# Weatherization Lost and Found: Attempting to Overcome Lost Opportunities from Pre-Weatherization Barriers to Achieve Deeper Savings

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## **ABSTRACT**

Common pre-weatherization barriers—such as evidence of knob and tube wiring, improper dryer venting, and general combustion safety—have historically been reasons that households delay or entirely forgo installing energy-efficiency measures recommended through residential audit programs. When utilities facilitate the expeditious removal of such barriers through education and targeted supplemental incentives, they can capture what would otherwise be a lost opportunity, and encourage their customers to install a greater number of energy-efficiency measures, thus achieving greater and more immediate per-home energy savings.

In this paper, the authors present the evaluation findings of a recent pilot designed to maximize the value of weatherization home audits by helping customers overcome three specific barriers to participation, as observed by the program's implementers.

The pilot was designed to determine if specific incentives that reduce the financial burden of preweatherization could improve measure installation rates. The Evaluation Team was tasked with assessing the viability of the pilot for permanent application and identifying improvements in program design and delivery. This paper discusses whether the financial incentives successfully persuaded customers to install more of the recommended home audit weatherization measures than they would have otherwise.

### Introduction

The Massachusetts Home Energy Services (HES) Program has been in place since the early 1980s, targeting non-low-income residential customers living in single-family houses or multifamily buildings with one to four units. The program offers home energy audits to participating customers, regardless of their heating fuel type. Through these audits, technicians identify opportunities for customers to save energy through a variety of home improvements, including weatherization measures such as insulation and air sealing.

The program's primary goal is to achieve significant energy savings by promoting a whole-house approach and by offering education, incentives, and financing options for gas and electric measures. All cost-effective, energy-saving improvements are targeted. The Massachusetts Program Administrators (PAs) all offer the HES program to their electric and gas customers.

Pre-weatherization barriers discovered during the audit process have historically been reasons that audited households delay or entirely forgo the installation of specifically recommended energy-efficiency measures.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Prior to 2010, the HES Program commonly was referred to as the Mass Save<sup>®</sup> Program, the name by which it is known by the majority of PAs, vendors, contractors, and participants. In 2010, Mass Save made the transition to the overarching brand used for Massachusetts' efficiency programs umbrella marketing efforts.

The PAs designed the Pre-Weatherization pilot with involvement from their lead vendors and stakeholders from the Energy Efficiency Advisory Council and the Green Justice Coalition. This effort seeks to help to minimize the financial burden of pre-weatherization repairs required prior to HES participation. Facilitating the removal of these barriers minimizes health and safety risks—by ensuring that homes meet Building Performance Institute standards—and allows more customers to install the energy-efficiency measures recommended from their home energy assessment.

The PAs offered the pilot from May 2012 and August 2012, providing a financial incentive in addition to the current HES Program offerings. The pilot covered three barriers, selected as they required relatively small financial investments to clear and, according to the pilot proposal, were determined to be those most commonly found during home energy assessments:

- 1. Evidence of knob and tube wiring requiring an inspection (with an incentive up to \$250).<sup>2</sup>
- 2. Improper dryer venting requiring installations/repairs (with an incentive up to \$250).<sup>3</sup>
- 3. General combustion safety requiring an inspection/repair (with an incentive up to \$300).

Current HES Program customers qualified for the pilot if their auditor identified one or more of the three pre-weatherization barriers. General combustion safety and improper dryer venting required tune-ups, repairs, or replacements to meet the pilot's requirements; evidence of knob and tube wiring required additional steps if the wires were live.

In March 2012, the PAs asked Cadmus, Opinion Dynamics, Navigant Consulting, Itron, and Energy and Resource Solutions (collectively called the Evaluation Team) to evaluate the pilot. This provided a unique opportunity to evaluate the pilot in real time and immediately after its conclusion. Background**Program Requirements.** Qualifying for the pilot incentive necessitated fulfilling the following requirements:

- Accepting the offer.
- Working with a program-identified and assigned contractor (the turnkey option), or independently hiring an appropriate expert (either an HVAC contractor or an electrician, depending on the barrier) to clear the barrier and sign pilot paperwork.
- After clearing barriers and achieving sign-off by the contractor or electrician, submitting pilot paperwork to the lead vendor/PA by either: the contract on behalf of participants (the turnkey option) or the customer (if the customer selected the contractor).

