

U.C. MINIGRANT FINAL REPORT - KENT/MSU EXTENSION

A Grassroots Approach to Energy Efficiency

The \$1,250 Urban Collaborators minigrant helped leverage a \$15,829 grant from the State Energy Office for this energy conservation project with neighborhood business owners. Eastown Business Association and West Fulton Business Association were Extension's project partners. This project was completed on September 30, 2008.

Project Results

A total of 10 neighborhood commercial buildings in the West Fulton and Eastown business districts had energy assessments conducted. The building owner was also the business owner in all cases. The energy assessments were done by Kevin Cook, an energy management consultant.

Each building had an energy usage analysis done by charting the gas and electric usage for the past year. Then Kevin inspected the building. He noted ways that energy could be saved and compiled recommendations in a written report. Kevin would then meet with the owner and review the recommendations and answer any questions. It was then up to the owner to decide what energy-saving measures would be implemented.

This project also identified two public buildings that were assessed by an energy consultant hired by the State Energy Office. Both buildings belong to Grand Valley State University: Cook Health Science building and the Pew Campus complex.

To expand the educational reach of this project, we organized a meeting of business owners in each of the two business districts. Kevin presented a PowerPoint that showed the main energy-saving measures businesses can take. Each meeting had about 20 people attending.

Expenditures

The Urban Collaborators' minigrant paid for one energy assessment - \$500. It also paid half the cost for a more extensive assessment called a Technical Energy Assessment - \$750. The total minigrant equaled \$1,250.

Evaluation

Since many of the energy assessments were completed only a few months ago, we have not systematically collected feedback from the building owners on their progress in implementing the recommendations contained in their reports. However, we do have some anecdotal information. One of the Eastown business owners said that she was financially unable at this time to make any of the physical improvements Kevin recommended. She did, though, undertake several "free" measures. For example, she took better advantage of natural light in her retail store and used fewer lights during the day. She learned from Kevin that some track lighting she had in part of her store was a real energy eater, so she has rarely turned them on. She also raised the temperature a

couple of degrees, thereby reducing the use of the air conditioner. She reported that she realized double digit savings in her utility bills this summer as a result of her increased awareness of energy costs and consumption.

It is our intent to utilize our U.C. summer intern in 2009 to do a more formal evaluation. The intern will review utility bills of the 10 businesses for the past year and compare the usage to the previous year. Information will be collected from the owners on what physical improvements and what energy-saving measures they have undertaken. Then an analysis will be done to see what correlation there is. An estimate of the amount of money saved in utility costs will also be made.

Expanding the Program

I have met with four neighborhood associations that are interested in a similar program for their residents. We would primarily target low income homeowners. The essence of the proposed program is to train neighborhood association staff and volunteers on how to do a basic home energy assessment, develop an energy tool box so that appropriate referrals can be made, and develop/distribute educational information. Local funding sources will be explored as well as a 2009 U.C. minigrant.

I also met with the Neighborhood Business Alliance Board, which consists of representatives of all 20 commercial districts. I reviewed the energy project, and they expressed interest in co-sponsoring with me a meeting similar to what we did at Eastown and West Fulton where the information learned by the businesses that had assessments would be shared with all business owners. We anticipate holding that meeting early next year. If there is interest, we might further develop the business part of an energy conservation program.

Barriers Encountered

MSU Contracts & Grants handled the grant from the State Energy Office. I have never encountered so many problems. They were next to impossible to work with. They did not invoice the State correctly or in a timely manner. This made me appreciate even more the good work Beata does. Even though I was delayed in getting invoices to her, she proceeded in a very professional manner and made it very easy for me. Thank you!