

How to Start a FLOWS Program in Your Community

A Brief Guide



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- 4. Government/University/NGO/Grassroots/Community Leaders/Private Sector (?)**

ii. Purpose of outreach

- 1. Tell them about FLOWS**
- 2. Find out what they are doing**
- 3. Explore potential collaborations/partnerships and make sure we are not replicating existing efforts.**
- 4. Ask for help spreading word about program to:**
 - a. Hire community members and students to become FLOW Leaders**
 - b. Help spread the word about FLOWS opportunity to get water/energy upgrades in low-income homes**
- 5. Outcomes: Established strong partnership with BHP, helped us identify a community to launch a pilot program, helped us identify other efforts and potential collaborators for the future.**

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Introduction

The Foundations for Leaders Organizing for Water and Sustainability (FLOWS) Program was initiated by the University of Colorado's Environmental Center in January of 2016. This program seeks to partner students with community members to enhance water and energy conservation in communities of color and low-income communities throughout the City and County of Boulder and beyond. The mission of the FLOWS Program is to bridge social justice and environmental issues providing leadership opportunities and green job training in collaboration with underserved communities. Consequently, the program's goals are to:

- Provide culturally relevant, hands-on water/energy education and training to students and underserved communities.
- Emphasize the importance of behavior change in water/energy conservation while building partnerships between students, staff, and community members.
- Raise awareness about diverse sustainable traditions in communities of color and low-income communities through intercultural education and dialogue.
- Lower water/energy bills in affordable housing communities by training students and community members to install free energy and water upgrades and sustainability measures such as water-smart showerheads, faucet aerators, energy-efficient light bulbs, green cleaners, etc. in low-income homes.
- Provide leadership and community engagement opportunities throughout the community, including:
 - inform the City of Boulder's climate action plan.
- Providing stipends and/or compensation of students and community members for training, installations and events.
- Provide a replicable framework to enhance water/energy conservation efforts at other universities.

This document was designed to help others start similar programs in their communities and let you know a little bit about our processes, successes and areas for growth, etc.

Background

The FLOWS Program is based on an existing water and energy conservation program at the CU Environmental Center called SCORE. SCORE focuses on water and energy conservation for university students living off campus. This student-to-student initiative provides water and energy upgrades for 200 student residences per year, impacting about 600 student tenants per year. The student-to-student model has been proven to be successful in reducing the carbon footprint of students at CU-Boulder. By installing free water-smart showerheads, faucet aerators, energy-efficient light builds, and other conservation widgets, students also benefit from lower water/energy bills. Additionally, behavior change is emphasized to encourage sustainable lifestyle changes students can practice at their current or future residences.

The FLOWS Program seeks to expand on the success of SCORE by collaborating with low-income and affordable housing communities. Consequently, the FLOWS Program provides a unique model for community-based participatory education, where both students and community members benefit. By engaging communities of color and low-income communities, FLOWS seeks to broaden equitable community partnerships of marginalized people throughout the City and County of Boulder. Part of what sets

Flows apart is that students and community members are compensated for their time, whether through hourly pay or through stipends and gift cards.

The FLOWS Program is a part of a larger water conservation initiative called Water for the West, which engages sports fans in water conservation and sustainable behaviors. FLOWS goes beyond outreach to only students address social equity issues in the broader community.

Sponsors and Community Partners

Sponsors, partnerships and collaborations are key to the success of the FLOWS Program. Sponsors contributed to the funding of the program to compensate staff, students, and community members for their participation in the program. Sponsors include Bonneville Environmental Foundation, Kohler, Xcel Energy, and Wells Fargo. Our key and most critical partnership has come in working with Boulder Housing Partners (BHP) which is the housing authority for Boulder. Other community partners include: the City of Boulder, the City of Boulder’s Office of Sustainability, Boulder Workforce Center, Boulder Food Share, Center for Resource Conservation, Intercambio, Ecoarts, Longs Peak Energy Conservation and various CU organizations, researchers, and educators (Table 1).