All PAs used these general requirements; more detailed requirements such as the pilot deadline varied by PA. Some PAs offered a 30-day timeframe, while others offered a 90-day timeframe. PAs offered customers three delivery mechanisms to participate in the pilot:

- 1. Vendor Turnkey.<sup>4</sup> Customers could request that the lead vendor assign a contractor to clear their barrier and submit paperwork on their behalf (described throughout this paper as the turnkey option).
- 2. Own Contractor. Customers could hire their own contractor or electrician to clear the barrier and sign off on the paperwork. The customer would then submit the offer form, evaluation form, and paid invoice to the lead vendor.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Average cost of addressing these pre-weatherization barriers ranged between \$75 and \$300, and most PAs paid 75% of the actual cost, up to the maximum incentive amount.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> One PA did not include the repair of improper dryer venting as a pre-weatherization pilot measure, as this PA already addressed this barrier as part of its home energy assessments.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The turnkey option discussed pertains to the pilot for customers assigned a program-identified contractor to address preweatherization barriers in their homes. This differs from the turnkey option offered by home performance contractors (HPCs) and lead vendor/program contractor teams for the HES Program, in which either the HPC or lead vendor helped guide the process for the customer, from initial audit through measure installation.

3. Home Performance Contractor. Customers could use an HPC to help guide this process.

The number of options varied by PA; each offered their customers one, two, or three of the above options.

## **Evaluation Method**

This evaluation focused on the effectiveness of the additional incentive in meeting the pilot's stated goal as well as on assessing the delivery of the pilot itself. The method relied on interviews with PAs and lead vendors to understand the pilot's design and implementation as well as on surveys with participating and nonparticipating customers, designed to understand the pilot's impact on customers' decision-making.

#### **Data Collection**

**PA and Lead Vendor Interviews.** The Evaluation Team interviewed all eight PAs and a representative from each of the four lead vendors, seeking to address the following research topics:

- Roles and responsibilities of PA and lead vendor program managers;
- Pilot purpose and goals;
- Pilot design and package delivery;
- Customer interactions;
- Data collection and tracking methods; and
- Suggestions for improved program delivery.

**Participant and Nonparticipant Surveys.** The Evaluation Team conducted phone surveys with pilot participants (those that cleared or were clearing their pre-weatherization barriers at the time of the survey) and nonparticipants (those offered the pilot but opted not to clear their pre-weatherization barrier). Surveys were conducted once the pilot offer had expired, ensuring a clear distinction between participating and nonparticipating customers. Table 1 shows the breakdown of participants and nonparticipants completing the survey.

**Table 1.** Total Survey Respondent by Type of Customer

Туре	Number of Survey Respondents	Percentage of Survey Respondents		
Participants	48*	40.7%		
Nonparticipants	70	59.3%		
Total	118	100%		

<sup>\*</sup>Although the Evaluation Team's goal was to complete 70 participant surveys, only 48 such surveys could be completed before exhausting the sample. The remaining participants in the sample were unwilling to be surveyed or could not be reached after eight to 10 attempts. However, due to the finite population correction factor, the overall participant survey results exceeded 90% confidence with  $\pm 10\%$  precision. The exact confidence and precision associated with each specific question varied.

The Evaluation Team focused the surveys on how the additional pilot incentives influenced customers' decisions to clear or not to clear their pre-weatherization barriers to allow them to move forward with installing weatherization measures.

# **Data Analysis**

Using data from approximately six months of implementation, covering the time period when the pilot was offered as well as several months after, the Evaluation Team analyzed the rate at which customers addressed pre-weatherization barriers. The study also compared HES measure adoption rates and associated *ex ante* savings of pilot participants with historic HES measure adoption rates and associated *ex ante* savings of previous participants. This was done with the entire pilot sample, compared to a similar historic sample, and with just the pilot customers and historic customers who were audited or were offered the pilot incentive in July, thus removing the potential effect of seasonality on the comparison.

# **Findings**

This paper first presents participation results, then the process-related evaluation findings relevant to the pilot, followed by findings associated with the data analysis.

# **Participation Results**

PAs and lead vendors agreed pilot participation was lower than expected; many preweatherization offers were made to customers, but few completions occurred. Other participation results included:

- Overall, 104 of 505 total customers, or 21%, of those offered the pilot accepted. The remaining 401 either explicitly declined the incentive or allowed the offer to expire.
- The majority of the customers offered the incentive were new customers, who received the offer during their first audit (n=446); these customers had a 22% acceptance rate.
- The small number of prior customers offered the pilot (n=59) received it through a callback or mailing; these customers had a lower 14% acceptance rate.

