

National Weatherization Assistance Program Evaluation
Communications Plan
November 19, 2009

Introduction

This plan outlines communications among key groups in the National Weatherization Assistance Program Evaluation data collection process. The plan focuses on communications among state offices, local weatherization agencies, utilities and evaluation team state and local liaisons. The plan also identifies outreach opportunities that will enhance compliance build credibility with evaluation stakeholders. The groups critical to the effective flow of data collection communications are defined below:

Definitions of critical groups

State offices: The 50 state-level offices responsible for management of the federal Department of Energy Weatherization Assistance Program.

Local agencies: The 900 agencies nationwide responsible for delivery of the federal weatherization program.

Utilities: The 500 electric and natural gas utilities nationwide that will be asked to provide billing data for the households in the evaluation.

State and local liaisons, outreach coordinators and case managers: Energy Center of Wisconsin staff responsible for managing data requests, coordinating communications and initiating follow-up with non-respondents to ensure a high level of compliance. Specifically, the liaisons oversee the entire process, including development of data forms and surveys; outreach coordinators initiate data request communications with critical groups and manage outreach opportunities; and case managers are the primary point of contact for data collection, non-respondent follow-up and problem resolution with local agencies.

Goals of the communications plan

There are several important reasons to define the communications strategies for the national evaluation. These reasons can be stated in the form of goals:

Goal 1: Achieve a high level of compliance with data collection efforts in order to increase the validity of the evaluation results.

Goal 2: Ensure a high level of cooperation with the evaluation process and build a network of champions within the weatherization community.

Goal 3: Ensure that the evaluation results are viewed by stakeholders as accurate, credible and actionable.

Communications flow

The success of the data collection process will depend on launching communications strategies with various audiences simultaneously and keeping these audiences informed. The flow of formal communications is described below and an attached chart provides a picture of the system of audiences, strategies and messages.

Introductory package to state offices (print package sent via USPS)

- An introductory letter from Oak Ridge National Laboratory [Branding: ORNL]
- An introductory letter from the Energy Center of Wisconsin [Branding: Energy Center]
- Frequently Asked Questions – [Branding: national evaluation logo]
- A form asking for additional state office contact information
- A preview of what’s next in the evaluation process
- Sample text for optional, voluntary communications with local weatherization agencies. The same information will be communicated to local agencies by the Energy Center of Wisconsin in an introductory letter.

Data request to state offices (electronic)

- Data request via email [Branding: WAP evaluation banner]
- Data form and survey (links to online versions):
All States Program Information Survey – S1
All States Agency Information Form – DF1

Introductory package to local agencies – (print sent via USPS)

- Introductory letter from the Energy Center [Branding: Energy Center]
- One additional paragraph for sampled agencies (*see letter*)
- FAQ [Branding: national evaluation logo]
- A preview of what’s next in the evaluation process

Data request to local agencies – 500 not in the sampled subset (electronic)

- Data request via email
- Data forms (links to online versions):
All Agencies Program Information Survey (S2)
All Agencies Overview Information Form (DF10)

Data request to sampled local agencies – subset of the 900 (electronic)

- Data request via email
- Data form (link to online version):
All Agencies Electric and Natural Gas Bills (DF4)

Data request to utilities (print package sent via USPS)

- Cover letter from ORNL
- Cover from Energy Center of Wisconsin
- Data form:
Electric and Natural Gas Bills (DF5)

Data request to sampled local agencies (electronic)

- Data request via email
- Data forms and surveys (links and/or attachments):
All Agencies Overview Information Form (DF10)
All Agencies Program Information Survey (S2)
Subset Agencies Detailed Program Information Survey (S3)
Housing Unit Information Form (DF2)
Building Information Form (DF3)
Metered Fuels and Air Conditioner Studies (DF6)

Case Manager Follow-Up

The scheduling of introductory packets, data requests and follow-up activities is detailed in the graphic headed *WAP Evaluation Project Emergency ICR Survey and Data Form Timeline*, which is included with this plan. The narrative presented here describes the follow-up strategy without a focus on the actual timeline.

The complete *data request strategy* includes a written request and a follow-up telephone call to answer questions and verify the timeline for submission of data. If this process does not result in affirmative contact and compliance with the data request, *follow-up strategy* will proceed:

First follow-up call: If unable to speak directly to the specified contact person, the case manager will leave a message and callback number. If the contact does not respond within the specified timeframe, the case manager will make a second follow-up call.

Second follow-up call: The case manager will make several calls at varying times of the day to reach the contact person directly. If this effort is unsuccessful, the case manager's supervisor will leave a message. If the agency contact does not respond within the specified timeframe, the case manager's supervisor will make a third follow-up call.

Third follow-up call: The case manager's supervisor will make several more calls at varying times of the day to reach the contact person directly or an alternate contact at the agency who may be able to assist with the data collection. If this effort is unsuccessful, the state and local agency liaison will call and leave one more message for the agency contact person. The liaison may also contact the state office for assistance if the state office's prior support of the evaluation indicates that they would be willing to encourage agency responsiveness to the data request.