Table 1. Key Sponsors and Community Partners for the FLOWS Program

Sponsors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Bonneville Environmental Foundation● Wells Fargo● Xcel Energy● Kohler
Community Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● <i>Boulder Housing Partners</i>● City of Boulder● City of Boulder’s Office of Sustainability● Boulder Workforce Center● Boulder Food Share● Center for Resource Conservation● Intercambio● Ecoarts● Longs Peak Energy Conservation● Various CU organizations● CU Researchers● Affordable Housing residents

Boulder Housing Partners is the affordable housing authority for Boulder. With them, we were able to work directly with affordable housing maintenance staff, while holding trainings and community engagement events on-site. Partnering with Boulder Housing Partners made our process much smoother and helped us avoid some of the scheduling complexities we anticipated in working with the community. Working with them helped ensure the success of the pilot program in the Summer of 2016, and moving forward. This partnership enabled the launch a successful pilot project in a low-income community with the possibility of expanding to other affordable housing communities throughout Boulder Housing Partners network. The following sections will go into further details on

how to launch a FLOWS Program at other universities, using the example of CU-Boulder's FLOWS Program as a case study.

How to Get Started?

Community Outreach

Establishing partnerships with multiple organizations is crucial to: (1) identifying other organizations that do similar work with communities of color and low-income communities; (2) identifying possible opportunities for collaboration with different organizations; (3) recruiting students and community members to become FLOWS leaders; and (4) helping spread the word about FLOWS. The first step to conducting community outreach is to identify organizations in your area that work in the area of economic, social, and/or environmental sustainability and/or justice. It's important to think outside of the box about potential partners in government, university-settings, non-profit organizations, grassroots organizations, the private sector, and community leaders that are not necessarily affiliated with an established organization. Community outreach serves the dual purpose of identifying potential collaborators and making sure that efforts are not being replicated by other local entities. When starting a new FLOWS Program, it is important to make sure you are not duplicating other local efforts and/or unintentionally undermining those efforts.

Possible partners include: water and/or energy conservation organizations, eco-social justice organizations, and organizations that are led by and serve people of color and/or low-income communities. For example, the Boulder Food Share doesn't necessarily seem like a likely partner with a water conservation organization on the surface; however, this organization focuses on providing affordable food for low-income communities. Collaborating with them as a partner will help spread the word about the FLOWS program to low-income community members that go to get food at the Boulder Food Share. There have also been discussions about holding community events at the grocery store to engage marginalized communities in the future. In another example, Intercambio focuses on language programs for the Latin@ (Latina/Latino) community. Since the focus of FLOWS is to collaborate with and serve people of color, we reached out to Intercambio to help spread the word about the FLOWS Program to the Latino community. In this case, one may not think initially that a language program has anything to do with a water and energy conservation program. However, serving and reaching the Latino community highlights the importance of collaborating with Intercambio. Intercambio helped with community outreach to spread the word about the program by sharing flyers and promotional information with the broader Latino community.

Upon identifying potential partners, reaching out to community organizations and people is largely about finding out what others are doing and telling them about the goals of the FLOWS Program. Outreach serves to introduce the FLOWS Program and explore potential collaborations. Introductions also serve to identify where collaboration isn't necessarily a good fit or is not there yet. Collaborations can range from strong partnerships to loose affiliations and it's important to go into the conversation open to different possibilities. An example of a strong partnership is the FLOWS Program's collaboration with Boulder Housing Partners (BHP), where the pilot project was launched at a BHP site. In contrast, a loose affiliation could include asking another organization to help spread the word about the FLOWS program. For example, a partner organization

could help spread the word about the opportunity for low-income communities to get water and energy upgrades. This can be done by emailing them details about the FLOWS Program and sharing an informational flyer about getting water/energy upgrades. Additionally, partners can also help by spreading the word about hiring community members and students to become FLOWS Leaders and get training to install water and energy upgrades. Figure 1 shows an example flyer that can be shared with community partners to help recruit students and community members to become FLOWS Leaders. It's important to create culturally relevant promotional content, such as bilingual flyers, if your goal is to reach the Latino community and/or other communities of color. Figure 1 shows a flyer that was designed for the launch of the pilot FLOWS Program that had a matching Spanish version.



Figure 1. Flyer to recruit students and community members to become FLOWS Leaders (Flyer also available in Spanish).

