders, the Company will continue to remind customers of the payment options and payment assistant programs that are available to them.
- Flexible payment solutions offered to customers: The Company will offer flexible payment solutions to customers during Phase 1.

- Targeted customer campaigns by segment, sub-segment, and commodity: The Company will conduct targeted customer campaigns by customer segments, sub-segments and commodity. The customer segments are Low and Medium Income, Residential, Small to Medium Business, and Large Commercial Customers. Sub segments are based on customer payment behavior such as always on time, first time in arrears, and regularly in arrears. Commodity is Electric and Gas.

During Phase 1, the Company will not send disconnection notices to customers, process accounts for third-party collection activities, or engage in any other collection activities. The Company would like to work with the Division on creative solutions that could be implemented in Phase 1. For example, the appropriate length of payment plans during this phase and whether existing customer deposits should be applied to past due balances.

ii. Customer Outreach During Phase 1

During Phase 1, customer outreach will continue with the same approach as Phase 0 and target specific customer segments. The message content will be in line with the areas of focus noted above in subsection B.i. More focus will be on the sub-segment of customers who are in the Regularly in Arrears and First Time in Arrears subsegments.

iii. Data to be monitored for Phase 1

The data for this phase are as follows:

- Same data points from Phase 0
- Develop propensity baselines
- Measure deferred payment compliance: The Company will measure whether customers are making payments pursuant to deferred payment options

C. Phase 2 – Restart of Collections Activities

i. Areas of Focus in Phase 2

During Phase 2, the Company will resume targeted collections activities by focusing on high dollar arrears and the length of time during which the accounts have been in arrears. During this phase, the Company will begin to assess late fees to customers and send disconnection notices. The specific Phase 2 activities will include the following:

- Activities permitted in Phases 0 and 1.
- Field collections activities: The Company will resume field collections activities.
- Dunning calls: The company will resume a higher level of collection-related calls to collect arrears.

- Late charges: The Company will begin to assess late charges for late payments on commercial accounts.
- Rule-based disconnection notices and disconnections: The Company will send disconnection notices and resume disconnections and activities pursuant to the applicable rules and regulations.

ii. Customer outreach during Phase 2

During Phase 2, customer outreach will continue with the same approach as Phase 1 targeting specific customer segments. The message content will be in line with the areas of focus noted above in section C.i. More focus will be on the subsegment of customers who are regularly in arrears.

iii. Data to be monitored for Phase 2

The data for this phase are as follows:

- Same data points from Phase 1
- Customers' promises to pay and payments the Company receives
- Improved write-off predictability

D. Phase 3- Full Return to Collections

i. Scope of Phase 3

During Phase 3, the Company will fully return to collections activities and ramp back up to normal. The specific Phase 3 activities will include business as usual collections activities, including disconnection of service.

ii. Customer Outreach During Phase 3

During Phase 3, customer outreach will continue with the same approach as Phase 2 targeting specific customer segments. The message content will be in line with the areas of focus noted above in section i. More focus will be on the subsegment of customers who are regularly in arrears.

iii. Data to be monitored for Phase 3

The data to be monitored is as follows:

- Same data points from Phases 0, 1, and 2
- Disconnect for nonpayment notices (DNP) notices and completes
- Effectiveness of collection efforts
- Actual write offs and debt expense

III. PAYMENT PLAN OPTIONS FOR CUSTOMERS

Through its extensive communication strategy, the Company will educate customers regarding the variety of payment and assistance programs available to them. The Company will encourage customers who are struggling to pay their bills to contact the Company either online

or by telephone to review the various options available to them. The following payment plans and assistance programs are currently available to customers:

1. Enhanced Flexible Payment Plans (since onset of COVID-19)

If the customer's service is still active, the Company will offer all customers (protected and non-protected) the following Payment Agreement:

- Residential: \$0 down and 12 months to pay the balance regardless of past Payment Agreement history
- Commercial & Industrial (C&I) gas and electric customers (who receive their electric supply from the Company): \$0 down and 3 to 6 installments. The Company is currently reviewing payment terms for electric customers who receive their electric supply from non-regulated power producer.

