



Energy Conservation Education Project

Operation Fuel, a Connecticut state-wide emergency energy assistance program, is developing a program to help energy assistance recipients maintain over the long run energy efficiency and energy conservation practices designed to reduce their home energy burden.

Patricia Wrice, executive director of Operation Fuel, said she had, for some time, been looking for a way to help low income households lower their energy costs. “Energy assistance grants provide immediate aid,” Wrice said “but we have been trying to find ways to help families actually lower their energy costs.”

“In 2010, I attended the National Energy and Utility Affordability Conference in San Antonio and heard a presentation by the luncheon speaker that made me believe that we could find a way to help people change their energy consumption habits,” Wrice said.

The featured speaker was Doug McKenzie-Mohr, an environmental psychologist and expert in the design of programs to promote sustainable behavior.

“Every time I go to the annual conference, I come away with at least one new idea,” Wrice said. “Hearing what Mr. McKenzie-Mohr had to say matched perfectly with what I wanted to do in Connecticut.”

Following the conference, Wrice contacted Jennifer Tabanico, president of Action Research, a California based behavioral research and marketing firm with expertise in sustainable behavior change and designing and evaluating community based social marketing projects. She also brought in a consulting firm, Ampersand Consulting, to help with the project.

In March, 2011, Wrice wrote to the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving seeking a planning grant to help finance the “foundational research...for identifying barriers to sustainable behavior related to energy conservation (specifically electricity use) in low income households.”

In the application, Wrice wrote that the grant would be used to “create a preliminary design for an ongoing educational program in Greater Hartford” and “identify evaluation methodology to be used during the three year program grant period.”

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving responded to the application by providing Operation Fuel with a \$21,100 grant to develop the program. Operation Fuel is supplementing the grant with \$21,750 bringing the total cost of the planning stage to \$42,850.

The planning stage is expected to be completed by the end of the year at which time Operation Fuel will apply to the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for a three year grant to implement the program.

A copy of Operation Fuel’s application for the planning grant is included below.

Operation Fuel's Energy Conservation Education Project

At a Glance

Purpose – Design an energy conservation education program to will promote sustainable behavior that will lead to reduced home energy consumption and increased energy conservation among low income households within the target area.

Funding – In 2011, Operation Fuel received a \$21,100 planning grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, which is supplemented with \$21,750 in agency funds for a total financial commitment of \$42,850.

Status – The planning phase is expected to be completed by the end of the year at which time Operation Fuel will apply to the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for a three year grant to implement the program.

For more information about Operation Fuel's Energy Conservation Education Project contact Patricia Wrice at 860 243-2345.



Operation Fuel, Inc.

WE'RE ALL PART OF THE OPERATION.

March 3, 2011

Sara A. Sneed, Senior Program Officer
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
10 Columbus Blvd. – 8th Floor
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Sara,

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this planning grant application, which describes the assistance we need to implement a promising approach to energy conservation education in the Hartford region. While the attached planning logic model outlines the issues, community needs, intended results, and goals of the Energy Education Project, the planning grant will enable us to explore the complex issues involved with designing education for sustainable behavior change, based on best practice research. Not only will this be the first project of its kind in the Hartford region, we believe it's first such program for low income consumers in the U.S.

About the issue

Energy affordability is a statewide crisis in Connecticut. In Greater Hartford about 20% of households have a gap of over \$2,000 between the cost of household energy and their ability to pay for utilities and home heating¹. Since 2007, this crisis has increasingly affected moderate income households. The households that experience the gap struggle to pay for oil, electricity, and gas, not only because of the recession and job loss, but due to rising energy prices. And there's almost nowhere to turn for help.

LIHEAP², the federal energy assistance program, covers only a fraction of home energy costs for a small percentage of the income eligible population, primarily very poor families. For example, in 2009 LIHEAP provided \$96 million in energy assistance to families in Connecticut, an amount that covered only 16.4% of the state's energy affordability gap. Each regulated natural gas and electric utility offers a mandated arrearage forgiveness program for hardship customers in the form of matching grants but in order to receive the match, customers must make all required payments – not a possibility for many households.

Connecticut has the highest utility rates in the continental U.S. The state's energy affordability gap, the difference between what low income households can afford to pay for energy and what it actually costs, was \$480 million in 2010. The gap actually decreased somewhat from the previous year because energy prices declined slightly. That won't

¹ *Home Energy Affordability Gap: Connecticut 2010*, www.operationfuel.org

² Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

happen this year – as the price of oil rises, the gap will increase. The energy affordability gap study that Operation Fuel publishes annually notes that the result of the mismatch between energy costs and the resources needed to pay bills causes many low income households to incur high arrearages and endure service termination. (Fisher, Sheehan & Colton, 2010) The gap in affordability also means that families can't pay for other household necessities, most notably food and overall shelter costs.

Operation Fuel's strategic response

As is true for most fuel funds in the U.S., Operation Fuel raises charitable dollars and distributes them through a network of community-based organizations that house fuel banks. Fuel banks, using a central Web-based application process managed by Operation Fuel, provide small emergency energy assistance grants, between \$250 – 500, to low income households that do not qualify for, or have exhausted, their government energy assistance benefits. As funds permit, grants are distributed year-round. While distributing emergency energy assistance grants is a critical aspect of helping low income households with rising energy costs, the grants are not a long-term solution to energy affordability. Other measures, such as discounted rates and energy conservation, will be critical to ultimately reducing the gap.