Community outreach can also serve to identify future collaborators and help other organization spread the word about their work. For example, researchers at in the Environmental Studies Program are working on a collaboration with trailer park communities that could serve as future site locations for water and energy upgrades. Additionally, researchers in the Environmental Engineering Program are conducting studies on indoor air quality in low-income communities. The FLOWS Program exchanged informational flyers with the air quality study to inform residents about this opportunity and the air quality study is simultaneously helping spread the word about the FLOWS Program. This collaboration is mutually beneficial for both organizations and may evolve into more in the future.

Community outreach should be an ongoing process that begins by compiling a list of potential collaborators and then creating an email template to set up a meeting with other organizations. At CU-Boulder, the FLOWS Program community outreach resulted in identifying potential funding sources, collaborating with the City of Boulder's Climate

Action Plan, establishing a strong partnership with BHP that helped launch a pilot program, and identifying other local efforts and sites for potential collaboration in the future. We are even applying for funding with some of our partner organizations.

Working with Boulder's Climate Action planners has also helped create additional leadership opportunities for FLOWS leaders, which is a big part of our mission for this program.

Launching a Pilot

Holding an Initial Community Event

Upon identifying a site location, community outreach was held at an affordable housing community to promote the program and recruit community members to become FLOWS leaders. This was done first sending out a notice to all residents through BHP to let them know that a meeting would be held. The notice gave some basic information about the FLOWS Program, highlighted an opportunity to sign up for free water and energy upgrades, and informed residents about the time and date of the meeting and the stipend opportunity. The meeting was intentionally set up to be informal to allow residents to come find out about the program. Tables were set up outdoors with information about the program and some snacks and refreshments for the community to enjoy (Hint: Everyone loves food, especially free food and it's a great way to draw people in). The meeting was held from 10-2 on a Saturday, when we expected most people would be off of work. As community members came to the table, we talked to them about the FLOWS Program, engaging parents and children about water and energy conservation. After talking to them about the program, we asked residents to sign up for site visits to receive free water and energy upgrades. We also asked community members if they were interested in conducting the water and energy upgrades and participating in a training to become FLOWS Leaders.

Key Lessons Learned: We were fortunate enough to identify community members interested in becoming FLOWS Leaders after one meeting, especially with a few key community members who recruited their friends. In other communities however, this will likely require multiple community engagement events prior to getting buy-in to participate in the program as FLOWS Leaders (which was our original expectation). Our recruitment team consisted of people of color and folks from low-income communities, which helped make recruiting much smoother. Most of our team was also bilingual (English/Spanish). Having the leadership of the organization reflect the communities that we sought to serve was beneficial to engaging community members. Despite being from a university setting, the diversity of the FLOWS recruitment team was an asset in fortifying a good connection to diverse members of the community.

Additionally, as we were setting up the program we heard from multiple organizations (e.g., governmental, NGO, and university) that it would be difficult to engage community members in sustainability efforts. We often heard that low-income communities and communities of color are not interested in sustainability, yet we found out that there was a lot of interest in water/energy conservation and sustainability in this particular community. It is important to note that low-income communities and communities of color do not consist of homogenous thinkers that all have the same worldview. As with any community, variability of thought exists from person to person and we were able to identify various low-income community members passionate about water, energy and the

environment. It is important to think about the words staff use to talk about sustainability. There are a lot of communities/people who might say they don't care passionately about "sustainability," but may care about water pollution, the high cost of housing and utilities or transportation, etc.

Recruiting FLOWS Leaders

The community outreach event was crucial to identifying community leaders and recruiting community members to participate in the program. We were able to identify interested community leaders and ask them for suggestions of other people that would be willing to participate in the FLOWS Program. Persistence was key to developing a relationship with community members to get them to participate in the program. Email, text, and phone calls were all used to follow-up with community members to recruit them to participate in the FLOWS training engaging each person in the mode of communication that best worked for them. In our experience, building personal connections and trust was key to the recruiting process.

Student recruitment was conducted differently than community recruitment of FLOWS Leaders. We had the advantage of speaking with students already engaged or employed through the CU Environmental Center. We reached out to SCORE staff (the peer-to-peer conservation program previously mentioned), members of the Environmental Justice Team, or graduates of our "Eco-Social Justice Leadership Program," facilitated by the FLOWS manager on campus. Therefore, we had a diverse pool of students who had already been examining the ways in which social justice issues and sustainability intertwine and learning to see communities that are often thought of as disadvantaged through an assets perspective.

