

FEBRUARY 1, 2021

WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM UPDATE

FEBRUARY 1, 2020 – FEBRUARY 1, 2021

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
79 Elm Street, Hartford



INTRODUCTION

This report seeks to fulfill the commitment made by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly to provide a mid-year assessment of the Weatherization Assistance Program. The Bureau of Energy and Technology Policy (BETP) of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) is pleased to document the improvements made to the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) during the period under review (February 1, 2020 – February 1, 2021). The CT WAP faced challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including a temporary moratorium on statewide in-home visits from March – June 2020. Notable actions taken during the last year include:

- Release of several COVID-related guidances directed at the subgrantee network.
- COVID-related Health and Safety training made available to entire WAP vendor network.
- Several contract amendments executed.
 - James Correia – Technical consultant
 - Community Renewal Team (CRT) – service provider
 - New Opportunities, Inc. (NOI) – service provider
- PY20 application to US DOE submitted on time.
- In-progress purchase of WAP management software.
- Contract executed with training center Green Jobs Academy.
- In-progress RFP for field monitor/quality control inspector.

DEEP is dedicated to the continuous improvement of the WAP program and is actively exploring additional ways to deliver weatherization services to as many customers with low incomes as possible.

Sincerely,

Victoria Hackett

Deputy Commissioner for Energy

Michael Li

Bureau Chief, BETP

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OVERVIEW

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENERGY AFFORDABILITY

DEEP, along with other agencies and organizations in Connecticut, is concerned with rising energy expenses. Energy expenses, including electric utility bills, delivered heating oil or natural gas, are considered “unaffordable” if they represent more than 6% of household income. We know that many Connecticut low-income households regularly pay more than that. DEEP is committed to helping households use less energy and thereby make their energy bills more affordable, while maintaining safety and comfort by improving the efficiency of homes through weatherization and other measures.

WHAT IS WAP?

WAP refers to the federal Weatherization Assistance Program. WAP is a \$3.7 million program in CT that provides households with low incomes with energy efficiency improvements, is granted by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and has been overseen by DEEP since April 1, 2012. Through our utility-run programs that DEEP oversees as well as WAP, residents with low incomes can access weatherization services at low or no cost, including insulation and energy-efficient lightbulb replacements. In the CT WAP, DEEP contracts with two local community action agencies who perform energy audits and subcontract the energy conservation improvement work out to qualified subcontractors across the state. WAP runs as a reimbursement program and CT WAP routinely reimburses the subgrantee based on acceptable reported costs.

Both WAP and the LIHEAP supplemental program to WAP are administered by Community Action Agencies (CAAs), also referred to herein as “service providers,” who manage client intake.

WAP PROGRAMMATIC CHANGES

COVID-19 SERVICE DISRUPTION

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the stoppage of all in-home weatherization-related visits from mid-March through the end of June. During this time DEEP issued several guidance’s aimed at maintaining the WAP workforce and establishing health and safety protocols, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) standards, to ensure a consistent and safe approach to resuming in-home weatherization work. The subgrantee network worked to establish internal policies and procedures to guide their approach to in-home service upon the resumption of activities. Among the policies and procedures established by the subgrantees were teleworking guidelines

for staff and new customer interaction protocols such as pre-visit health screenings and temperature checks upon arrival at a customer home.

DEEP HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS

During the service shutdown from March – June 2020, DEEP developed Health and Safety protocols to guide weatherization workers in consistent, safe practices for performing weatherization work. Created as a consistent approach with the Utility-administered energy efficiency programs (Home Energy Solutions and Home Energy Solutions – Income Eligible), the Health and Safety protocols created a uniform set of rules and instructions for working in customer homes, including mandatory PPE requirements and customer interaction guidance. An online training course was developed by a third-party and all weatherization workers were required to complete the training prior to re-entry into customer homes. The Health and Safety protocols were distributed to the subgrantee network on June 11, 2020. An informational conference call was held on June 16, 2020. In line with Governor Lamont’s Phase 2 re-opening plan, we allowed WAP weatherization providers to resume in-home work starting June 17, 2020.

US DOE WAP MEMORANDUM 060

Released on March 25, 2020 by the US Department of Energy, WAP Memo 060 gives guidance related to the COVID-19 pandemic, notably the ability for States to combine program year 2019 and 2020 for budgetary and production reasons. Combining program years gives States two years to expend their budgets and production cycle for those States which had shut down production due to the pandemic. In practice, DEEP revised the Program Year 2019 application and combined the funding from PY19 with PY20, creating a two-year budget period (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2021). Following the application approval, DEEP created and issued new reporting templates to the subgrantee network to reflect the combined budget period.

