



The Michigan Low-Income Weatherization Assistance Program Evaluation

Summary:

The Michigan Low-Income Weatherization Assistance Program Evaluation is a collaborative effort designed to provide managers and professionals with careful, credible analysis of the impact of low-income weatherization programs on the consumption and expenditures of participating households. The results of this study, which will assess the impacts of both Federal and State-funded weatherization assistance efforts, should help practitioners by informing future programs, alleviating evaluation costs, and guiding marketing and outreach strategies to eligible households.

Michigan was chosen as a focus area for this in-depth evaluation for several reasons. The state's climate and demographic characteristics make it home to a large number of eligible households. Additionally, our objectives complement programs that are being implemented under Public Act 295. We are working carefully to streamline our study with existing efforts so as not to unnecessarily burden the many agencies and organizations who are responding to dramatic increase in weatherization efforts. We welcome and encourage your feedback and participation. If you have any questions, please contact:

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The Michigan Low-Income Weatherization Assistance Program Evaluation

The Michigan Low-Income Weatherization Assistance Program Evaluation is a collaborative effort designed to provide managers and professionals with careful, credible analysis of the impact of low-income weatherization programs on the consumption and expenditures of participating households. This evaluation effort will focus on the 2011 and 2012 program years and will assess both Federal and State-funded assistance efforts. The project will serve to inform future low income weatherization assistance programs, alleviate evaluation costs, and guide future marketing and outreach strategies.

Over the past 30 years, an estimated 6.2 million low-income households have received weatherization

assistance to increase the energy efficiency of their homes through the Federal Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dramatically increased the scale and the scope of the WAP—resulting in \$243 million allocated to Michigan. The state has further augmented support for low-income weatherization assistance through variety of channels. Program evaluation will play an important role in assessing the impacts of this unprecedented increase in weatherization assistance.

The primary emphasis of this more-intensive study will be on estimating household-level energy consumption and expenditures. We will also assess—to the extent possible—avoided rate subsidies, reduced carrying cost on arrearages, and potentially, household comfort levels. The objectives and activities of this project will complement those of Michigan Public Act 295¹. We believe that the study will generate valuable insights that will help inform future weatherization efforts in Michigan.

- Credible, unbiased estimates of how households are responding to different weatherization interventions can be used to inform the design and implementation of Michigan's energy optimization programs going forward. In particular, this study will provide reliable estimates of how the provision of weatherization assistance affects energy consumption and expenditures at participating households.
- Well-executed program evaluation is costly. Identifying eligible households, coordinating with partners, and data management and analysis is time and resource intensive. The extensive data collection, preparation and analysis that we are undertaking for this study can be leveraged for future program planning and implementation.

¹“ Public Act 295 promotes the development of clean and renewable energy and energy optimization through the implementation of standards that will cost-effectively provide greater energy security and diversify the energy resources used to meet consumers' needs, encourage private investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency and improve air quality.” Michigan Public Service Commission, Department of Energy, Labor, and Economic Growth; http://www.michigan.gov/mpsc/0,1607,7-159-52495_53472---,00.html



- Part of the research will focus on how weatherization impacts vary with observable household and residence characteristics. This better understanding of how program impacts vary across households and residences can help practitioners tailor their outreach and implementation approach.
- The study will also begin to identify the returns to recruitment efforts and identify factors that may inhibit households from participating in weatherization programs. This will enable program managers to create more effective marketing strategies.

The designers of the evaluation continue to solicit feedback from key stakeholders and welcome input that could improve the study's design. Above all, the research team does not want to increase the workload for all those working tirelessly to implement weatherization programs in Michigan. The gathering for the data will be integrated into existing survey instruments to streamline the approach. Furthermore, the research team will work with participating Community Action Agencies to provide resources to aid in the processing of data. We welcome your feedback and look forward to working with you.

The research is being led by University of California-Berkeley professors Catherine Wolfram and Meredith Fowlie (formerly of University of Michigan), and MIT professor Michael Greenstone.