

Managing Lean and Green:
Engaging Tenants in Making our Buildings More Sustainable

Workshop presented by Alexis Perrotta, Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDCO); with Cathy Brady, Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation; William Lang, Geel Community Services; and, Anthony Gelber, Pratt Institute
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There do not seem to be any true experts in enlisting tenants' support in managing affordable housing to be more sustainable; yet, there are people in the forefront of efforts to do so. We were lucky to have a few of these at our November workshop. Ideas were shared by presenters and participants alike; these ideas are summarized below.

To engage tenant in building retrofits

When WHEDCO set out to retrofit Urban Horizons a landmark building that they had originally renovated in 1997, their utilities cost over \$500,000 - over 30% of their original projections. In addition, the tenants' costs were high for electricity.

After a first round of addressing some relatively inexpensive easy energy reduction measures, e.g., replacing lighting and inefficient refrigerators, WHEDCO staff held a **tenant meeting** about how tenants can lower their Con Ed bills. At the meeting WHEDCO staff discussed:

- How tenants can reduce their own costs: WHEDCO staff had **researched the tenants' billing history** so that they could report that measures WHEDCO had already taken had decreased the tenants bills by 6% even while the bills went up 8% around the city;
- How tenants **can be part of something bigger**;
- That electricity uses fossil fuels that harm the environment (something many tenants did not know);
- **Made the link between energy use and asthma and allergies** by explaining that using electricity, heating fuels increases the pollutants that cause asthma and allergies;
- **New cleaning products**, again emphasizing the relationship between harmful chemicals and asthma and allergies;
- Next steps, **including measures that would make the tenants happy**, i.e., new vestibule doors.

Some reasons they found this meeting to be successful:

- They included specific building information on the flyer
- Gave the tenants lots of notice
- Had a sign-in sheet at the meeting
- Had property managers on hand to address questions

- Presented a unified front of building management, maintenance, development staff.
- Gave out some **free handouts** which they had received from Con Edison

William Lang of Geel Community Services shared successful steps on their efforts to improve the rate of recycling in their buildings.

- Department of Sanitation **provides workshops** to help ensure the building sorts garbage appropriately.
- The **tenants were provided with bags and bins** to make recycling easier.
- The building management **tracked the amount of recycling** by counting bags of recycled materials on a public bulletin board that set goals and showed when goals were reached.
- When the goals were reached, the building management hosted a **green party** for the tenants with free food and drinks.

To continuously engage tenants in energy conservation efforts, Fordham Bedford,

- Sends out a **newsletter** with the monthly rent bills that informs and asks for tenants' participation in energy conservation measures. For example, they request that tenants remove their air conditioners in the winter and remove their furniture from in front of their radiators during heating season. They ask the tenants to notify management of faulty window locks and leaks. Newsletters include neighborhood events. Fordham Bedford sends out over 2800 newsletters.
- In addition, they hand out **flyers about the heating laws** to explain that what tenants expect is not necessarily the same as what is required.
- They **provide their supers with heat guns** so they can confirm temperature in the apartments when they get heating complaints. The supers are instructed to check the temperature at different places in the apartment, for example, in front of a tenant's window air conditioner.
- They have offered to **store tenants' air conditioners** and set a goal of 100% AC removal during winter.
- Market the **EmPower NY program** so tenants get their own efficient lighting, AC and refrigerators.
- **Con Edison provided CFL bulbs** via Quality Conservation Services, Inc through Con Ed's No Cost Lighting Express Program.
- They **reviewed Con Edison Bills** with their tenants after the change in light bulbs, refrigerator and AC and showed tenants that they were saving \$20- \$40 per month.

Anthony Gelber, Pratt Institute's Sustainability Director for Facilities reported that Pratt:

- Runs an **Eco-Reps** program in the dorms as a way to enlist student involvement. Students are given a small budget that they can use to make their dorms more sustainable. These programs are run in college campuses around the country. Sometimes there is a competition between buildings to see who can reduce costs most. They may focus on turning off or replacing lighting, recycling, or other measures to make their residences more environmentally friendly.