May 21, 2011 - Getting Useful Real Time Feedback About Your Program Webinar (text version)

Below is the text version of the Webinar titled “Getting Useful Real Time Feedback About Your Program” originally presented on May 21, 2011. (Please note: portions of the transcript below may be incomplete where indicated with an underlined placeholder space. Please refer to the webinar presentation recording and slides for additional information.)

Operator:
The broadcast is now starting. All attendees are listen only mode.

Sargon de Jesus:
Good afternoon. My name is Sargon de Jesus and I am with ERG, a contractor supporting the U.S. Department of Energy Better Buildings program. I wanna thank you for joining today’s webinar titled “Getting useful real time feedback about your program.” Today moderating the discussion is Amanda Chu with Energetics, but before we get started I’d like to go over a few logistical items. All the participants online have been put on universal mute right now to prevent background noise, however if you haven’t done so already please enter your two- or three-digit audio pin. You can find your audio pin in the questions control panel box on the right hand side of your screen, and to enter it you just need to hit pound and then those two or three digit numbers, and then pound again. If you don’t enter your audio pin we won’t be able to un-mute your line during the questions period because we are inviting oral questions to you over the phone if you’d like. These questions will be taken at the end of today’s presentation and during the Q&A session. If you have a question that you’d like to ask over the phone just please raise your hand virtually. There should be a little raise hand feature there on the control panel, or if you prefer you can ask a question just by typing it into the questions box on the right hand side as well, and then we’ll go through these questions both oral and written at the end of today’s presentation. Finally, the presentations from today’s webinar include copies of the slides as well as a recording and a transcript will be posted to the Better Buildings Google site shortly. With that I’ll hand it over to Amanda who will introduce today’s speakers. Amanda?

Amanda:
Thanks, Sargon. Hi everyone and welcome. Glad you’re able to join us. Today we are very excited to have Lila Glick, Sara Vandergrist and Jane Peters talk with us and discuss their experiences with _____ evaluation and realtime feedback and we’ll start with Lila. Lila is the marketing and community outreach director at the Greater Cincinnati Energy Alliance. She has over ten years of experience in community organizing and program management and her background includes _____ as a small business development Peace Corps volunteer in Nicaragua and organizing city and school district projects in _____ _____ Oregon. She’s worked on Massachusetts policy initiatives at Team Water Action and mostly recently as the director of community outreach at the Cambridge Energy Alliance. Lila, the floor is yours. Thanks.

Lila:
Thank you so much, Amanda. I appreciate the opportunity to share some of the work that we’ve done in regards to valuating our program. I’d like to tell a least first share a little bit about our organization and what motivated us to take action into evaluating our programs.

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The Greater Cincinnati Energy Alliance, we're a 501c3 nonprofit. We were established back in 2008. Andy Holtzhouser is the executive director, really was inspired initially by the Cambridge Energy Alliance in Massachusetts, which was one of the first major nonprofit initiatives to do energy efficiency outreach work. We are focused in three main areas. One is education and outreach. Obviously everything from workshops to canvassing activities to large conferences. We provide project management assistance specifically working with the contractors, and I can talk more about that if folks are interested, and then in addition we provide financing. Up to 35 percent of our program is covered as well as we reduce the costs of the actual energy assessment, which is only $50.00. Then finally right now our program is focused to both the residential and nonprofit commercial sectors, so through the Better Buildings grant that we received last year we're hoping ultimately to expand out to the commercial and larger multi-family sector, but really right now we're really trying to get those two initial projects off the ground.

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As I've mentioned we are a nonprofit and we're funded primarily through the foundation. As I said we were one of 25 Better Building selected projects. We received $17 million to serve quite a large region, which is seven municipal governments that also had contributed initially through the energy efficiency community block grant to get our project off the ground.

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So ultimately our marketing program has really been fully launched for a little over a year and in a sense we've been running forward without having a lot of time to evaluate what's working, what hasn't been working. I was hired on about seven months ago and part of our initial I guess one of the initial projects I was working on was how to evaluate what was done so far with the marketing team, which _____ up to community outreach advisors. So we had decided to do a phone blitz and an online evaluation. One of the reasons that we decided to take this route is that last summer back in July we had a major channel 12 news story. That news story had actually brought in over 700 audits or assessment requests within a 48-hour period, and we really wanted to know what percentage of those had converted to an assessment and then what percentage had actually converted to a retrofit. Up until that point we had basically been managing all of our data via Google Docs and at the time we were working with about five or six contractors, so as you can imagine we had over almost 800 energy assessment requests. The contractors were having difficulties updating the files and because all of this was being managed on spreadsheets it's really hard for us to understand how well we were doing. So between November 2010 and January 2011 we did a series of phone blitzes working actually with volunteers and staff, and then follow-up online evaluations for folks we were unable to reach. We had multiple goals. As I said the prime goal other than evaluating where we were and what our success rates were but also to help boost our conversion rates. This was seen as a good way to communicate with customers, help move them through the assessment to the retrofit process, and really again evaluate how well we were doing. Then in the long-term the idea is we were moving from a Google Doc system to using a software tool developed through performance system development, and our launch date actually was in April, so at the end of this Power Point presentation or towards the end I'll walk through some of the tools that are available. Ultimately we wanted to get to a place where we would have the tools

to better manage all of our customer leads and report to the Department of Energy and our project partners on our successes.