# **Process Findings**

During evaluation of the pilot process and design, the Evaluation Team identified three main topics for discussion with the PAs:

- Whether or not to offer customers a turnkey option when hiring a contractor to clear the identified barrier.
- The confusion many customers experienced regarding the cost of inspecting and mitigating knob and tube wiring.
- The appropriate time limit to allow customers to clear their barrier to qualify for the pilot incentive.

**Turnkey Issue.** As discussed, PAs offered their customers a choice of up to three delivery mechanisms to participate in the program: using the turnkey option, finding their own contractor, or using an HPC.

In the event that the pilot offering be added to the HES program, the most common delivery mechanism issue cited by all PAs and lead vendors, was whether or not to offer turnkey services. While the turnkey option could benefit customers by offering easy access to approved contractors and be allowing customers to pay only a co-pay rather than full upfront costs, the PAs and lead vendors that offered the turnkey option were uncertain of its long-term viability.

These PAs and lead vendors cited difficulties in identifying and enrolling contractors, given the limited financial opportunities for these contractors. In other words, the level of work required by the pilot (inspection of knob and tube wiring, and clearance of other pre-weatherization barriers) was not of sufficient interest to enlist an adequate number of approved turnkey contractors. These PAs and lead vendors also cited administrative burdens, such as managing and updating the lists, as a challenge to turnkey viability. Furthermore, according to survey respondents, only a small number of participants used this delivery option (n=2).<sup>5</sup>

**Knob and Tube Wiring Cost Confusion.** Many customers expressed confusion regarding knob and tube wiring.

*Requirements.* If knob and tube wiring was found in a home during the audit process, the customer had to have it inspected before installing any weatherization measures.

- If, upon inspection, the knob and tube wiring was found to be inactive, a certified electrician's signature on the pilot paperwork was sufficient documentation to install certain weatherization measures.
- If the electrician determined the wiring was live, it was required to be deactivated (and presumably replaced) prior to installing select weatherization measures.<sup>6</sup>

Because a distinction must be made between these two steps, this paper refers to the initial inspection (which determines whether the wiring is live) as "inspection," and refers to the step to deactivate or remove wiring (if it is found to be live) as "mitigation."

Survey and Interview Findings. In interviews, PAs and lead vendors cited the overall assumed costs of clearing barriers, particularly for mitigating live knob and tube wiring, as the most common participation challenge. One lead vendor noted old wiring is unsurprising in aged New England houses: "One comment I have heard more than once is about the knob and tube barrier. The incentive covers the inspection to see if the wiring is live, but it doesn't cover if the wiring needs to be removed, which is very expensive and it's the barrier we most often come across."

Customer survey results supported their assertion: 25 nonparticipants (36%) said the cost of clearing the barrier was the main reason they did not take advantage of the pilot incentive. Many of these respondents had knob and tube wiring, and likely referred to the cost of rewiring their home (mitigation), not to the cost of having their wiring inspected.

The Evaluation Team found that survey respondents—particularly nonparticipants—had a difficult time separating the concepts of knob and tube wiring inspection from mitigation, and they often confused the costs associated with each activity. During the survey, even after being told that the incentive covered a wiring inspection, nonparticipants wanted a higher incentive; they did not differentiate between the cost of the inspection and the cost of mitigating live knob and tube wiring.

Thirty-day and 90-day Pilot Time Limits. Another frequent topic of discussion from stakeholder interviews and from customer surveys was the number of days a customer had to clear the barrier to ensure eligibility for the incentive.

Stakeholders and customers subjected to the 30-day requirement indicated that additional time would have helped. Several survey respondents (both participants and nonparticipants) given the offer

<sup>6</sup> It is critical to note that the incentive offered through the pilot only covered the cost of knob and tube wiring inspection, not mitigation. If knob and tube wiring was identified as live, the customer was financially responsible for having their home rewired before installing any insulation measures through HES.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Only a subset of survey customers were asked questions about whether or not a turnkey option was available and which option they chose.

with a 30-day deadline indicated the timeframe presented a challenge to addressing pilot barriers (12%, n=13). Only one respondent given a 90-day deadline considered the timeframe too short (7%, n=1).

