

# Maximizing Reach and Impact to the Underserved with Unique Partnerships and Braided Funding

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## ABSTRACT

Utilities are no stranger to the decade-plus long push to ensure low-income families become a focus for energy efficiency upgrades. The purpose of this paper is to share how Entergy Arkansas (EAL) partnered with other organizations with a shared goal of helping low-income families become more comfortable, safe and energy efficient. By collaborating with other organizations to braid federal funding with utility funding, EAL has maximized its reach and impact to underserved customers in Arkansas. Since 2020, more than 100 customers have been served by this program.

EAL and its partner organizations have developed a basis for an efficient and successful format that could be easily replicated outside of Arkansas. The first step taken was to find organizations with overlapping service territory, complimentary service offerings, and the willingness to partner. Once the organizations were identified, collaboration started to identify challenges and barriers and find reasonable solutions so multiple teams understood how to best navigate within two different programs.

Through this program, more services were provided by both programs combined than either program could provide independently. In addition to passing along more savings and comfort to the customers who need it most, providing education on energy security to individuals, communities, and organizations was also a priority facet. One of the best measurements of success is what customers say. Program participant Ms. Mary Lowe shared “They came and did the work when I really needed it and I’m so thankful it came when it did, it was right in time”.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In 2020, EAL launched an energy efficiency program intentionally designed to serve its residential customers who were most at-risk for energy insecurity. The Low-Income Solutions (LIS) program delivers no-cost to consumer solutions for multiple home types including energy audits, direct install products, air and duct sealing, insulation, and up to \$500 for health and safety upgrades such as smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and exhaust fans or repairs to HVAC and electrical equipment.

To better serve these at-risk customers and extend its reach, Entergy successfully established unique partnerships with organizations that fund complimentary energy efficiency and health and safety upgrades. By partnering with the Arkansas Energy Office (AEO), administrator of federal Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) and Better Community Development (BCD), more customers are served, and more funding is available when the utility and government funds are braided together. This partnership serves as a model of how

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<sup>1</sup> Please visit [vimeo.com/591723706](https://vimeo.com/591723706) to hear more of what Ms. Lowe had to say.

government and utility funds can successfully be braided together to make the most impact for customers with the largest financial and energy burdens.

## Partner Organizations

As part of the effort to reach these households, the EAL LIS program team reached out to both the AEO and BCD, an implementor for WAP programs, in early 2020 to learn about possible partnerships for outreach and shared projects. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship and roles of all three partner organizations. Through this partnership, these organizations accomplish their shared goal of helping low-income households become more energy efficient, safe, and comfortable.