2. Budget Billing

The Company offers Budget Billing, which equalizes monthly payments to avoid seasonal peaks. Budget billing programs run for 12-month cycles with the customer payment amount determined based on estimated annual energy costs over those 12 months. At the end of that 12-month period, the final budget payment amount will be the customer's account balance at that time or it may be rolled into the next budget season. The Company performs reviews periodically so that if there is a significant difference, the budget amount will decrease or increase. Customers must be current on the account to be eligible and cannot also be on a flexible payment plan.

3. Forgiveness Program (Arrearage Management Plan)

The Company offers a residential Arrearage Management Program (AMP) available to eligible customers, along with an arrearage forgiveness component. The AMP program is available to customers on income eligible discount rates who have a balance of at least \$300 that is more than 60 days past due.⁶ Customers must pay their bill on time each month to remain active in the program. Customer are removed from enrollment after missing two payments in a 12-month period. Since the onset of the Pandemic, however, and pursuant to the PUC's Emergency Order, any customer who is currently enrolled in the AMP who misses their third payment in their applicable 12-month period through April 15, 2020 will not be disenrolled unless they miss another payment subsequently in the same 12-month period.

4. Income Eligible Discount Rate

The Company provides a discount rates to customers who meet income eligibility requirements or receive government assistance. Customers who receive food stamps or SNAP benefits qualify for LIHEAP or receive supplemental security income from the social security administration receive a 25% discount rate. Customers on

⁶ Eligible customers are also statutorily required to have a termination notice to enroll in AMP. Currently and during the termination moratorium, the Company is not sending termination notices; therefore, the Company does not believe that it is able to enroll new customers in the AMP during the moratorium. The Company will continue to offer other flexible payment options.

Medicaid, the Rhode Island Works Program, or General Public Assistance receive a 30% discount rate.

5. Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

LIHEAP is a federally funded program that helps low-income households pay their energy bills. These funds are administered by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and delivered through the local Community Action Programs (CAP) agencies. To be eligible for LIHEAP, a customer's household income must be at or below 60% of the state median income. The Company makes referrals to LIHEAP and enables the direct payment of a LIHEAP award to a customer's bill.

6. Good Neighbor Energy Fund

The Good Neighbor Energy Fund is available to customers who are in a temporary financial crisis and are having trouble paying their heating bills, but may not be necessarily income-eligible for Fuel Assistance. This statewide fund is managed by the United Way of Rhode Island.

7. Service Restoration (since onset of COVID-19)

In addition to the above-described initiatives, since the onset of the Pandemic, and pursuant to the terms of the PUC's Emergency Order, the Company will offer the following terms to restore service to customers whose service has been terminated for nonpayment or who has a termination date scheduled: (i) for balances less than

\$1,000, the customer will be required to pay 10% of the total balance due as a down payment and be given 18 months to pay the balance; (ii) for balances between \$1,000 and \$2,499.99, the customer will be required to pay 10% of the total balance due as a down payment and be given 24 months to pay balance; and (iii) for balances of \$2,500 or more, the customer will be required to pay 10% of the total balance due as a down payment and be given 36 months to pay balance.

8. Bill Health Outreach Program

The Company has launched an outreach program to speak with customers who may be in need of support to ensure they have awareness of support that might be available to them such as:

- The Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act
- Economic injury disaster loans for businesses in Rhode Island and
- Enhanced unemployment benefits for businesses and residents in Rhode Island
- National Grid customers solutions such as the enhanced flexible payment options

This outreach program started with small and medium businesses but will be extended to residential customers in the coming weeks. The Company's regular billing process will continue, and the Company will encourage customers to manage their National Grid accounts

online. The Company will continue to offer a variety of payment and billing options designed to make transactions easy and convenient, and call center representatives will remain available to assist customers.

IV. THE COMPANY'S PREPARATION FOR CUSTOMER OUTREACH DURING AND AFTER THE MORATORIUM ON UTILITY TERMINATIONS IS LIFTED

The Company is prepared to handle future call volume as follows:

- **Internal Call Center:** The internal call center has not furloughed agents, and there has not been a decline in the number of resources since the Pandemic started. The Company implemented an aggressive work-from-home strategy to respond to the Pandemic. The Company has deployed 86% of its workforce to a work-from-home environment while pursuing a decentralization of the call center. While doing this, the Company has staffed a brick-and-mortar center with the required staff to take emergency calls and outages. The brick-and-mortar center follows the Center for Disease Controls (CDC) guidelines and ensure that call center operations are not impacted in case of potential connectivity issues for the work-from-home agents.

