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Massachusetts Recovery



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Stimulus-funded green energy training program will get houses warm and people working



The South Middlesex Opportunity Council proposed one of 34 projects across the country that will receive a stimulus grant from the US Department of Energy. The social service agency will receive \$700,000 to develop and implement a "green jobs" training program that will help nearly 200 unemployed people over the next three years get jobs.

The grant was a collaborative effort between SMOC's job training center and its energy conservation services program. According to David Harrison, director of SMOC's energy and financial assistance division, the agency's weatherization contractors didn't have the skilled laborers to keep up with the demand for weatherization projects. A year ago, SMOC received \$8.3 million in stimulus-funded weatherization grants and within the last nine months, 441 units have been weatherized. Prior to stimulus, the agency had been averaging about 140 units a year.

"My weatherization department has between 75 to 100 jobs right now but I'm slowed up because my contractor base hasn't grown," says Harrison. "We talked to contractors who had trouble finding experienced help. We have these stimulus funds to get the contracts but we don't have the people to implement it."

SMOC tried to solve this problem on its own last October when it trained 10 people to work in the weatherization field. All those people are currently working. "We saw we could do this ourselves but we wanted to do it on a larger scale," says Harrison. He adds that it was the multidisciplinary approach of the proposal that he believes made it such a good one.



"We have all the expertise under one roof," he says. "We have a team of employment specialists and weatherization specialists who will provide the expertise to train these guys and train the trainers."

SMOC plans to use the stimulus grant to retrofit a training center inside its storage warehouse where trainees will learn in the classroom and on the site how to do weatherization services such as blowing insulation into walls an attic spaces, sealing air cracks and installing efficient shower heads. The program will train installers as well as crew chiefs.

One of the most significant features of the program involves SMOC's weatherization contractors, the potential employers. "We sat down with our contractors and every one said they would expand their crews if we could provide trained workers," says Harrison. SMOC agreed to provide the first two months salary of the workers trained by SMOC that the contractors hired.

"I'm really proud of this," says Harrison. "We were elated to get the grant and it will really help our opportunity center. It will get people jobs and it will help people who need their homes weatherized. This is what the President wanted to do with the Recovery Act."



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