

Michigan Water Leak Pilot: Recommendations for Improving Local and State Agency Collaborations with Community Groups and Residents

The lessons learned from this project are applicable to a wide variety of projects that involve engineers or local or state agencies working closely with community members, accessing their homes, providing repairs or upgrades, and/or seeking specific behavior changes. Specifically, these recommendations should be incorporated into any future water leak or lead service line replacement project.

- There should be an overall program manager with authority to work across agencies, to ensure all contractors or project participants know their roles/responsibilities and those of their colleagues, and to coordinate among all contractors. This individual should provide regular updates to all contractors, especially when processes are updated or changed in any way.
- The program manager should work with community groups to find the appropriate education/engagement outlets for a given community/audience and trusted messengers, and use those outlets regularly throughout the program. Repetition is key to adopting behavior change.
- The program manager should appoint community organizers to shepherd residents through the entire process of the program. This individual or organization should be known and trusted by the community. They will be in a position to help community members who have experienced successful participation in the program communicate and encourage their neighbors to participate.
- The program manager should build in and enforce review processes that quickly identify and address barriers and other challenges that emerge over the course of the project. This would be aided by regular all-hands meetings that allow everyone to hear and respond to emerging needs.
- Program managers need to be in the room with community members and they need to listen to each other to understand what is working and not working.

These lessons learned come from a program evaluation of the water leak pilot program initiated by the [Michigan Clean Water Public Advocate](#) in January 2021. The pilot program was conducted in two communities: Highland Park in Southeast Michigan and Benton Harbor in Southwest Michigan. The goal of the pilot project was to provide plumbing services to stop supply-side leaks in up to 100 homes in each community. You can access the full report at graham.umich.edu/system/files/pubs/Water-Pilot-Assessment-Report-FINAL.pdf.

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