

To: Brett KenCairn, City of Boulder
From: Meister Consultants Group/Cadmus Group
Re: Summary of Best Practices for Residential Community Renewable Energy Marketing Campaigns

This memo discusses a range of marketing best practices observed from community renewable energy outreach, education, and group purchasing campaigns. This memo draws on approaches, programs, and data derived from city, community, and utility programs focusing on heat pumps, solar PV, and energy efficiency, given the more limited number of heat pump-focused campaigns that have been implemented in the past few years.

This memo summarizes general best practices observed in community campaigns and programs primarily from the Northeast and provides additional information on the effectiveness, costs, and potential approaches for deploying various outreach methods.

General best practices

Organize a core team of volunteers to support engagement with partner organizations, drive word-of-mouth, and augment city capacity. While the City and County will be leading the pilot program, community campaigns are labor intensive (e.g. average 4-6 month Solarize campaign takes about 600 person-hours). Successful city campaigns have often been supported by a strong network of volunteers who can build on and expand the reach of city marketing and outreach efforts. Solarize campaigns have typically utilized a core volunteer team of approximately eight individuals, one of which often serves as a “Coach” for leading the broader group, coordinating with the municipal government, and/or being the primary point of contact for inquiries.

Build and leverage support from a broad network of partner organizations to support outreach. Campaign implementing entities often have limited marketing resources and budgets (e.g. Solarize Mass provides campaign organizers with a \$2,500 grant, of which up to \$1,000 may be used as a stipend). Leveraging existing city resources that can be used at no additional cost (e.g. public meeting spaces, tabling at city-organized events, city-organized citizen action committees) will be valuable, though building a broad network of partner organizations can also be critical to amplify City reach, target different market segments, and reinforce community trust within a City program. In particular, targeting key influencers as partner organizations to promote the City’s program can be a cost-effective way to drive positive word-of-mouth. These influencers could include:

- Affinity groups and local community organizations/non-profits that can boost messaging to various partners. For example, the City of Northampton leveraged volunteer support from Climate Action Now and Mothers Out Front, two climate advocacy organizations active in Western Mass.
- Organizations affiliated with high-value market segments. For example, Councils on Aging are trusted information providers within a community and may be able to more effectively promote cooling/home comfort benefits to their audiences (e.g. senior citizens, caretakers)
- Financing organizations that participate in special loan programs. For example, Somerville coordinated with Century Bank (which offers the Mass Save HEAT Loan) to send out letters on City letterhead to mailing lists provided by the City at no cost to the City. Somerville has considered this to be the single most cost-effective means of outreach during their campaign: while direct mailers from the City drew in the most leads, they were also the most expensive.

- Utilities and utility efficiency program administrators with existing relationships across the HVAC supply chain. For example, Mass Save, a statewide efficiency initiative sponsored by the electric and gas utilities in Massachusetts, coordinates closely with a variety of contractor and retailer partners to promote Mass Save programs through social media.

As a first step, the City and County could put together a list of influencers based on their existing relationships, and reach out to them about promoting the electrification program(s), particularly where the building electrification program offers beneficial information to promote to the influencer's own followers.

Emphasize marketing and communications approaches that have been leveraged by the City in the past. While a variety of marketing and communications activities can be successful for driving outreach, the City should consider first prioritizing outreach pathways that have been previously successful for driving action. Engaging a broader network of partners can unlock a wider range of outreach pathways and existing infrastructure for maximizing marketing.

- For example, while email blasts are often considered of medium value to Solarize organizers, a membership organization or utility that communicates to its members/customers primarily through email blasts may find these efforts more impactful. In the Mass Solar Connect Pilot, Mass Energy found that 45% of all leads and nearly 60% of leads from their members came within two days of an email blast. Furthermore, Mass Save has an email list of over 50,000 contacts, and maintains an open rate of roughly 40%, as monthly emails are a primary means of promoting their programs.

Ensure clear and consistent branding and messaging for the campaign, particularly where there are other related City/County programs (that promote other related initiatives and technologies) that could cause confusion.