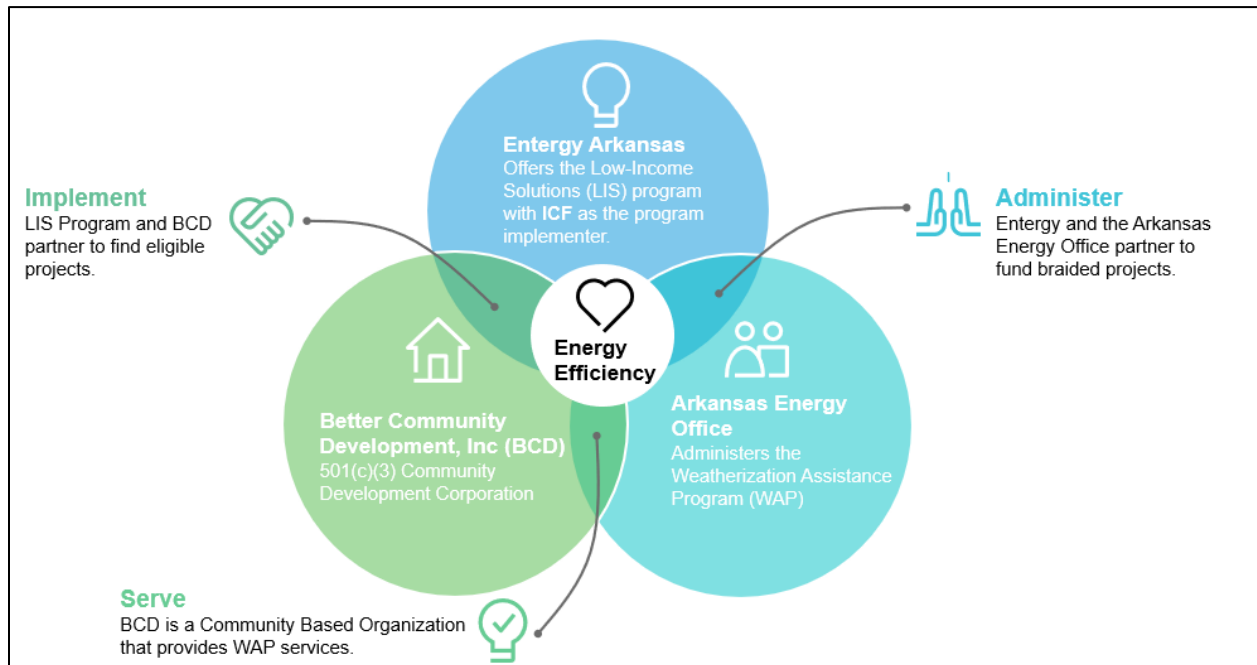


Figure 1. Relationship and roles between EAL, AEO and BCD when partnering on joint projects.

## Initial Planning Phase

Once all parties were interested in a braided funding project, one-to-one introductory meetings were swiftly converted to standing monthly virtual group meetings. While pandemic-related disturbances delayed the start-up phase, it did not prevent the project from moving forward once the group agreed the different programs could be aligned.

Early in the planning phase, great care was taken to identify and address challenges that may impact the partnership from moving forward:

- **Finding appropriate points of contacts and scheduling meetings.** While this task took time, each organization understood the importance and made time in their busy schedules to meet on a regular basis.
- **Learning each program's design and nuance.** Several meetings were held to specifically discuss and document each program's details.

- **Understanding each program’s strict regulatory guidelines.** Many meetings were held to ensure all regulatory guidelines were documented and adhered to.

## Overcoming Barriers

As shown in Figure 2, the two overarching barriers encountered for launching braided projects was the additional administrative burden to the BCD team and developing a new process that accounted for the shared costs and the different documents required so that costs and kWh savings were separated as needed and training the staff to properly submit braided projects.

EAL and AEO/WAP each use separate software for their application intake process. Each program also requires different training sessions, types of project photos, enrollment documents and calculations. Since projects still required separate applications and tracking, it was acknowledged early-on that BCD’s administrative lift could significantly increase. The team worked together to streamline and share the additional work required. The biggest relief was provided when the LIS team took the responsibility for entering project data into the Entergy system. Documenting the new process, providing training, and staying in close contact ensured a smooth application process.

