

Project Warm

Program Profile

Lowering Utility Bills and Improving Comfort

[Project Warm](#), formerly known as Energy Conservation Associates Inc., first launched as an independent nonprofit in 1982 and now operated by [YouthBuild Louisville](#), promotes energy efficiency and conservation to underserved communities in Jefferson County, Kentucky. It offers weatherization services, education, and supplies through three main programs: First Line Weatherization Services, Project Warm Blitz, and Energy Management Workshops.

First Line Weatherization Services provides weatherization repairs to help homes stay warm in cold weather and cool in hot weather, reducing residents' energy bills. The program uses Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) area median income (AMI) to determine eligibility, and applicants are required to document their income. The program seeks to aid households with incomes up to 200 percent of the poverty level. Applicants must not have been served by the program within the past three years to allow new clients to receive support.

Once eligibility is confirmed, administrators schedule a home assessment, which is conducted by the program's weatherization specialist. Then an appointment is set for this specialist to return and implement the needed weatherization upgrades. These upgrades can include replacing doors and windows; caulking around windows and doors, and filling cracks in walls; installing LED lightbulbs; repairing minor holes in drywall; replacing furnace filters; and providing infrared heaters for the winter and fans for the summer. After implementing the weatherization upgrades, the program performs audits and surveys program recipients six months after services are administered to determine the impact of the weatherization updates on household utility bills.

Project Warm Blitz is an annual event during which more than 250 volunteers winterize and air seal the homes of over 300 seniors and/or disabled individuals. Volunteers come from area businesses, religious congregations, schools, and colleges and are trained in various

Fast Facts

Program scope: Weatherization upgrades to reduce utility bills and decrease carbon footprint.

Communities served: Low-income, elderly, and disabled homeowners and renters in Jefferson County, Kentucky.

Funding: Louisville Gas & Electric Company and Metro Louisville provide funding, with additional funding from AmeriCorps.

Key partners: Government organizations, community-based organizations, nonprofits.

Promising practices: Strong volunteer network, community workshops.



weatherization services by the Project Warm staff. Applicants can apply in August each year and the event takes place in late October to early November. To qualify for the program, participants must be aged 55 or older or have a disability that prohibits them from participating in an Energy Management Workshop.

Over a dozen Energy Management Workshops are hosted by Project Warm staff each year between October and February, which teach residents how to weatherize their own homes. Workshop participants who are Louisville Gas & Electric (LG&E) customers also receive a free kit of materials to weatherize their homes. Beyond weatherization, the workshops teach residents how to save money by implementing energy efficiency improvements. While there are income and/or age qualifications for participation in Project Warm's other two programs, the Energy Management Workshops are open to any resident of Louisville.

Community History

Jefferson County, Kentucky, is the most populated county in Kentucky and contains the city of Louisville. Louisville has a long history of racial discrimination, and to this day still has a high degree of racial segregation.¹ It is also one of the most economically segregated large metro areas in the United States.² In the 1930s, the federal government codified redlining in Louisville, creating maps that designated certain areas to focus investments.³ Construction of an elevated expressway along 9th Street created a physical barrier that further divided the city. Jefferson County residents in the historically disadvantaged areas are those most heavily serviced by Project Warm.

Residents in those areas also experience high vulnerability to cumulative pollution exposure from three operating coal plants and large industrial and commercial facilities that release particulate matter pollution into the air.¹ The weatherization services provided by Project Warm help seal homes and prevent this particulate matter from entering. As such, Project Warm services can help improve the long-term health of Louisville residents, not only by protecting them from extreme heat or cold weather but also by improving indoor air quality.

¹ Othering and Belonging Institute, University of California, Berkeley, 2023. [Most to Least Segregated Cities in 2020](#).

² Bloomberg, 2014. [The U.S. Cities Where the Rich Are Most Segregated From Everyone Else](#).

³ Acknowledge, Recognize, and Connect LLC. [Redlining Louisville](#).



Community Engagement

Project Warm began over 40 years ago, with financial support from LG&E and Metro Louisville. Today, LG&E and Metro Louisville continue to invest in Project Warm because of the social, economic, and environmental impact the program continues to produce.

YouthBuild Louisville, which became the fiscal partner for Project Warm in 2020, performs evaluations after community workshops to determine areas of improvement. Based on feedback from stakeholders about expanding program offerings, the program is preparing to apply for a federal grant to do deeper, more expensive work in the homes such as installing water heaters, new heating, and ventilation.

Community members can become participants in the program through multiple routes. LG&E refers people to Project Warm. Project Warm also engages neighborhood associations, nursing homes, and schools to identify potential applicants. Community action agencies, local nonprofits that provide services to low-income individuals, and the city's housing agency also refer people to Project Warm. Additionally, during Project Warm's Energy Management Workshops, participants can apply to Project Warm Blitz or First Line Weatherization Services. Community members may also reach out to Project Warm directly.

Key Partners

Project Warm has a diverse team of partners, including:

- [Louisville Metro Fire Department](#) – The fire department for Louisville Metro.
- [Louisville Gas & Electric Company](#) (LG&E) – A regulated utility that serves 762,000 customers in Louisville.
- [Metro Louisville](#) – City of Louisville, Kentucky, local government.
- [The Gheens Foundation](#) – A Louisville nonprofit that aims to improve the quality of life for the residents of Louisville and distributes over \$8 million in charitable grants annually.
- [Kentucky Colonels](#) – An organization appointed by the Governor of Kentucky that supports Kentucky charities.
- [AmeriCorps](#) – The federal agency for national service and volunteerism.
- [Louisville Urban League](#) – A nonprofit community service organization dedicated to eliminating racism and its adverse impact in Louisville.