As a proactive step to handle future call volumes, the Company has focused on completing training for the call center agents. The purpose of the training is to provide agents with deeper knowledge of the Company's personalization solution to offer customers the next best offer and increase enrollment rates. In addition, the

Company is training call center agents on soft skills to efficiently and effectively serve customer calls and ensure first call resolution. The Company has completed approximately 30% of this training and plans to complete the training by mid-June 2020.

- **Vendors - Call Center:** Vendors are the third-parties that handle a portion of the Company's call volume, including collections calls. Due to a decline in vendor call volumes, the Company implemented a vendor optimization strategy, which included insourcing some of the vendor volume. Under this strategy, the Company shifted vendor resources to other clients. In order for the Company to go back to business as usual, the Company will need to bring these third-party vendor agents back and possibly hire new agents. Onboarding, training, and quality review of the agents will be imbedded in the process.

By assisting customers early, encouraging them to manage their accounts online, and evaluating opportunities to drive self-service, the Plan and outreach strategy will also help to bend the curve or expected influx of customer inbound connections once normal collections activities resume. In 2018, the company implemented a personalization solution tool, which provides the "next best offer" for customers who contact the Company. Offers include, discount rates, energy efficiency solutions, billing programs (i.e. budget billing), and LIHEAP or other assistance programs.

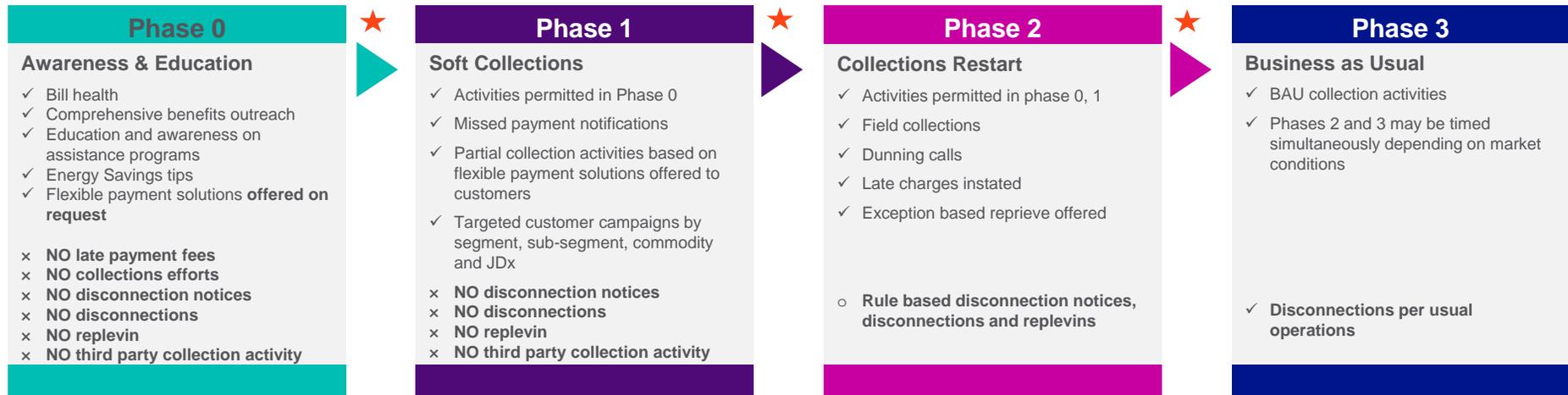
When the tool is utilized during customer conversations, a significantly higher enrollment rate has been observed as well as a reduction in customer arrears. These collective actions will help relieve pressure on contact centers when collections resume, enabling customers to be quickly and effectively served. This year, contact center agents received refresher training on how to use the personalization solution tool.

