



Climate Coach Program - 6 Month Report

Oak Park Climate Action Network (OPCAN)

Prepared for the Village of Oak Park

Sept 15, 2024

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Background and objectives

Climate Coaches is a program run by Oak Park Climate Action Network to provide technical assistance neighbor-to-neighbor advisory services on pathways to emissions reductions.

This idea came out of the [Climate Ready Oak Park Plan](#), specifically:

BD03. Implement an outreach and education program to raise awareness and connect residents, businesses, institutions, and property owners with technical and financial services for energy and climate resiliency upgrades, including federal, State, and utility programs.

- *Timeline: Medium-Term*
- *Cost Range: Low*
- *Lead Implementor: Community Group*

Although OPCAN included this idea in its budget priority recommendations to the Village late in 2022, no funding was allocated to the idea. As a result, OPCAN decided to create a volunteer-run service on an interim basis so that residents could get assistance. It is still OPCAN's objective that the Village implement climate coaching at its one-stop center.

In March of 2024, OPCAN launched the Climate Coach program in partnership with the Village of Oak Park.

Program structure

As a program run by unpaid volunteers, Climate Coaches was designed on the following principles:

- Focus on short-term engagements and referrals to professional resources (30 minute phone calls, emails, etc)
- Not intended to substitute for full-time paid labor or contractor
- Is not affiliated with any of the vendors we recommend and we receive no money for referrals
- Respect the confidentiality of residents

Many members of OPCAN have already undertaken electrification upgrades and improvements to their own home. Based on a survey of our members willing to volunteer their time, we decided to offer assistance on:

- Getting started reducing my emissions
- Insulating drafty homes
- Installing rooftop solar panels
- Signing up for community solar
- Switching from gas heating to electric heat pumps
- Switching to a heat pump hot water heater
- Switching to an induction stove
- Upgrading electrical panels
- Preparing for and purchasing an Electric Vehicle (EV)
- Native gardening for your lawn or parkway
- Reducing basement flooding
- Recycling and composting
- Available grants, rebates and tax credits

We also launched a website, <https://opcan.org>, with resources on electrification, lists of vetted local vendors, and relevant financial incentives – for renters, landlords, and homeowners at all income levels.

The Climate Coach program was given a dedicated page on our website (<https://opcan.org/climate-coaches>) linking to a simple Google Form for requesting a Climate Coach. The program has been administered since March of 2024 by Derek Eder, Laura Derks, Pam Tate, Wendy Greenhouse, and Macey Majkrzak.

The program has been promoted via:

- Email blasts to the OPCAN email list
- Facebook posts
- Press release on the Village website
- Included in the Summer OP/FYI newsletter sent to all Oak Park residences
- Tabling and flyers at the Farmers Market, A Day in Our Village, Barrie Fest, Eco Extravaganza