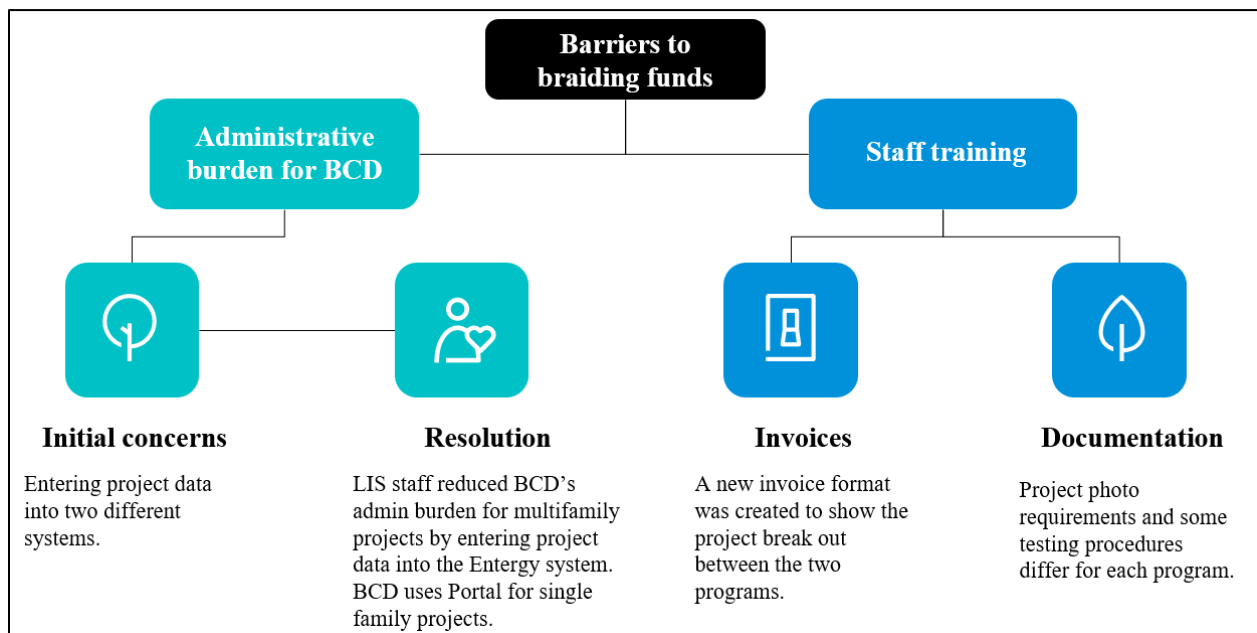


Figure 2. Barriers identified and solutions implemented to launch the braided funding partnership.

To drill down even further, through fact-finding discussions, the team identified specific challenges that needed to be addressed, documented, and developed training to ensure the project was aligned with multiple sets of requirements. Table 1 illustrates some of these specific challenges and their solutions.

Table 1. Specific challenges encountered and the resulting solutions.

Challenge	Solution
Learn how to navigate two different programs.	The team discussed expectations and documented the differences between the two programs.  The teams identified the measures offered by both programs and established baselines for applying the work done to the appropriate program to maximize savings under the braided approach.
Understand requirements. The LIS program had unique requirements that the WAP program didn't have.	The team identified unique requirements such as the below and included these requirement in project training documents: LIS requires LIHEAP income qualification, geotag-stamped project pictures and when duct sealing is performed – duct blaster is needed to obtain pre/post leakage.
Confirm eligibility based on past participation with Entergy programs.	The administrative team was able to utilize EAL's online Past Participation Tool to confirm past participation eligibility.
Input projects into multiple systems.	Since inputting projects into multiple systems was unavoidable, the LIS team took responsibility for inputting project information into the EAL system.

## Measure Assignment

Through this collaboration, more services are provided by both programs combined than either program can provide independently. Most measures can be covered by either of the two programs, though each program has its own cost-effectiveness calculation that determines what can be included in an individual project. WAP funding allows for big-ticket items such as refrigerators or new HVAC systems that are not available via the LIS program. Some measures can be covered by each program if minimum requirements are met. Great care is taken to ensure double counting of kWh savings and double dipping of incentives do not occur. Table 2 illustrates the measure assignment for a typical braided project.

Table 2. Measure assignment for a typical braided project.

Measure offered	Entergy Arkansas LIS	Weatherization Assistance Program
Home energy assessment	✓	
Attic insulation	✓	✓
Air sealing	✓	✓

Measure offered	Entergy Arkansas LIS	Weatherization Assistance Program
Duct sealing	✓	✓
LEDs		✓
HVAC repair	✓	✓
Ventilation fan	✓	✓
Door/window replacement	✓	✓
Smoke/CO alarms	✓	✓
Other health and safety	✓	✓
HVAC replacement		✓
Water heater replacement		✓
New refrigerator		✓
Manufactured home belly insulation		✓

For additional clarity, Figure 3 is a sample invoice that clearly outlines the funding of each measure offered. In the delivery phase, program teams have a clear understanding of how to apply each measure. Of the project total, roughly 20% is funded by the EAL LIS program and 80% is funded by the WAP program.