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So based on this we went through a process in regards to how we were gonna do the online and phone evaluation and we figured out who is our target groups, and so based on that we decided we wanted folks who requested an assessment but never scheduled one. We wanted to connect with folks who had completed an assessment but never moved through to the retrofit process, and then the last group, which is folks who had completed or were in process for their retrofits. The reason being is we really wanted to understand what were the roadblocks for people converting for each steps and then finally in the last group, what was the level of satisfaction with the overall program? As I mentioned we had a number of goals. We had additional to the three that I had mentioned on the last slide. We also want to use this as a way to gather testimonials for our website and also assess if there was interest for further focus groups. The marketing team worked very closely with the operations department to really figure out what were the key questions that we needed to ask that would help us develop the survey questions. We used a program called line survey rather than let's say a spreadsheet tool, which really would allow volunteers and staff members to based on which target group be able to enter a code that would ultimately connect back to the customer's data so that when the staff member or the volunteer connected with the residents they didn't have to ask for name, address, etc. All of that was based on uploading the data from the previous spreadsheets, and then based on entering that code number and whether they were in one of those three target groups there was a series of questions built as a tree. So if you answer let's say yes to whether you've had your assessment or not, or no, it would take you down a different path, and we were able to collect that data that was both quantitative and qualitative. We also developed training that would help both staff and volunteers, which we pulled from the University of Miami to really help us go through. I mean we had over 800 customers that we had to reach and so we included a phone script, we'd prompt them on the survey, and we also had questions and answers that could be available if customers had questions that a volunteer would be able to answer.

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So here's some examples of the data that we had collected. One is for folks who requested an assessment we ultimately had you can see 360 in the call pool and we reached quite a large number, almost 121 responses, and over 88 percent of people that we had spoken with were interested in participating, but what was interesting as we went through this we really found out the major problems that were coming up, one, less than half were actually contacted by the contractor, and there were a number of issues with for instance playing phone tag or the contractor would give up at a certain point, so that was an issue we had identified. Folks wanted to schedule their audit. 74 percent who had not scheduled their audit actually wanted to move forward with it, so we found this follow-up phone blitz was really helpful in moving people through the process, and of that we found that only 36 percent had actually scheduled their audit. Then almost 30 percent actually want to move forward with getting connected to the newsletter, so it was a very useful tool and as I said the biggest thing was contractor communication and realizing that we had a large portion of folks who – it's almost 50 people who wanted to schedule their audit but didn't.

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For both folks who didn't schedule their assessment or didn't schedule their retrofit we asked questions as to why they didn't schedule their assessment, and as you can see the top two is not enough time or the cost of the energy assessment itself. It's interesting for us, some of those things we can work on and others I think are more difficult 'cause ultimately we're actually right now talking about increasing the costs of the energy assessment. Right now it's only $50. But not having time, that's something that we can work on, on facilitating improvements to our program and making it easier and more accessible. We found out some people didn't understand the program properly and there were issues where they didn't qualify, not owner occupied, etc.

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We did the same process for folks who completed their assessment itself and some of the main lessons learned that you can see from this graph here is that only 23 percent had scheduled their retrofit, and ultimately our goal is to move people forward to getting their retrofits completed. Some people did not receive their report, small percentage, but in general people were interested in participating in focus groups.

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Most importantly you can see ultimately the reasons for not scheduling their retrofits was ultimately the cost. So one of the things that we were working on to address that the cost being prohibitive is developing a new loan program, which we actually launched last month. Again no time comes up close second, which is quite interesting, so really making this process as seamless as possible. Problems schedule, again that's scheduling with the contractor. It's an issue that has been coming up for both of those groups.

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What we're really excited about is that this new system that we're developing to help us evaluate and track our progress, ultimately the first phase launched last month. This self-assessment that we did for our program by questioning our customers helped us decide what was needed in this performance systems development tool and ways that we can improve the program, so I'm gonna speak specifically to this software tool primarily, but I'd be happy to answer more questions about our program design later on. The main component is a web portal, which allows people to do a free home energy comparison. An energy management program site for administrators internally for us to be able to manage and track how many assessments come in, how many retrofits come in, what does that lead to in regards to KWH, therm, jobs created, etc. There are two different compasses. There's the residential and the commercial compass that will allow contractors to use their field collection tool to enter in both the assessment and the retrofit data, which will then feed up into the energy management program site. So this is really a tool for customers, for managers within the energy alliance, and then for contractors to create a seamless system where we're able to track all of our data and energy reduction numbers that come in.

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So here are some slides to show you pictures from our new website and there's a login and a sign-up screen and there's all sorts of tools for homeowners, nonprofits, for contractors, etc. I'd recommend if folks have time to check out the new website at greaterca.org.

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This is example folks will create their user account, which collects everything on size of household, the age of the home, income level. There's a utility scrape that allows folks over a 12-month period to see how their home compares to other households.

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This is a screen shot that actually connects to Duke Energy, which is our utility provider. We have made it possible to bypass this so if folks wanna go directly to the contractor and not do the utility comparison they can do that. Filing out your home's energy dashboard, it really only takes five minutes and if you have your login username and password you can quickly do a profile for your electricity use pretty seamlessly.

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And then we have all of our contractors listed and they're actually listed. There's a way that we're able to rank based on a number of qualifications we have for the contractors, making sure level of satisfaction with customers, then meeting all of our requirements, etc. So folks who go in directly request their assessment and set up their assessment or retrofit with their contractor.

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And then internally this is what the contractor is gonna be using to manage the building information for each customer and it has information from structure with the heating and cooling data, appliances, etc., the utility consumption numbers and the measurement they get for instance from blower door tests, and they're able to calibrate this and actually provide a co-branded report for both the energy alliance and the contractor.

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And then internally both contractors and staff is able to go back in and look at the ultimate savings, costs, return on investments for the various projects.