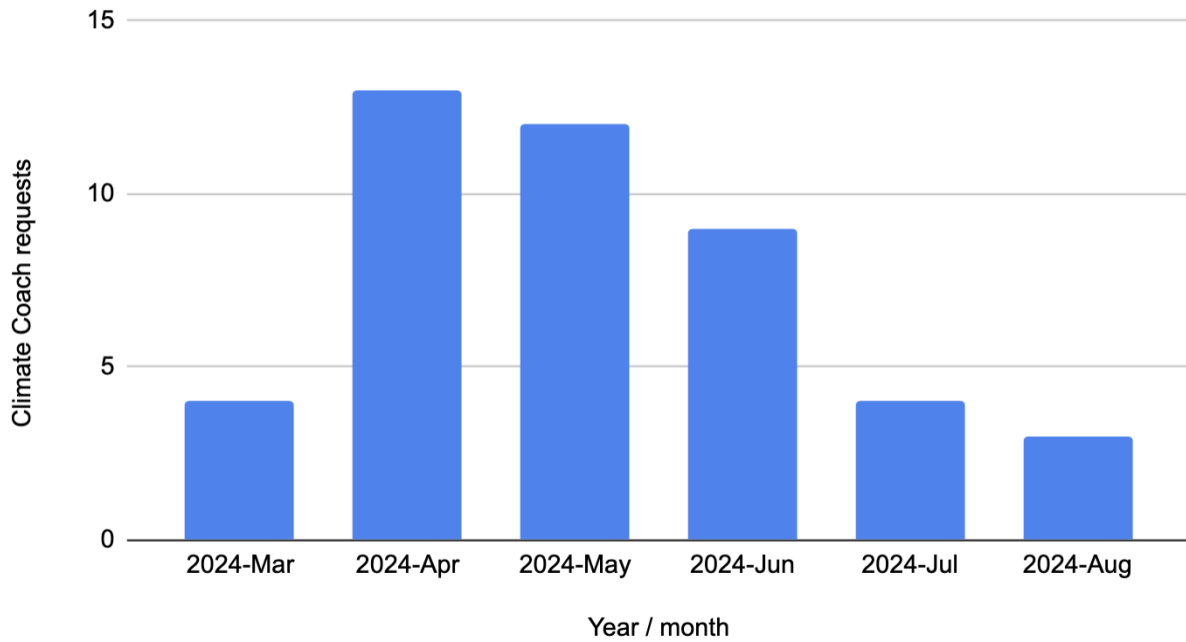
Results after 6 months

The Climate Coach program was launched on March 11, 2024. Here are the top level numbers since then:

- 45 Climate Coach Requests received, averaging about 2 requests per week
- 17 Climate Coach volunteers (we launched with 13 and have since added 4 more)

Our program's popularity peaked in April and May when it was heavily promoted by OPCAN, the Village of Oak Park, and COOP.

Climate Coach requests per month



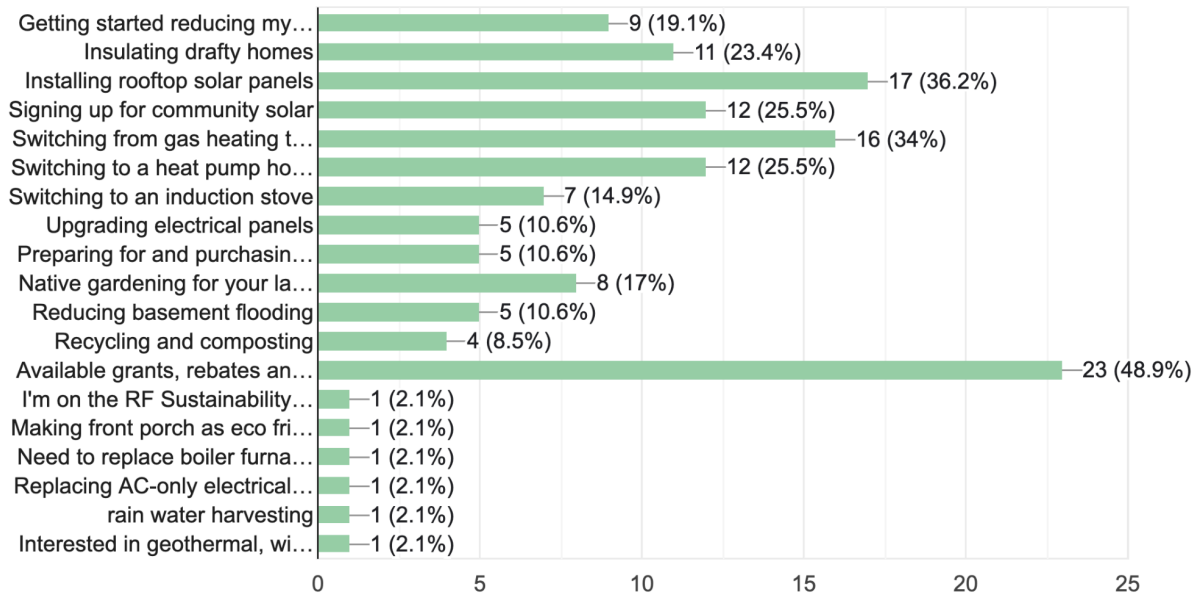
Of the requests we received, the most popular topics/needs were:

- Available grants, rebates and tax credits (23)
- Installing rooftop solar panels (17)
- Switching from gas heating to electric heat pumps (16)
- Signing up for community solar (12)
- Switching to a heat pump hot water heater (12)
- Insulating drafty homes (11)

Total requests by topic. Note: each resident may indicate multiple requests.