Despite the responses that the 30-day timeframe was too short, it should be noted that the three PAs with the highest participation rates (acceptances per offer) all required a 30-day deadline. However, given other program design differences between these three PAs and the PAs requiring a 90-day deadline, it is not possible to determine definitively if the shorter deadline resulted in the higher acceptance rate. For example, two of the three PAs requiring a 30-day deadline offered additional delivery channels (HPC and turnkey), which were not available to some customers whose utilities required the 90-day timeframe.<sup>9</sup>

It was not possible to conclusively distinguish between the relative influence of the timeframe versus the influence of different delivery options. Empirically determining the relative influence of the timeframe was complicated by the large disparity of pilot offers made by 30-day deadline (n=404) versus 90-day deadline (n=101) PAs.

## **Impact Findings**

**Pilot Participation Summary.** The Evaluation Team analyzed data provided by two PAs, which included customers offered the pilot. The dataset included all weatherization measure installations for these customers through mid-February 2013. Findings from the pilot data include:

- Of pilot customers facing a barrier and having weatherization measures recommended, 28% accepted the pilot offer and cleared the barrier. Not all of these customers necessarily installed measures.
- For these two PAs, 72% of participants who accepted the pilot incentive installed a recommended weatherization measure (i.e., measure adoption).
- The measure adoption rate was highest for customers needing to address the dryer vent barrier (43%), and lowest for those who needing to address combustion safety (22%).
- Thirteen percent of participants who did not accept the pilot incentive still installed a recommended weatherization measure through HES. Only 7% installed weatherization measures after declining the pilot offer for combustion safety. In both instances, customers may have had barriers addressed outside of the program.

**Net Impact Analysis.** The Evaluation Team assessed the pilot's ability to cause customers to clear pre-weatherization barriers that they otherwise would not have cleared, and then to proceed with installing previously ineligible recommended efficiency measures. We conducted this assessment using two methods:

- 1. The Team asked surveyed customers a set of questions about the pilot's influence on their decisions to clear the barrier. This assessment revealed customers' perspectives regarding the role of the additional incentive in their decisions.
- 2. The Team then compared the rate at which pilot customers installed recommended measures after clearing the pre-weatherization barrier to the rate at which historic customers—who did not receive an additional incentive—overcame the same barrier and installed recommend measures. This second assessment answered the most critical question about the pilot effort

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> This percentage is based on the sample population of surveyed participants and nonparticipants offered the pilot in the 30-day deadline territory; these totaled 105.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> This excepts one PA, which offered 90 days and used HPCs.

and evaluation: do additional incentives to clear pre-weatherization barriers result in more installed measures and therefore greater program savings?

Participant Self-Report. To calculate the rate that pilot customers would have acted similarly, independent of the pilot, the Evaluation Team used a battery of self-report survey questions, allowing estimation of the pilot's influence on participants' decision-making processes.

Based on responses from 45 customer participant self-reports,  $^{10}$  only 25% of pilot barriers would have been cleared without the extra incentive (with  $\pm$  9% precision at a 90% confidence interval).

Pilot and Historic Data Analysis. As the PAs and lead vendors offered the pilot incentive to all customers with the selected, known barriers during the pilot period (May to September 2012), no control group exists of customers with similar barriers who were not offered the pilot incentive. Lack of a direct control group makes isolating the impact of the additional incentives on barrier clearing and measure adoption rates more difficult. As a result, the Evaluation Team analyzed historic barriers for HES participants to understand the naturally occurring rate at which participants overcame barriers without an additional incentive, and compared these data with the observed rates at which pilot participants overcame the same barriers and installed program-recommended measures.

When comparing pilot and historic data, the Evaluation Team could only directly compare pilot barrier inspection rates and the resulting installation rates with historic rates for only two PAs and for only one barrier type: knob and tube wiring.<sup>11</sup>

Table 2 compares the overall measure adoption rates for pilot and historic customers.

			Fixed	Percent Fixed	Installed	Percent Installed
Data Source	Decision	n	Barrier	Barrier	Insulation	Insulation
Pilot Data	Participated	55	51	93%	35	64%
(May–February	Declined	183	69	38%	25	14%
2012)	Total	238	120	50%	60	25%
Historic Data						
(July 2011–	No offer	2,438	1,383	57%	567	23%
April 2012)						

**Table 2.** Comparison of Pilot and Historic HES Participants (Knob and Tube Barriers for two PAs)

As shown in Table 2, a comparison of the two datasets shows a marginally higher measure adoption rate for the pilot customers. However, this comparison includes two unaccounted-for factors: seasonality and the interval of time since the audit or offer date.

