



Community Retrofit Program City of New Bedford

The City of New Bedford officially announced plans to implement a community-based residential energy efficiency program on October 30, 2009. The Community Retrofit Program has three objectives: create sustainable local careers, save residents money on their energy costs, and reduce carbon emissions. These goals will be achieved by providing energy audit and weatherization services to the residents in designated Green Impact Zones in the city in a systematic, impactful, and cost effective manner. These services will be delivered in collaboration with the local utility company. The program will demonstrate the effectiveness, scalability and replicability of a neighborhood outreach approach. By aggregating the work in a small geographic area, it is possible to achieve better economies of scale, making the project more cost and time effective. To facilitate the process of aggregating demand, a team of local residents will be trained as Community Mobilization Leaders to execute an extensive grassroots outreach, engagement and education initiative, including door-to-door canvassing, creative marketing and hosting community events. By training local residents to do this work, a social incentive is created – the process of making a home more energy efficient is demystified and encouraged by neighbors and friends. Community Mobilization Teams will engage upwards of 10,000 households in the city with the goal of having 5000 small businesses and units of housing weatherized by 2013. Using these methods will grow leadership, build community, and raise general awareness while driving demand for services that will result in an increase in job creation, reduced emissions and lowered energy costs. This will also maximize the funds already being invested in the city for energy efficiency and renewable energy. The program will be executed through a unique collaboration between the City of New Bedford, local non-profits such as PACE YouthBuild New Bedford, local contractors, Greater New Bedford Economic Development Council, NSTAR, New Bedford Housing Authority, the Department of Housing and Community Development, Greater New Bedford Workforce Investment Board, institutions of secondary and higher learning, and other key stakeholders.

The program will specifically support services for residents who are not well served by current weatherization programs: residents whose household incomes fall between 60 – 120% of state median. Families in this income range are often the working poor that are not eligible for federally funded weatherization assistance programs, but cannot afford the initial investment necessary to reduce their utility bills through existing rebate or other incentive programs. Outreach and education efforts will also recruit residents with incomes above 120% of the median income and will refer low-income residents to existing resources, such as the Weatherization Assistance Program.

In order to create the most effective program possible and have it be a viable model for other towns and cities, we will specifically address challenges common to many urban communities including: split incentive for landlords and renters, language barriers, disinterest in “environmental” programs, absentee landlords, multi-family units, unregulated heating fuels and electric heat, masonry buildings, and pre-weatherization work needs (i.e.: addressing knob and tube wiring and asbestos removal).

Workforce development is a vital component of the Community Retrofit Program. We anticipate that upwards of 60 direct jobs will be created, from entry level weatherization technicians to highly skilled contractors. The City will develop a Community Workforce Agreement to ensure that the jobs created through the program go to local residents and businesses and that fair labor practices are followed.