



## Washington county partnership provides weatherization to wide demographic

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Two nonprofits in Whatcom County, Wash. have teamed up on a unique effort to expand weatherization and energy retrofits – under a program called the [Community Energy Challenge](#).



A contractor from the Community Energy Challenge helps weatherize a home in Bellingham, Wash. | **Photo courtesy of Sustainable Connections**

The goal of the partnership between Sustainable Connections, which assists businesses in implementing sustainable practices, and nonprofit community action agency, Opportunity Council, is to improve the energy efficiency of 900 homes and 150 local businesses.

Opportunity Council already provides services through the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) to homes for low-income residents.

"We are offering the same services – basic energy efficiency measures – to people who make too much money to qualify for WAP," says Alex Ramel, energy and policy manager of Sustainable Connections.

## **Expectations and results**

**The Community Energy Challenge received approximately \$4 million in funding from six major sources, including the U.S. Department of Energy's State Energy Program and Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant via the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.**

Since June, the first month that weatherization projects began for the Community Energy Challenge, the partnership has completed two residential energy efficiency upgrades and has five more currently in progress. In addition, the Challenge has provided energy assessments for more than 20 homes and 20 businesses. Five local contracting firms are working on the projects, in addition to a variety of subcontracting firms. The Opportunity Council provides on-the-job support for the contractors as well as in-depth training regarding weatherization techniques, building science principles, and diagnostic testing of structures.

According to Ramel, The Community Energy Challenge has already "created about a half a dozen full time jobs" directly attributed to the Recovery Act.

"At present, our primary source of funding for the whole program is the Recovery Act," Ramel says, some of which goes to things like the equipment library, which provides weatherization equipment for participating contractors to help offset the large capital investments needed to start work. Training is also provided to technicians for utilizing tools such as the blower door, infrared camera, and monoxer (carbon monoxide detector).

### **The Community Energy Challenge goals by the end of 2011:**

- **900 homes weatherized**
- **150 businesses more energy efficient**
- **25 jobs created**
- **7,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> avoided annually**
- **5-30% energy savings**

Ramel adds, "The majority of that money will be going into the homes and businesses. And will be matched by investments from the home and business owners."

### **The partnership**

Sustainable Connections is a local nonprofit forum that facilitates sustainable economic development by offering education, connections, and marketplace development to the community. "The division of labor is essentially that Sustainable Connections is responsible for marketing and outreach for the campaign and for implementing the commercial end of the program," says Ramel. "Opportunity Council is responsible for being the lead fiscal agent for the Challenge, providing job training to all participating contractors and for implementing the 900 residential efficiency projects county-wide for the program."

Over the last 20 years, community action agency Opportunity Council has weatherized nearly 5,000 homes. This experience, compounded with the agency's training of the weatherization technicians and Sustainable Connection's expansion of the program to wider demographics, have united the two organizations to thoroughly permeate the benefits of the Recovery Act.

Shawn Collins, Community Energy Challenge Manager of Opportunity Council, notes that by providing necessary training, the Opportunity Council is "able to offer local contractors new skills and opportunities for growth while getting people back to work in the construction field, which has been an industry very hard hit. The benefits of the program are multiplied by providing homeowners with cost savings through efficiency retrofits. It is really a win-win situation."