- [Cleaner World Project](#) – A nonprofit organization that works to combat the energy crisis and create solutions for climate change.

Project Warm receives funding from LG&E, Metro Louisville, and AmeriCorps. Project Warm Blitz receives additional funding for supplies from the Gheens Foundation and the Kentucky Colonels. The Louisville Metro Office of Resilience and Community Services has provided retired senior volunteers over the past 20 years to help implement weatherization updates for both First Line Weatherization Services and Project Warm Blitz.

Funding Mechanism

LG&E, Metro Louisville, and AmeriCorps fund Project Warm. To continue receiving this funding, Project Warm is required to report energy bill audit outcomes annually to LG&E and Metro Louisville. Project Warm Blitz receives additional funding from the Gheens Foundation and the Kentucky Colonels. Together, these sources of funding cover all weatherization services provided through Project Warm—providing no-cost services to participants through its First Line Weatherization and Project Warm Blitz programs, as well as education and free weatherization kits through its workshops.

YouthBuild is currently exploring options for additional funding to expand the program. The nonprofit is planning to apply to a [HUD Healthy Homes grant](#), specifically for Project Warm, and is considering seeking additional funding from private foundations. With additional funding, Project Warm would be able to implement more extensive weatherization updates and service more homes.

Program Impact

In 2023, First Line Weatherization Services helped approximately 25 households each month.⁴ That same year, Project Warm Blitz helped weatherize the homes of nearly 300 additional seniors and disabled individuals. In 2022, the First Line Weatherization Services program provided services to 194 homes and 423 individuals.⁴ Project Warm is currently seeking additional funding which would allow the program to serve more households.

⁴ Alayna Lofgren, program manager, Project Warm, 2023. Personal Communication.



Project Warm evaluates energy savings by analyzing a sample of First Line Weatherization Services participants' home energy bills to track the average decrease in energy use. The program's services can help reduce a home's energy use by an average of 10 percent; some households have reported as much as a 35 percent reduction.⁴ Project Warm does not currently track emission impacts or cost savings, but it is interested in measuring these benefits in the future. With additional funding, Project Warm could collect these metrics to better understand the program's impact and track progress towards future goals.

Barriers and Challenges

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Project Warm was unable to access participants' homes due to concern about spreading the virus.⁵ The YouthBuild CEO noted that it is difficult for a program like this to jumpstart after such a pause in services, because without strong performance metrics, it can be hard to maintain and secure funding.⁵

Another challenge noted by the project administrator is that some Project Warm participants would set an appointment for weatherization services but then were not home at the scheduled date and time. As such, workers would show up to provide services but were unable to enter these homes. At these times, the program invested time and effort to gather supplies and secure workers for the job, but were unable to provide services to participants because an alternate participant could not be scheduled without advanced notice.⁵ Another challenge related to home access is that some participants have been anxious about allowing people to enter their homes, in some cases due to embarrassment over the state of their living situations.⁵

“Just this past week, our Weatherization Specialist went out to the home of one of our clients. This particular client is on a fixed income, had been without heat for the past three years, and her pipes had recently burst. She had a single gas fireplace and a few space heaters that she was using to try to heat the home. The weatherization specialist installed a new lock on her door, a new crawl space door, but most importantly, covered up the foundation vents that had caused her pipes to burst. The team showed her how to uninstall the materials and use them again next year when it became cold again. She was extremely grateful for the help and was fighting back tears while she thanked our weatherization specialist and group of volunteers.”

- Alayna Lofgren, Project Warm Program Manager

⁵ Lynn Rippy, CEO, YouthBuild Louisville, 2023. Personal Communication.



Recommendations from the Field

- **Cultivate strong partnerships with volunteer groups.** Project Warm administrators and its parent organization, YouthBuild, recommend cultivating strong partnerships with reliable and committed volunteers including church groups, community groups, and civic and school groups. Project Warm relies heavily on volunteers and has found that volunteers can be incredibly important to keep a program running even when funding is limited. Specifically, retired volunteers have been very helpful to this program since they often have more time to volunteer. These strong partnerships with community volunteers can create great value for the program and attract new participants.
- **Seek out similar organizations.** Project Warm partners with LG&E's WeCare program to refer clients to one another in a way that will best suit client needs. Discovering and partnering with other local organizations with similar missions and programs allows organizations to provide more comprehensive services to their clients. By coordinating efforts, community-based organizations can serve more clients and potentially extend the scope of the work provided.
- **Create well-known annual events.** One of the reasons Project Warm's Blitz event is so successful is that it has taken place every year for the past 41 years. Volunteer groups and clients alike expect this event to take place around the same time every year and continue coming back to participate. This makes finding volunteers a smooth process. Not only do previous volunteers come back to serve, but they will usually bring new friends to help as well. This process allows Project Warm Blitz to serve more clients each year while also growing the project's volunteer database.

For More Information

- [Project Warm](#)
- [YouthBuild Louisville Programs](#)
- [HUD Healthy Homes](#)