V. CONCLUSION

The Company recognizes that creativity will be needed to develop options for sustained customer aid balanced with the mechanisms necessary for adequate regulatory support. Given the severe impacts of the Pandemic, it is critical that the Company have an approved long-term strategy that will position the Company to extend sustained customer aid while maintaining the financial integrity necessary to conduct and finance its operations since many customers may need support long after the PUC's Emergency Order is lifted. To this end, the Company will continue to refine its Plan and work with the Division, PUC, and other stakeholders to ensure that the right solutions are in place to assist customers on a long-term and sustainable basis.

We drafted a phased approach to drive our Customer Outreach and Regulator Advocacy efforts

- We are undertaking a **phased approach** to re-engage our customers and resume cash collections
- The timing of these phases will be determined by **key triggers** based on regulatory feasibility, severity of pandemic conditions in jurisdictions, customer sentiment, organizational preparedness and customer financial needs



Covid-19 Customer Outreach Update

May 15, 2020



Covid communications – our strategic focus

- Stay connected with our customers through a proactive and segmented comms strategy focusing on their needs.
- Help our customers maintain their bill health with bill assistance programs and energy savings.
- Reinforce our commitment to deliver safe and reliable energy.

Covid communications – lifecycle communication strategy

The five stages of lifecycle represent an opportunity to define the start and end of a specific time-period where customers' needs, information, and requirements change.

Strategizing our communications around these phases will enable us to address more cohesively the specific needs of different customers through the overall pandemic.

Overarching messages:

We Care

Stay Connected

In this together

We're committed to helping you

Customer Subsegments/ Persona

Residential (Resi and Income Eligible)

Commercial (SMB and Large C&I)



First time in arrears

A customer that, for the first time, misses one or two monthly payments.



First time in arrears

A commercial customer that, for the first time, misses one or two monthly payments for one or some of its account payments due to the ongoing crisis.



Regular in arrears

A residential customer that misses its monthly payments regularly, independently of the current ongoing crisis.



Regular in arrears

A commercial customer that misses its monthly payments for one or many of its accounts regularly, independently of the current ongoing crisis.



On-time

A customer that has been able to continue paying his/her bill throughout the crisis.



On-time

A commercial customer that has been able to continue paying its bill throughout the crisis.

What's happening this week: 5/11/20 - 5/15/20

	Message	Segment	Channel
Week of 5/11/20	Be Aware of COVID-19 Scams YouTube Video	All	Social Media
	*IVR Message - Payment Assistance & HEAP extension	All	IVR
	We Connect Bill Insert - Stay Safe - Outdoor Safety, Scam Awareness, EE Offers	Residential	Bill Insert
	All Customer Email- Financial Support Awareness	Residential	Email
	Ways to Save: Energy Efficiency Conserve & Save Tips	Residential	Social Media
	Opower Reports: Conserve & Save Tips	Residential	Email, Direct Mail
	Stay Home; Stay Comfortable; Stay Connected - Marketplace	Residential	Digital Ads
	Weekly Virtual/Online Home Energy Assessments	Residential	Email, Radio, Digital Ads
	*EE Savings: Fridge Recycling - Contactless Pickup	Residential	Digital Ads
	*EE Savings: Lighting Kits Sale	Residential	Email
	Safety: Gas Dig Safe Campaign	Residential	Social Media
	New Enrollment in Discount Rate	Income Eligible	Email
	Flexible Payment Plan Awareness	Income Eligible	Email
	*Budget Billing Awareness	Income Eligible	Email
	Managed Account Outreach	SMB & LCI	Calls, Email

What's happening next week: 5/18/20 - 5/22/20

	Message	Segment	Channel
Week of 5/18/20	Ways to Save: Energy Efficiency Tips YouTube Video	All	Social Media
	*Community: Thank you to front line essential workers	All	Print Ad
	We Connect Newsletter: Stay Safe - Outdoor Safety, Scam Awareness, EE Offers	Residential	Bill Insert
	Stay Safe: Gas Dig Safe Campaign	Residential	Social Media
	Stay Home; Stay Comfortable; Stay Connected - Marketplace	Residential	Digital Ads
	Conserve & Save: Energy Efficiency Tips	Residential	Social Media
	Virtual Online Home Energy Assessments	Residential	Email, Radio, Digital Ads
	Ways to Save: Special product price savings, limited time offers	Residential	Email
	Ways to Save: Fridge Recycling - Contactless Pickup	Residential	Digital Ads
	Financial Support - Assistance Awareness	Income Eligible	Digital & Print Ads
	Financial Support - Programs	SMB & LCI	Outbound Calls & Emails
	COVID Commercial "Business" website updates	SMB & LCI	Website
	Bill Health: Manual Meter Read Education Letters	SMB & LCI	Mail/Email
	Commercial Customer Council Invitation to Join	SMB & LCI	Email
	LI/HEAP Extension Campaign	Income Eligible	Calls, Email

