

Designing a Needs Assessment for Low-Income Customers

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Introduction

The effective implementation of energy efficiency initiatives for low-income customers requires an assessment of baseline market conditions and potential for improvement as well as knowledge of customer energy-related needs and concerns. This study was essentially a scoping study that addressed the issues related to designing an assessment of the energy-related needs of California's low-income households. A second phase of the study, to begin in 2003, will involve the completion of the needs assessment.

Approach

Information was gathered from five sources: 1) current literature, 2) Census data, 3) public comments from a series of workshops, 4) interviews with key stakeholders, and 5) focus groups with low-income customers. Using an ongoing review process in which issues were discussed in public forums, a methodology for identifying low-income customers using Census data was detailed and specific indicators for measuring program potential and penetration were formulated. In addition, a list of energy-related needs and concerns to be researched in the second phase of the project were identified, and methods for collecting data and tracking program penetration were described. The results were used to write a Request for Proposals to initiate a statewide needs assessment study in 2003.

Results

This poster presents the following results that were developed during this design phase of the study: 1) a description of the indicators of potential for low-income programs in California;¹ 2) a list of key characteristics of the low-income community to be analyzed in Phase II of the study; 3) a list of specific needs, concerns and perceptions of the low-income community to be researched in Phase II; and 4) a description of the data to be collected during Phase II. In addition, some of the key issues confronted in researching and developing these results, particularly those related to the use of Census data and to the appropriate representation of minority groups in the low-income population, will be incorporated into the presentation.

¹ In particular, the indicators were developed for the Low-Income Energy Efficiency (LIEE) Program and for the California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) Program.

