

Communicating Messages to Hard-to-Reach Consumers: Lessons from the Electric Education Trust

*Jerome Hipps, WestEd
David Hungerford, California Energy Commission*

ABSTRACT

The California Public Utilities Commission established the Electric Education Trust Community Outreach Program (COP) in the late 1990s to educate consumers about changes to the state's electricity industry as it transitioned to direct access. The program targeted consumer groups and communities where it appeared that consumers were not aware they could choose their electricity supplier and/or where reported abuse of consumers was high. The COP funded community-based organizations (CBOs) such as community action agencies, immigrant support and advocacy groups, faith-based organizations, senior citizens groups, and community legal services to serve as information sources for their communities. The CBOs succeeded in providing information to just over 500,000 Californians during the first of two grant cycles.

Results from a 2002 evaluation of the COP indicated that using CBOs to educate subpopulations on energy conservation issues and assistance programs for low-income consumers was an effective strategy. During a review of the evaluation's findings, three specific factors, trust, knowledge, and adaptability, emerged from the data as helping to explain why CBOs were effective in educating hard-to-reach populations. Trust within the target community allowed CBOs to deliver messages that consumers accepted. Knowledge was multi-dimensional and included both educational content and an understanding of how to effectively reach specific subpopulations. Adaptability referred to modifying how messages were presented to make sure that information reached targeted groups in ways that were both understandable and usable. These factors compliment the four-part framework proposed by Weiss and Tschirchart for making media campaigns effective policy instruments and extend our understanding of how to educate targeted consumer groups.

Introduction

In 1996, the California State legislature restructured the State's electric services industry. The restructuring allowed multiple energy companies to serve the same geographic area, permitting consumers to choose their energy suppliers. The enabling legislation, Assembly Bill 1890, recognized that successful restructuring required that consumers understand the choices available to them. The bill noted the following: "It is the intent of the Legislature that (1) electricity consumers be provided with sufficient and reliable information to be able to compare and select among products and services provided in the electricity market, and (2) consumers be provided with mechanisms to protect themselves from marketing practices that are unfair or abusive" (AB 1890, Article 11.392 (b)).

As part of the State's restructuring efforts, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) established the Electric Education Trust (EET) to promote consumer education about changes to the State's electric industry. Funds were budgeted to target consumer groups and communities where few consumers chose a company to provide electricity other than their

traditional investor-owned utility (Pacific Gas and Electric, Southern California Edison, and SEMPRA Energy), or where the level of reported consumer abuses was high. California's efforts to reach these groups was consistent with Alexander's (1998) blueprint for protecting and educating consumers and the actions other states such as Pennsylvania, Maine, and Virginia have followed as they deregulated their electricity and telecommunications markets (NGA Center for Best Practices, 1999; CONEG Policy Research Center, Inc., 1999; Virginia State Corporation Commission, 2002).

The Electric Education Trust Administrative Committee (EETAC) was established to oversee and advise the Commission on various issues, education plans, and budget itemizations for the EET. The EETAC prepared an education plan that enlisted the efforts of community-based organizations (CBOs) to work with hard-to-reach consumers, those who are not reached through the communication channels that served the majority of the state's consumers. The targeted groups included consumers with limited English language skills, those with low-incomes, seniors, the physically challenged, rural residents, small and very small business owners, and agricultural producers. The EET's goals for this effort included the following:

- To help such consumers understand the changes to the electric utility industry and the choices available to them in the restructured electricity market;
- To target consumer groups and communities where direct access participation remained low or where the level of reported consumer abuse was high;
- To pay special attention to ensuring that consumers, especially those with limited English-speaking ability or other disadvantages when dealing with sophisticated marketers, receive correct, reliable, and easily understood information to help them make informed choices among electricity providers; and
- To design and manage a community based education and outreach effort.

An \$8.5 million fund was established for making grants for education to CBOs. In April 2000, grants were awarded to 97 CBOs to help consumers understand the changes in the electricity utility industry. Grants were for a 12-month period beginning May 1, 2000. A second cycle of grants was awarded in May 2001 to 105 CBOs. Many of these organizations (76 percent) also had received Cycle I grants. The funded CBOs included community action agencies, immigrant support and advocacy groups, faith-based organizations, senior citizens groups, and community legal services organizations. During the first grant cycle, the CBOs provided information to over 500,000 consumers (Electric Education Trust Administrative Committee, 2001).