*sample attached

**Week of 5/11/20
Budget Billing Awareness**

nationalgrid



Our Budget Plan can make energy costs more predictable.

That makes managing your expenses much easier.

During these uncertain times, you may be facing increased financial pressures. We're here to help with programs, services and advice for managing your energy costs. Taking part in our Budget Plan allows you to pay the same amount* month-to-month. It's a great way to manage your regular expenses and reduce unwanted surprises.

ENROLL NOW

National Grid



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*The Budget Plan starts out based on the prior 12 months of use at your address and adjusts as needed over time. Every six months, adjustments (if needed) will be made to your bill to reflect your actual energy usage. You will be notified on your bill a month ahead of time if your plan needs to be adjusted. In the twelfth month of your budget plan, if you paid for more energy than you used over the year, that month's bill will be reduced to reflect your credit. If you didn't pay enough to cover your energy usage, you can choose to either pay the amount over the next 12 months or pay one lump sum.

To be eligible for a Budget Plan, your account must be current and you cannot have any outstanding charges. Please note that it takes two business days for any payment to clear, so unfortunately you cannot enroll immediately after making a payment.

280 Metrose Street, Providence, RI 02907

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Week of 5/18/20
Community: Thank you to front line essential workers
RI Print ad

A community unified by hope.

We salute healthcare workers, first responders, utility workers, and everyone on the front lines for their daily acts of courage and compassion, and for all they do to keep us safe and strong.

Please join us in this message of thanks and hope by displaying Shepard Fairey's "Hope and Strength" in your window.

As Rhode Islander's, we'll navigate these difficult times together.

#401love

nationalgrid



Rhode Island Monthly Magazine

RI JDX sponsored an ad to underwrite a commemorative poster (seen on right) that was created to recognize Rhode Island frontline healthcare workers and all the workers powering the Rhode Island Community.

Week of 5/11/20
IVR Message - Payment Assistance
& HEAP extension

Up front message every single caller hears:

National Grid is committed to providing safe and reliable service and to helping our customers through the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. To lessen financial hardship and ease concerns about your energy service, we have temporarily suspended collections activities, including service disconnects, until further notice. Regular billing continues.

If you are struggling to pay your bill, our agents can assist with payment plans. You may also be eligible for assistance, even if you have never qualified before. The deadline to apply for Heating/Fuel Assistance, also known as the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) has been extended to (new date for state) . This grant does not need to be paid back. Learn more at ngrid.com/discount.

Full details on our pandemic response may be found at, ngrid.com/covid-19, and our social media channels. Thank you for being a valued customer.

Week of 5/11/20
EE Savings: Fridge Recycling - Contactless Pickup



Week of 5/11/20
EE Savings: Lighting Kits Sale



Thank you for being a loyal customer. We want to introduce you to new and easy ways to conserve energy and save money while many of us are spending more time at home. Our new \$5 Energy-Saving Kit has everything you need to brighten up a space for reading, homework or a little personal time. There are two kits to choose from, each includes long-lasting LED bulbs, an energy-efficient power strip, and an LED desk lamp. Pick the bulb type best for your home and your kit will be shipped for free.

Choose your kit

Energy-Saving Kit options:



Choose your kit

 National Grid Massachusetts, champions of energy efficiency, ranked #1 in the nation.



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Week of 5/11/20
Social Media Overview

We continue to leverage our social media channels to support key messaging with 15 posts for the week of 5/11, garnering a total of 40k+ impressions and 1k+ engagements. Our top performing posts included our United Way partnership, our UK/US COVID video, and our push to our educational hub, Energy Explorer. Our scam video featuring Warren Bamford had over 13K impressions and over 250 engagements.

