

Washington State Weatherization Plus Health Enhanced Grantee Profiles: Blue Mountain Action Council

Blue Mountain Action Council (BMAC) is one of two local agencies in Washington to receive an Enhanced Weatherization Plus Health (Wx + H) Start-up Grant. Start-up grants were made available to agencies that applied for the Enhanced Grant Program but did not score high enough to secure full funding. These grants were intended to build on existing capacity and prepare grantees for full participation in upcoming Wx + H program cycles.

BMAC used start-up grant funds to test referral relationships with The Health Center, an independent clinic serving schools and students, and to integrate Healthy Homes education and measures into existing weatherization services.

While this relationship ultimately did not generate as many referrals as hoped, BMAC found enough eligible clients in its existing weatherization and energy services queue.

BMAC provided comprehensive services to seven households, exceeding its initial target five projects. Less-intensive services were provided to an eighth household.

BMAC reported that the program was very visible and very rewarding. The program attracted resources and extra effort from partners and contractors who wanted to help out.

BMAC Wx+H Clients



Program Delivery Strategy

Under the start-up grant, BMAC screened referrals and existing Weatherization and Energy Assistance clients to identify people of all ages with asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary

Wx + Health Program

The Wx + H Program, funded by Washington State's Energy Matchmaker Program, integrates investments in energy efficiency and Healthy Homes improvements in low-income households with education and services to reduce energy bills; increase home durability; and improve occupant health, safety, and well-being.

The **initial focus** of the Wx + H Enhanced Grant initiative is assessing the effectiveness of integrating weatherization and Healthy Homes services to serve households with members who have asthma or other respiratory illnesses. Enhanced grants are intended to support pilot projects to develop, test, and deploy new measures, strategies, and partnerships to deliver services.

disease (COPD). Screened households were assessed for weatherization and Healthy Homes services, and a coordinated scope of work was prepared.

During the initial assessment, the household received education on maintaining a weatherized and healthy home. At 3, 6, and 12 months after measures were installed, BMAC completed in-home follow-up visits. Measure installations, education, and follow-up visits were provided by BMAC staff and crews, with the exception of some flooring work that was sub-contracted out.

The project built on BMAC's experience as a participant in Washington Healthy Homes Pilot coordinated by the Opportunity Council, where BMAC provided wraparound weatherization and Healthy Homes services to six homes.

Key Lessons

Referrals from The Health Center were not a good match for LI Weatherization

BMAC received 12 referrals from The Health Center, but none resulted in a project. Half were

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not income eligible, a quarter were renters and very difficult to qualify, and the remainder were “turned off by the application.”

Need for Wx + H services among BMAC’s existing clients

BMAC found all of their projects among existing weatherization and energy assistance clients. This was unexpected. Intake and auditing staff received informal training to ask questions and note indications that a household may have respiratory disease and could be eligible.

The eight completed projects comprised about 15% of annual production. With sufficient funding, it is likely this level of effort could be sustained. Moving beyond that would require BMAC to find other community partners.

The \$4,000 Wx + H spending soft cap resulted in some work not being done

Half of the projects included measures that were not done, such as carpet removal and flooring replacement. While there were procedures for lifting caps in consultation with Commerce, it was not always feasible, from a scheduling perspective, to do so.

Communicating the value of Wx + H activity

Health outcomes, while hard to measure, were easier to communicate and were more influential with partners and stakeholder than saving energy and saving money. Contractors were willing in some cases to go the extra mile when some projects hit project cost caps.

Challenges meeting compressed timelines around other high-priority needs

Much of the work occurred in the final quarter of FY 2017 due to delays in Wx + H program startup, winter weather, a major emergency rehabilitation project, and the need to spend out other weatherization funding. Although BMAC crews could do flooring, some of this work was contracted out to help manage workload.

Lack of clear program requirements and specifications slowed start-up and increased costs

BMAC found that their Wx + H program startup was slower than when they participated in the Healthy Homes Pilot with the Opportunity Council, which provided detailed work process flows, lists of eligible measures, educational materials, and training.

Although BMAC has had some experience providing wrap-around services in the Healthy Homes Pilot, it was not clear to BMAC how Wx + H was different and where there was new flexibility. BMAC wanted more specific and standardized guidance on Wx + H processes and requirements. Once the program was underway, BMAC did appreciate Commerce’s flexibility around eligible measures and wanted that feature to be preserved.