- In Massachusetts, participants have often reported being confused about the branding of initiatives, given a variety of similar-sounding programs that promote residential renewable energy adoption (e.g. Mass Save, MassCEC, Mass Solar Connect, Solarize Mass, Mass Energy, etc.)
- Additionally, if leveraging incentives, ensure continuity where possible to ensure that customers are able to continue receiving the same benefit throughout the course of the campaign. Where this is not possible (e.g. limited budget without ability to expand to meet higher-than-expected demand), message around limits on incentive availability upfront and use impending incentive expirations over the course of the campaign to drive action.

The effectiveness of outreach methods has varied by campaign depending on the existing market position of the lead entity. Additionally, as many previous campaigns have been volunteer-driven, more robust metrics on outreach effectiveness have been more challenging to acquire.¹ Grassroots-driven campaigns (e.g. Solarize or based on Solarize model) have often reported that word of mouth and community workshops were the most effective, while utility and city-led programs (e.g. less emphasis on grassroots/volunteer outreach) have often found a broader mix of effective outreach methods.

- Mass Save, for example, uses a broad mix of marketing materials, including email, social media (paid and organic), radio ads, point-of-purchase (POP) signage, among other tactics. The most successful tactics have

¹ While campaigns frequently have collected information on how program participants heard of a program, metrics regarding how effective or efficient these outreach methods were (e.g. click-through rate, conversion rate, \$/lead) are less-frequently collected, particularly when campaigns are primarily volunteer-driven and/or lack support from a state or utility entity or technical consultant.

been email and social media, due to the ability to target a large number of MA residents at relatively low cost. In 2017, Mass Save grew its number of Facebook followers to over 133,000, maintaining an average post reach of over 7,000 with an engagement rate of 1.6%. Mass Save was able to do this through a combination of paid and organic posts, combining an in-depth knowledge of their target audience with their ability to develop a wide variety of content. For email, Mass Save maintained a click through rate of just under 7% on 2017 email sends, well above the industry benchmark of 3.6%.

- In many cases, non-utility campaign-organizing entities have often leveraged outreach methods that have been effective at reaching target audiences in previous campaigns or traditional media approaches (e.g. Solarize organizers have typically been less-likely to utilize robust online/social media marketing due to less familiarity with costs, effectiveness, etc.)

The City should evaluate the range of outreach and marketing approaches discussed throughout this memo but should consider prioritizing: 1) outreach methods that have been used in the past to (successfully) deliver energy-related information, and 2) low-cost efforts that leverage support from other affinity groups, community members, and volunteers to maximize the reach of the City’s limited marketing resources.

Results from a survey of 35 Solarize organizers who were asked to rate how effective they considered the marketing and outreach strategies deployed in their campaigns are provided below (Figure 1). A variety of metrics regarding how participants heard of three residential renewable energy/energy efficiency campaigns are provided in Appendix A for reference.

Figure 1. Effectiveness of marketing strategies in 35 Solarize campaigns in the U.S. (self-assessed by campaign organizers)

Marketing Strategies	MA						Other					
	1	2	3	4	5	Avg	1	2	3	4	5	Avg
Educational workshops	0	1	4	5	11	4.2	0	0	0	6	8	4.6
Word of mouth	0	4	3	8	6	3.8	0	0	3	2	9	4.4
Traditional media	0	2	6	8	4	3.7	0	2	4	5	3	3.6
Email blasts	2	2	5	8	3	3.4	0	2	2	5	4	3.8
Events at solar homes	2	1	5	4	4	3.4	1	0	2	6	2	3.7
Utility bill inserts	0	1	0	3	0	3.5	0	1	1	1	1	3.5
Tabling at events	3	3	5	6	4	3.2	0	2	5	5	2	3.5
Social media	1	4	3	4	2	3.1	0	2	5	3	0	3.1
Mailers / door hangers	4	1	6	4	1	2.8	0	1	1	2	1	3.6

To allow for easier visual comparison, cells with higher frequencies are shaded and the most frequent response is bolded.

Key: 1: Not Effective; 5: Very Effective

Potential marketing and outreach activities

This section discusses various marketing and outreach activities the City could consider deploying for their pilot program. It summarizes typical components of these activities, potential benefits and drawbacks, and relative costs.

Community educational and “Meet the Installer” events. “Meet the installer” workshops are typically a primary outreach method of Solarize-style campaigns.

