

Tips for CAPs When Speaking to Utilities

First of all, if you do not already have relationships with a utility, attend a board meeting or two. I wouldn't necessarily give a presentation right away. Introduce yourself and listen to the meeting regardless of the agenda to get a feel for the board's interests. When you talk to the utility or present to a board, sculpt your delivery around the areas where your WAP program aligns with and can facilitate a board's particular interests.

Start by explaining how CAPs assists Low income Americans with a variety of services. Identify yourself as part of the CAP that serves the service area of the Utility. Give a quick rundown of the services your CAP provides. I always throw in some form of why I think what we do is a good investment of tax payers dollars.

Focus in on the services provided by your "Energy unit" (Weatherization and Energy assistance). Cover the entire list of services provided by your program. Include everything from income qualification, energy assistance, heat crisis and Energy education to weatherization and more....

Present the goals of your program and the services you are best at providing

Talk about your assets: wait list, grants, staff, and as well as the institutional knowledge, experience and networking you bring to the table.

Ask about the utility's general energy efficiency goals and how they meet them. It is good to give them the time to explain and brag about the whole breadth of their EE program. They are as proud of their programs as you are of your program. Listen and take mental notes on ways your WAP program could help the utility and how what they are already doing could help your program. Use the information as the conversation rolls on.

Ask if they have a low income EEI program. This is a good time to remind the utility that through the WAP regulated application process you have a wait list of "certified" low income clients waiting for energy efficiency services.

Lead the conversation towards the ways utility program goals align with CAP goals. Talk about the strengths and weaknesses of each program and seek out ways the overlap of the two programs can strengthen the other. Be careful of preconceived outcomes. You may go into a meeting and seemingly get nowhere with your goal of partnering your low income weatherization. On the other hand, you may walk out of the meeting with a new efficient heating system for your Head Start or upgraded lighting for your food bank warehouse. A partnership is a partnership and good partnerships are cultivated and grow.

Always end the meeting recognizing and thanking the utility for their services to the community.