DESCRIPTION	QTY	UNIT PRICE	INCENTIVE
Entergy Incentive, Tier 2 Audit	1	75.00	75.00
Entergy Incentive, Insulation	1	583.68	583.68
Entergy Incentive, Air Sealing	1	442.74	442.74
Entergy Incentive, Duct Sealing	1	516.62	516.62
Entergy Incentive - Health & Safety - Vent Fan	1	500.00	500.00
BCD Group, 9W LED	19	8.00	152.00
BCD Group, Attic Prep, Air Seal	1	839.68	839.68
BCD Group, HVAC as ECM	1	6500.00	6500.00
BCD Group, Health & Safety - Dryer vent, Seal furnace closet	1	715.00	715.00
This is a joint project sponsored by the Better Community Development group and Entergy's Low Income Solutions program.		<b>Entergy LIS Contribution</b>	<b>\$2,118.04</b>
		<b>BCD Contribution</b>	<b>\$8,206.68</b>
		<b>Total Value: \$</b>	<b>10,324.72</b>

Figure 3. Sample invoice illustrating kWh and cost accounting.

## Results

The first joint projects were executed in 2020. Participation requirements included:

- Must be a residential customer in EAL service territory.
- Must have an income status that is LIHEAP eligible or aged 65+.
- Must have a working central A/C system, for HVAC/duct measure.

- Must not have previously participated in an EAL energy efficiency program.

Figure 4 illustrates typical funding contributions by home type for joint projects. The LIS program has covered roughly 20% of the costs for single-family home projects and 13% for multifamily home projects. The bulk of the difference in payment is due to WAP funding covering high-cost items such as new HVAC systems and appliances.