- ⦿ Often structured with 60-90 minutes of presentations followed by opportunities for Q&A and customer sign-ups, these workshops offer an opportunity for interested residents to learn more about the technology, speak with selected installers, and sign up for site visits. Campaigns often host three to five such events through a 4-6 month campaign (including a kickoff event), though some programs have greatly emphasized educational workshops (e.g. HeatSmart Tompkins, which offered 20 workshops and 12 open houses in their first round).
- ⦿ Heat pump 101 presentations are often provided by a trusted source (e.g. the City, County, utility program), and are supported by testimonials from residents who can establish credibility (e.g. familiarity with typical home comfort issues faced by residents) and advocate on behalf of the technology, which together can position the technology well and set up contractors for success. Contractors have typically responded very positively to these workshops, as they are positioned as trusted service providers for the community; have the opportunity to answer questions in a group setting; and qualify leads before a site visit. Contractors can also bring demo units to help customers better understand how the technology will look.
- ⦿ Educational open houses can also offer an opportunity for individuals to see a technology installed in the home of a resident. Particularly for technologies with indoor or outdoor aesthetic considerations, open houses can be beneficial to help interested customers see how these technologies might look in or on their home, as well as to see how early adopters have been using the technology. Similar to having resident testimonials at “meet the installer workshops,” these open houses feature the resident owner as a trusted information provider (supported by the City and/or selected installers). Open houses are often hosted where volunteers and residents are willing to provide them, though ideally they could be targeted in “high-potential” neighborhoods (as identified through the Radiant tool).
- ⦿ Educational/meet the installer workshops and open houses are typically high-impact activities with minimal costs (e.g. printing handouts, refreshments), as cities/community groups leverage city-owned/community facilities or support from volunteers/engaged citizens. Even when installers are not able to participate, they offer opportunities to cross-sell other energy services and allow outreach partners to table/gain visibility.

Social media. In today’s marketing landscape, social media has become one of the most important tools to promote a product or service for many reasons:

- ⦿ 50% of millennials use the Internet to research products before purchasing
- ⦿ 73.4% of users follow a brand because they’re interested in the product or service
- ⦿ Social media and messaging accounts for roughly 1 in every 3 minutes spent on the Internet

In order to target the right audience, as well as take advantage of millennials who are moving into the home-buying phase of their lives, it’s important for any brand to have a strong presence on social media. Mass Save, for example, has sold thousands of energy efficient products in the past 10 years just through paid and organic social media content. The Mass Save social media team implements the following strategy—which could be deployed in other jurisdictions—when developing content for Mass Save:

1. Conduct research on the target audience to understand who they are and what they’re interested in
 - a. This can be done both through the social media platforms directly (free) or third-party tools (free and paid options available)
2. Develop and post content, including post copy, images, videos, etc.
3. Monitor post performance closely to determine if strategy can be improved

Organic content is a very cost-effective way to promote a product or service, with the only cost being staff time. Because of the automated tools available, creating content can be done relatively quickly, especially as processes are refined over time. Paid social media ads require only slightly more staff labor but have the added cost of

the dollar amount that could be spent to promote an ad. Even a small ad budget can make a big difference: Mass Save has run successful ad campaigns with as little as \$100 put behind ads. Additionally, Facebook provides extensive information on their website on [how to run ads effectively](#). The added benefit of running social media ads is that the ad platforms can offer advanced targeting tools to ensure your ads are only seen by your target audience. For example, an ad can be designed so that it targets people based on location (through zip code targeting), interests, household income, and many other demographic variables—which could be harmonized with key attributes of the customer profiles identified by the Radiant tool.

Program website.² Greater educational information provided from a trusted source regarding heat pumps as well as costs, economics, and incentives can be valuable for helping to familiarize customers with the technology and potentially to help customers be better prepared to engage with contractors.

- ⦿ For example, in Northampton, over 60% of pre-launch survey respondents³ expressed a preference to learn about heat pumps through the website. In Somerville, the average website visitor (over 2,600 views, 5% conversion) spent over three and a half minutes reading educational content on the HeatSmart CoolSmart website.
- ⦿ Expanding the EnergySmart (or City) website to include components such as a heat pump/program FAQ, customer testimonials and representative case studies, and more information about the participating contractors could be accomplished with minimal cost (beyond staff time).
- ⦿ Positioning the City's program website as a trusted source for information has benefits, though there can be concerns about trustworthiness if contractors are providing very different information during site visits to customers. It is important to coordinate with participating installers prior to program launch to ensure that messaging and information provided (especially around costs, economics, and functionality) are in alignment.

