



Conduct Community Outreach

Outreach campaigns that focus entirely on education create public awareness of issues, but have little or no effect on behavior. Direct personal contact is far more effective. Community-based social marketing (CBSM) goes beyond traditional outreach efforts by leveraging community relationships and social interactions to build upon informational campaigns. CBSM requires those performing outreach to think carefully about their desired goals and how they can utilize local, community-based interests, values, and relationships to achieve such goals. It requires effective and knowledgeable leaders, a clear vision of targeted behaviors or actions, focused and personalized messages, and a clear process to adopt targeted behaviors. This strategy outlines how to design and implement community outreach for energy efforts using community-based social marketing.

Program Implementation Steps

1. Select Behaviors to Encourage.

To effectively promote energy actions, first identify what specific behaviors to target. Are you trying to encourage people to sign up for an energy audit? To use a programmable thermostat? Selected behaviors should have a high impact, a high probability of being adopted, and a low current level of penetration in the target audience.

2. Identify Barriers and Benefits.

Even marketing can be ineffective if the behavior it is encouraging is difficult, costly, or unusual. After selecting the behaviors to promote, identify the barriers to such behaviors. Is an energy audit considered too time consuming? Is a programmable thermostat considered too expensive? Perceptions of barriers—even mistaken ones—are as important as actual barriers. Misperceptions can be identified by conducting literature reviews, observations, focus groups, and surveys. Outreach strategies will directly address these barriers.

Barrier	Strategy
Lack of motivation	Commitment, social norms, incentives
Forget to act	Prompts
Lack of social pressure	Social norms
Lack of knowledge	Communication, social diffusion
Inconvenience	Convenience

3. Design Strategy.

Tailor strategies to address specific barriers and combine them as needed.

- **Offer incentives** – Incentives are most effective when they are presented at the time a behavior occurs (think store sales rather than coupons). They need to be large enough to be taken seriously, but past a certain point they lead to diminishing returns. Be careful about eventually removing incentives—that can feel like a disincentive, and people’s reactions to disincentives can be unpredictable.
 - Highlight Mass Save’s financial rebates and other incentives for energy efficiency improvements. Explain to residents or businesses that they have actually already paid into the Mass Save system through a system benefits charge on their utility bill.
 - Prizes should be meaningful—no one really cares about getting another free reusable bag or t-shirt. Some energy campaigns have sought donations from utility providers or private businesses to provide solar panels on schools or gift cards to local businesses.
 - Provide public recognition in the local paper, on the municipal website, etc. This type of incentive may be particularly effective for those who are not motivated by financial incentives.
- **Make it convenient** – All the messaging in the world cannot convince people to do something that is seriously inconvenient. Addressing the factors that prevent people from adopting behaviors is more effective than trying to change their minds.
 - Installing energy-efficient light bulbs and low-flow faucets at the time an energy audit is conducted removes multiple steps that may prevent residents from doing it themselves.
 - Addressing convenience issues may take more resources than are available. If this is the case, consider making the unwanted behavior more inconvenient, for instance by charging more for it.
- **Build commitment** – People have a strong desire to be seen as consistent, so a simple commitment can be an effective way to encourage behavior. Written pledges not only give a person more incentive to follow through with an action, but they can also be displayed (the more public the commitment the better). However, commitments must be voluntary—they do not work if people feel pressured.
 - Keep written pledges simple and non-authoritarian (e.g., “I pledge to sign up for a MassSave audit”).
 - Follow up with people to remind them that they expressed interest in the program.

- Get homeowners involved in their own energy audits—the small act of looking into an attic or touching an uninsulated water heater makes the issue more concrete.
- **Emphasize social norms** – Descriptive norms indicate which behaviors are engaged in by a community. If an undesirable behavior is a frequent occurrence, showcasing the frequency of it may actually encourage others to engage in that action too. Therefore, one should only use descriptive norms to promote desirable behaviors. Injunctive norms promote behaviors approved of by the community. A message with both a descriptive and an injunctive norm is most effective.
 - Use descriptive norms to promote desirable behavior: “90% of guests at this hotel choose to re-use their towels.”
 - Back up descriptive norms with injunctive norms: “15 of 25 houses on this block have had energy audits. Keep up the good work! 😊”
- **Encourage social diffusion** – Modeling desired behavior is one of the most effective ways of encouraging it in others, and people are most likely to be influenced by people they see as similar to themselves—neighbors, friends, family. Community volunteers or block leaders who already engage in the activity are the best ambassadors on the neighborhood level. Existing volunteer groups, influential community members, or local leaders are all resources that should be explored.
 - Ask those who have had energy audits to place signs in their yards announcing it.
 - Ask solar early adopters to host open houses and talk to their neighbors about their experience.
- **Use prompts** – For behaviors that are easily forgotten, reminders reinforce previous commitments. In order to be effective, prompts should be as close in time and space as possible to the desired behavior.
 - Place stickers on light switches, thermostats, dishwashers, and washing machines.
 - Give people take-home cards to remind them of their written pledges.
- **Communicate effectively** – Messages should be vivid, concrete, and personalized in order to gain and keep people’s attention.
 - Know the audience. People are more likely to respond to messages that are tailored to their concerns and just slightly more extreme than their own beliefs. If people are worried about costs, use “free” as a selling point; if people are busy, show them how little time/effort the action requires.
 - Keep it simple and just present one side of an issue if the audience is new to the subject. Present both sides if the audience is more knowledgeable.

- Use the right messengers. The more credible a person or organization is, the more influence they have.
- Emphasize losses due to inaction rather than savings due to action.
- Present the impact of behavior changes.
- Combine descriptions of problems with clear, straightforward suggestions for action.

4. Pilot Strategy.

Use small-scale pilots to test the effectiveness of various strategies before using more resources to expand the program. To ensure that the results are actually due to the strategy, compare any behavior changes to those of a control group that has not been approached yet.

5. Implement and Evaluate Impact.

Make measuring actual behavior change a priority, both to show the effectiveness of programs that are ending and to make improvements to programs that will continue. Be sure to assess behavior change at different times to show whether the program has had long-term impact, since behavior changes are likely to trail off.

ENHANCED “TRADITIONAL” OUTREACH

- **Advertising in newspapers and mailings** – While traditional advertising and mailings are educational, many people overlook it. Using catchy images in conjunction with social norm messaging could help increase the effectiveness. You can also think about putting messages on mail that people already look at, like water bills.
- **Email** – Everyone is overwhelmed with email. To increase the number of viewers of a mass email, ask a well-known leader or organization to send it out. Emails that focus just on the action you are promoting will likely be more effective than embedding it in a general newsletter that has multiple messages.
- **Workshops** – Themed workshops are a great way to reach people who are not initially interested in energy-related issues. The Housing Assistance Corporation on Cape Cod (HAC) holds new homebuyer workshops that include sections on the benefits of energy efficiency. The audience could easily be expanded to include those who are planning to do major renovations to their home.
- **Tabling** – Although some tabling efforts yield great results, many groups struggle with it because they are either preaching to the choir or at places where people are too busy to talk. One way to improve tabling success is to ask people to make a written pledge to commit to an action and then follow up with them via phone and email to remind them of their commitment. Another way is to offer rewards for signing up, like a gift card to a nearby business.

References

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