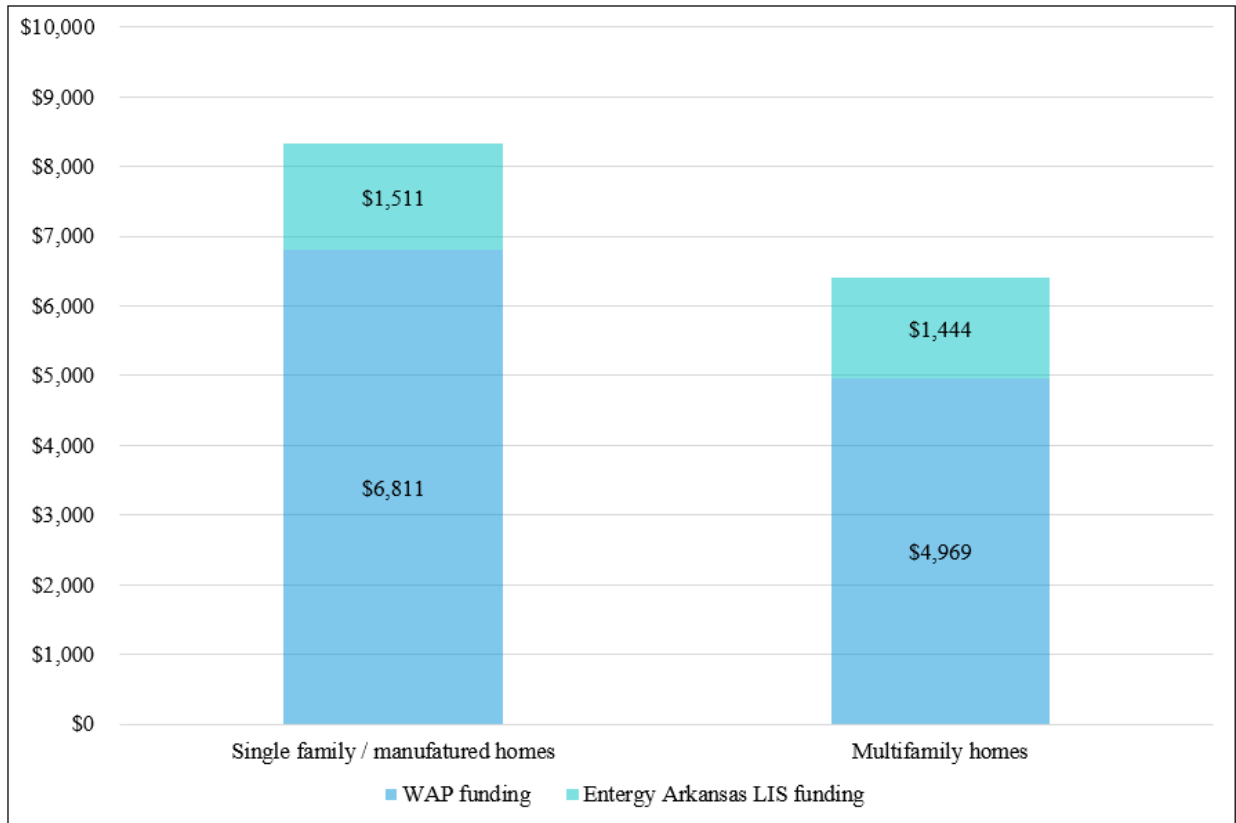


Figure 4. Typical funding contributions by home type for joint projects.

From 2020 through 2023, more than 100 projects have been delivered through this braided funding partnership. Due to service territory overlaps, BCD multifamily home projects consisted of rural, suburban and urban customers while single-family home projects were largely located in rural areas, specifically in the southeast Delta region of Arkansas. With additional funding provided by the EAL program, 15 homes were served that would not have qualified otherwise. Additionally, the partnership allowed for more measures to be installed which created a better customer experience while keeping health and safety measure costs down. The main drivers of non-qualification include WAP projects outside of EAL service territory or previous participation in an EAL program. Very few customers are not qualified based on income. Figure 5 illustrates the number and type of BCD WAP projects that were braided with Entergy LIS funding from 2020-2023.

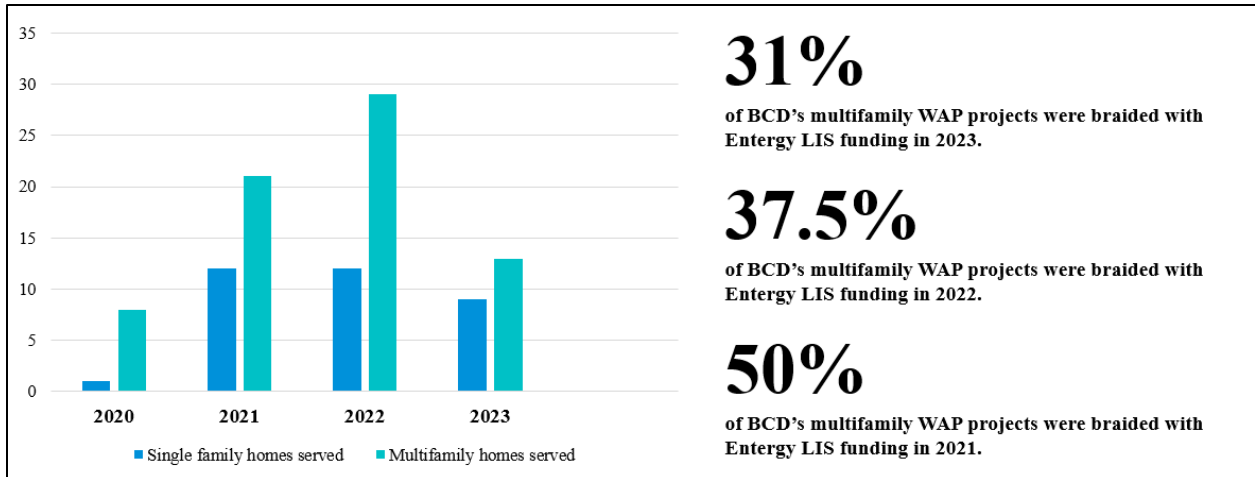


Figure 5. Number and type of BCD WAP projects that were braided with Entergy LIS funding.

## Conclusion

The success of this program and its partnerships continue to grow. Through the commitment of three separate organizations with a shared goal of reaching the most customers with the largest financial and energy burdens, since 2020, over 100 homes have been helped and participating customers have seen combined energy savings of over 23,067,000 kWh. This is equivalent to powering nearly 2,000 homes for one year, and over three million dollars in annual savings. The details shared in this paper could be replicated by others seeking to serve low-income families with enhanced funding opportunities by braiding together utility and government funds.