

CARD Webinar Audience Questions & Answers

Insights to Better Serve BIPOC, Low-Income and Renter Communities

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If landlords are unlikely to do something if it requires gathering financial info from their renters, what recommendations would you have for supporting income-eligible and low-income residents who aren't income-eligible?

Our research suggests we need to change the way we "qualify" a customer for enhanced services and benefits. Income qualification is a barrier to providing service to both homeowners and rental property owners and likely prevents a utility program from providing the level of service required to support the targeted customers. There is some movement towards using geography to qualify residents of specific areas that have sufficient data available to demonstrate residents are primarily income-eligible without having to ask each resident specifically. CenterPoint Energy has initiated work in this direction. Additionally, we would suggest methods to directly reach out to the income-eligible and low-income (but not eligible) renters to make them aware of programs.

As a COU whose energy efficiency plan is due soon, how can we engage with this research and proposals in a way that can inform program design?

In addition to consulting the toolkits within the final report, we would invite people to contact the research team project manager, Carmen Carruthers carmenc@cupminnesota.org, directly to ask follow-up questions about how these ideas could be implemented. We believe there are several aspects of the program ideas that would be applicable to COU customers. Examples include evaluating whether programs are designed to capture emergency replacement scenarios, ensuring local contractors are familiar with efficiency programs, and making sure rental property owners are aware of programs that can help reduce their expenses for energy efficiency upgrades to rental properties.

What financing solutions have you looked into for property owners assuming many are unlikely to do something complicated (or that requires info from their renters) and others don't qualify for loans based on credit score?

Our interviews and survey with rental property owners suggested financing the cost of improvements was not a major issue for them. They had the capital to pay for improvements. For homeowners, the big challenge was poor credit making it difficult for them to obtain low-cost financing (there is plenty of high-cost financing, like high interest loans).

How did Safety play a role in these findings? there are a number of researched concerns with systems like gas natural draft water heaters, does there seem to be interest from property owners to provide safer mechanical systems if its non-emergency?

We did not specifically address non-emergency safety issues within this study. The research focused mainly at equipment failure.

Have there been similar studies within the Indigenous communities in St. Paul Minneapolis area?

We're not aware of any similar studies regarding indigenous communities in the Twin Cities. This would be a great follow-up project. Our interview and survey templates, provided in the Appendices, could be used as a starting point. We recognize that indigenous households have high energy burdens across the state. It would be worthwhile to consider how this study could be applied to that group and what other research would be helpful to address some of their unique energy needs and concerns.

Did you get a sense as to the relative importance of equipment cost vs operating cost associated with energy efficient equipment?

First cost (equipment cost) is the most important factor.

What about a pilot project with rental property owners. I am one in St. Paul and the cost of transitioning from gas to all-electric was cost-prohibitive. I would have been willing to move forward if the payback would have been less than 10 years. I'd like to see CEE/auditors funded to offer an "advanced energy audit" to help homeowners and property owners do a phased-in "Home Energy Plan". Could a pilot project be funded?

This study did not focus on electrification. However, based on the hesitancy of the rental property owners we spoke with to take on non-emergency, non-essential improvements we would expect additional incentives and support would be needed to encourage voluntary steps towards electrification. We would also suggest reaching out to your city about their interest in and plans for encouraging electrification. The Air Source Heat Pump Collaborative's website (created by the Center for the Energy and Environment) <https://www.mnashp.org/> has good information about electrifying heating systems including how to maximize the environmental benefits and manage operational costs.

Are Minneapolis 4D incentives not generous enough? I know they always have more applications than funding?

The Minneapolis 4D incentives are generous enough to get proactive energy efficiency / weatherization work completed. In the first couple years, the city of Minneapolis ensured that up to 90% of costs were covered for energy improvements (the city added to any utility or state rebates or resources to reach that goal). This year that cost-share has dropped to 70% because there wasn't enough money to fund all projects (the program was successful!). Details on the 4d offering is available here: <https://www2.minneapolismn.gov/government/programs-initiatives/housing-development-assistance/rental-property/4d/>.

Our team would say these are unique cases and not translatable to rental properties generally. First, these rental property owners are choosing to maintain affordable rents for 10 years in exchange for property tax break. The property owners cannot be a Tier 3 rental property (maintenance issues). These owners are approaching the program with an altruistic interest in providing quality, affordable housing for residents; not just trying to maximize profits. This approach makes them more likely to want to participate in programs like energy efficiency.

I am wondering if you have a percentage of property owners who said they did not want to ask their tenants for financial information as many programs require this information

Because our sample was small, percentages are not as relevant. A preponderance of the interviews said they do not want to ask renters for personal information.

Was this webinar recorded?

Yes. It was recorded and will be made available at a later date.