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And as you can see we can go through and we can track if jobs are open. We actually have throughout the process an automated email response that will go out to customers. So for instance if they've requested an assessment and it hasn't been scheduled they'll get an automatic response reminding them. If they got their assessment report and haven't scheduled a retrofit they'll also get a reminder. So there's actually five communication points throughout the process where they will get either reminders or information to help move them through the communication chain and ultimately complete their project.

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Lastly, this program connects to Sales Force so we can run major campaigns, we can target given neighborhoods or given counties. For instance we're gonna be running a campaign coming up for northern Kentucky 'cause we have a special reduced rate loan program that we're able to offer just for northern Kentucky residents. So we can pull queries and reports or spreadsheets based on location or other given data points and then communicate and then track open rates, hits, and other types of communication responses.

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So ultimately this is our last slide. I just wanna talk about where we're going from here. As I've mentioned we initially launched the program next month. The next phase is we need to create a commercial program to go along with it. Right now the nonprofit program does not have this type of robust support system, so that's next under development for us. We also have coupon codes. Example to your right the "green your home" contest. If you were to go there there's a pre-loaded code, so when people fill out the form we're able to track and communicate with customers and see how successful given campaigns are, and we can do this for a number of different ones. Right now we have another one running through a Green-o-Rama home tour that we're doing as part of the USGBC Conference. So we're really excited and really testing different models where we can do email campaigns or major online campaigns and see how they work. We're also gonna be running a major phone blitz this summer to really see how this new program is working out and the general overall customer satisfaction with this new software program. Finally on our website we're gonna be developing password protected pages for contractors so we can store surveys, Power Point presentations, marketing materials, etc. to help us better evaluate not only the programs for customers but also for our contractors and really give them the support they need to help us collectively really create the best program possible.

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The last slide provides my contact information, and I guess we're saving questions until the very end, correct?

Amanda:
Yep. Well actually if there are any questions right now feel free to raise your hand virtually. Actually I'd like to chime in with my own question. Can you give us a sense of how long or what kind of timeframe you're operating under to actually identify the qualitative data that you're looking for, actually collect it, and then ultimately translate that information into the slides that you had of why people weren't moving from audit to retrofit, that piece of the story?

Lila Glick:
Well it was definitely rushed through a little quicker than my preference and partly we were on a deadline to go back through the work that we did through the July launch. We had some big goals that we were trying to reach in January, so probably the planning process was only three weeks. As I said ideally I would give more time, but basically met with the various departments. We brainstormed what type of information we wanted to get for those three target groups. I created a series of questions that were then translated on to the online survey and we create all the training materials and the FAQ's that were to go along with the training materials and the phone blitz and the online survey happened over a period of I believe three months. We did a couple rounds of it. The processing of the information happened about a month later, so from start to finish it's basically October through January with the final report in February. I don't know if that fully answered your question.

Amanda:
Yep. That's great. Thanks. All right, well thank you, Lila. Now let's transition to Sara Vandergrist. Sara is the Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corporation and she is an 11-year veteran of _____ and leads the planning and development and execution of all of the Wisconsin residential programs including the Focus On Energy program. She works to make sure that these programs achieve their goals and maintain and achieve their quality standards on time and on budget. She monitors programs and

services to identify synergies and streamline operations for effectiveness and cost efficiency. Sara, the floor is yours.

Sara Vandergrist:
Thank you. Just a little bit of background on my perspective here. I'm gonna really be talking today about an example of having used process evaluation to improve program design outside of Better Buildings programs, so this is sort of a hindsight view that I hope can be useful for folks as they look forward. I should also start by saying working on the Better Buildings programs that are running in the cities of Madison, Milwaukee, and Racine in Wisconsin, so some of what we learned that I'm gonna talk about did influence program design for our Better Buildings program.

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I just wanna give people a little bit of perspective. I think sometimes people hear the word "evaluation" and they get a little scared. They think it's maybe punitive or it's looking for flaws. In contrast I really try to view evaluation as a means to improve implementation approach, to provide a snapshot on program progress, and I think that it's really important as we're running programs to understand that they're sort of always in flux and that there's always opportunity to make improvements, but you kind of have to be open to hearing the results. If you go out there and start asking questions you're going to get the good and the bad back and sometimes you can confirm assumptions you've made, but from my experience more often than not you often end up denying assumptions you've made in your planning process, so that's one reason why this is really important. It can be iterative and focused on just parts of your program. I know a lot of the Better Building programs are up and running, but I don't think it's too late ever to take a look at a piece of the program, to hone in on a part of the offer and do a little evaluation to see if there is an opportunity for improvement or change that could better the results of the program.

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So I'm gonna focus on two approaches and I'm really gonna leave sort of the evaluation expertise to Jane, the next speaker, and I'll just hit on the next two slides quickly. From our perspective when we're thinking about a process evaluation we're really looking at sort of two approaches. There's the formal process evaluation using a third party evaluation firm and these are usually much more in depth. You have experts involved in conducting interviews with participants. They are certainly more costly than doing something sort of quick and dirty, but they also can give you some really good information that can either help you partway through your program path or can help you as you look at the next generation of your program. The second approach really is informal evaluation, something maybe you can complete in house, and I am all for this kind of work as well. I think it can be a really great way to quickly and inexpensively learn something about your program and help you make improvements sort of along the path. It does require that you have some expertise in terms of asking questions and framing things so you know how to get the information you're looking for and you do need to keep in mind if you do something more informal it really provides a flavor. It doesn't necessarily provide all the details. A quick example of when we've used this in some of our programs is we were looking at whether we needed a bigger contractor _____ for a program that we were offering and we were ready to go. We thought this is a good idea, this is gonna make all the difference, but we decided to stop and have someone on our staff do a quick phone survey of some of the contractors participating in the program and ask some questions around this topic. She came back and we found out that the spiff wasn't really the motivating factor at all, that there were a couple of other things we could

do instead, and it saved us from jumping down the path on an approach that wasn't gonna give us the results that we were hoping for in the end.

