

Civic Works: Serving Communities through Energy Efficiency

Civic Works, a non-profit working to strengthen Baltimore County's neighborhoods, leveraged funding from the MEA's FY15 [Low-to-Moderate Income Grant Program](#) to reach residents not served by other government and utility energy efficiency programs. This focused effort on filling service gaps has resulted in improved home energy efficiency for 303 low- and moderate-income families in the Baltimore region in 2015, families that have also enjoyed health, safety, and financial resilience benefits through the program.



Civic Works Retrofit Baltimore Program Manager Evie Schwartz and Director of the Baltimore Center for Green Careers (BCGC) Eli Allen

With funding from MEA, Civic Works' [Project Lightbulb](#) program makes energy conservation visits to low-to-moderate income households located in Baltimore County, providing residents with information about reducing energy use and installing energy efficiency measures at no cost. Project Lightbulb trains teams of AmeriCorps members, who serve approximately three months with Civic Works and receive a modest stipend and job development training. Project Lightbulb corps members work as community educators and advisors, engaging and educating low-to-moderate income residents on the energy efficiency benefits of installing low-cost upgrades in order to participate in the program. Then, corps members install CFLs, LED lights, faucet aerators, low-flow showerheads, water heater wraps and pipe insulation in the home.

The program also installs energy-efficient fixtures and explains their use. By coupling the provision of free upgrades with resident education, Project Lightbulb ensures that residents are immediately able to begin benefitting from the services. Engaging community networks and utilizing trusted messengers in the community to reach residents who typically would not implement energy efficiency measures enables the project to reach low-to-moderate income residents who would otherwise be left unserved

Civic Works has also been able to utilize an MEA-funded home energy upgrade and education program to perform more comprehensive measures beyond what Project Lightbulb offers. Measures such as increased insulation and weatherization can restore previously abandoned areas of the home to livability.

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As Monica, a Baltimore County resident, related, “My bedroom was always either too hot or too cold. Whatever the temperature was outside, that was the temperature in the room.” But weatherization changed all that. “I am thrilled that my room is comfortable now,” she said after the MEA-funded upgrades.

Ofelia of Loch Raven in Baltimore County has a similar story. “For fourteen years I slept in the back bedroom because my room was too frigid to sleep comfortably.” Insulation made all the difference. “I am forever grateful,” she told her project team, “for all you have done for me and my daughter.”

MEA’s 2015 LMI grant to Civic Works enabled home energy efficiency upgrades in which a certified [Building Performance Institute](#) auditor analyzed the home using diagnostic tools to recommend cost-effective upgrades. By leveraging the advantages of weatherization work, health hazards and building envelope problems can be addressed together through insulation and moisture control, thereby improving the comfort and health of a home.



Before attic insulation



After attic insulation

MEA’s 2015 LMI grant to Civic Works has helped create green career pathways out of poverty for Baltimore City residents. The three-month Energy Retrofit Training provides low-income residents with hands-on learning, industry-recognized certifications and essential skills. The grant also allows Civic Works to provide participants with 320 hours of on-the-job training in completing whole house air sealing and insulation projects—work experience that is valued by employers. Since 2003, Civic Works’ [Baltimore Center for Green Careers](#) has maintained an average job placement rate of 85%.

Through the combined efforts of Civic Works and MEA, the quest for energy efficiency is benefiting Baltimore County communities in increased home comfort, lower bills, green jobs—and energy savings.

The MEA LMI Grant Program has been supporting projects that improve the energy performance of Maryland’s low to moderate income housing since 2010. To learn about the next cycle of the grant program, visit energy.maryland.gov.