

Montana – WAP Success Story

The incredibly beautiful vast open spaces of Montana are one of the natural treasures of the nation. The State covers 147,138 square miles, with a single agency covering 47,945 square miles, an area as large as the state of Louisiana. The harsh climate can be hard on the housing stock and low-income families in the State. The Montana Recovery Act Program has risen to the challenge of providing comprehensive energy efficiency retrofits through their Weatherization Assistance Program, making homes more comfortable and safe for thousands of households.

Montana received \$26,543,777 in Recovery Act funding for a Program typically funded around \$2-3 million. To ensure the funds were as effective as possible and in the spirit of the Recovery Act, Jim Nolan, Bureau Chief of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services chose to approach the grant as two year money. They have been effective at doing so, with some agencies already close to finishing out Recovery Act production and with 4,081 units completed by the end of 3rd Quarter 2010.

When asked about Montana's success, Jim states, "Our weatherization staff, headed by Kane Quenemoen and his field staff have been extraordinary in working to get this program rolled out." Nolan credit regular meetings, excellent management, and a cooperative relationship between the State and local agencies for the smoothly running Program. The regular meetings include State level meetings weekly and meetings with the ten Community Action Agencies and one tribal government monthly to ensure that guidance is clear. These meetings include clear metrics and reports on homes weatherized and steps necessary to move forward. Further, even before the Recovery Act, Montana convened quarterly roundtable meetings to talk about what is and what is not working and make sure all interested parties are at the table when making decisions.

Montana also chose to move funds around from local agency to local agency, utilizing agency wisdom and experience. Local agencies stepped up to the challenge and did all they could to roll out the expanded program. Also, when the Recovery Act hit but before they received funding, the State used non-DOE money, such as utility and LIHEAP funds, to ramp up with equipment and vehicles so that everyone was ready to go.

In addition to the WAP, Jim's office runs several other programs, including the Community Services Block Grant, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Housing for People with AIDS (HOPWA), Emergency Shelter grants and a new HUD homelessness program called Housing Prevention Rapid ReHousing, funded at \$4 million. Finally, his might be the only CSBG office that operates a food commodities warehouse, complete with 3 trucks and trailers to store, handle and ship USDA food to Indian reservations, food banks and senior centers!

Hiring and training of workers has been key to getting funds out quickly and efficiently, including two at the State level and 130 at the local level. One concern about the end of the Recovery Act is the possible loss of jobs once the WAP ramps down. Nolan says, "the training and work experience we have provided should serve staff well as the green jobs economy comes into play." Montana State University (MSU) provides training for the Program, with 400 attending in the last year on a wide variety of topics including Weatherization 101, Lead Renovation Repair and Painting, Furnace Training, Health and Safety, Mobile Home Clinic, and more. MSU is a nationally recognized leader in training and has been widely praised for their WXTV training videos found here: <http://www.weatherization.org/wxtv/>.

Montana is truly a model of cooperative training and management as well as Recovery Act success. Mr. Nolan also thanks us, his national partner saying, "All the information NASCSP has made available on weatherization and through WAPTAC has been invaluable." Thanks for showing us that weatherization works!