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So a process evaluation approach, and again I think Jane will talk more about this, but there's a couple ways to go at it. You can do in depth interviews and from my end I have been interviewed by evaluators as a program staff perspective. We have energy advocates involved in our Better Buildings programs and in some of our pilot programs they participated in the interviews, contractors, homeowners, anyone who is touched by the program in depth interviews can help get at sort of what, where, when, why, and how they decided to participate. What their experience was, what we could do better, where we could do better, etc. Participant surveys, less in depth but can get you a higher level view of how people are feeling about the program, and as you can see it kind of gives you a census of the overall program participants hopefully at different points in time in their participation.

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So I'm gonna talk specifically about how we did both of these approaches in a pilot program we were running in Wisconsin and Milwaukee called Together We Save. I should note that this pilot program really was a precursor to the Wisconsin Better Buildings program, so it will sound a lot like many of the Better Buildings programs that are running out there today. It really aimed to leverage a community-based approach to increase energy efficiency retrofits in homes in the city of Milwaukee. It was very turnkey. It involved having what we call energy advocates helping the homeowner through the whole process. It had a financing component and we ran it for about 18 months and our target was 100 homes in two neighborhoods, so it was very small, but we considered it a test and learn opportunity that could get us to the next stage in terms of expanding these programs farther and getting bigger reach.

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So in this program we have two points of evaluation on process. We had one post-design but pre-launch, and I know for some programs you may be too far down the road for that, but I think this is a really important point for people to consider when they're designing programs. Oftentimes we go into the design phase with assumptions about what we need to do, and taking the temperature pre-launch, post-design can help confirm those assumptions, it can help you determine where you may need to tweak design, or where you may just be way off from what your customers might be looking for. The second is mid-course and for our Together We Save program the mid-course evaluation was a formal process evaluation conducted by a third party evaluation firm, and through that evaluation we were able to look inward for sort of process improvements on our end and look outward for improvements on how we could change the program for version two, or what we could learn as we were moving into getting ready to launch some of the Better Buildings programs in Wisconsin.

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So a little more detail on these. The informal evaluation as I mentioned was something that we did post-design but pre-launch, and I'll tell you when we went into the design phase for this program we had a planning group who worked with us on developing this program. It involved the city, it involved the utility, it involved the state's energy efficiency and renewable energy program, it involved some local advocates, older folks. We had a very big group involved in designing this pilot, and in the initial design phase there was a really heavy financing focus on the design, so

a lot of the program was about offering financing for the retrofit work for those costs that wouldn't be supported by incentives. We decided before we launched we really needed to understand if that's something people needed, so we did a sort of quick survey partnering with another firm to just ask customers who lived in the target neighborhoods what they thought of some components of the program, of the financing component, of the different partners we were gonna leverage and what their impression would be if those leveraged partners in the materials and then convincing them to participate, and in the type of detail we might provide in reports or assessment summaries that would help encourage them to complete work. So those were sort of the three areas of focus in our pre-launch informal evaluation. As I mentioned earlier, oftentimes your assumptions are wrong, and in this case we found out a lot of our assumptions were wrong, and had we not done this we would've had gone pretty far down the road with a design that wasn't really speaking to the customers we were trying to reach. So again, heavy emphasis on financing was not supported as a need in the pre-launch surveys. Which of the brands we thought might be most relevant to the customers participating in the program, so we thought it might be really important to have the utility brand front and center versus the city brand front and center, and we kind of found out that the customers had very definitive opinions about one brand versus the other, and that helped us decide how to position the partners and how to make sure that customers really believed in the entity that was delivering the program to them. Then in terms of the assessment form I think this always happens when you're on the program side. We always think the customer wants a lot more detail than they really do, and part of this pre-survey we sent out a sample assessment form. It has level of payback, it had all kinds of information that the customer could use to determine how much they might save and how much improvements were gonna cost, how long it would take to pay that back, etc. The feedback we got from customers was that was way too much information. They did not want that kind of detail. They wanted a page or two that just told them what they needed to do. They wanted kind of one number around what they might save. So we saved I think a lot of pain on our end and pain on the customers' end by asking them about that up front because we were going to provide them with a much too detailed assessment that was probably gonna cause sort of analysis, paralysis, and keep customers from moving forward with the program. So that's kind of the pre-launch what we learned, and we had to kind of quickly go back and make some changes to the program design, but from our perspective it was better to do that pre-launch than to get three months down the road and find we had a problem.