The Research Plan for the Community Outreach Program called for an evaluation of the Program during the second grant cycle. This evaluation built on research that had already been conducted during 2000-01 with Cycle I grantees (Hungerford, Hipps, & Ormsby, 2002). The evaluation involved a survey that was completed by 66 of the CBOs that received a Cycle II grant. Additionally, the evaluators conducted 19 group interviews with consumers who had received educational services from one of the funded CBOs. A total of 148 individuals participated in the interviews. We sought to understand what consumers gained through the efforts of the CBOs, strategies that were effective when providing services to hard-to-reach populations, and the effectiveness of using CBOs to serve these communities.

Evaluation of Second Grant Cycle

Methodology

Data collection in spring 2002 focused on the CBOs that were funded during the second grant cycle and the individuals who participated in their education programs. The information that evaluators gathered focused on the following questions:

- What did CBOs feel were the most important messages they conveyed to their clients? How successful did they feel they were in doing so and why?
- What education strategies did CBOs feel worked best for educating their clients?
- What benefits did clients feel they gained from the education efforts of the CBOs?

We explored these questions using two data collection strategies. First, we distributed a mail survey to each of the Cycle II CBOs. Second, staff from both WestEd and its subcontractor, Duerr Evaluation Research (DER), conducted group interviews with individuals who had participated in the CBOs' education efforts. The following sections describe our research activities in more detail.

CBO survey. Cycle II CBOs completed a survey that focused on a number of areas about their EET-related work. It began by asking for a description of the client groups that the CBOs served. It proceeded to examine what the CBOs perceived as the most important messages they conveyed to their clients and how successfully they believed they were in conveying those messages. We asked the Cycle II CBOs to indicate what they felt were the best strategies for working with their clients. The next section contained a series of items that asked CBOs about a number of areas related to their educational activities. Some of these items focused on impressions of what their clients learned while others were oriented to a CBO's relationship with its clients and how comfortable the CBO was providing information about such areas as reducing electricity bills, assistance programs for low-income consumers, consumer rights, California's changing electricity market (deregulation had collapsed and blackouts were occurring), and how to read an electricity meter.

The CBO Survey was mailed in April 2002 to each of the 105 Cycle II CBOs. After two weeks passed, WestEd staff began following-up with the CBOs that had not returned a completed survey. These CBOs were contacted by telephone and e-mail to remind them to answer and return the survey. Some of the CBOs were contacted several times. In all, 66 CBOs returned a survey to WestEd, a 63 percent return rate. There was enough commonality to the answers we received that we felt the completed surveys present very good insights into the experiences of the Cycle II CBOs.

Group interviews. A key evaluation goal was to collect information from consumers who participated in the education efforts of the EET-funded CBOs. By gathering this information, we hoped to do two things. First, we wanted to learn how consumers had benefited from the CBOs' education programs. Second, conversations with consumers provided an excellent opportunity to validate the strategy of using CBOs to communicate with hard-to-reach communities. Group interviews explored a number of areas including the following: the areas that were included in

the education consumers received from CBOs, what they learned, and their perceptions of the CBOs.

WestEd sampled a total of 33 CBOs to participate in the group interview process. We began contacting the CBOs in April and successfully completed group interviews at 19 CBOs. We encountered many difficulties during the scheduling process. First, 11 CBOs did not return our telephone calls when we attempted to contact them to arrange a group interview even though we telephoned each of these organizations at least three times. Second, we found that two CBOs did not have a list of the clients they had served making follow-up impossible. One of these CBOs provided legal services and declined to participate in the group interview process indicating that providing information about who had been a client would violate attorney-client confidentiality. Lastly, one agency declined to participate after they had scheduled a date when a group interview could be conducted.

Staff from WestEd and DER conducted group interviews with a total of 148 individuals served by the EET-funded CBOs. The CBOs were responsible for recruiting clients to participate in the interviews. The group participants were diverse and included immigrants who spoke limited amounts of English and came from many language backgrounds i.e., Spanish, Lao, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Separate groups also included seniors, the visually impaired, American Indians, African Americans, small business owners, and rural populations. Interviews were conducted as far north as Crescent City, as far south as San Diego, and in the interior valley of the California. Bilingual WestEd evaluators conducted the Spanish language group interviews. Interviews with the Lao, Vietnamese, and Chinese-speaking consumers were conducted in English with staff from the CBOs serving as translators.

