

Strategies to Minimize Displacement

Weatherization Assistance



Benefit: Cut cost on energy for low-income households, improves health and safety



Problem addressed: High energy cost, health hazards



Administered by: Government or nonprofit organizations



Scale of impact: Individual, potential for community-wide

Introduction

Brownfields—or properties with environmental contamination or potentially contaminated land—are disproportionately located in or near communities of color and low-income communities. Residents near these properties may face heightened health hazards and economic disinvestment until the site undergoes assessment and cleanup, which can be costly and lengthy. Safely reusing a brownfield site is an opportunity to improve community health and bring in new amenities. However, brownfield redevelopment can also exacerbate affordability and displacement concerns. As property values increase and associated taxes, rents, and other costs rise, it becomes more expensive to live in a community. The result often is that lower-income residents and small businesses are displaced or pushed out of their neighborhoods. Early and meaningful community engagement in the brownfields reuse process presents an opportunity for the community to have a consequential role and input into future reuse determinations. Subsequently, community participation may increase opportunities to minimize displacement through the cleanup, planning, and reuse process. Community leaders, stakeholders, and practitioners can be proactive in implementing strategies to minimize the risk of displacement. These strategies take time, resources, and political will to implement, and they are most effective if initiated during the early planning stages of a project and implemented before displacement begins to occur.

Tool: Weatherization Assistance

Low-income families and individuals are often disproportionately burdened by their household energy costs, usually spending close to 14 percent on average of total annual income on energy bills compared to just 3 percent in higher-income households.¹ High energy bills impact the ability to pay for other necessary expenses such as food and healthcare. Assisting low-income residents with home weatherization is an approach designed to reduce household energy costs. Weatherization activities improve the home's ability to protect residents from rain, snow, deep freezes, excessive cold, and heat. Weatherization enables households to save money on their monthly energy bills because they do not have to consume as much energy to heat or cool their homes. Non-energy benefits of weatherization include improved health, safety, and comfort, which could include insulation, lead-safe weatherization, air infiltration mitigation, and procedures to identify, address, and prevent pre-existing health conditions in homes which are especially beneficial to low-income households. Weatherization reduces air pollution and increases affordable housing improves quality of life, while keeping costs down and creating job opportunities contributes to community economic growth.



Source: US EPA, [Weatherization Assistance Program Timeline](#)

1 <https://www.energy.gov/scep/wap/about-weatherization-assistance-program>

The Department of Energy's (DOE) State and Community Energy Program's (SCEP) [Weatherization Assistance Program](#) (WAP) administers funding to state and local weatherization providers. State agencies or local organizations can use this funding to offer assessments and energy efficiency and water standard updates for low-income households to reduce energy costs. Applicants either apply for services via a state/tribal website or to the local provider.² Once income and eligibility match and are approved, there will be an auditor assigned to a home that will give an analysis of what is needed for the home. Then the work will be completed. There are different programs, like Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Community Services Block Grants, to provide funding to upgrade homes to meet its goals of increased health for low-income households. Many weatherization programs also support small businesses and provide job opportunities for home performance contractors.

Potential challenges

While building standards have drastically improved over the years to create healthier, safer homes for people to live in, homes that were built before modern building codes and standards can present challenges to weatherization projects. Homes that have structural issues and homes constructed with outdated materials such as lead—which may have been common practices when these homes were constructed—might not be able to receive the upgrades that WAP or other funding sources offer. Homeowners need to address those issues before receiving weatherization upgrades. These pre-weatherization construction upgrades can be cost-prohibitive for low- or moderate-income homeowners.

Case Study



HELP (Housing, Emergency Services, Life Skills, and Prevention) of Southern Nevada is a nonprofit agency started by the Junior League of Las Vegas and incorporated in 1970 in Clark County, Nevada.³ HELP provides social services to address poverty, homelessness, addiction, and much more. Since 1992, it has also provided weatherization services to many communities in Nevada. HELP's service area is about three-quarters of Nevada's population. Between 2005 and 2011, a period where Nevada experienced a decline in tourism and construction, and a high unemployment rate, HELP provided weatherization services to 8,000 dwellings. Of the 17,000 people served by HELP, approximately 4,200 have been seniors, 3,400 disabled, and 2,200 children. HELP has reduced energy needs by close to 29 million kilowatt hours, saving up to \$4 million on utility bill payments since 2005.

HELP also serves a relatively high volume of multifamily units or apartment buildings. From 2011 to 2012, 59 percent of its projects were multifamily units. HELP of Southern Nevada has used its existing network of clients from other programs to engage buildings that might be eligible. HELP has found that owners of multifamily buildings, whether private or nonprofit, often apply for and then supplement WAP funds to install weatherization measures in the common areas of their apartment complexes.

2 <https://www.energy.gov/scep/wap/how-apply-weatherization-assistance>

3 https://weatherization.ornl.gov/wp-content/uploads/pdf/WAPRetroEvalFinalReports/ORNL_TM-2014_317.pdf page 57



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