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In terms of sort of more formal evaluation, that mid-course approach I was talking to you, I just wanna say that again a lot of people think "I'm too far in, I don't have time to do this", and I think mid-course process evaluation is really vital to complete especially in programs where you maybe have a year and a half to two years that you're running. I think it's really important to consider this as an option maybe a third or halfway into the program because I don't think it's ever too late to make tweaks that can increase participation and help improve process for the customers. So in this same pilot we did this mid-course formal process evaluation and our aim in this one was really to look inward and to make process improvements so that we could in a version two of the program or the last six to eight months of the program deal with some of the issues that we might hear from customers. One of the things we really learned was that timing was an issue. It takes a really long time to get customers through the process. You have their decision points in there, you have our decision points, getting the contractor lined up to be there, getting the technical

reviews done, etc. Through the process evaluation we were able to really pick out which of those points were the most painful for the contractors, for our technical experts on the program, and for the customers, and in the future design phases able to look at ways to streamline some of those processes. In a second iteration of this pilot that we're running in another community we've been able to cut that timing issue down by about two-thirds, speeding up the process a lot more for customers. We also looked at outward improvements for sort of the next version, and part of that was trying to understand what piece of the pilot do the customers value the most. So what should we put front and center going forward when we're talking about these types of programs? We certainly had our opinions on what we thought that might be. As I mentioned earlier we really thought that could be financing, and by asking customers these questions and getting to understand that we learned that the answer was very different than we thought it was, and we were able to position those pieces customers most appreciated more front and center, forward for this pilot, and then even more so for the Better Buildings program that we have operating in cities in Wisconsin. I'll talk a little bit about how that came out in a future slide, again kind of to the same point, allowing us to focus on what matters most to the customers participating and to the contractors working on the program. I just wanna make a quick note that our process evaluation was completed by a third party evaluator who worked on the Focus On Energy program that was completed by _____ _____, and I want to make sure I say their name 'cause they did a lot of this hard work and we were able to use it to improve our program.

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So this slide's important because it gives you a sense of how different things can be based on compared to what you think it might be. So we really thought financing was gonna be the most important factor for customers participating in our pilot programs, and if you look at this you can see that only 7 percent of the respondents actually thought that was the most important factor for them, so we were way off in thinking that this was number one and in fact it was on the bottom of the pile. This pilot program also had financial incentives so there were rebates for completing work, and as you can see that is what customers thought was the most important, and that's not a surprise. That's typically what we see customers say when we ask them, "What matters to you?" They often say it's financial incentives. Another thing that really surprised us was we thought the turnkey contractor approach, so them not having to go out and hire a contractor themselves and deal with all of that was gonna be really appealing to people and that would be the key to getting them to do these retrofits, and as we found out only 16 percent of the respondents thought that was really important, and from our perspective this was really important for us to know because this was probably the most complicated piece of running this pilot program. We were sort of the general contractor. We had contractors under contract to us to do the work in these homes and it took a tremendous amount of management to do that. So learning that the turnkey contractor approach was really not as important as other factors for customers was very important to us and it caused us to completely change our design approach going forward for all of these pilot programs we've been running, and we haven't seen any big negative impact from that. We're still seeing decent participation in our other pilot programs and it just confirms that the turnkey contractor wasn't as important as we thought. A couple other interesting things that the energy advocate or that person who can sort of move people through the process, participating in a home retrofit program, we weren't sure how important that would be. 38 percent, that's a fairly positive rating for customers participating in the program, and so we've carried that piece forward into other pilot programs. I think my point being that you can learn a lot and it can

completely turn your thoughts upside-down in terms of what you think customers want versus what they really want, and it's important to know that before you get too far along down the path of program implementation and/or too far into your program that you can't make a change.

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So in terms of cost I was asked to just touch on cost briefly if you go to the next slide. I think a lot of people have concern about evaluation is expensive and dollars should go to incentives or financing or other pieces for customers, and evaluation can be expensive. Formal evaluation in Wisconsin is about 6 percent of program budget, but there is really a range. Informal evaluation or more small scale evaluation to sort of take the temperature of where our program is can be 1.5 to 2 percent of program budgets, and I think that's a pretty small price to pay and a pretty small investment to make to really learning what your customers want and understanding if you're talking to them, reaching them, and offering them the right things. So I think it's a balance. You have to balance those additional costs or those costs going towards evaluation with again going too far down in one direction and finding out you've gone the wrong way and having to turn around and go back, which I think in the end can be more costly and more damaging to programs than investing a little bit in research and understanding your customers up front.

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Next slide is my contact information and the contact information for the manager who did the process evaluation for our Together We Save program at _____ _____ and if you have any questions please feel free to let me know or ask now.

Amanda:
Great. Thank you, Sara. If you have any questions feel free to just type in your question real quick or you can save it until the end. Actually let's save those questions until the end.

Jane:
There's just one question on the chat.

Amanda:
Jane, can you read it?

Jane:
It says, "What percent of staff time was needed to run the informal evaluation?"

Sara Vandergrist:
Sure. You know it was pretty small. Any time you do something where you're trying to reach out to a group of customers who you don't have on a contact list, that's the most time consuming part. We had two neighborhoods we were working in and we had to find a way to get to those homeowners so we could be asking people in our target neighborhoods the questions we needed to ask, and I would say overall this sort of more informal evaluation probably costs us about $20,000.00 in staff time, analysis, a third party that came in and did a little bit of work for us on the evaluations, so the benefit of time I couldn't give you exact hours, but giving you sort of that amount might give you an idea of the scope of that. It was nobody's full time job while it was being done and it was completed in about four weeks from start to finish.

Amanda:
Thanks, Sara. Next we'd like to have our evaluation expert on the line, Jane Peters with Research Interaction. She's the president and founder of Research Interaction and has more than 30 years of experience in evaluation, focusing on energy efficiency, renewable energy, and other environmental issues as well as program performance measurements, customer research, and market assessment. Jane, the floor is yours.

Jane Peters:
Thanks, Amanda. Lila and Sara have given some really good examples of the types of evaluations that folks could do on their various Aura funded projects without having to go out and get a third party to come in and do evaluation, and the purpose of my presentation is to sort of encourage you to help make evaluation happen in your organization.

