

## **Suggestions for the 2016-2018 Mass Save 3-year plan presented by Lynn Benander, CEO & President, Co-op Power**

Co-op Power is a mission driven network of consumer-owned community energy cooperatives across Massachusetts. We are 480 owner households, 7,000 supporters, and 25 full-time staff working for a more just and sustainable energy future here in our communities. We are a small business, a part of the Commonwealth's green economy, with \$2 million in sales a year. We are a multi-class, multi-race network that works to ensure the energy efficiency measures and jobs are available to all communities, including limited resource communities. Energy efficiency is our top priority.

We are proud to partner with the EEAC, the utilities, the Commonwealth, lead vendors, and WAP programs to bring MassSave services to communities across the Commonwealth, with an office in Boston and one in Western Massachusetts. We are a Home Performance Contractor with most of the Utilities in the state, serving 30-40 homes a week. We work with our Members and supporters to sign on everyone in their communities for an energy assessment and follow them through the weatherization upgrade process.

We are part owner of Energía, a residential and commercial energy efficiency business in Holyoke MA that serves as an Independent Insulation Contractor in the MassSave program.

As part of a network of weatherization companies, Co-op Power runs a Good Green Jobs program that trains weatherization workers, places them in jobs in weatherization companies, and provides support for ongoing career development.

We are here today speaking on behalf of the customers who own our cooperative, on behalf of their communities, on behalf of contractors in the MassSave program and on behalf of our workers and the other weatherization companies we work with in the state. Here are the program aspects we would like to see in the upcoming 3 year plan.

### **1) Develop a greater menu of energy saving options**

- Expand funding for efficiency measures based on climate change mitigation. To reach our CO<sub>2</sub> reduction mandates, deeper cuts in energy use are needed.
- Provide continued financial support for homeowners who have exhausted the improvements available through the Mass Save program to allow still further energy savings.
- Support multi-year plans to help consumers make significant reductions in their energy use and in their use of fossil fuels.
- Continue EMPlus to give limited resource communities better access to weatherization programs and report out data by zip code showing that how communities are being served by Mass Save.
- Allow fuel assistance recipients to opt out of WAP services and select Mass Save services. (Some would prefer MassSave because of shorter response time and special options options for funding energy savings improvements, such as the HEAT Loan Program.)
- Continue the expanded Heat Loan Program, which helps with the cost of removing roadblocks such as knob and tube wiring. (This is especially useful in limited resource communities.)
- Offer an incentive program to encourage landlords to invest in weatherization work on multi-family and apartment buildings to promote larger scale energy savings, especially when a landlord is not paying for heat and hot water.
- Develop a program similar to the MPG pilot program to give consumers a way of understanding their home's energy use.
- Support ongoing community mobilization programs where municipalities and non-profits can sign up their residents and members for weatherization upgrades.

## **2) Increase payments to contractors**

- Pay contractors according to the true costs of implementation. Increase compensation for energy assessments. Increase compensation for rigid board, wall insulation, carpentry detailed work-cutting finish accesses, cutting and installing ventilation, and combustion safety.
- Include an annual increase to reflect annual cost increases.
- Provide additional funding to HPC contractors for their administrative and outreach costs.

## **3) Create an adjustment compensation scale to reflect geographic cost of living differences**

- Adjust contractor payments based on the cost of living in different locations across the state. (It costs more to run and efficiency business in Boston than it does in Western Massachusetts, higher rents, higher personnel costs, etc.)

## **4) Expand workforce development and training subsidies**

- Invest in ongoing training for energy efficiency workers to ensure continuous improvement in quality and efficiency of Mass Save work.
- Provide support for both entry-level training costs to establish foundational skills and knowledge as well as higher-level certification trainings for incumbent workers.
- Provide travel subsidies to reflect the relative cost of distance traveled to approved training sites, most of which are centrally located in Worcester, requiring long-distance multi-day commutes or accommodation costs for crew chief and other longer training series.

## **5) Modify the recently expanded background check / drug testing requirements**

When the new background and drug testing protocols came out, Co-op Power conducted a survey of 120 Mass Save weatherization companies in Massachusetts. 40 responded. Responses indicated that 85% of the Mass Save contractors responding reported that they have a very difficult time finding qualified workers for entry level positions and 92% reported they have a very difficult time finding experienced workers for non-entry level positions. 90% said they expect the increased enforcement of background checks and drug testing will have a significant impact on their business. 78% predict significant likelihood of current staff losses.

Contractors mentioned a percentage (10-60%) of their entry-level workers smoke pot on the weekends, but that it didn't interfere with their work on the job during the week. Some of their workers have medical marijuana cards, and they expressed concern that these workers would not be exempted from the drug testing process.

The contractors expressed widespread concern about the costs involved in retesting of staff who had already been tested with other background and drug testing services, in putting experienced staff who failed the background test or drug test on unemployment, and in hiring and training new staff to replace those workers.

We ask that you:

- Encourage expanded application of the Background Check Exception Request process to ensure fair consideration of candidates that might be exceptionally qualified workers.
- Remove marijuana from the drug testing requirements, as use of this particular substance is comparable to alcohol in many communities, and federal and state drug policy and laws are increasingly moving toward legalization. Including marijuana creates unnecessary barriers to employment that may unfairly restrict excellent candidates from jobs we need them to be doing.
- Ensure an expedited process for both background checks and drug testing required so that contractors are able to hire qualified candidates for open positions in a timely manner.