



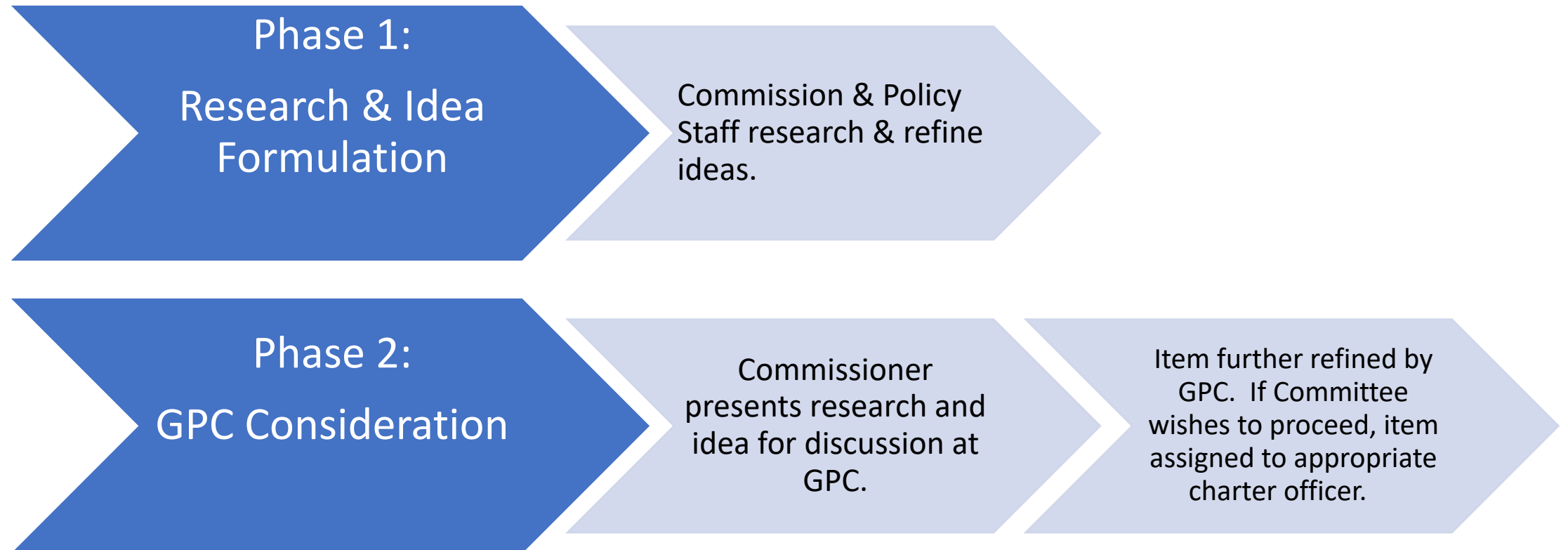
Utility Bill Assistance

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Policy Research Team

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Policy Research Process



Utility Bill Assistance

- Existing GRU Programs
- Existing Federal and Statewide Programs
- Funding and Administration of Assistance Programs
- Example Municipal Programs
 - LIFT-UP - St. Petersburg, Florida
 - Weatherization Programs - Knoxville, Tennessee
 - Discount Programs – Seattle, Washington; Austin, Texas; Columbus, Ohio

Existing GRU Programs

- Automatic Payment Extension Program
- GRU Project Share, where voluntary donations from customers and employees go to assist the elderly and handicapped in paying their bills.
- GRU Low-Income Energy Efficiency Program Plus, which assists low income customers with home improvements to lower their electric bills
- GRU Energy audit options, such as the Home Energy Advisor Tool, to help identify possible savings.
- Personal Hardship Extensions and Extend-A-Hand installment payments.
- GRU also advertises community agencies, such as Catholic Charities, Community Action Agency, Florida Coalition for the Homeless, Gainesville Community Ministry, and Salvation Army, who offer assistance