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So what I wanna talk to you about is just touch on a little bit about what evaluation is and I really thank Sara for giving sort of that introduction and steps that you're gonna take, and those are the things I'm gonna concentrate on, so how do you know what you're supposed to focus on, what sort of _____ _____ collection methods, etc. and then where you might get help so that you could do this on your own if you have – I suppose you all do – have limited budgets.

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Okay, so evaluation. It's fundamentally very simply systematic feedback. Informally or formally again is less the issue than how systematic the process is. Almost any program that operates has informal un-systematic feedback. Somebody calls you up and says, "You didn't do this the way I wanted" or "That was fabulous and I told my mother about this", or they call somebody else who's a funder or something like that. So these sorts of informal feedback happen all the time. What evaluation is, is systematic feedback, feedback that you can actually generalize to the program and not just say somebody feels really good or somebody feels really bad. So what I've got here are these little green spots would be places where you could conduct an evaluation along the course of a project going towards your goals, the notion being that you conduct sort of first surveys, small surveys periodically to just give you a touch of what's going on in your program. Lila talked about an assessment that was done very early so they could figure out what to do and it would be great to then hear that again now coming up on six months having since January, doing another one of those blitz to see whether or not there's anything that needs to be touched on still. That's the sort of thing that we're talking about, quick little touch backs in the same way that Sara talked about, did that lunch and did then that midterm evaluation.

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Okay, so program theory. You hear this idea, what's my program theory? Well think of it this way. What is your program trying to do? How will you know that you actually had any success? I try to think of this theory as sort of an arrow. You're trying to move from the beginning to that end, so you're going from well we have this idea that if we give enough people messages and awareness and then they get a contractor and they get financing and they get this audit, then they will do this whole house retrofit or make whatever purchases and that will lead to savings. It's rather simplistic, but thinking about what is it we're gonna take, what messages do we need to give, that defines it more clearly, or what's the information needs to be in

the audit, or what services do they need from contractors. Defining that then brings it from the simple arrow into more concrete pieces of the program that lead towards that ultimate effort of getting your savings goals. So you need to think about your program as a process and then the notion of doing a process evaluation begins to make a little bit more sense because you're trying to see whether or not you're actually completing the various steps in the process that you want to complete in order to achieve the goal at the end.

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Okay, so you decide yes I do wanna know whether or not I'm getting close to where I wanna go. You have to think about who has the possible answers. There are issues that you may specifically wanna know such as why is it that 300 people have called up for audits and only one person has completed anything so far? I mean that might be on your mind as to what's going on there. You might wanna know why is it that 20 people have gone to the bank fro financing and all 20 got it? What is it that made that work? So you wanna know who has the answers relative to the type of questions that you're asking, and it can be any of a number of different types of folks.

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I wanna talk briefly about privacy and respect. I know in some of the Better Buildings meetings I've attended there's been a lot of discussion about getting utility data and about how difficult it is and so there's this sense that the utilities are standing in the way of getting that information, but the reason is because of laws about privacy. It's something that we all have to pay attention to no matter what side of the equation we're on, whether we're the community group or the city or the county or utility or the evaluator. Privacy is something that people really value. It's been enshrined in law and those laws have gotten more strict, and with computers and the ability to steal information having gotten in fact easier because of computers, privacy protection is really necessary and more required than ever. So utilities have a lot of restrictions. In fact as somebody who's worked with utility companies now for 25 to 30 years it's very interesting. This year has been the most significant change in the restrictions that we have as evaluators, so there are a lot of rules that are being imposed on all of us right now as we deal with what is considered to be personal data. So when you go out and work with your customers you're gonna have to be respectful of them. You're gonna have to request permission to use their information so that you can actually conduct this research, and if you don't request their permission then you will have limits on what you can do. I just wanted to point out that it's very important that you ask their permission and then get their permission so that you will be able to use those data. Lila talked about one of the ways that some folks have come up with how to get the utility data, and those are basically committing to using the codes that people already having and using those and allowing their processes to link back and forth.

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So what you need to do. You need to collect contact information. You're gonna need to get names, phone numbers, email address and street addresses. That's pretty private information, so when you ask that you're going to have to tell them what it's for, which in this case would be not sales but for research and for participation in the program. You can do that off of application forms, registration forms, various sign-up sheets, when the auditor or the assessment person goes and conducts visits or from contractors if you coordinate that with contractors, but getting that information will

make it possible for you to do the next steps, which are actually conducting the research with folks.

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Okay, so a little while ago you decided that yeah, I really wanna know why this financing is really working well at this bank. Yeah I really wanna know why we're not getting any follow through on all those people who signed up. You're gonna generate the issues for the study. You wanna understand what are you trying to do, what don't you know, and you do this in a group effort. You get the folks who are working on the program around the table, talk about the issues that you need answers to, why it's not working, why it's not working well, and what seems to be getting in the way of your success. In energy efficiency research we often call this the barriers, but it's really what's getting in the way of your success and what other things that you're hearing so you are getting some calls. Ask what types of calls are you getting? Are they positive calls? Are they negative calls? Are they clues to something that you need to know something more about? One of the things that we hear a lot from our utility and energy program contacts is that they wanna know just how serious is a particular problem that they've heard about over the phone. So we'll take that issue and we'll include it in our research and find out whether or not in fact it's a problem for multiple people or just those one or two that have been calling. You want to think about what do you wanna change? So Sara was talking about trying to understand where their program is now and whether the assumption that they had about how the program was working would actually work by asking these questions early before the program actually launched. But then actually as the program was launching such as Lila was talking about, you've got a program that's in the field and you're not getting the response. You wanna know what is it that we need to change? Let's change out those various pieces.