In addition to non-respondents, we may encounter agencies that refuse to provide the requested data or be slow to do so. Sampled agencies that refuse to provide the information will receive a call from the state and local agency liaison to inquire about the reason for the refusal and to seek to overcome any obstacles or objections. Any agencies that continue to refuse to comply may be referred to the ORNL project manager in an additional effort to overcome agency concerns.

Sampled agencies that are slow at providing the requested data will receive periodic follow-ups from the evaluation team's case manager. After approximately three follow-up contacts, the case manager would refer the agency to a supervisor or the manager in charge of agency data collection for additional follow up.

Communications strategies

The evaluation team will use a variety of strategies to communicate with critical groups. The key strategies are defined here and will be referred to in the outline of the communications and outreach flow.

Formal communications: For this plan, formal communications are written messages – letters, emails, memos and website content – using formal language and tone. Formal communications have generally been agreed upon by the members of the evaluation team and reviewed by U.S. Office of Management and Budget. Formal communications have specific, accurate information about the evaluation and usually request action on the part of the recipient, i.e. a data collection request. Written reports, project meetings, training, news releases and newsletters are also formal communications.

Case management follow-up: To minimize confusion and reduce the data request burden on local agencies, the evaluation team will use a case management strategy. A “case manager” will be assigned to each local agency to assist with data collection, answer questions, provide consistent information and conduct follow-up on overdue responses or incomplete submissions.

Communications tools

In addition to the strategies outlined in this plan, there are various tools available to the evaluation team to assist in reaching communications goals. Use of these tools is outside the scope of data collection, but will help ensure a high level of cooperation with the evaluation process.

A stand-alone website will be developed to facilitate communications with state offices, local agencies and utilities. The site will also archive regular evaluation updates, maintain an online Q&A (questions may be submitted via an online form) and serve as a portal to the online data forms and surveys.

Regular email updates will be sent to contacts at state offices. These updates will share information deemed important for state managers and will build relationships and buy-in for the evaluation. Traditionally and formally, DOE communicates with state offices and states communicate with local agencies. Evaluation outreach will use the same structure to facilitate ongoing communications. Regular updates will keep state offices informed so that they can continue to provide informal communications to the local agencies. These regular evaluation updates will be archived on the website. Other evaluation stakeholders, including local agencies, utilities and state and national associations will not receive regular updates unless they opt-in by signing up on the evaluation website. This will build our database of interested stakeholders and will allow recipients to control their preferred level and flow of information.

Over the more than 30 years that the weatherization program has been operating, a number of strong communications channels have been established to provide program information to local agencies and others. The Weatherization Assistance Program Technical Assistance Center website – www.waptac.org – provides weatherization practitioners and other energy conservation professionals with information related to the weatherization program, its on-going operations and its partnerships with stakeholders. National Association for State Community Services Programs receives funding from DOE to maintain the website. Evaluation outreach will contact NASCSP and discuss how to proceed with providing content for [waptac.org](http://www.waptac.org) to update the existing evaluation FAQ, which was last updated in October 2007.

There may be opportunities for sharing website content with other related websites, including DOE’s website for information on energy efficiency and renewable energy (EERE) technologies. <http://www.eere.energy.gov/>.

In addition to the tools discussed here, there are opportunities for webinars, meetings and conference presentations to further evaluation goals:

Webinars produced by the evaluation team

- A webinar was held to answer questions about oversampling in states to achieve state-specific evaluation results
- Webinars could be scheduled as needed to achieve data collection and communications goals

Regular meetings with stakeholders

- Weatherization Network Committee (meeting planned for January 2010)

Conferences and meetings hosted by stakeholders

- Make evaluation team members available to give progress reports or participate in discussions about the national evaluation.
- National association meetings, national DOE-sponsored meetings, etc.

Outreach strategies

Efforts by critical groups – state offices, local agencies, state and local evaluation liaisons and other members of the evaluation team – to reach out to various state and national associations will be encouraged. The goals of outreach efforts are to:

- Inform evaluation stakeholders
- Create goodwill within association networks
- Build on existing relationships within the 30-year old weatherization program
- Develop a broad understanding of how the evaluation provides useful information for the weatherization community
- Achieve a high level of compliance with data collection efforts

Outreach should target all parties who play a role in implementing the weatherization program, advocating for the program and its constituents or providing program information to interested audiences. This includes, but is not limited to state offices, local agencies, utilities and state and national trade associations.

Outreach target audiences

- State Community Action Program associations
- State associations of weatherization providers
- State and regional training and technical assistance providers
- National Association for State Community Services Programs
- National Community Action Foundation
- American Public Power Association
- Edison Electric Institute
- National Rural Electric Cooperative Association
- National Gas Association