Data on GRU Customers Referred to Collections in 2020

Month	# of Active Accounts	# of Referred Accounts	% Referred	Amount Referred
January	79539	226	0.3%	104,529.90
February	79255	240	0.3%	101,958.76
March	84832	266	0.3%	135,530.00
April	82892	251	0.3%	100,526.24
May	79870	200	0.3%	83,143.60
June	80885	162	0.2%	60,121.54
July	79689	208	0.3%	102,069.46
August	79405	204	0.3%	86,493.62
September	83620	440	0.5%	207,526.94
October	85777	385	0.4%	200,489.18
November	72544	308	0.4%	342,281.88
December	84182	364	0.4%	260,968.50
Totals	972490	3254	0.3%	1,785,639.62

Federal and Statewide Programs

- The Home Energy Assistance Program, which assist low income individuals with their heating and medically necessary cooling bills.
- The Weatherization Assistance Program provides grants for projects such as attic and floor insulation or ventilation, applying solar reflective coatings, installing solar screens, and repairing or replacing inefficient heating and cooling units.
- The Elderly Home Energy Assistance Program assists low income households with elderly individuals when the household is experiencing a home energy emergency and is unable to pay their utility bill.

Funding and Administering Utility Assistance Programs

- Options to be explored:
 - Allocate money directly from the General Fund to be distributed to a third party agency or organization that would then administer a utility bill assistance program.
 - Allocate a percentage of the utility tax to be distributed to a third party agency or organization that would then administer a utility bill assistance program.
 - Allocate money from the American Rescue Plan funds to be distributed to a third party agency or organization that would then administer a utility bill assistance program.
- If these strategies are taken, the City could develop a policy that would outline the criteria that applicants must meet to receive assistance, in addition to the criteria the third party organization administering the funds would have to meet. Further analysis needs to be done by the appropriate Charter(s).

Examples

- LIFT-UP, St. Petersburg, Florida
- Knoxville, Tennessee – Weatherization
- Discount Programs
 - Seattle, Washington
 - Austin, Texas
 - Columbus, Ohio

LIFT-UP

- The National League of Cities established the program LIFT-UP for families who are unable to pay their utility bills. The program connects residents to financial empowerment services, and helps cities avoid the costs of using debt collectors or imposing repeated service shut offs.
- The program began in five pilot cities and results showed that cities were better able to collect utility payments with less reliance on debt collection or resorting to shutting off services.
- In St. Petersburg, the program enrolled 100 participants, who were connected to a financial counselor to develop a customized payment plan, and the participants saw a significant reduction in the average number of shut-offs compared to the control group.