Print materials. Typically print materials (e.g. posters, lawn signs, mailers, flyers) can be higher-cost activities, though they can provide significant visibility to the program, particularly when distributed in dense city areas or high-potential neighborhoods.⁴

- ⦿ Mailers and door hangers tend to be higher-cost activities with lower impact, as they are often broadcast across the entire community. For example, while Somerville got a plurality of customer leads through mailers and utility bill inserts, approx. 28,000 of these were deployed throughout the City at a cost of roughly \$8,500 (though over 80% of these costs were paid for by participating contractors).
- ⦿ Targeted deployment (e.g. targeting high-value customer segments identified through Radiant Tool) of these materials could reduce costs and be more impactful. For example, Northampton leveraged results from MCG's market segmentation analysis to identify key neighborhoods with high electric resistance heating to target for print materials and door-to-door canvassing (results pending).
- ⦿ Other print materials—from "save the date" postcards for major events to educational materials (e.g. brochures/pamphlets, one-pagers, postcards etc.)—are valuable to have for distribution at events and to be left at locations of key partners (e.g. at City offices, community centers, banks/credit unions that provide

² It is expected that primary lead intake for the City's program will be managed through the EnergySmart website/concierge service.

³ These survey respondents were drawn from the previous Solarize Northampton campaign.

⁴ The Solarize Mass and HeatSmart Mass marketing "kits" provided to participating communities typically include templates for: trifold pamphlets, large-format posters, flyers, door hangers, lawn signs, banners, print/online ads, postcards, and technology 101s.

energy loans). While their impact can be lower from a lead generation perspective, they are valuable for education/raising awareness and critical to have at events and provide to volunteers, who can provide them with attendees who may not be ready to sign up for the program or have time to engage in an in-depth conversation.

- ⦿ Lawn/yard signs can be valuable for raising visibility of the program (e.g. over 30% of post-program survey respondents from HeatSmart Tompkins heard about the program through yard signs) and can be distributed to volunteers and early adopters who are likely to feature it prominently. The City may also consider leveraging the Radiant tool to deploy yard signs in higher-potential neighborhoods.
- ⦿ Costs for these materials can vary, depending on the types of materials selected, the relationship the organizer has with local printers, and more. Solarize Mass campaigns, for example, often spend a significant proportion of their \$1,500-\$2,500 on printing materials for distribution.

Print/traditional media. Community campaigns will often leverage advantage of earned, traditional media and print advertising through local media outlets to get the word out.

- ⦿ The effectiveness of print media depends heavily on how residents get local news. Some communities have found print media to be extremely effective where local papers and news have high circulation (e.g. Solarize Greater Media [Pennsylvania] found that nearly 20% of leads came through print media and newspapers), while others have found it less effective (e.g. only four leads in HeatSmart CoolSmart Somerville came through newspapers/print media). Traditionally many grassroots campaigns have relied more on print media/advertising than online/social media efforts (e.g. due to the familiarity of volunteers with methods and costs, willingness of local newspapers to run stories on campaigns).
- ⦿ Costs can vary, depending on the connections the organizers have with local media (e.g. some will offer columns and discounted advertising, while others will not offer any promotional support), though inviting reporters to participate in kickoff educational events can be a great way to gain free publicity.

Participation at community events. Campaigns often will find community events (esp. in the summer) to table and/or present at. These events can help to increase the visibility of the program and distribute print materials to interested attendees.

- ⦿ Booth spaces at scheduled community events, particularly where individuals from a target audience/market segment are likely to attend, can be valuable to raise the profile of the initiative and get face-to-face interactions between potential customers and staff/volunteers/contractors. These face-to-face interactions can be leveraged to increase positive word-of-mouth; gain insights from customers that could be difficult to determine through online marketing tactics; and provide more customized approaches and solutions to the customer, who may otherwise have difficulty finding all of the information they need to address their specific situation through online resources.
- ⦿ While low- or no-cost (beyond volunteer time/print materials) and valuable for raising the profile of the program, it is important to determine how effective the community event will be at drawing in target audiences prior to committing to it (particularly if booth space needs to be purchased). Some events that community campaigns table at will be unrelated to energy and may be less promising for lead intake (e.g. attendees may be attending with families or not well-primed to be receptive to energy-related information), though other events, particularly those that draw in sustainability-minded individuals (e.g. farmers markets, energy/sustainability fairs) have tended to be significantly more effective. Regardless of the event type, however, participation in low-cost community events could still be valuable for increasing customer face time even if less promising for lead development (e.g. Mass Save purchases annual booth space at Plymouth Waterfront Festival for approx. \$1,000 and typically is able to engage with 1,200 utility customers per event).

