

Local Interventions for Financial Empowerment through Utility Payments (LIFT-UP)

Locally known as the Utility Empowerment Program

Louisville, Kentucky

Population: 760,026 (from *Population Estimates U.S. Census Quickfacts, July 1, 2014*)



Courtesy of LouisvilleKY.com

Program Goals: In 2013, the National League of Cities partnered with five pilot cities to launch Local Interventions for Financial Empowerment through Utility Payments (LIFT-UP), an innovative pilot program to help low-income families pay their utility bills and achieve financial stability. LIFT-UP aspired to 1) impact the payment patterns of residents with a history of unpaid utility bills, 2) identify a demand for the program from the target population and 3) determine whether the model is worth expanding based on its success with pilot participants.

This program allowed the City to test the framework of aligning local financial empowerment services with municipal utility department collections practices, with the goal of identifying our struggling families and assisting them to become financially secure.

Key City Partners:

[Louisville Metro Community Services](#): Directs city's financial empowerment efforts (LIFT-UP Champion) and served as project team lead. Also provided financial counseling for LIFT-UP participants and provided supportive services for residents.

[Louisville Water Company](#): Provided incentives for clients who successfully completed the program. Also provided program support and administrative data.

[Apprisen](#): Delivered financial counseling for a subset of LIFT-UP enrollees with severe debt

Louisville Highlights: Louisville targeted customers from the Shawnee neighborhood to offer the LIFT-UP intervention and developed customized repayment plans according to the participant's financial means. In addition, Louisville adopted a case management approach to financial counseling that provided individualized wrap around access to broader services and multiple meetings with a counselor to develop strong relationships with clients and financial skill building.

Louisville Pilot Success: Louisville's LIFT-UP team developed an innovative enrollment algorithm that identified customers who were at the greatest risk of incurring fees or having their water service turned off, allowing for more targeted outreach to ensure information about the program reached an audience that was likely to participate. This customized algorithm helped Louisville increase participation without heavily concentrating resources on recruitment.

Louisville experienced particular program success with senior participants on fixed incomes. Seniors engaged in this program were able to adjust their payment due dates to better align with receipt of their monthly income. This allowed many seniors to catch up on their outstanding debt without incurring further fees or penalties for late payments and set them up for future on-time payment success.

Quote:

"The program helped intensify what I already knew about budgeting - but never used. It helped me to better myself with structure, being more responsible about paying my bill on time and maintaining my budget." – Louisville resident

Other details: The LIFT-UP pilot was supported by grants from the [Center for Financial Services Innovation](#) (CFSI) [Financial Capability Innovation Fund II](#), [the Ford Foundation](#), and the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#). As the program's external evaluator, the [Center for Financial Security \(CFS\) at the University of Wisconsin](#) produced a process evaluation documenting the implementation process and will produce an impact evaluation. The [National League of Cities'](#) Institute for Youth, Education, and Families provided each city with in-depth technical assistance and peer networking opportunities through site visits, cross-site convenings, conference calls, and partnerships with national experts.

Resources:

- [Research Brief: LIFT-UP: Innovative City Strategy Reduces Utility Debt and Financial Insecurity for Residents](#)
- [Executive Summary: Implementation and Impact Evaluation of Local Interventions for Financial Empowerment through Utility Payments \(LIFT-UP\)](#)
- [Full Report: Implementation and Impact Evaluation of Local Interventions for Financial Empowerment through Utility Payments \(LIFT-UP\)](#)