Evaluation Findings

The 66 CBOs who completed a survey worked with a diverse group of clients. All but two of the CBOs provided assistance to individual clients. Characteristically, most of the CBOs (88%) worked with low-income individuals. The next largest group of clients served was seniors, targeted by 76% of CBOs, followed by language minority citizens (71%). Asian/Pacific Americans received services from 59% of CBOs while the Hispanic/Latino population was served by just over one-half (52%) of the CBOs. Both individuals with disabilities and African Americans were served by 26 CBOs or 39% of the responding grantees. Just a dozen organizations targeted clients living in rural or agricultural settings. Almost one-half of the CBOs (49%) provided services to organizations, generally other CBOs. One dozen CBOs (18%) assisted small businesses, another of the EET target groups.

WestEd staff reviewed the description of each message provided by the CBOs and categorized the messages. Then, we tabulated how many of the grantees listed each message. These data showed that CBOs emphasized a number of messages when working with their clients. Overall, the theme of energy conservation and/or energy efficiency was the most frequent focus of CBOs, with all but three organizations referring specifically to teaching clients about these areas. Assistance programs that reduce a consumer's utility bill were the next most frequently mentioned themes that CBOs said that they emphasized. Almost two-thirds of the grantees (63%) provided their clients with such information. The programs that were specifically mentioned included the California Alternate Rates for Energy Program (CARE), a program that discounts electric and gas rates by 20 percent, and the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), a federal program that helps low-income consumers pay utility bills.

Other areas where CBOs offered education included consumer rights and protection, understanding electricity bills, how to read electricity meters, and the functioning of California's electricity markets. However, these latter areas were not widespread focuses of CBO activities. No more than 10 CBOs (16% of the survey respondents) listed one of these as one of their three most important messages.

Ratings from CBOs indicated that they generally felt that they were moderately to very successful in conveying information to consumers. Additionally, they believed they were most successful in those two areas that were most likely a part of the CBOs' messages to consumers, energy conservation and/or efficiency and assistance programs. Information about consumer rights/protection and safety were the next two most highly rated categories. CBOs believed they were least successful conveying messages that sought to help consumers understand electricity bills and/or electricity meters.

CBOs offered many reasons why they felt their educational programs had been effective. A review of their responses showed that their judgments were based on differing degrees of substantive information ranging from clients' reports of behavior change and formal surveys to simply observing the clients who attended CBO presentations.

The most frequently cited type of evidence that CBOs noted was changes in consumers' energy bills. The 11 CBOs whose responses fell into this category noted how they saw changes in the bills they reviewed with their clients. The following are representative comments:

One of the participants who attended our presentation contacted us after the presentation. She wanted us to review her electricity bill. With our advice, she was able to reduce 15% of the electric bills in subsequent months. This client was eligible for the CARE program.

One example is getting the monthly energy costs from clients for two or three consecutive months after the energy conservation workshop. The majority of the clients (about 90%) would show a decrease in their electricity bill.

Some of the people I worked with tracked their electricity bill for four months and we noted the savings.

The next most frequently mentioned source of evidence (ten comments) was the feedback their clients gave CBOs about the impacts of their education efforts. This response category was followed by CBO comments about the number of CARE applications that their clients had completed due to the CBO's efforts, an observation noted by eight CBOs.

Successful education strategies. The CBO survey allowed grantees to provide their own descriptions of their work during the past year. We used these items to gain data about the strategies that CBOs found were effective in educating their clients. As one would expect given the diversity of the client groups these projects served, CBOs identified a number of different but effective educational approaches. While no one approach was mentioned by more than 16 CBOs, the majority of the approaches were adaptive strategies for making educational messages accessible to their clients.

The approach that CBOs mentioned most frequently was educating clients through one-on-one contact. These contacts could occur at the agency's office or at a client's home, during a home visit by an outreach worker going door-to-door in a neighborhood. A smaller number of

CBOs referred to small group meetings as an effective way to educate clients. Frequently, grantees found both individual and small group contacts were valuable strategies.

CBOs adapted their work to the needs of their clients. The CBOs with clients whose primary language was something other than English found success in providing both their presentations and the materials in the consumer's primary language. CBOs also had ideas about the content of the information that they provided. They suggested keeping messages short, focusing on important information that had practical uses. Materials should be "appealing" and "entertaining" and presentations should make clients feel welcome and comfortable.