Conserving energy requires that consumers learn techniques to help lower their household energy costs. Educating low income individuals and families became an important aspect of Operation Fuel's strategy, both in terms of influencing public policy and helping low income consumers lower costs. We currently do not sponsor educational programs related to energy conservation but had begun planning to do so.

As we prepared for our first discussion with you related to our application for a three-year program grant, we reviewed research about energy conservation education. We were surprised to find that traditional educational programs are largely ineffective in changing consumer behavior. (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000) For example, California spent \$200m in the 1980s to fund information-intensive (traditional) education methods intended to foster residential energy conservation and yet household energy use remained virtually unchanged.

We found research results that support an alternative educational approach to help low income consumers conserve energy. Educational programs that identify barriers to desired behavior and provide supports for sustainable behavior change, called community-based social marketing (CBSM)³, have been shown to increase consumers' energy conservation measures and even reduce utility bills. We recognized the potential to develop a program based on the principles of CBSM, aimed at helping low income consumers change their behavior related to electricity use – from our preliminary work, we believe this program would be the first of its kind in the country. That is, while there has been research showing that CBSM changed middle and higher income consumers' energy consumption behavior and expenditures, we were unable to find similar research conducted with low income household members.

To develop an educational intervention that we believe will be most effective in helping low income consumers in the Hartford region reduce utility costs, a strategic approach to the energy affordability gap; we are requesting a planning grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

Planning grant request

There are three outcomes we want to achieve through the planning phase of this project. These are to:

³ See www.csbm.com for additional information.

1. Conduct foundational research, such as focus groups and/or surveys for identifying barriers to sustainable behavior related to energy conservation (specifically, electricity use) in low income households.
2. Create a preliminary design for an ongoing educational program in Greater Hartford to overcome barriers to selected behavior(s) and support sustainable behavior change.
3. Identify evaluation methodology to be used during the three-year program grant period. Evaluation will be used to assess pre- and post-education behavior related to energy use as well as pre- and post-education utility costs.

We believe that because our project is unique and addresses a critical community need (as well as a long-term environmental concern), an extended time period during which the project and evaluation can be designed, funded with a planning grant, is warranted.

Planning project budget and timeframe

We are requesting a planning grant of \$21,100, which will be supplemented by Operation Fuel as shown in the table below. Total planning project cost is \$42,850; we anticipate a 4-6 month planning period, beginning in May 2011.

Expense	Proposed Scope of Work	HFGP Planning Grant	Operation Fuel
Personnel (5% of Executive Director & 10% of Director of Development, includes fringes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align project development with Operation Fuel strategic and operating plans. Develop project partnerships and identify additional funding for three-year grant period and beyond. 	-0-	20,000
Consulting - Action Research* (President [oversight]: 4 days/32 hrs @\$125/hr = \$4,000) (Project Director: 10 days/80 hrs @\$90/hr = \$7,200) (Research Assoc: 3 days/24 hrs @\$60/hr = \$1,440) (Research Ass't): 3 days/24 hrs @\$40/hr = \$960)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist with planning project design. Design methods of identifying barriers to sustainable behavior change (focus group, surveys, etc.). Collate/analyze focus group and survey results. Design three-year project evaluation. 	13,600	1,750 (travel)
Consulting - Ampersand Consulting** (6.5 days/52 hrs @\$100/hr)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Act as liaison between Operation Fuel and Action Research. Assist with planning project design. Facilitate focus groups; assist with surveys. Write planning project summary for internal and external stakeholders. 	6,500.00	

Focus groups (4): meeting equipment and supplies, food		800.00	-0-
Miscellaneous (office supplies, etc.)		200.00	-0-
Total		\$21,100	\$21,750

* **Action Research, Inc.** is a California based behavioral research and marketing firm whose consulting team has significant experience designing and evaluating community-based social marketing projects. The firm's expertise is in sustainable behavior change, with the goal of bridging the gap between academic research and real-world applications. Since its establishment in 2001, the mission of Action Research has been to blend traditional marketing activities with effective strategies of behavior change to promote, clean, healthy, and sustainable communities. Additional information about Action Research is attached to this proposal.

Operation Fuel has engaged Jennifer Tabanico, the President of Action Research, to be the keynote speaker at our annual Power Breakfast event on June 7. Although expenses related to her keynote are not included in our planning grant request, we will be able to have an initial project planning session with Jennifer and the consultant who will be our project director, Lori Large, who will also attend the event.

** **Ampersand Consulting.** Janna Pedersen of Ampersand Consulting has provided planning, board development, and capacity building consulting for communities and nonprofits in Connecticut since 1995. She co-facilitated Operation Fuel's strategic planning process in 2006 and subsequently has consulted with the organization's board and management, assisting with the implementation of a variety of projects.

Sara, I know you've been in and out of the office and unable to respond to requests for guidance about the parameters of the planning grant. If you need additional information, or we need to use a different format for this application, please let me know. I will be out of the office from Friday, March 4, returning Monday, March 14 so if you have questions during that time, please direct them to Lynn McDonald, the Director of Development at 860-243-2345 ext. 303.

Thank you again for this opportunity Sara. We are all very excited about this project and hope you will be as well!

Regards,

Patricia Wrice, MSW
Executive Director

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