In addition to sending out a job announcement through the CU Environmental Center, we spoke in classrooms about the program, met with researchers in similar areas to help spread the word, and reached out to social justice and POC-oriented student organizations. Additionally, we reached out to students with prior experience to conducting water and energy upgrades through the SCORE Program to gauge interest in the FLOWS Program.

Hiring FLOWS Leaders

Upon identifying students and community members interested in becoming FLOWS Leaders, we asked all interested participants to fill out an online application. One application was designed for students where as another application was designed for community members. All applications were subsequently reviewed and a doodle poll was used to schedule interviews with applicants that met the minimum requirements. Priority was given to low-income community members that lived in the community where the pilot was going to be launched. We then conducted job interviews to select 7 community member and 7 students to become FLOWS Leaders. Participants were selected based on their interest in community engagement and sustainability, dedication to and previous experience with social justice work, and willingness to participate in the scheduled trainings and installations. Scheduling is one of the more difficult parts and we found that we had to work to do events and trainings on weekends or in some cases late afternoons/evenings.

Scheduling

Once all students and community members were hired, a doodle poll was sent out to identify a weekend to conduct training sessions and installations. The training was conducted through a 2-day course on a weekend in May from 10-2 and the installations took place on a weekend in June from 10-2. On both days lunch was provided and childcare was provided for FLOWS Leaders. The training covered the following topics:

Day 1 - Training

- Introductions to FLOWS Program and Icebreaker
- Background on Program and Training
- Key Stressors on Water and Energy Resources
- Connection between Water, Energy, Food & Climate Change
- Water Usage Patterns in U.S.
- Importance of Technology and Behavior to Reduce Water Usage
- Showed Watershed film and discussed film

Day 2 - Training

- Social Justice as an Integral Part of Sustainability
- Legacies of Sustainability & Eco-Social Justice
- Examples of Water Traditions of Indigenous Communities
- Three Pillars of Sustainability: Social, Economic, and Environmental
- Brief History of Environmental Justice and Contributions for People of Color
- Problems and Solutions to Sustainability Change with Context
- Who Cares About Environmental Issues? Perspectives and Misperceptions
- The 4I's of Transformation: Ideological, Internal, Interpersonal, Institutional
- Practical Introductions to Installation Materials and Sample Installations
- FLOWS Assessment Form
- Importance of Respectful Community Engagement

Installations and FLOWS Assessment Form

After conducting a weekend of trainings we held another weekend to conduct the installations. The installations training consisted of showing FLOWS Leaders how to fill out a FLOWS Assessment Form and how to install key water and energy upgrades. Training on installations include the following water and energy upgrades:

- Shower heads
- Faucet Aerators
- Zip-Its
- Shower Timers
- Green Cleaners
- Energy-efficient Light Bulbs
- Weather Stripping
- Window Film
- Pipe Insulation
- We also test:
 - Freezer & Refrigerator temperatures
 - Hot water temperatures

- Toilets for leaks
- Toilet fixes (handles, flappers, water bricks) (pending)
- Toilets (water efficient donated in-kind by Kohler)

Getting Community Feedback

Throughout all of the trainings and at the end of the installation days, we asked for feedback in a variety of mediums—from conversations, to space to free-write and finally with a survey. Because we centered on community-building and approached sustainability from an equity perspective, we received incredibly positive feedback with the main feedback being that people wanted to do more and wanted to continue learning and working together. Speaking about the ways in which low-income communities and indigenous and international communities are sustainability geniuses and should be recognized as leaders was a powerful way to lead.

Moving forward

Moving forward, we'd like to make FLOWS be an even more powerful program for “Green Job” training and even entrepreneurial training and support, getting deeper and deeper into the ways in which we can partner to make our communities more sustainable from the ground up. This can involve more trainings around solar installation, plumbin, and deeper energy audits. We are also hoping to eventually incorporate outdoor trips and experiences so that students/community members have an opportunity to connect with the air, water, and land they are working so hard to protect.

If you are interested in starting your own program or would like more information, please contact us. Best of luck & thank you!

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