APPLICATION AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

The 2021 Program Year application to the U.S. Department of Energy is ahead of schedule and is currently projected to be submitted three weeks before the deadline, similar to last year. This represents a marked improvement over prior years and demonstrates DEEP’s commitment to improving the program. Early application submission is important because it allows U.S. DOE to begin the review process ahead of other applicants, which moves CT closer to the approval stage. Reaching the approval stage before July 1st is critical, as funding is not released to grantees without a fully approved application package. US DOE is allowing for PY21 to be combined with PY19 and PY20, similar to the guidance issued in WAP Memo 060 described above. With the grant cycle extended by one more year, DEEP now has until June 30, 2022 to expend all available WAP funds.

PY20 CONTRACT EXTENSIONS

The weatherization contract for Community Renewal Team was extended on 6/16/2020 to ensure service delivery through 6/30/2021. As of this writing, DEEP is pursuing the issuance of a new contract with CRT to cover the service period of 7/1/2021 – 6/30/2022. Included with this new contract will be additional carryforward funding, unspent from previous program years.

NOI's weatherization contract was extended on 6/8/2020 to ensure service delivery through 6/30/2021. As of this writing, DEEP is pursuing the issuance of a new contract with NOI to cover the service period of 7/1/2021 – 6/30/2022. Included with this new contract will be additional carryforward funding, unspent from previous program years.

WAP TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ENHANCEMENTS

CONTRACT WITH CERTIFIED TRAINING CENTER

In December 2020, the CT WAP program engaged the services of an IREC-certified weatherization training center located in Worcester, Massachusetts (due to a lack of adequate providers in Connecticut). DEEP contracted with the Green Jobs Academy, an accredited training center providing U.S. DOE-mandated training services and credentialing, to provide a variety of critical weatherization training courses, most notably the Energy Auditor (EA) training certification course and the Crew Leader (CL) certification training course. These credentials, among others, are encouraged by U.S. DOE to conduct weatherization audits. The Green Jobs Academy provides training services to the staff of our two service providers (CRT and NOI) as well as to their subcontractors performing the weatherization work. The basic and advanced training courses improve the quality of the services provided by NOI and CRT, enabling them to provide the highest quality of service to their clients.

PROVIDED ON-SITE TRAINING FOR NOI

Meet Your Provider

Community Renewal Team (CRT)

Headquarters:
Hartford

Regions:
1 & 2

PY19/20 Budget:
\$5,057,959

Unit Goal:
572

Amendment
Execution Date:
6/16/2020

The CT WAP Team developed a training plan specifically designed to assess and deliver the necessary skills to restore NOI to full WAP service delivery capacity. That training consisted of multiple on-site events with weatherization staff and classroom and hands-on training at the IREC accredited facility, Green Jobs Academy. On-site training consisted of a review of U.S. DOE regulations and standards, State Plan requirements, State Operations and Training requirements, Procurement Standards and best practices, and Single-family and Manufactured Home Audit tool operations.

Meet Your Provider

New Opportunities, Inc. (NOI)

Headquarters:
Waterbury

Regions:
3, 4, & 5

PY19/20 Budget:
\$3,373,706

Unit Goal:
353

Amendment Execution Date:
6/8/2020

ONLINE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Due to pandemic-related travel restrictions, a number of virtual training opportunities were made available to the subgrantee network, designed to provide health and safety training or enhance overall program knowledge and capacity.

UTILITY-BASED HEALTH & SAFETY TRAINING

Created as a prerequisite to re-entering field operations, this online training taught field practitioners methods of donning and doffing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), new methods of interacting with customers, and proper ways to disinfect customer homes, vehicles, and office spaces.

SANTA FE COMMUNITY COLLEGE HEALTH & SAFETY TRAINING

In cooperation with US DOE, Santa Fe Community College in New Mexico offered a robust online course in health and safety protocols free of charge to WAP participants across the country. Many members of the CT WAP subgrantee network participated in preparation for returning to in-home services.

GREEN JOBS ACADEMY ONLINE TRAINING

A series of 12 technical training courses providing continuing education credits were made available to subgrantee weatherization staff during the COVID shutdown period.

WAP LITMOS ONLINE TRAINING

Created by US DOE, the WAP LITMOS training provides subgrantee administrative staff with a series of modules designed to teach users about specific areas of program administration. Areas of training include financial management, project management, federal regulation review, and others.

WAP FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

PY21 CONTRACTS

To avoid programmatic disruption between contract periods, DEEP is planning to execute new contracts before July 1, 2021 with our two service providers (CRT and NOI), with our training center Green Jobs Academy, and with our technical advisor. Timely execution of contracts is critical in order to prevent a break in service to customers and to ensure that the WAP workforce is kept intact.