While small group and individual contacts were the preferred strategy for many CBOs, there were others who found local fairs were excellent places to distribute information to their communities. Agencies that work with Native Americans and immigrants mentioned that such events are important in the cultural lives of these groups.

Service providers found that they reached larger audiences by "piggybacking" their messages about electricity onto other services or events. Some agencies adopted this kind of strategy when they found that a presentation that focused only on electricity did not generate much interest or attendance. For other agencies, such as groups that provided weatherization or other educational services, "piggybacking" occurred as education about electricity could be readily incorporated into other services the agency was providing. We saw ample evidence of "piggybacking" when we spoke with the consumers who worked with EET grantees. It was very common for a consumer to tell us that she had received information related to electricity when she came to the CBO for other services.

Findings from consumers. We collected data from consumers who had participated in educational activities conducted by Cycle II CBOs. These interviews provided an opportunity to explore how consumers benefited from these activities, the responsiveness of the CBOs, and the areas where consumer education could be expanded. In the end, we learned from consumers that information from CBOs contributed to lowering consumers' electricity consumption and electricity bills. Furthermore, the consumers saw CBOs as reliable sources of information in their communities that they would turn to again for information. Lastly, the group interviews provided valuable support for the strategy of educating hard-to-reach communities through community groups that target services to those communities.

We asked consumers about the kind of information they had received from CBOs. There was high agreement that CBOs provided education about how to lower electricity bills including the use of energy efficient products. Clients also indicated that they had learned about assistance programs and topics like blackouts and electricity shortages. There were differences among CBOs in the degree to which they helped their clients understand electricity bills. In some instances, almost everyone participating in an interview had a better understanding of their bills. There were many groups, though, where only two or three people recalled the CBO providing information in this area.

During the group interview, consumers were asked about the one or two most important things they had learned during working with CBOs. Energy conservation was high among their responses with many of the groups' participants talking about specific steps they had taken to lower their electricity costs. Among these steps were actions such as turning off appliances, lights, or the television when these were not being used, changing to using compact florescent light bulbs, washing clothing in the evening, letting other family members also know how to save energy, and weatherizing residences. Through their work with the CBOs, consumers

regularly commented on how they were more aware of how they used electricity and the importance of turning off lights, televisions, and appliances when they were not needed, saving both energy and money. Some of the group members felt empowered by what they had learned.

Many of those interviewed pursued the policy, “if you are not using it, turn it off,” in their homes. They reported that they turned off unused lights and appliances. Some even reported unplugging their VCRs and microwaves to counter the so-called “vampire” energy users. Families reported that they encouraged children to watch only one television. One grandfather even limited the number of hours his grandchildren could use their Nintendo.

Some participants reported that they were not using appliances such as toasters and hairdryers as often because they perceived them as energy “hogs.” Some of these practices and opinions point to the perpetuation of certain energy folktales with regards to certain appliances, their level of energy use, and peak usage hours.

The group interviews were an opportunity to learn why education for hard-to-reach populations is important. Through our conversations, consumers revealed a great deal about their perspectives on electricity and how it is used that might not be obvious. For instance, many immigrants from Southeast Asia came from rural areas that did not have electricity. As a result, they understood very little about electricity and its use. They told us they learned things that individuals who grew up in the United States might take for granted, such as cooling food before refrigerating it or turning off a light in an empty basement. Prior to working with their CBOs, these consumers did not understand the importance of these actions.

Our group interview with visually impaired consumers was equally as revealing. The concept of turning off lights was not salient to many because they were totally blind. These individuals may leave a radio on in their bedrooms, using the sound as an aid that helped them navigate around their apartments. The visually impaired did appreciate helpful reminders to turn off television sets when they are not being used.

Although their immediate concerns about rising costs and blackouts had passed, the majority of individuals we interviewed said that they had taken steps to conserve energy and anticipated continuing to do so. Some of the consumers had replaced older appliances with new energy saving ones. Many indicated that they were replacing incandescent light bulbs with low usage florescent ones as the older bulbs burned out.

Although there was a range in knowledge and understanding of state and federal assistance programs, many of those interviewed during Cycle II had enrolled in CARE or HEAP. Indeed, there were some consumers who said they contacted a CBO specifically because they were interested in enrolling in the CARE program. Those who had enrolled said that it had reduced their electricity bills.

