

# WAP Corner: Training for Recovery

*by Robert Scott*

As soon as there were rumors of a significant increase in program funding associated with a potential Stimulus Bill, the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) network realized there would be a need for a major ramp up of the program's training efforts. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) awarded \$5 billion for the WAP, with a major goal of providing jobs and utilizing the vast expertise in the weatherization network to help grow the training infrastructure needed to support a national residential energy efficiency retrofit market. The bill doubled the percentage of Training and Technical Assistance Funds to 20%, making \$1 billion available for this purpose. To put some perspective on that figure, the average amount of annual T&TA funds in the past several years has been somewhere in the \$22.5 million range, making the total ARRA T&TA funds approximately 40 times greater than the recent annual funds awarded for that purpose.

Anyone with any degree of in-depth knowledge about the Weatherization Assistance Program knows that training has always been an essential element in insuring a quality program that best serves program recipients with the greatest possible energy savings while addressing any potential health or safety problems. A well-trained workforce is a vital prerequisite for achieving a truly cost-effective, state-of-the-art program. The WAP network has made major advances in the national training effort over the history of the program. Computerized energy audits and diagnostic testing, utilizing blower doors, digital combustion analyzers, duct leakage testing, and measuring electricity use of refrigerators is now commonplace in the program. More and more programs use infrared camera technology in auditing, installations, and inspections. Whole house weatherization technology has become the accepted approach, treating the dwelling as an interrelated system rather than an assortment of unrelated pieces. Practices such as dense pack sidewall insulation, advanced insulation techniques in mobile homes, and electric baseload measures are performed routinely in today's program. Many of the practices seen as the most technologically advanced in the emerging residential energy efficiency retrofit market were first developed, tested, and implemented by the WAP network.

Weatherization Program managers and trainers recognize and acknowledge that both technical and management/administrative WAP personnel need frequent and consistent training, and that buy-in to a well-planned training program from all levels of the program is needed. The unprecedented funding of ARRA has necessitated a rapidly accelerated training effort, particularly to train new workers on the program diagnostics, technologies, and installation methods quickly, while maintaining quality control with dramatically increased production requirements. This challenge has tested Weatherization operators throughout the network.

In the past few years, training resources have been more readily available than ever before. The ease of electronic dissemination of documents and materials facilitates information sharing and exchange. The Weatherization Core Competencies, developed by the Trainers Consortium, is a widely utilized document explaining the necessary knowledge and specialized skills needed for the various identified worker classifications in the Weatherization Program. Field Standards, Field Guides, and Best Practices are frequently exchanged between states and agencies. There are increased resources for online training. The Department of Energy has prioritized the development of training centers as part of their Training and Technical Assistance plan, with \$30 million targeted for that purpose. States are collaborating and forming partnerships with community colleges, trade schools, Workforce Investment Boards, and other organizations. While there are better resources than ever before, the need for a greatly expanded and properly trained workforce in very quick order is confronting the network.

Even before ARRA, the Supplemental DOE Grant in the Fall of 2008 and an increase in LIHEAP funds in many states helped pave the way for an increased training effort. New York State WAP Manager Tom Carey stated that the increased New York training effort began before ARRA funds were contracted. Mr. Carey stated "Our 2009 program was already a huge increase due to the release of the DOE supplemental funds and the large increase in LIHEAP. This allowed agencies to ramp up with regular funds and we did a lot of training." The state

of Maine is another that got a jump on training before ARRA funds were contracted. Jo-Ann Choate, Maine Weatherization Manager, said that “We trained basic weatherization to approximately 358 people. We have trained over 472 auditors over the years, most of them for this current ramping up.”

Several states implemented a Weatherization “boot camp” to provide quick yet comprehensive training for new hires. Pat Costello, T&TA Supervisor for the New York WAP, commented that the “boot camp is designed to provide a week-long training for up to 30 new employees including blower door technology, air sealing methodology, health and safety awareness and testing, insulation installation, and lead safe practices.” In Ohio, approximately, 350 weatherization workers have been trained through a boot-camp style program since January 2009, including 100 Inspectors, 130 existing heating contractors, as well as approximately 40 Inspector and 10 Heat Tech recertifications.

Most WAP managers and trainers know that training is an ongoing process with a need for continual and repeated reinforcement after the initial training on a subject. On site field training is generally considered the most effective means of training. Along those lines, Kate Drexler,

Weatherization Grants Manager for the Colorado Governor’s Energy Office, states “A major emphasis of our training plan is to develop local on-the-ground employees dedicated to training agency staff on a day-to-day basis.”

With the very large investment of T&TA funds in ARRA, and the open acknowledgement that the vast expertise in the weatherization network can be a gateway to support an emerging national residential energy efficiency retrofit market, the WAP network needs think not just in terms of insuring quality work on ARRA production, but to consider future sustainability of their training efforts. Pat Costello recognized this in stating “In order to accommodate this exponential growth, additional facilities are now in the planning stages, allowing us to provide training on an even grander scale. New York DHCR’s WAP is focused on creating a weatherization training infrastructure that will remain long after ARRA is concluded.”

Training has been and continues to be a cornerstone of the Weatherization Program network. A well-trained workforce is one of the best guarantees that current and future work quality and maximum energy savings can be achieved. The WAP network remains committed to this objective.

## WAP Recovery Act Success Story: Idaho

*by Rebecca Stewart*

*This is the third in a series of articles which will take a closer look at some state and local programs which have excelled in rolling out American Recovery and Reinvestment (ARRA) funds and rapidly ramped up their programs to meet the Obama Administration’s goals. States already highlighted: Ohio, Colorado.*

Idaho residents are benefitting from \$30,341,929 of American Recovery and Reinvestment of 2009 (ARRA) funds for the Weatherization Assistance Program. While the state plan was approved in July of last year and the Davis Bacon Wage determination received on August 31, 2009, the first agency to produce homes with ARRA money began doing so in August, while the rest followed with all six agencies producing with ARRA funds by November of 2009. In December, Idaho hit its production targets and as of January 14, the state has already hit 76% of their production target, with several

weeks of the month remaining. What is their secret?

Planning was a major component of the Idaho approach to the ARRA funding increase. Management conducted a risk analysis session in February of 2009 to address issues before they became pressing. For instance, agency Directors expressed concerns about cash flow and the necessity for cash advances from the state to allow large purchases of equipment. While previously, the Department of Health and Welfare had interpreted the state’s rules and regulations as not allowing advances, this was identified as a barrier to meeting Ramp Up and production demands. Genie Sue Weppner, Program Manager of the Weatherization Program in Idaho says, “Leadership in the Department stepped in at the appropriate time to encourage staff to take another look at the states regulation in light of the opportunities presented by the ARRA funds. As a result, a process to provide ‘advance’ funding in the