I have questions about (check up to 3)

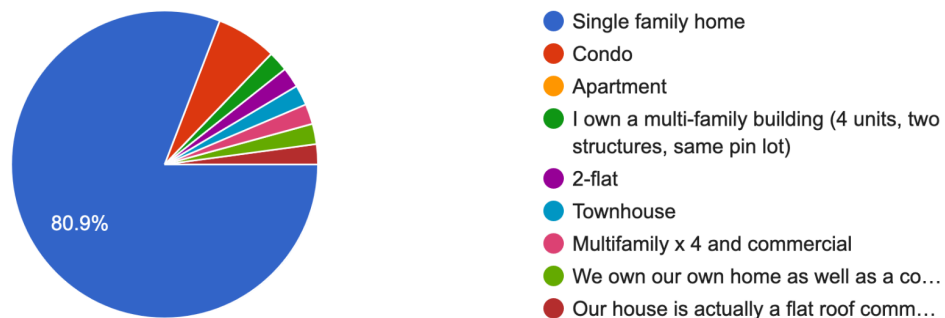
47 responses



81% of the requests came from residents living in a single family home, which tracks with the overall housing composition of the Village.

What kind of home do you have?

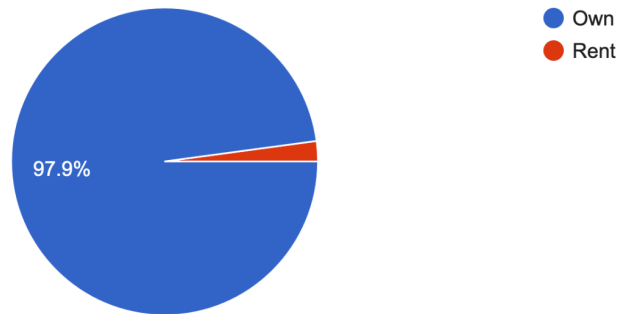
47 responses



All but one (97.7%) of our requests came from homeowners. This likely reflects both the reach of our network, and the fact that most climate related home improvements must be made by the homeowner.

Do you own or rent your home?

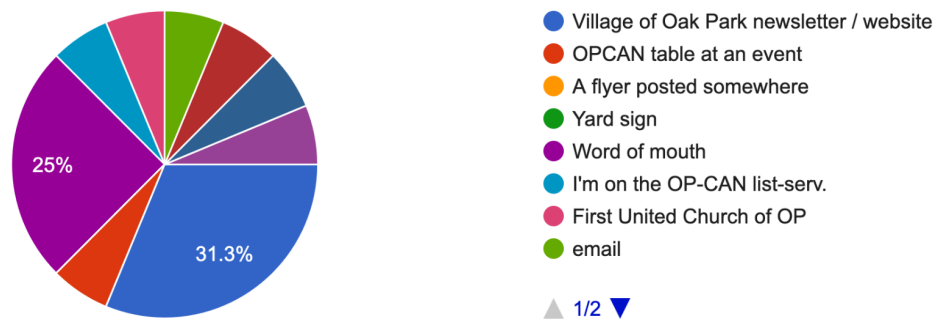
47 responses



The primary way that people have heard of the Climate Coach program was the Village of Oak Park newsletter / website (31.3%), followed by word of mouth (25%).

How did you hear about Climate Coaches?

16 responses



Recommendations for next steps

The feedback we have received on this program has been overwhelmingly positive. Residents who have received climate coach advice have been empowered with the information and confidence they need to take their next step, whether that be deciding what kind of heat pump system to install, how to sign up for community solar, or just getting started reducing their emissions.

One key advantage of the program being volunteer and neighbor-driven is that requestors don't feel like they're being 'sold' anything and that the advice is trusted and genuine. We also have the benefit of recommending contractors, whereas the Village would likely be restricted in providing specific referrals.

However, despite the program's success, Climate Coach requests have slowed down in the later summer months. This is likely due to our limitations in marketing and outreach, combined with summer breaks and vacations.

Recommended next steps:

- Ramp up marketing efforts for the Climate Coach program through all Village communications, especially:
 - by bringing mention of Climate Coaches forward on the website (too buried now)
 - Repeating the OP/FYI notice in the fall/winter, and
 - Reminding audiences of the program through flyers, announcements, and tabling at relevant Village events
- Fund OPCAN's recommendations for education and outreach in 2025 (included in our August email and discussed with the Village on September 12, 2024).

About OPCAN

Oak Park Climate Action Network (OPCAN) is a volunteer group of Oak Park residents working to eliminate our community's contribution to the global climate crisis through equitable policies and practices.

OPCAN advocates for timely implementation of the goals of [Climate Ready Oak Park](#), the climate action plan adopted by the Village of Oak Park in 2022. We also advocate for more climate friendly policies with other local taxing bodies, residents, businesses, and organizations.

OPCAN members meet monthly to discuss goals and activities, with working groups meeting more frequently to focus on building electrification, budgeting and policy, and resident outreach.