The Community Outreach Program was established based on recognition that educating some communities requires the efforts of groups that are a part of those communities. The consumers they serve are seen as trusting of the CBOs that work with their communities. The data collection efforts of WestEd and DER explored this area, seeking consumers’ perspectives on this issue.

Our interviews with consumers indicated that they viewed the EET CBOs in a positive way. Some of the CBOs were important institutions in the immigrant communities they served. Others had long reputations of providing social services in rural areas of the state. The vast majority of the participants felt that the services they had received from their CBOs were excellent and the information that the CBOs provided was reliable. Consumers also said that they would return to the participating CBO if they had future questions about electricity.

CBOs appeared to be particularly helpful to clients who spoke little to no English. These populations are particularly at risk for scams, as well as less likely to receive information on how to conserve energy and consequently keep their costs down. Indeed many consumers were frustrated because they could not understand their bills due to their highly technical language and the lack of a bill translated for non-English speakers. CBOs often bridged this problem, providing information in the consumer's home language.

Consumers believed that a handbook that CBOs distributed in multiple languages was useful, due in part to its pictorial nature, which may have made it more accessible to those with limited English ability or low literacy skills. Some participants said that the handbook was particularly useful for children. Additionally, consumers told us many times that they had shared the electricity-related information from CBOs with their children and friends. In this sense, as we noted in when discussing this issue in relationship to the CBO Survey, the Community Outreach Program's impacts extended beyond the individuals that were directly educated by the CBOs to others with whom these consumers interacted.

Discussion

When we began our work evaluating the EET Community Outreach Program, we set our sights on better understanding how CBOs may be used in efforts designed to educate hard-to-reach populations about electricity issues. Our evaluation found that CBOs were successful in their efforts to promote both electricity conservation and participation in assistance programs (e.g., CARE and HEAP). Data from CBOs indicated that 95% of them emphasized energy conservation and efficiency among the messages that they conveyed to consumers. The availability of programs like CARE was an important focus of at least 63% of the CBOs.

For their part, consumers appeared to take the CBOs' primary messages to heart. Our group interviews found that energy conservation was high among the things that consumers had learned working with the CBOs. They told us of many steps that they were now taking in order to lower the amount of electricity they consumed. Some CBOs indicated that they had urged their clients to pass on the information that they were learning about energy conservation. Comments made by consumers showed that this was in fact what they were doing. They were telling children, other family members, and friends about the importance of turning off unused lights and televisions, and saving electricity. These comments indicated the Community Outreach Program had ripple effects that extended beyond the consumers who directly interacted with the CBOs.

Information from both CBOs and consumers indicated that efforts to conserve electricity and lower energy bills were generally successful. Several CBOs wrote how they tracked electricity bills with their clients over three or four months and saw that costs declined. For their part, many of the consumers who participated in group interviews told us, often without the subject being broached, that they were saving on their bills because of their efforts to use less electricity.

Trust, Knowledge, and Adaptability

The information we gathered from CBOs and consumers was very useful because it helps understand why community agencies are important when trying to educate "hard-to-reach" populations. Reviewing our data, we found that three factors contributed to the ability of the EET

grantees to reach the groups they served: trust, knowledge, and adaptability. The latter two characteristics are inter-related. These elements emerged from our data as we reviewed what we had learned from our evaluation of the COP. Furthermore, we found the findings are consistent with previous observations about effective public information campaigns (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994; Bender, Moezzi, Gossard & Lutzenhiser, 2002; Stern, 2002; and Valente & Schuster, 2002), particularly Valente and Schuster's observation that it is possible to prescribe elements of successful information campaigns. Our synthesis from the COP about educating hard-to-reach consumers also adds to our understanding of how to work with these groups because it fleshes out elements that increase the likelihood that campaigns will reach them.

Trust. We found that CBOs are effective in educating the communities with whom they work because their communities trust them and the messages that they deliver. Almost every CBO indicated that their clients saw them as reliable sources of information. Many of the agencies that received EET grants were well known and respected within the communities they served. Some of the CBOs were logical points of contact in their communities, such as two agencies where we spoke with Vietnamese and Lao immigrants. Clients come to these organizations because the groups have long records of serving new arrivals who needed to navigate through a new culture. Using CBOs as educators allowed messages to reach groups who might otherwise have ignored the message because of their wariness of the message's source. Our findings exemplify Stern's (2002) point that community groups can be more effective in reaching target populations than methods of mass communications.