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Now this is a tool that you can use to help you figure out what the questions are that you ask. First you identify issues such as I wanna know how much people are aware of the program, where they heard about it, and whether or not they're interested in the type of services we're offering. So you come up with the issue, then you begin to identify the types of questions that would relate to that issue of awareness, and you would identify then what population would likely be able to give you answers about that. So for instance on the issue about the experience they had with the service, if they get it in an audit or assessment report they can address it. If you are interested in why people have not gone from the point of awareness to assessment since they haven't received the assessment yet you're not gonna ask them what they thought about the audit report. So what's their next step? We're only gonna ask that of people who actually took the application and then participated, that they didn't drop out in between 'cause they can't tell us. So one of the things that we have done, research into action provided to the Department of Energy are some topics and question libraries for the types of issues and associated questions that you could ask consumers and the types of questions you could ask contractors. So there's two libraries of issues and questions that we've provided that Amanda will talk about later. Can we go to the next slide please?

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Once you get those ideas you're going to then want to do the actual surveys, either phone interviews or telephone or email surveys. By the way, we tend to think of interviews as going to small groups of people such as Sara was talking about like the staff people or if you have ten contractors working in your program you probably just

want to do an interview with them, but if you have 40 contractors then you're gonna wanna do a survey because you wanna get a sample and you want to use closed-ended questions to get their responses, so you can tally across and say, "So many percent said x and so many percent said y." So in addition to generating this library of topics and questions, we also generate some examples of surveys. We have three for consumers, those who just signed up, those who dropped out, and those who are actually going forth and participating with test-ins and test-outs. Then we have one for contractors about their general experience with the program and then information about their firm so you can see what types of contractors are participating in your firm. So we have these samples of questions and the matrix of issues that are the topic and question library and the examples of _____.

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So when you conduct this research, I think Lila and Sara talked a lot about how it takes quite a bit of effort. You actually have to spend some time. You contact people. You're gonna develop the instrument either for your own use for a phone survey or as an email survey. There's several free tools that you can use. There's Survey Monkey, there's Lime Survey, there's Free Online Surveys, and there's Zoomerang. So these are at least four different companies that make online survey tools. You can use those with phone interviews. You can use them with an email that you send out to people and have them then come back and respond to the survey themselves online. So they are tools that you can use in a variety of different ways. When you collect this information you're again going to make this instrument be as systematic as possible so that the issues directly relate to the questions and the questions are appropriate for the different groups. You don't want to have preferences in which you choose to talk with. So we usually try and randomly pick people to call or to send emails to participate in a survey. You have to pick enough people and people often ask, "How do you know enough?" There's a rule of thumb. If you have more than a couple hundred people you can call 68 people and you'll have a pretty good sample. That's not based on being half, but it's based on statistical properties. If you only have about 68 people then you might have to call a lot more because the statistical properties tell you that you need to get maybe 50 or 45, so you can't use the – at least 50 percent is at my call enough. So it is possible to figure out the number to call. You don't need to call all, but you should call a good sample and you should call them without any preference. You want to use the same questions across multiple groups. If you're calling to try and find out about awareness you don't want to change the question a lot for different groups. That's why we use that library and that matrix I showed earlier. So what are the questions that you're gonna ask about awareness? Make sure you ask it the same way for different groups. Ultimately you're gonna hear good news and you're gonna hear bad news. Some people are gonna tell you everything's great and other people are gonna tell you it's not. In truth if you want to improve your program, make it run as effectively as possible, the bad news often can be more useful than the good news. So don't be afraid to hear the bad news 'cause it might tell you something that's really important. On a program that we were looking at, which also used the term "energy advocate", we did five surveys and in every survey we had people objecting to the term energy advocate, but it wasn't until the end of this survey that the program decided that maybe they would change that term, and it may be working great in Wisconsin, but it wasn't working at this other place very well, so you never know. You can't necessarily guarantee that terms that are used in one city or in one county or state are going to be comfortable for people in other cities or counties or states.

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So a question was asked about how much time does it take to do this and Sara gave you some good information about how much money is being spent on formal evaluations versus informal evaluations. Your capacity will help you define how much you need to spend to do this or how much effort it's gonna take. You might have somebody volunteering who actually has research experience and they wanna do this. You might find someone who wants to do this as part of their dissertation. There are some projects like that going on around the country right now. You might have a really big meeting room and you could bring people into that meeting room and sit down and invite 12 contractors to come. Maybe only 8 or 10 would show up. Give them some snacks, have them sit down and talk about what happened to them, or the same with some of your homeowners who participated and then dropped out. Have them come in and sit around and talk. You don't have to use a formal focus group facility. You can use your own meeting room and have someone facilitate it who's a good facilitator. Have the folks who are on the staff being on the outside listening in. We recently did a focus group that was done in a rural part of the northwest out in Idaho and we had a computer and a camera and we did a Web X. That way we were able to show the focus group to people who were on the Pacific coast who weren't actually in Idaho so they could see what was going on. They could observe it. Similarly you could do that sort of thing where you could have a simple Web X or other type of tool like that and use that to show your focus group outside to people who aren't in the room. You don't have to have a room with special glass walls to do this. The computer skills that you have access to I know a lot of groups have a lot of young volunteers with a lot of computer skills, they can be utilized to really improve your ability to collect information. Some groups are having their volunteers do the phone surveys like Lila said. Others are collecting information from people with short forms, say an outreach meeting or a fair that you might have a booth at. So use the tools that you have, but be systematic, and make sure you get information from people so that you can follow up and tell them it's for research purposes, and use it for that. Don't use it for sales but use it for research or participation in the program. Tell them you won't sell the list. They might be willing to give you the information.