WAP SOFTWARE PURCHASE

CT WAP is currently pursuing the purchase of a comprehensive software product which will greatly impact the efficiency of the program. In addition to the ability to capture customer data and enter energy audit inputs digitally, the new software will allow DEEP to monitor the program production and spending in real time and automate the required reporting for both subgrantees and for DEEP. The resource savings for both DEEP and the subgrantee network will be significant in comparison to current methods. The cost is entirely covered by the WAP and DEEP is aiming to roll out the implementation phase during the summer of 2021.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL FOR TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Before the start of the 2021 Program Year, DEEP plans to issue an RFP for a technical monitor(s) to ensure our WAP team meets the U.S. DOE-required certifications and training. DEEP is interested in the services of a technical monitor/inspector to review work orders and field work to ensure weatherization is being performed to the standard set by U.S. DOE.

WAP PRODUCTION AND SPENDING

PRODUCTION

COVID-19 significantly impacted production during the last quarter of PY19 and the first quarter of PY20, leading to below expected units closed and high average unit costs. As described earlier, program year's 2019 and 2020 were combined for budget and production purposes. From the start of PY19 (July 1, 2019) through December 31, 2020, the program closed 96 units. CRT is responsible for 82 closed units, while NOI closed 14 units. The disparity between the two subgrantees is attributable to CRT's program experience. As a new provider, NOI required a significant amount of training and was not able to start training until their contract execution

date of December 31, 2019. Ten weeks into NOI's training phase, the program was shut down due to the pandemic. NOI was not able to enter production mode until August 2020. At the close of PY20 on June 30, 2021, NOI is projected to have completed 86 units, while CRT is projected to have completed 154 units, for a total of 240 units completed. The target goal over this two-year period is 264 units for CRT and 243 units for NOI, a statewide total of 507 units completed.

Unit Production, by Region – July 1, 2019 – December 31, 2020								
		PROGRAM YEAR 2019				PROGRAM YEAR 2020		
	REGION	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
CRT	1	0	7	20	2	11	17	57
	2	0	1	14	0	2	8	25
NOI	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
	4	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
	5	0	0	0	0	1	8	9
TOTAL		0	8	34	2	14	38	96

SPENDING

Overall spending is lower than expected due to the shutdown from March – June related to the COVID-19 pandemic. When calculating the PY19+PY20 budget, we included unused carryover funding from previous program years (PY17 and PY18). Together with the funding from PY19 and PY20, the total budget was \$9,842,161. Total subgrantee spending through December 2020 is \$1,509,562 while grantee spending is \$351,214, for a total of \$1,860,776. The total budget balance through December 2020 is \$7,981,384. Projected unused carryover funding from PY19/20 is \$5,982,628. Together with the upcoming PY21 award of \$3,417,529, the anticipated budget for the combined program years of 19/20/21 (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2022) will be \$9,400,157.

PY19+20 Budget	PY19+20 Expenses (Est.)	Carryover Balance	PY21 New Funding	Total PY19/20/21 Budget
\$9,842,161	\$3,859,532	\$5,982,628	\$3,417,529	\$9,400,157

CONCLUSION

DEEP, CRT and NOI worked strategically and collaboratively through the struggles associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and were able to emerge with an intact workforce equipped with the necessary training to reengage in weatherization work. DEEP is on schedule to submit the PY21 grant application on time as well as issue new contracts to the network in time for the July 1, 2021 program year beginning. The addition of program software this year will greatly contribute to program efficiency and should ultimately lead to more clients being served. DEEP also aims to broaden grantee support through the addition of a new technical field monitor. All of these improvements are in furtherance of providing the best service to Connecticut’s low-income residents. DEEP is grateful for the opportunity to administer this program and plans to continue to improve processes in future years.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Victoria Hackett
 Deputy Commissioner for Energy

Michael Li
 Bureau Chief, Energy and Technology Policy

APPENDIX B: AVAILABLE FUNDS FOR PY21 (EST.)

	DEEP	CRT	NOI
Grantee Administration	\$336,605		
Grantee Training and Technical Assistance	\$1,488,336		
Subgrantee Financial Audits		\$8,396	\$9,104
Subgrantee Insurance		\$19,238	\$17,890
Subgrantee Training and Technical Assistance		\$85,063	\$13,311
Subgrantee Health and Safety		\$459,461	\$512,945
Subgrantee Administration		\$359,704	\$355,497
Subgrantee Program Support		\$3,091,930	\$3,451,851
Total	\$1,824,941	\$4,023,792	\$4,360,598