Limited funding

The start-up grant was not large enough to fund experimentation or develop new processes, procedures, and relationships with health services providers in the community. BMAC’s experience suggests the need for a more prescriptive model and tools for smaller grants.

Going Forward

BMAC is interested in continuing to offer Wx + H services if funding is available and Commerce maintains flexibility in how it could be used.

Providing more comprehensive Healthy Homes measures to existing clients

Wx + H funding allowed BMAC to address opportunities that were missed due to funding restrictions, such as replacing carpets, cleaning HVAC systems, and providing low-cost Healthy Homes measures. Although some funds are available for repairs and Healthy Homes measures through Community Development Block Grant and city programs, these funds are limited geographically.

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Little or no funding was available to provide low-cost measures such as cleaning kits (since the Living Green program funding ended) and HEPA vacuums. BMAC would like the flexibility to provide some of these measures as an option going forward

Leveraging resources

BMAC had some success leveraging resources from other funding sources, including a grant from the ROE Foundation to provide additional accessibility services to seniors such as grab bars, stair repairs, hand-held showerheads, ramps, and handrails.

These funding sources are challenging to integrate with weatherization funding and are not well reported. The flexibility that came with Wx + H funding was valuable.

Funding for installed measures came from the following sources:

- DOE, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, BPA, Matchmaker: 60%
- Matchmaker, Wx + H: 27%
- Utility: 13%

Strengthening relationships with medical providers in the community

The referral arrangement with The Health Center did not result in projects, in part because more time was needed to educate The Health Center staff on weatherization criteria.

BMAC still sees some potential for The Health Center and other medical providers to be sources of referral and to help build relationships with the local public health agency, which has new leadership and may be open to stronger community partnerships.

Partners

BMAC is a nonprofit community action program that provides services to those who reside in Walla Walla, Garfield, and Columbia counties. All enhanced program services are delivered by the BMAC Housing Program Department.

Medical partners

The Health Center was BMAC's initial referral partner for the start-up grant.

ROE Foundation

The ROE Foundation supports services to elderly citizens in eastern Washington, with a focus on serving rural, distressed areas. The ROE Foundation resources allow BMAC to offer additional accessibility services to seniors.

Services provided by BMAC and these partners are summarized in Table 1. Table 2 lists eligible Healthy Homes measures.

Budget

- Enhanced Wx + H Start-up Grant: **\$50,000**
- Leveraged resources: ROE Foundation

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Table 1. Services Offered by the BMAC Grant

Service	BMAC	The Health Center	ROE Foundation
Outreach and referrals	X	x	
Intake screening/qualification	X		
Initial Healthy Homes assessment	X		
Energy audit/assessment	X		
Service coordination	X	x	
Weatherization	X		
Healthy Homes measures	X		
Client education and follow-up	X		
Additional services (repair, social)	x		x

LEAD = X, Support = x, Green shading indicates new partner or existing partner in new role

Table 2. Percentage of Wx + H Projects with Healthy Homes and Weatherization Measures Installed (n=7)

Measures	Plus Health Measures		Weatherization Measures		
	All Grantees	BMAC	Measures	All Grantees	BMAC
Green cleaning kit	94%	100%	Air sealing	77%	86%
Bedding (dust mite)	71%	100%	Floor insulation	44%	71%
Mechanical ventilation	65%	57%	Attic insulation	54%	86%
HEPA vacuum	65%	100%	Wall insulation	12%	14%
Walk-off mats	65%	100%	Windows	17%	
CO detector	57%	100%	Door	19%	
Low VOC flooring	33%	86%	Duct insulation	20%	57%
Smoke detector	24%	100%	Duct repair	10%	14%
Advanced ventilation	18%		Duct sealing	33%	29%
HEPA/MEPA filter	17%	71%	HVAC - replace	33%	
HVAC cleaning	17%	86%	Furnace T and Cn	22%	57%
Air filter	15%		HVAC - repair	13%	43%
Plumbing repair	13%		Thermostat	15%	
Gutter, downspout	13%		Passive venting	44%	86%
Moisture/mold abatement	13%		Lighting	33%	57%
Roof repair/replace	11%		WH low cost	52%	71%
Pest mitigation	9%		Water heater	12%	14%
Comprehensive cleaning	8%		Electrical repair	13%	29%
Crawlspace	7%		Wx repair	1%	
Slip/fall prevention	5%	14%			
Dehumidifier	2%				

Darker cell colors indicate higher rates of installation.

Blank cells indicate that a measure was not installed by the grantee.