

MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN RESEARCH AND
PROGRAM IMPLEMENTERS: AN EXAMPLE OF FEDERAL INITIATIVE

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BACKGROUND

The two primary goals of the Residential and Commercial Conservation Program (RCCP) are: (1) to manage the implementation of the Residential Conservation Service (RCS) by states and utilities nationwide and (2) to encourage the adoption of energy efficiency programs for the residential and commercial sectors by states, utilities, and other program implementers.

In support of these goals RCCP has developed technical assistance products, conducted evaluations of specific utility programs, and collected and summarized data from the operation of RCS nationwide. However, after an initial spate of technical assistance activity in the late 70's, the program's potential for providing technical assistance was largely limited by policy directives that reflected a new Administration's desire to eliminate the program. From about 1981-1985 very few new technical assistance products were developed to support the RCS program. Instead, technical assistance consisted largely of states and/or utilities turning to one of the national laboratories funded to support RCS for consultation on a specific technical issue. Although the program continued to sponsor some evaluation projects and other specific program analyses, no concerted effort was made to share the findings of these projects with potentially interested RCS program managers or other program implementers.

In 1986 Congress enacted new legislation related to the Residential Conservation Service Program (P.L. 99-412). The new law specifically tasked the U.S. Department of Energy (U.S.DOE) to provide technical assistance and information dissemination services to states and utilities implementing residential programs. This requirement provided an opportunity for RCCP to revitalize its previously underutilized technical assistance capability. However, doing so involved considerable rethinking of the RCCP historical technical assistance approach in order to shape a new technology transfer strategy for facilitating the utilization of RCCP products and project results.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER PLANNING APPROACH

To assist RCCP staff in the development of a new strategy, a Technology Transfer Plan team was established. It included experts from Oak Ridge National Laboratory who had previously worked on technology transfer strategies for other DOE's programs and who had analyzed technical assistance needs of state energy offices for the SECP/EES programs, and a utility marketing consultant who advised on the best methods for communicating with RCCP's significant utility audience.

The Team focused on several specific goals in the planning process. These included:

- o Fostering the transfer of data specified by the law implementing RCS and information supporting voluntary programs;
- o Developing a needs assessment/feedback process to keep RCCP cognizant of program implementer needs;
- o Providing organizational and implementation strategies for new transfer activities;
- o Focusing on transferring project results and concepts rather than simply disseminating reports;
- o Leveraging resources through the use of existing mechanisms of communication and dissemination;
- o Facilitating interaction of RCCP with program implementers and fostering networking among program implementers.

MAJOR PLANNING TASKS

With these goals in mind, the Team conducted several specific tasks. First, RCCP products were catalogued and categorized. In keeping with the desire to focus on project results and concepts, categorization concentrated on issues addressed and lessons learned. Categories adopted included: (1) program implementation, (2) technology and techniques application, (3) planning and management, and (4) program performance results. The purpose of these categories was to concentrate attention on the substance of project results and to assist project managers in identifying who might be the most likely targets for specific results in the vast and wide ranging RCCP audience.

Secondly, RCCP audiences were categorized. Generally, the RCCP audience consists of energy efficiency program implementers and energy intermediaries. Program implementers are defined to include state energy office staff, utility regulators, utility program managers, local governments, nonprofit organizations and private sector organizations such as energy service companies. Energy intermediaries are defined as organizations and individuals that provide recommendations or exercise decisionmaking authority over energy management in buildings.

However, within this broad audience there are several tiers of potential users of RCCP technical assistance. Most important are state energy offices, utility regulators, and utility program personnel. Of secondary importance are local governments, nonprofit and civic organizations, private sector energy professionals and state economic opportunity offices. Third in priority are federal agencies, researchers and educators, and other state agencies. The ranking reflects the degree to which RCCP project results and

assistance are expected to be useful. Since most RCCP projects involve the implementation of programs by states and utilities, their information needs have the highest priority; most RCCP projects are undertaken with the needs of state and utility personnel in mind. Some projects focus on local governments or nonprofit organizations, and dissemination strategies for these groups are utilized with these projects. Private sector energy professionals, researchers and educators, federal agencies, and other state agencies may have influence on the adoption of energy efficiency techniques, but they do not form the focus of RCCP's attention. On selected occasions specific dissemination strategies can be adopted for these groups.

An additional consideration with audiences is the diverse functions of personnel within each program implementer organization. For example, utilities employ program managers, planners, marketing specialists, customer representatives, and energy auditors, among others, in their demand side management departments. State energy offices employ managers, planners, evaluators, implementers, and field representatives. This diversity of function relates directly back to the method selected for categorizing RCCP project results, because the information that is useful depends to some extent on the user's functional responsibility. This diversity of audience also reinforces the need RCCP has identified to work closely with associations and other established information networks. There is simply no other more cost effective way for RCCP to communicate on a regular basis.

OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER PLAN

The RCCP Technology Transfer Plan identifies typical and practical methods for RCCP to conduct needs assessment of its primary audience. Integral to this is the desire to obtain feedback of representative program implementers on a regular basis. The use of focus groups or rap sessions and the establishment of project review committees and program-level review activities are considered highly desirable.

The Plan also includes a lengthy catalogue of technology transfer mechanisms, which project managers can refer to for consideration in the development of a transfer plan for a specific project. Fifteen specific types of mechanisms are identified with comments on the advantages and disadvantages of each and an assessment of appropriate utilization of each mechanism.

RCCP TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER STRATEGY

From all of the analysis and discussion involved in this project, a technology transfer strategy has been developed and is now being implemented within a new set of task goals and operating imperatives. To summarize briefly, RCCP is focusing on low and moderate cost, nearterm technology transfer activities such as developing a standardized package of outreach products. This will support the visibility of the organization and the transfer of new RCCP project results. Also, strategy forms and worksheets have been developed to assist project managers in implementing their individual transfer plans. Moreover, through the establishment of a

technology transfer management position, support and oversight are provided to staff to assist in identifying dissemination opportunities and developing implementation strategies.

To raise the visibility of the program and awareness of RCCP technical assistance resources, program-level presentations are planned at several national meetings. To provide feedback and guidance, project review committees are being established and a program-level implementers feedback mechanism is being investigated. Moreover, we continue to expand our working relationships with trade and professional associations through ongoing communications and the activities of the Energy Efficiency Information Services Network. A list of current activities below provide examples of our new approach:

- o Eight sets of project results completed and distributed in FY'88.
- o Establishment of Report Briefs and Project Summaries for mass distribution.
- o Periodic meetings of the RCCP Information Services Network.
- o Sponsorship of Third National Utility DSM Conference (Houseon, 6/87) and planning with EPRI of Fourth National Utility DSM Conference (Cincinnati, 5/89).
- o Development of Residential Sector Information Package
- o Ongoing assessment of utility, state energy office, and regulatory commission programs.
- o Further analysis of the RCCP audience to identify opinion leaders and innovators.
- o Presentations at five national conferences or professional association meetings.

CONCLUSIONS

All of these new activities are small steps toward creating a proactive, responsive technical assistance program that reflects program implementer current needs and provides guidance on program issues that are not being adequately addressed by other resources. Formidable problems still remain, since RCCP resources continue to be severely limited by current federal budgetary priorities. However, despite our diminishing resource base we continue to support 6-8 new research projects a year. Our goal is to insure that our primary audience of program implementers and energy intermediaries is aware of our services and knows how to reach us, either for direct assistance or for referral to other knowledgeable program experts.