



## **WeatherizeDC**

### **Applying Campaign Mobilization Tactics to Drive Demand**

WeatherizeDC is the anchor initiative of the DC Project, a nonprofit in Washington, DC. WeatherizeDC applies political campaign organizing tools and tactics to generate demand for home energy improvements. WeatherizeDC targets homes based on demographic information, such as age of home and household income, and reaches out to them in various ways, including door-to-door canvassing, to bring onboard participants, supporters, and volunteers. The program applies data tools such as outreach micro-targeting and tracks program metrics and best practices in real time through web-based platforms accessible to volunteers, field staff, and contractors. The program delivers a triple bottom-line message as volunteers engage homeowners in deeper conversations about the program: weatherization will (1) create high-quality jobs in DC's underserved communities, (2) result in energy savings and more comfortable homes, and (3) have positive environmental impacts. The DC Project anticipates that home energy improvements from initial pilot will mobilize \$300,000 to \$600,000 of private investment in energy efficiency, and project staff plan on launching programs across the US.

### **Background**

Founded in January 2009, WeatherizeDC has served as an incubator for the DC Project to develop, test, and refine job creation in the home performance industry. Their three-pronged model includes driving demand for home energy improvements, forging partnerships that can generate high-quality jobs and workforce development for neighborhoods with high unemployment, and pursuing more affordable financing for all.

#### *Driving Demand*

At the core of the DC Project's demand creation strategy is harnessing existing neighborhood networks and relationships to mobilize consumer interest in home performance retrofits, all the while meticulously tracking data about their efforts and impact. Neighborhood residents are approached not merely as customers but as potential leaders who can spread WeatherizeDC's message within their neighborhoods, faith congregations, schools, unions, and other networks.

#### *Ensuring High Standards*

With its social- and economic-justice mission, the DC Project reached agreement with local business and labor partners to ensure that its demand creation efforts help the District of Columbia's more disadvantaged communities. The DC Project provides contractors with new business leads, provided that the partners meet specific requirements for local hiring, certification-based training, livable wages, and benefits. By partnering with home-performance businesses that meet job-quality and workforce-sourcing criteria for being a WeatherizeDC contractor, the program tries to ensure that home energy improvements create jobs in distressed neighborhoods.



## *Policy Engagement*

The DC Project launched WeatherizeDC in a market where many neighborhoods face difficulty accessing affordable financing or attractive incentives for home energy upgrades, barriers that can put weatherization out of reach for many residents. The DC Project is working with local government leaders and other partners to advance financing programs and other policies to support home energy improvements.

## **Lessons for Driving Demand**

WeatherizeDC micro-targets messaging based on detailed demographic information and employs several outreach methods to reach potential program participants and supporters. WeatherizeDC relies most heavily on door-to-door canvassing. WeatherizeDC has, to date, canvassed only neighborhoods where median income is high enough that homeowners either have access to financing or can pay for improvements out of pocket.

At the doors, volunteers and paid organizers focus on developing a relationship with residents, presenting information designed to resonate with the neighborhood. Project staff tests messaging with neighborhood leaders, conduct the outreach effort, and carefully track responses. Prior to launching WeatherizeDC, the DC Project conducted focus groups that found that the top three messages homeowners responded to are; 1) immediate energy-cost savings, 2) benefits to the environment and 3) local job creation. “However, with experience we discovered that the number one reason people were choosing to weatherize their homes was actually increased comfort, a message not included in the original focus-group testing,” says John Lauer, DC Project Program Director.

Canvassers are trained to educate homeowners, answer basic questions, gauge interest in weatherization, then sign people up to attend a house or community meeting, usually within the week. Field director Sam Witherbee explains that “we found it is much more effective to ask them at the door to attend an already scheduled meeting in their neighborhood, in fact we often knock on doors around the house where the next community meeting is scheduled.”

At the meetings, homeowners learn about WeatherizeDC and hear other homeowners talk about their experience with weatherization. Staff offers to connect the homeowner with a contractor. Approximately 55% of homeowners who attend a meeting commit to getting an assessment, and over half of those have followed through with an assessment to date. The DC Project discovered that the messaging that drives people to a meeting is not necessarily the same as what they express interest in at the meetings. At the doors, people say energy savings and comfort are their primary reasons for interest. When people gather with their neighbors and peers, they express more interest in the greater good, the economy, and jobs.

While WeatherizeDC tailors the primary message (the quick pitch) according to the audience, it delivers a triple bottom line message to all potential supporters as they engage in deeper conversations about the program: weatherization will create high-quality, much-needed jobs in the district’s underserved communities; it will provide monetary savings and comfort to



homeowners; and it is good for the environment. This approach gains the support of individuals and organizations with varying interests and priorities.

The DC Project also relies heavily on online outreach through its “New Media Suite,” using Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, email and blogs to reach diverse audiences. Messages are tailored to the audience rather than copied from a template, and responses are tracked digitally.

Outreach tactics are adjusted based on results. These assessments are also shared with organizers to motivate them and track their progress toward goals. WeatherizeDC tracks a host of metrics about its efforts including:

- Volunteer engagement: collaborating organizations, energy captains, team leaders, trainings, training attendees, campus fellows, active volunteers, and specific volunteer interests, profiles, and constituencies;
- Weatherization outreach: doors knocked, phone calls made, depth and type of interest by homeowners, households at energy meetings, households connected with local green businesses;
- Industry fulfillment: assessments completed, homes weatherized, money generated, jobs created, and energy consumption and reduction.

WeatherizeDC volunteers and contractors talk to homeowners during home energy assessments and improvements process to better understand their energy usage, energy-improvement needs, and estimated savings that will be realized post-upgrade. Homeowners are encouraged to track their energy consumption through Earth Aid, a free web application that enables households to monitor their electric and gas usage.

## **Impact, Cost & Evaluation**

Four months into its pilot, WeatherizeDC has trained over 200 volunteer leaders, partnered with 24 local organizations, visited 2,126 homes, and brought 220 households to energy meetings. Of those, 70 have completed energy assessments, and 17 have completed home improvements, with more homeowners connected to a contractor and planning improvements. The DC Projects anticipates that completed upgrades and leads from the pilot will mobilize \$300,000 to \$600,000 of private investment in energy efficiency. To date, four full-time jobs have been created for DC residents in high-unemployment neighborhoods.

***This case was prepared by Green for All.***