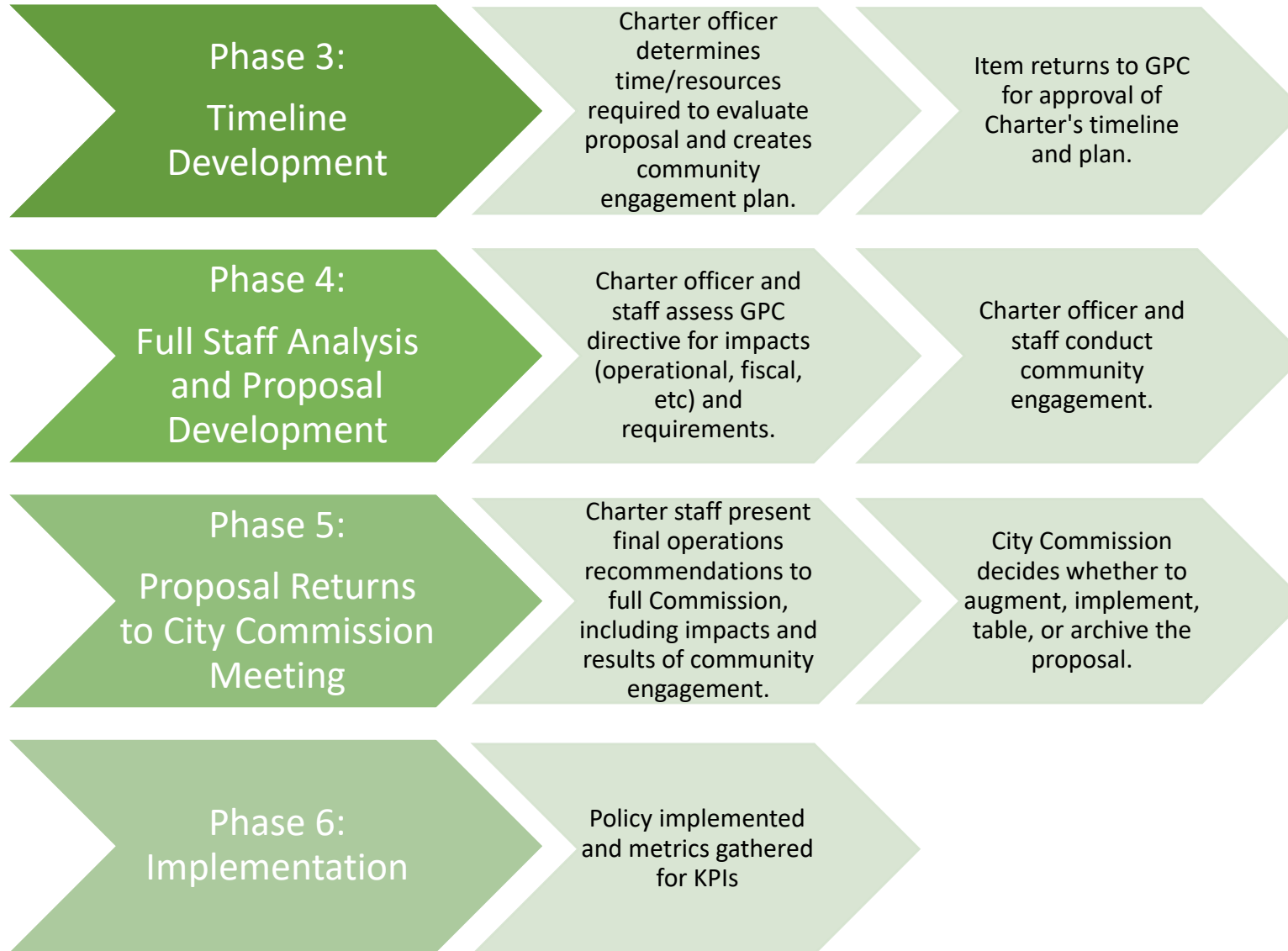
Weatherization Programs, Knoxville, Tennessee

- Knoxville partnered with groups including the Knoxville Utilities Board, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee, and the Alliance to Save Energy to assist 1,500 low income households from 2016-2018 to become more energy efficient.
- The city, funded by a \$15 million grant from the TVA, refurbished homes with better heating and air units and insulation, and helped educate participants on how to maximize savings.
- The programs are expected to save 6 million kilowatts annually, and participants reported saving \$500 annually on their utility bills.

Discount Programs

- Seattle, Washington
 - In Seattle, the City offers a discount program if your household income is at or below 70% of the state's median income. If eligible, you can receive a discount of 60% on your light bill, and 50% on your public utilities bill.
- Austin, Texas
 - Austin offers a Customer Assistance Program, which offers a utility bill discount to customers on low or fixed incomes who participate in certain assistance programs. CAP Discounts can reduce utility bills an average of \$650 a year, and individuals can also receive discounts on electric services, water services, drainage fees, and more.
- Columbus, Ohio
 - Columbus offers a low income discount program, where eligible participants can receive 20% off water and sewer usage charges. Income qualified persons 60+ can also qualify for a 10% discount on electric and water bills.

Policy Research Process



Discussion?