The full historic dataset of customers with a knob and tube wiring barrier included those with audits conducted throughout the majority of the year—July 2011 through April 2012, whereas the pilot data included only HES customers who had an offer extended as part of the pilot—May 2012 through July 2012. For a better comparison, the Evaluation Team trimmed the proposed and installed dates in the historic data to approximately match the timeframe of the pilot data. <sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The Evaluation Team analyzed all of the historic knob and tube wiring data provided from July 2011 through April 2012, as well as all 2010 HES customer data.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Three of the 48 participating customers surveyed did not answer this battery.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The compared historic dataset included just those customers for whom at least seven months but less than 10 months had passed since their audit. To ensure a reasonable comparison, the Evaluation Team determined the measure adoption rate at the end of month seven for both groups. By looking at the installation rates seven months after the audit or offer, we could use all pilot data that covered the most number of months.

Table 3 compares the two datasets seven months after the audit or offer for customers with between seven and 10 months since their audit or offer date.

**Table 3.** Comparison of Pilot and Historic HES Participants' Measure Adoption Rates (Knob and Tube Barriers for Two PAs)\*

Data Source	Offer Status	n	Fixed Barrier	Percent Fixed Barrier	Installed Insulation	Percent Installed Insulation
Pilot Data (at month seven)	Offer	238	110	46%	52	22%
Historic Data (at month seven)	No offer	1,378	775	56%	367	27%

<sup>\*</sup>This table only shows customers' data at seven months for those with between seven and 10 months since the audit or offer.

As shown in Table 3, the measure adoption rate from the historic data is slightly higher than the pilot data. This comparison of cumulative measure adoption rates is also presented in Figure 1, which shows how the adoption rate increases as time passes. Although the two lines follow slightly different paths, when a t-test was run on these data, the measure adoption rates did not differ significantly between the pilot data and historic data (p=0.72).

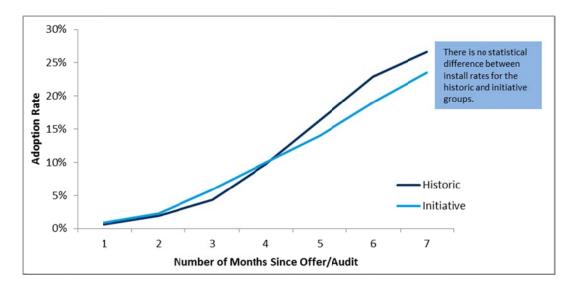
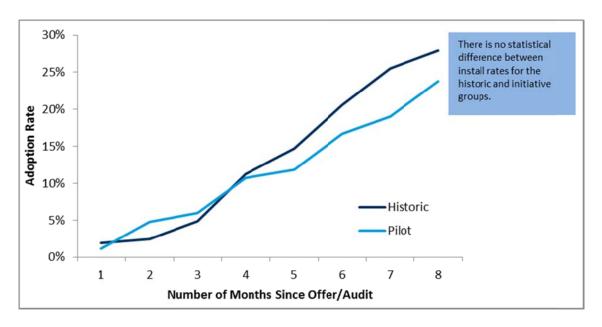


Figure 1. Cumulative Measure Adoption Rates Seven Months Following an Audit or Offer

This comparison could still be impacted by seasonality, given that pilot customers only received offers from May 2012 through July 2012. To control for seasonality, the Evaluation Team compared the historic and pilot data only for customers audited in July 2011 (for historic data), and July 2012 (for pilot data). This was the only month when both historic and pilot data were available for the same time period. Although this limited the datasets to just one month, it allowed comparisons with the seasonality effect removed.

Figure 2 compares the measure adoption rates of customers who had audits in July. The lines in the figure appear to take slightly different paths; however, when the Evaluation Team ran a t-test on these data, the uptake rates between the pilot and historic data did not differ significantly (p=0.68).



**Figure 2.** Cumulative Measure Adoption Rates Over Eight Months for Pilot and Historic Customers with Audits or Offers in July

# **Conclusions**

The 2012–2013 Massachusetts' Pre-Weatherization Pilot evaluation did not conclusively show that the extra incentives lead to more measures being installed, specifically for customers facing a knob and tube wiring barrier.