Developing a volunteer network. As discussed above, developing a volunteer network will be valuable for getting more “boots on the ground” and unlocking more labor-intensive activities (e.g. door-to-door canvassing, tabling) that City/County staff alone would otherwise lack capacity to complete.

- ⦿ Solarize-style campaigns have typically leveraged a campaign “coach” to lead the volunteer team (typically paid a stipend) and coordinate with City representatives. Often these individuals are sustainability champions that have some visibility in the community (e.g. participants in City climate/sustainability committees).
- ⦿ Affinity/community group partners may also have individuals willing to volunteer to support program activities.
- ⦿ Volunteers can also provide valuable insights as to how community members respond to different outreach messages and materials over the duration of the campaign, enabling the community to course correct and modify materials as needed.
- ⦿ Depending on the organization leading the campaign, volunteer support may be less necessary. Utility programs have typically not directly leveraged volunteer networks due to the natural lack of interest and trust that utility customers have in their utilities. Instead, utility programs have had success leveraging influencers to promote their program. Mass Save does this regularly through their [Partner platform](#), which provides incentives to contractors who work with and promote Mass Save’s programs as well as to municipal governments and community organizers who can promote Mass Save programs through local branding.

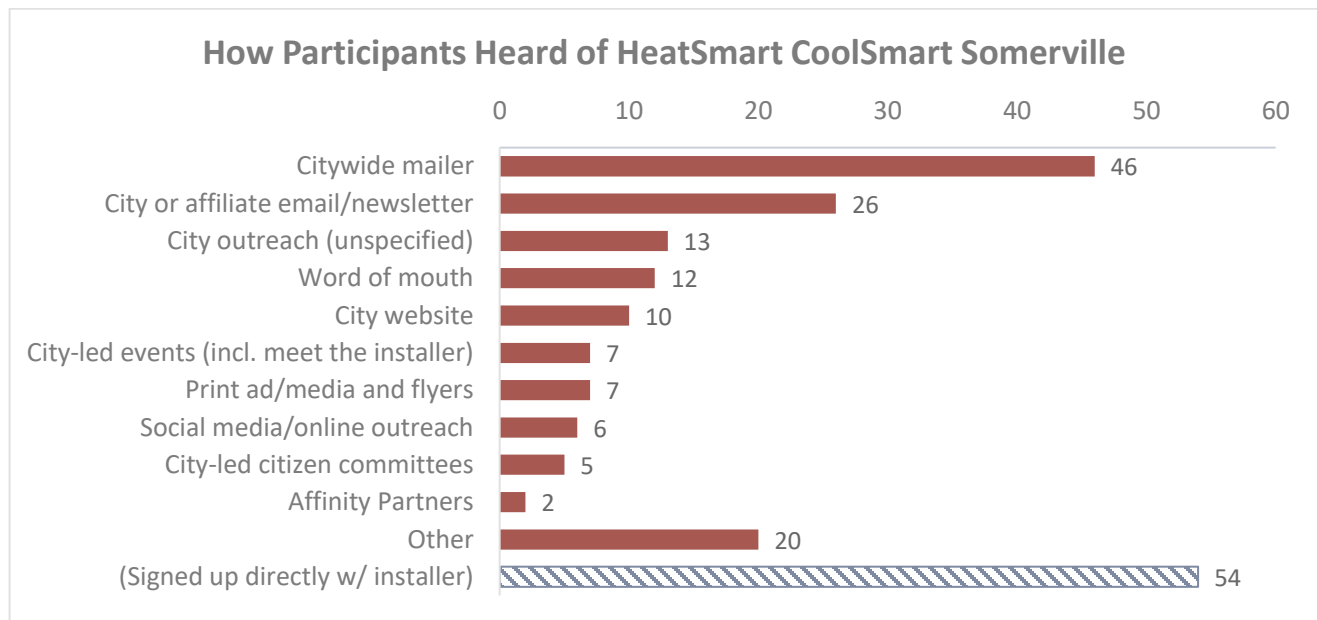
Sources and Additional Reading:

- ⦿ http://files.masscec.com/uploads/attachments/2015_Mass_Solar_Connect_Program_Pilot_Overview.pdf
- ⦿ http://files.masscec.com/uploads/attachments/Solarize%20Mass%20Community%20Best%20Practices%20Guide_1.pdf
- ⦿ <http://www.neep.org/sites/default/files/HeatSmartforNEEP170627.pdf>
- ⦿ <http://solaroutreach.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Solarize.pdf>
- ⦿ <http://www.emiconsulting.com/assets/Emera-Maine-Heat-Pump-Final-Report-2014.09.30.pdf>
- ⦿ <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-statistics/>
- ⦿ Results reported from HeatSmart CoolSmart Somerville, HeatSmart Northampton, and the Casco Bay Heat Pump Challenge are preliminary. Final conclusions and results will be provided in the CNCA “Bringing Renewable Thermal Solutions to New England Cities” final report, to be released at end of March 2018.

APPENDIX A: HOW PARTICIPANTS HEARD OF VARIOUS RESIDENTIAL CLEAN ENERGY CAMPAIGNS

Data from enrollees in three clean energy campaigns in the Northeast, as well as descriptions of the campaigns and their organizers, are provided below for reference:

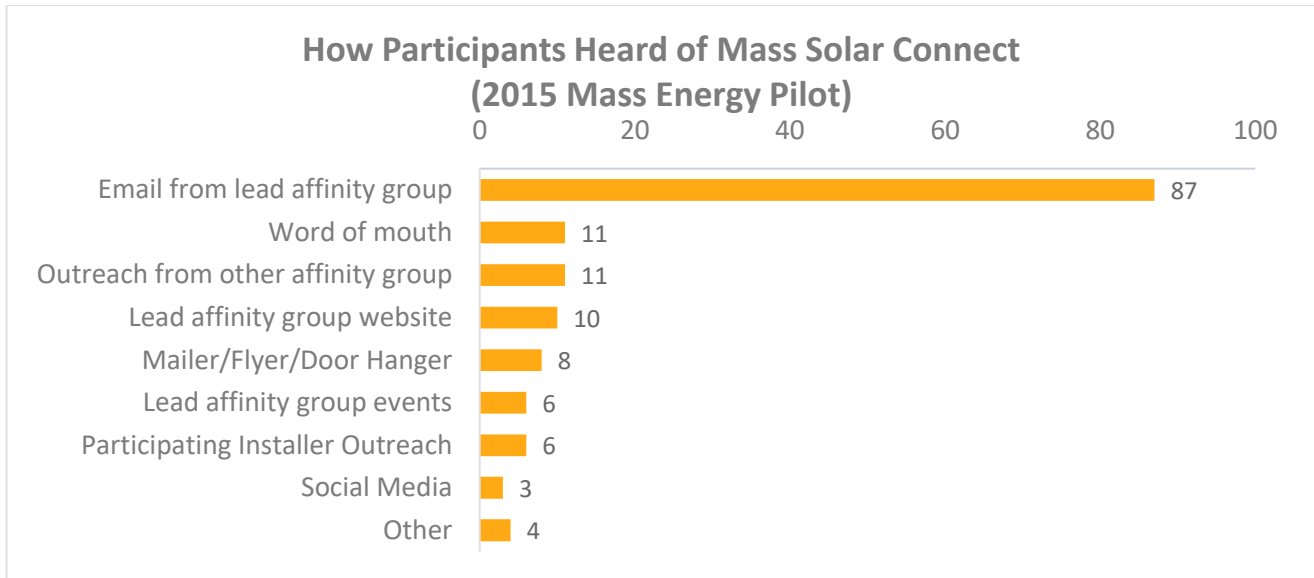
HeatSmart CoolSmart Somerville (July 2017-Feb 2018), a city-led heat pump program in Somerville, MA. Somerville emphasized traditional marketing approaches (e.g. city-wide mass mailer, promotion through city newsletters) and advertising through other existing city outreach and citizen-engagement methods (e.g. city sustainability and other community action committees). Somerville also hosted two “meet the installer” workshops that attracted over 100 attendees in total.⁵



