

Category: Homeownership  
Sub-Category: Home Improvement and Rehabilitation  
Entry Name: Weatherization Assistance Program

*"Improving a home's energy efficiency saves money for the homeowner and precious resources for our entire state, while training and empowering Maryland's workforce for the green economy of tomorrow."*

- Governor Martin O'Malley

## Rising to the Challenge

Last August, an Edgewater, Md. woman wrote on behalf of her neighbor Barry, who is 48-years-old and a double leg amputee, to thank the weatherization program for making his home more energy efficient. "The difference it made was *enormous*," she wrote. "We both are still overwhelmed that there would be such a program to help him with these huge and necessary items, as he would not have been able to do any of this on his own."

In the spring of 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act authorized \$5 billion in additional funding for state weatherization programs. DHCD received \$61.4 million for 36 months for the Weatherization Assistance Program and faced the daunting task of expanding its existing program by more than ten times within an extremely limited window of time.

DHCD rose to this challenge, expanding the program capacity dramatically while revolutionizing Maryland's data management system for weatherization and project tracking. These innovative responses to the challenge of drastic program expansion have provided the state with several solutions that are easily replicable in other states. DHCD's Weatherization Assistance Program leverages partnerships with utility providers, private corporations, the state's community college system and other state agencies.

In addition, the program furthers Maryland's strategic objectives to be "Smart, Green and Growing" and to reduce the state's energy consumption by 15 percent by 2015 as outlined in the EmPower Maryland initiative. Through these efforts, DHCD anticipates that it will provide weatherization and healthy home assistance to over 7800 households in Maryland by 2012.

In the words of the Edgewater woman, the difference the program has made has been *enormous*.

## Expanding Maryland's Training Capacity

DHCD's first challenge to ramp-up for Recovery Act expansion was to dramatically increase the number of weatherization providers within the state. Before 2009, professionals in need of training or certification travelled to the Pennsylvania College of Technology's Weatherization Training Center in Williamsport, Pa. Training courses in Williamsport were in high demand and often left Maryland's technicians waiting months for training slot availability. This made it unfeasible to train the workforce of several hundred individuals needed to meet Maryland's expanded program demands. DHCD's answer to this challenge

was to meet with Maryland's community colleges through the Construction and Energy Technologies Education Consortium to develop our own weatherization training program. In partnership with the Maryland Energy Administration, the consortium and five initial community colleges located across the state, DHCD built a weatherization training program in five months, combining curricula from the Williamsport Training Center and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority with the U.S. Department of Energy's Core Competencies for weatherization.

The training program initially featured week-long courses in weatherization tactics and home energy analysis. Within eight months, courses were expanded to include a class on Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning (HVAC), advanced building envelope and lead renovation, repair and painting. Each community college is outfitted with four-room training modules, insulation blowers, blower doors, Bacharach and diagnostic equipment, and all tools needed for safe and effective weatherization practice. Over 20 weatherization instructors have been trained to provide classroom and field instruction (and performance evaluation) to professional students and weatherization practitioners. DHCD has partnered with the Maryland Department of Human Resources, the Governor's Workforce Investment Board, and local Departments of Social Services, local Workforce Investment Boards and One-Stop Employment Centers to provide workforce training for Maryland's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families recipients, non-custodial parents and youth no longer residing in foster care. Through the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, grants have been provided for DSS clients to provide for four-month internships for clients hired by Local Weatherization Agencies.

In addition to its state support, the training program is used by private companies, retrofit contractors, and utility companies, buoying the training program's sustainability beyond the Recovery Act's weatherization funding. Although tailored for the mid-Atlantic region, the curriculum exceeds the Department of Energy's Core Competencies for weatherization and provides full Building Performance Institute component instruction. This ensures that Maryland's Weatherization Training Program sets the standard for professional development and certification within the field. As a result, Maryland's training program has allowed for Local Weatherization Agencies to rapidly expand their staff and skill sets, training and employing Maryland citizens and providing expedited energy-saving services to needy families across the state.

### **Inspiring Technology Innovations**

When DHCD began to ramp-up its weatherization program to meet the Recovery Act production goals and comprehensive reporting requirements, it was clear that the current data management platform would be insufficient for the new scale of the program. DHCD identified the Hancock Energy Software's weatherization software as the ideal candidate, both for its web access and real-time tracking of a job's progress, and for its Weatherization Assistance Program specific design and ability to track multiple funding sources and manage multiple project and agency budgets. At the time, there were only two other states utilizing the Hancock Weatherization system and the software itself was only recently developed.

The software has been modified to allow tracking of home inspections on completed jobs and monitoring of Davis-Bacon Act compliance reporting and wage/hour documentation. The automated tracking of Davis-Bacon Act compliance, in particular, has been an impressive achievement, as the amount of paperwork required to verify wages and hours for contractors and subcontractors working in scattered-site locations is lengthy. DHCD's insistence that this module be included with the Hancock software has saved countless hours for staff and Local Weatherization Agencies, while dramatically improving the reporting accuracy and Davis-Bacon Act compliance.

As a result of DHCD's modifications, Hancock Energy Software has implemented similar changes in their off-the-shelf systems and is providing the weatherization software to several states, including Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, Georgia, New Jersey, Louisiana and Ohio.

### **Building Upon Best Practices**

DHCD has demonstrated its ability to lead the charge in Recovery Act ramp-up for the Weatherization Assistance Program in Maryland, and neighboring states have come to call on DHCD for expertise related to the training and quality control processes, as well as its progressive approach towards implementation of new techniques and technologies. DHCD is happy to share its knowledge and experiences with other states, but has also used this expertise to expand its energy efficiency efforts throughout the department. In April 2010, DHCD was awarded \$20 million from the Department of Energy's competitive Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Retrofit Ramp-up program. With only 25 awards made across the state, DHCD was fortunate to be able to draw on its experiences with the weatherization program, the weatherization training program and its lending and bonding expertise as a Housing Finance Agency to create a proposal for energy efficiency retrofit financing that is innovative, sustainable and highly leverages private capital. This highly competitive award will allow DHCD to provide energy efficiency measures and weatherization to small business owners, affordable multifamily housing, and moderate income homeowners in targeted areas across the state, and will create replicable, scalable models for expanded implementation both statewide and nationwide.