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We're just about coming up on time for questions. Once you do this research you shouldn't just hide it away. Prepare some sort of written summary of what you learned. Prepare a presentation. Share it with the team because the point isn't just to collect the information but it's actually to use it. We've already heard and I just wanna reiterate, be prepared for people to be surprised about what they learned. People get pretty committed to the program as they've designed it. We've been doing this for 30 years and we're always learning new things about what it takes to get people interested in energy efficiency because new people are coming all the time, and those people weren't as interested before and now they're interested today. So there's always something new to learn and we cannot expect that we've already figured it all out or else we'll all be done. Make changes based on what you learn and then do more research to see how those changes affected the people you're trying to attract. There's this constant evolution and we can learn from one thing that worked well, we can maybe make further improvements and learn from that and do it better next time.

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My next slide is just some ideas again for where you might find some help: local colleges, local research professionals, American Evaluation Association has people all over the country, environmental or energy organizations, certainly interns, and then

I mentioned Survey Monkey here, but I also told you about Free Online Surveys, Lime Survey, and Zoomerang as other possible low cost or no cost survey tools that you can use to help you, and my contact information is on the next, and I think we have time for questions. Amanda, it's up to you.

Amanda:
Thanks, Jane. Let me take a few minutes very briefly to show you where the evaluation tools that Jane had mentioned are located.

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So as Jane mentioned we have put together, Research Into Action has developed a number of resources for Better Buildings including a program evaluation _____ and question library for program participants and also for contractors as well as three sample surveys of how to collect that information. So these tools are located on the Better Buildings Google site, and they'll also be located on the Better Buildings website sometime soon, but in the meantime I'd like to take a minute and just show you where they are on the Google site. If you don't have access to the Google site and you would like to use these resources, feel free to type into the questions box on the right side of your screen your name, email address, and just a brief note requesting these tools and we can make sure to email them to you. So these are located on the Better Buildings Google site and after you sign in they're on the data and evaluation page. If you scroll down you can see a section under data and evaluation topics and resources, process and impact evaluation, and here are where the resources in a Word Document form are available for you to download, and you can access them and feel free to copy and paste some of the questions and use them to develop your own surveys. I have here the library for program participants to give you a sense of what you'll be looking at. It's organized by identifying what kind of research questions you have, you've identified and you would like to have answered by your program, by the focus group that you are going to be asking the questions, and also by particular topics. How are your program participants for example becoming aware of your program and what are barriers that they've run into going through your program process? So there are a number of research questions that you can use as a starting point. This isn't meant to be a full compendium by any means of all your research questions and topics, but it's definitely pretty comprehensive and it would be a great starting point for you. We also have as I mentioned a number of example email surveys and phone surveys. This is an example of the email survey that you could send to participants in your program who went all the way through your process and completed an energy efficiency upgrade, and you can paste it into an online survey tool that you use via email or however you find it most effective. So again these are all located on the Better Buildings Google site and they'll be shortly posted on to the Better Buildings website. So let's go ahead and open the floor up to any questions. If you have any questions feel free to go ahead and type them in or raise your hand virtually. Actually what might be most effective is Sargon, why don't we open up the floor to all the attendees and we can have a bit of a discussion on what everyone is thinking in this piece of their program.

Sargon de Jesus:
Okay.

Amanda:
So a few questions in our remaining few minutes for all of our Better Buildings _____. What is your plan? How are you thinking of developing or using something like a real time evaluation or process evaluation to get a better sense of what's

working in your program? Is there anyone who would like to talk about their response?

Chuck Wilson:
Amanda, are we un-muted?

Amanda:
Yes. Everyone is un-muted now.

Chuck Wilson:
It's Chuck Wilson calling. I am with the town of University Park, Maryland. First of all thanks to all the presenters. I thought this was a very helpful session and I have two questions. The first has to do with tying all of your survey feedback into a database. I'd be curious to know what sort of data setup you guys used because each initiative presumably was a different size and we are right now wrestling with the issue of how to organize our data, so I think if people could give some sort of indication on using the instruments but then tying that to the back end, that's a mechanical question. The second one somewhat related is continually updating the customer resource contact. As you go through these questionnaires and a customer moves from one category, say they registered for the program but haven't gotten the audit, and the next time you contact them they've gotten the audit, how do you keep track of that? Is there a software like Sales Force or something that you can use to help kind of manage those outreach tasks? So those would be the two questions.

Jane Peters:
I wouldn't speak to software particularly. The one thing I'd say is when you're going to be conducting research you wanna be careful what thing you're calling people about. So let's say you have folks who have applied and it's been just a few weeks. You can't necessarily assume they've dropped out because they haven't done anything, but if it's been six months then you probably should look at those dropouts and ask why they've dropped out. Assume that some may be going forward and some may not, but really the question then becomes what percent of the people who haven't done anything are going forward, what percent aren't, and of those who aren't, what do you need to know to help them go forward if anything and those who are going forward, is there anything you can help them move more quickly. So that whole process of identifying the issues and who to survey is actually fairly complicated in the sense that you wanna make sure you don't inadvertently put somebody in a bin and assume that that's the end of the process because as you know people are always moving along the process. Somebody else has something to say about databases?

Sargon de Jesus:
Amanda?

Amanda:
Oh, I'm so sorry. I was on mute. My bad. I think let's go ahead and wrap up with the session and thank you, everyone for calling in.

Sargon de Jesus:
All right. Thank you everyone for participating. Again follow up materials will be made available on the Google site, so check in the next week or so if you want to reference these presentations again. Thank you again to all three of our presenters and to Amanda as well.

[End of Audio]