

WAP Corner: NASCSP Conference – A Valuable WAP Information Exchange

by Robert Scott

In these incredibly challenging times for all levels of the Weatherization Network, the Weatherization Track of the recent NASCSP Mid-Winter Conference provided an excellent opportunity for Grantee WAP management to examine more closely and discuss the multitude of issues confronting the Program. WAP representatives from around the country, along with a large number of Department of Energy staff, participated in Orientation Training for New WAP Managers, the NASCSP Weatherization Committee Meeting, and the Weatherization track of the conference.

Department of Energy Staff and close associates led the two-day Orientation Training. Approximately 65 people attended the training – by far the highest participation number ever. In addition to newer Grantee managers, there were also a number of DOE Project Management Center staff and more experienced State WAP Managers in attendance for a refresher course. Presentations and discussion included an overview of WAP, WAP rules and policies, Recovery Act issues, State Plan development, training, and monitoring. Evaluations of the training were very positive, but also provided valuable input that NASCSP and DOE staff will discuss to integrate into next year's Orientation Training.

The NASCSP Committee Meetings are a forum for NASCSP members to learn about and discuss topics including legislative issues, policy, and controversial program developments. The WAP Committee Meeting encompassed many such concerns. Jeff Genzer, Chief Counsel for the National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO) and the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA), presented an update on legislative issues related to WAP. He included timely developments like the President's 2011 proposed WAP budget of \$300 Million, status of the jobs bills and climate change legislation, the Home Star initiative, concerns over the negative press surrounding WAP ARRA implementation, and the need to respond with positive stories demonstrating program successes.

Randy Bennett, WAP Manager from Illinois, discussed the DOE Inspector General visit and report on the Illinois WAP. Randy's presentation gave participants good insight

and perspective on the visit, and provided tips for those who may have future visits from the IG. The audience appreciated his humorous recount of the visit, and though we all realize that it was anything but humorous at the time, he certainly drove home both details on what to expect and ideas for preparing for such visits.

Bruce Tonn, from Oak Ridge National Laboratory, discussed the upcoming National WAP Evaluation. The extremely comprehensive evaluation will actually be two separate evaluations. The first, a retrospective evaluation, will focus on WAP Program Years 2007 and 2008. A second evaluation will focus on WAP during the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) period. The evaluation is very important because it will provide scientific evidence of the value of WAP to policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public. But the evaluation will also be another challenge to the WAP network because significant time and focused attention will be needed from many WAP providers. It is very important that State and local WAP managers plan for the evaluation and how they will allocate the personnel needed for the tasks involved.

NASCSP Conferences have almost always had a DOE Federal Perspective session where DOE staff presents updates and initiatives on DOE WAP issues, followed by audience questions and discussion. With so many pressing issues related to ARRA, and significantly more Weatherization Program Notices issued than in any other period in the program's history, the *DOE Federal Perspective* session was expanded to a double session, or three hours. The idea was to take advantage of the relatively rare opportunity of having DOE Headquarters staff and a majority of Grantee WAP managers in the same room to provide a consistent message on clarifications of issues, updates, and program directions. And somewhat as could have been predicted, even the double session was arguably not enough time for the explanations, discussion, and debate of the issues. For many of the participants, it was their first opportunity to meet Claire Broido Johnson, Acting Program Manager, Office of Weatherization and Intergovernmental Program. The sessions also enabled the WAP network to be reacquainted with long time DOE

partners, including Jean Diggs and Greg Reamy, and also to meet several of the new staff at DOE and to become more familiar with the talent and resources they provide. All but the newest of NASCSP membership already knew Bob Adams, who used to be Director of Weatherization Services at NASCSP. Bob is now at DOE Headquarters, working as General Supervisor at OWIP. Bob was also a primary presenter during the session. Space does not allow for a full review of the session, but the PowerPoint presentation reviewed by DOE staff can be found on WAPTAC at <http://207.188.207.153/doclib/openfile.asp?id=1505>.

Other WAP sessions focused on relevant program issues. *The Crafting a Positive Message* session concentrated on both the need and means to contest the negative press on ARRA WAP by being proactive with the message that everyday, all over the country, there are successful stories proving that Weatherization Works. Although there have been obstacles slowing the progress of ARRA implementation, those problems have been largely overcome. New and talented workers who were previously unemployed have been hired and trained in green weatherization technologies, and homes are still being effectively weatherized, providing thousands of low-income households with significant energy savings. The presenters discussed strategies and tools so the WAP network could tell that story.

The Lessons Learned – How States Have Responded to ARRA Challenges showcased stories by presenters from five different states on how they have successfully solved particular problems in implementing ARRA and moved ahead. Session evaluations demonstrated that this type of session, when participants hear directly from their peers about resolving issues they too face, is especially rewarding and appreciated. Special thanks to Steve Payne (WA), Geoff

Wilcox (VT), Kate Drexler (CO), Nick Milano (OH), and Jon Phelps (LA) for each sharing one initiative that helped advance their programs the past few months. NASCSP plans to continue these valuable sessions where peers discuss problem solving on various topics also being confronted by most of their colleagues.

The final WAP session focused on training initiatives. Holly Ravesloot from DOE reviewed the DOE ARRA WAP Training and Technical Assistance Plan. Kelly Cutchin provided an update on the Standardized Training Curricula, and Duke Elliott provided sound recommendations on setting up training programs.

If anyone who attended the conference wants to reference any of the presentations, or anyone who was unable to attend wants to become more familiar with sessions, most of the handouts and presentations, for the Orientation Training, WAP Committee Meeting, and WAP track of the NASCSP Conference, can be found on WAPTAC. These documents should prove a valuable resource for program managers.

Lastly, please mark your calendars now for the upcoming NASCSP Conference, scheduled for September 21-24, 2010 in Charleston, South Carolina. As with the past several Fall Conferences in even numbered years, NASCSP will partner with DOE for a combined NASCSP Conference/DOE State WAP Managers Conference, promising to build upon the informative sessions and opportunity for discussion from the 2010 Mid-Winter Conference. We look forward to seeing you there!



Conference Highlight Photo

NASCSP Chair Vaughn Clark, poses questions to panel participants during the *Making the Connection Breakfast Session*. Left to right: Vaughn Clark, Oklahoma; David Quam, Director, Office of Federal Relations, National Governors Association; Jim McKlesky, Director, Washington Office, State of North Carolina; Clay McLure, Senior Policy Advisor for Federal Relations, State of Iowa; and Hilary Jochmans, Director, Washington Office, State of New York.