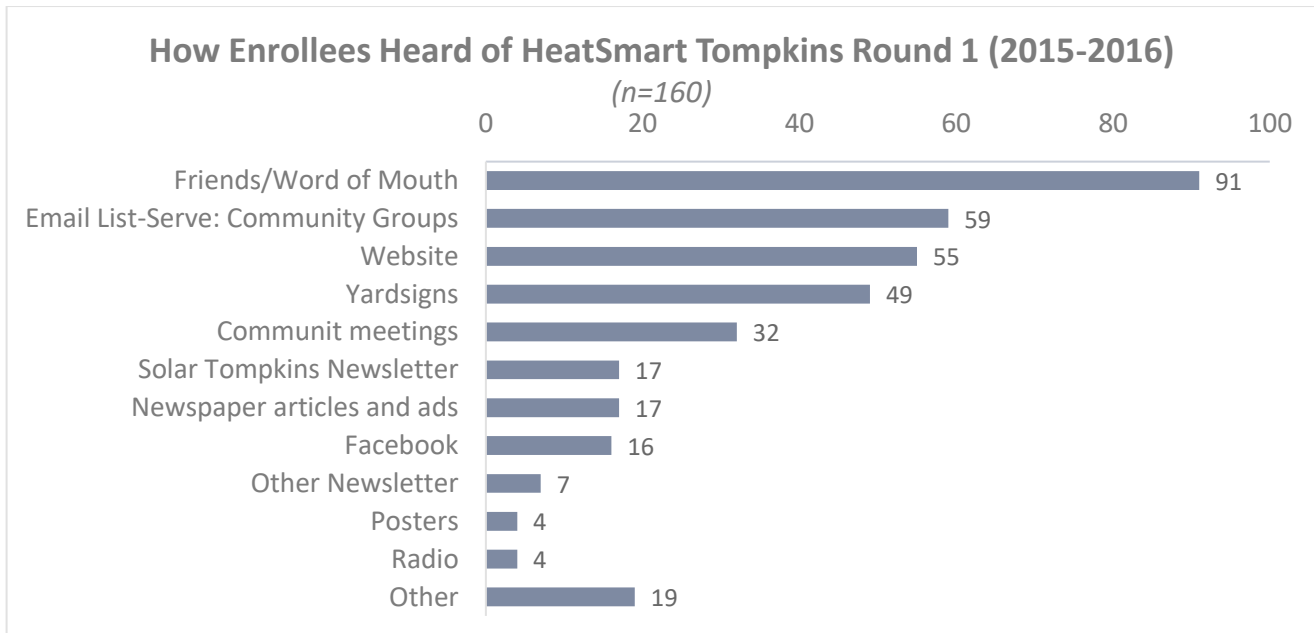
Mass Solar Connect Pilot (Mar-Sep 2015),⁶ a Massachusetts-wide solar PV program led by a regional non-profit group, Mass Energy). While Mass Energy hosted six in-person “meet the installer” workshops across the state, attendance was lower than expected. By contrast, as Mass Energy is a membership-based organization that has traditionally focused on email blasts and one-on-one engagement (through an internal concierge-type service) to drive action, 45% of program leads came within two days of an email blast.

⁵ Data provided only includes responses from participants who signed up through the City website. Workshop attendees are likely to have signed up directly with the installers at the event. In total, approximately 30% of participants signed up directly with an installer and not through the City’s online intake form.

⁶ Massachusetts Clean Energy Center. (2015). Mass Solar Connect Pilot Overview – December 2015.



HeatSmart Tompkins (Round 1: 2015-2016, Round 2: 2016-2017),⁷ a countywide program in Tompkins County, NY led by a local non-profit, Solar Tompkins, which was formed in 2013 to implement countywide Solarize programs. HeatSmart Tompkins targeted a mix of home weatherization and heat pumps (ASHP/GSHP/HPWH) technologies and heavily utilized community educational workshops (20 public workshops and 12 home tours in Round 1) to market the program and educate residents about a whole-home approach to energy.



⁷ Comstock, J. (2017). HeatSmart Tompkins: Home Energy Efficiency, Heat Pumps, and Community Mobilization. Presented at the Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships 2017 Regional Cold Climate Air Source Heat Pump Market Transformation Workshop.