Based on the responses from 45 customer participant self-reports, only 25% of pilot barriers would have been cleared without the extra incentive (with  $\pm$  9% precision at a 90% confidence interval). This means 75% of the barriers cleared as part of the pilot were caused to some extent by the pilot, according to self-report.

Because of the study's timeframe limitation,<sup>14</sup> the evaluation could not ask customers additional self-report questions about net-to-gross (NTG) to determine the pilot's influence on weatherization measure installs. However, with such a high reported NTG for barrier clearing, it is probable that at least a portion of the resulting weatherization measure installs could be attributed to the additional incentive as well.

At the same time, comparing the data of customers with knob and tube barriers showed no significant difference in adoption rates to customers who were offered the pilot and those who were not.

Given this analysis is based only on a subset of customers from only two PAs and these customers all had knob and tube barriers, the Evaluation Team's findings should not be considered representative of the entire set of customers facing pre-weatherization barriers. For example, the fact that many customers with knob and tube wiring seemed very confused about inspection and mitigation and their respective costs could mean this incentive had a diminished impact on this population. (That is, if a customer thinks clearing a knob and tube wiring barrier will cost \$5,000 or more, the pilot offer of \$250 might not have the same impact as it would for a customer who understands an inspection costs \$300 or less.)

Three of the 48 participating customers surveyed did not answer this battery.

The evaluation customer surveys were conducted directly after the pilot ended, which did not leave sufficient time to gather reliable NTG data.

Though the data did not conclusively find the pilot directly responsible for a higher rate of measure installations, this evaluation did provide relevant insights for other states exploring the potential benefits of adding such an incentive to audit-to-install programs where customers face similar preweatherization barriers.

#### **Pilot Successes**

The PAs agreed that offering the pilot during the home energy assessment proved to be a positive design aspect, as it allowed auditors to explain the pilot to customers and to answer their questions. Other cited benefits included:

- Ease of participation. The simple design, easy paperwork, and limited incentive offers made participation easy, and may have encouraged customers to act sooner than they otherwise would have.
- The time of year chosen. The pilot was implemented during the slower season for the HES Program, giving PAs, vendors, and contractors more time to address questions and discuss issues with customers.
- Encouragement of earlier pre-weatherization barrier removal. Fifteen of the 24 surveyed participants who said they would have addressed the barrier even without the extra incentive said the incentive moved them to address the barrier earlier than they would have otherwise.

#### **Pilot Lessons Learned**

The pilot offering and the resulting evaluation process allowed much to be learned about how to implement incentives for an audit-to-install program.

**Participation Challenges.** The lead vendors and PAs identified two primary challenges to customer participation in the pilot: 1) it requires a second step—the requirement to clear the identified barrier; and 2) its overall costs.

The lead vendors and PAs noted that having to clear the identified barrier might have prevented customers from participating in the pilot and the HES Program. In some cases, this additional step required customers to find qualified contractors. Very few surveyed customers, however, cited this extra step as problematic.

PAs and lead vendors also cited the most common participation challenge as the overall costs of clearing barriers, particularly mitigating live knob and tube wiring. Customer survey results support the PAs' and lead vendors' assertion; 25 nonparticipants (36%) said the cost of clearing the barrier was the main reason they did not take advantage of the pilot incentive. Many of these respondents had knob and tube wiring, and were likely referring to the cost of rewiring their home (mitigation), not the cost of having their wiring inspected, which is covered by the pilot.

**Turnkey Challenges.** Given the challenges described by the PAs and lead vendors that offered their customers a turnkey option for clearing pre-weatherization barriers, any stakeholders considering a similar approach should carefully review the contractor network within their jurisdiction.

Knob and Tube Wiring Barrier Customer Confusion. Survey respondents—particularly nonparticipants—expressed confusion regarding inspection and mitigation of knob and tube wiring and

their costs. Customers in other jurisdictions may be equally confused; thus, these jurisdictions may need to address additional customer education during the audit.

**Thirty-day and 90-day Pilot Time Limits.** Many stakeholders and customers found the 30-day timeframe too short. However, the three PAs offering the 30-day deadline also were those with the highest participation rates (acceptances per offer). By choosing a compromise deadline of 45 or 60 days, some benefits from a deadline's immediacy could be maintained while offering a more realistic timeframe.

# References

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