Interpersonal communication was an important element that increased the likelihood that consumers will accept a message (Valente & Schuster, 2002). Many of the EET CBOs educated their clients by either working with them one-on-one or in small groups. Both approaches allowed the CBOs to actively engage their clients and involve them in the education process (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994; Valente & Schuster, 2002). These strategies made it possible for educators to target information to their clients' concerns and clarify their misconceptions.

Knowledge. Knowledge is a second important characteristic underlying the success of using community organizations to reach special populations. While "knowledge" includes understanding the specific *content* that being conveyed through the educational process (e.g., knowledge about conserving electricity, deregulation in California, and scams), content is only one element of the knowledge that is needed to educate hard-to-reach populations. While necessary, it may not be sufficient to reach such consumers.

The work of the agencies funded through the Community Outreach Program demonstrated that educating hard-to-reach consumers also required understanding the specific subpopulations living in California's diverse communities. By definition, general information campaigns do not educate these subpopulations. Doing so requires knowledge of the groups you wish to contact. Several kinds of information are required to do so including the following:

- Knowledge of where the group is located and how it may be contacted;
- Knowledge of the sources of information used by the group's members;
- Knowledge of the cultural patterns of the group; and
- Knowledge of how the information needs to be presented if it is going to be understood.

While these may seem to be elementary points, they are important to keep in mind as they help understand the value of incorporating community-based organizations into education efforts. Such information provides a roadmap for effectively working with consumers who would not otherwise be served by educational efforts.

CBOs are effective channels of communication because they know their communities, where they congregate, how to effectively contact them, and special considerations that may be needed such as presentations and materials in non-English languages. The CBOs also understand the cultural differences in the expectations of their communities. For instance, various immigrant subpopulations differ in the degree to which they trust government. Some may perceive representatives of a utility as an arm of the government. Our research found that when trust and knowledge are present, the educational activities of CBOs are more likely to be effective. Hence the consumers that participated in our group interviews learned about energy conservation and assistance programs and reduced their electricity consumption and their utility bills.

We also found that when education efforts are not supported by these key elements, messages are less likely to impact consumers. The “Flex Your Power” campaign was being presented in the mass media at the same time that we were interviewing consumers. The consumer groups with whom we spoke were apparently not being exposed to these public service announcements. Only one of the group interview participants indicated that she was familiar with the “Flex Your Power” campaign. This finding is another indicator of the value of finding ways to educate some consumer groups that more general information campaigns do not reach.

Adaptability. The last of the three key elements that our evaluation found is important when working with hard-to-reach populations is adaptability. Adaptability refers to taking the many forms of knowledge just discussed (location, information source, cultural patterns, etc.) and using them to modify how messages are presented to make sure that information reaches consumers in an appropriate way. For some groups, individual contact is important. Others may best be reached through small group interaction, translated materials, community fairs and celebrations, door-to-door canvassing, or other means. These approaches are consistent with Valente and Schuster’s (2002) suggestion that education strategies actively try to reach audiences. Clearly, these strategies are valuable to use with at least some groups.

The Community Outreach Program provided the messages that CBOs needed and the flexibility to adapt these messages in ways that were appropriate and needed in order to reach their client communities. CBOs brought an understanding of how messages need to be adapted to educate their clients. Trust, knowledge, and adaptability combined to facilitate effective communications with hard-to-reach populations.

The data we gathered from CBOs indicated that their educational efforts were most effective when they conveyed simple, straightforward messages. We also see this principle is the formula that has been used with information campaigns that target the general public. “Plug-in California” and “Flex Your Power” are two examples used to in California to focus consumers on important electricity-related matters. As Bender, Moezzi, Gossard, and Lutzenhiser (2002) noted, “To achieve clarity, messages need to communicate specific, easy things to do to conserve electricity.” The same principle is important with hard-to-reach populations.

The consumers in our group interviews clearly received, understood, and took action on the simple message of turning off lights and appliances when not in use. The message is easy to understand and act upon. The CBO outreach effort appeared to be less successful when conveying more complex messages like how to read electricity bills. We found that few of the

CBOs referred to this as one of the “three most important messages you have been conveying to clients.” This message also had the lowest rating of success in conveying the message. We suspect that these CBOs’ experiences reflected the fact that an understanding of electricity bills is much more complicated and difficult to convey to consumers than the message, “Turn off unused lights.” In fact, general media campaigns do not tackle the issue of electricity bills, likely for the same reason.

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