

Helping customers through innovative programming

With rising energy costs in the wake of the global pandemic, the National Energy Assistance Directors Association estimates that as many as 20 million U.S. households are behind on their utility bills. While several utility cost savings and crisis assistance programs exist, enrollment of eligible households remains low. Driven by its core values of Equity and Customer Focus, the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (District) sought an innovative solution to increase enrollment in its cost savings programs.

The District and the elected officials within its service area conceived a process to identify and lower the barriers to cost-savings and community benefit enrollment by holding Utility Assistance Resource Fairs (UARF). At each UARF, representatives from each local utility and the agencies that process assistance applications come together as a “one-stop shop”. Attendees can learn about their eligibility for programs, speak to their utility providers, as well as submit completed applications for a variety of utility assistance programs and community benefits.



The standing challenges to utility assistance enrollment- even with the help of utilities and service providers- are manifold. These include increasing community awareness of the programs, explaining eligibility requirements, and most challenging: receiving complete applications. In order to receive the benefit of attending a UARF, attendees must come prepared with very specific personal documents that can be difficult to acquire, but without which applications cannot be completed. In light of this, clear communication of these requirements and building trust between residents and the assistance providers is critical for increasing UARF attendance and successful enrollment.

Faced with the knowledge of existing barriers and the desire for a robust enrollment, a comprehensive campaign was created to guarantee that each UARF not only maximized the number of individuals in attendance, but also ensured that each resident submitted a completed application and received the assistance that they needed. Through the use of physical and digital advertising, radio and tv, automated calling, and a digital registry system, communication regarding the UARF was disseminated through target communities. Residents were registered one-on-one with a customer service representative to ensure clear communication regarding what programs were available and the necessary documents that residents needed to bring to the UARF. Then, a team of trained staff from all utility providers and agencies was amassed and equipped with the technological resources needed to execute a successful event. Finally, data was gathered throughout and after each UARF using Ipads and custom-created digital applications, so that each successive event was informed by metrics gathered from all previous UARF, further driving success of the enrollment initiative.

NORTHEAST OHIO REGIONAL SEWER DISTRICT

UTILITY ASSISTANCE RESOURCE FAIRS

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARD



NEORSD employees help connect customers with the support from utilities and services they need at one of four 2024 Utility Assistance Resource Fairs. neorsd.org/help

2024

Rate Reduction program
enrollments in 2024:

2,041

Total families served
at Resources Fairs in 2024:

848

Crisis Assistance Awards
in 2024 (total \$267,000+)

1,040