Transforming Operation Fuel's Energy Assistance

About Us

NewOrg empowers nonprofits and service organizations with a secure platform to simplify data, save time, and showcase their impact.

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Executive Summary

Operation Fuel, a Connecticut-based nonprofit, dramatically improved its energy assistance services by adopting NewOrg's data management system. Previously faced with challenges such as slow application processing, inadequate financial tracking, and inefficient vendor communications, the integration of NewOrg streamlined operations and brought substantial improvements. Application processing times were cut from 3–6 months to just 1 month for 1,500 applications, financial management was automated—leading to a reduction in financial discrepancies to nearly zero—and vendor relations were enhanced through quicker payment processes, from weeks to just a few days. These metrics not only highlight the operational efficiency gained but also underscore the organization's enhanced capacity to serve its community more effectively.

Introduction

Operation Fuel is a Connecticut-based nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing energy insecurity among low and middle-income residents. Their mission is clear yet urgent: to ensure that residents have secure, affordable access to heat, power, and water, enabling families to live safely and comfortably, particularly during critical seasons. They provide:

- **Energy and Utility Assistance Grants:** Covering costs for electricity, gas, oil, and other heating fuels.

- **Home Energy Improvement Programs:** Offering sustainable and energy-efficient solutions.

- **Advocacy:** Pushing for systemic changes that address energy affordability and equity across the state.

However, behind this noble mission, Operation Fuel faced mounting challenges in delivering services efficiently to thousands of households. These obstacles hindered not only their operational processes but also their ability to maximize their impact.

Section 1: Pre-Existing Challenges

Before implementing NewOrg, Operation Fuel's operations were severely hampered by outdated and inefficient systems. These challenges spanned across multiple dimensions of their organization, including application management, reporting, and vendor communication. The consequences were profound, affecting clients, staff, and community partners.

1.1 Slow Application Processing

Operation Fuel's legacy system struggled to manage the sheer volume of applications they received during peak seasons. Applications were processed on a first-come, first-served basis, which failed to account for clients in critical need, such as those facing shutoffs or fuel shortages.

Key Metrics Pre-NewOrg:

- **Processing Time:** 3–6 months to process 2,000–3,000 applications.

- **Client Impact:** Clients often went weeks without heat, exacerbating health and safety risks during the winter months.

- **Manual Effort:** Staff required significant overtime to manually sort and review applications.

Nancy Abramowitz, Operations Manager, described the experience: ⟶

> " We couldn't quickly process applications, and that really impacts Connecticut residents... People apply because they're in a troubling time. Approving them quickly became a huge problem. "

1.2 Limited Data & Financial Tracking

The absence of real-time reporting made it difficult for Operation Fuel to monitor critical data:

- **Grant Allocation:** Staff struggled to track how much funding had been distributed versus what remained, leading to unexpected shortfalls.

- **Financial Reporting:** With over 80 restricted grants, the process of matching clients to the correct funding source was time-consuming and error-prone.

- **Operational Decisions:** Leadership lacked immediate access to performance data, forcing decisions based on outdated or incomplete information.

Nancy explained the implications:

> " We couldn't see how much money we had in the pipeline, or how many grants were left to approve... We were always playing catch-up. "

1.3 Outdated Vendor & Invoice Management

Operation Fuel works with over 300 fuel vendors and utility companies, but their old system exacerbated confusion:

- **Vendor Selection Errors:** Clients had to manually scroll through hundreds of vendor names, often choosing incorrect companies.

- **Payment Delays:** Miscommunications and manual invoice submissions meant vendors faced delays in getting paid, straining relationships.

- **Outstanding Invoices:** At the end of the previous season, hundreds of invoices—sometimes as many as 800—remained unresolved.

Gannon Long, Chief Program & Policy Officer, reflected on these inefficiencies:

> **"** We were always behind. At the end of every season, we were scrambling to reconcile hundreds of outstanding invoices. **"**

Section 2: The Transition to NewOrg

Recognizing the need for a transformative solution, Operation Fuel explored a range of software platforms. Their selection process highlighted the importance of:

- **Customizability:** Many platforms were too rigid to accommodate their unique mix of nonprofit and quasi-governmental workflows.

- **Affordability:** As a nonprofit, sustainability was critical; the solution needed to balance robust features with cost-effectiveness.

- **Proven Results:** NewOrg stood out due to its flexibility, client references, and track record of success with similar organizations.

Nancy described the decision:

> **"** NewOrg hit the right balance— giving us the features we needed without stretching our budget. **"**

2.1 Implementation Process

The transition to NewOrg was a collaborative process, carefully tailored to meet Operation Fuel's needs:

- Detailed Scoping and Onboarding: NewOrg's team, led by Duncan and Jared, worked closely with Operation Fuel to map out workflows, prioritize needs, and build customized features.

- Staff and Vendor Training: Training sessions ensured staff, fuel banks, and vendors were confident in using the new system.

- Iterative Problem Solving: As unexpected issues arose, the NewOrg team addressed them promptly, often delivering solutions in real-time.

Nancy praised the partnership:

> **It felt very collaborative. The NewOrg team knows their software inside and out and helped us figure out the best way to achieve what we needed.**

Section 3: The Impact of NewOrg

The implementation of NewOrg has transformed Operation Fuel's operations. The results are tangible, significant, and far-reaching.

## 3.1 Faster & Smarter Application Processing

NewOrg has transformed application processing at Operation Fuel by implementing a grant requirement matrix that staff can easily configure, enhancing the prioritization of applications based on urgency and grant restrictions. This matrix helps collect appropriate client information directly, allowing for prioritization based on a number of factors to ensure funds from more restricted grants are used effectively. The application summary screen equips staff with vital information to quickly address issues like duplicate households and missing documents. It also facilitates direct communications with vendors and applicants via email or SMS, ensuring efficient and transparent processing.

Processing Time Reduced:

- Pre-NewOrg: 3–6 months to process ~2,000 applications.

- Post-NewOrg: 1 month to process **1,500 applications**; **800 applications** in just 2 weeks.

Potential Applications Processed Over 6 Months

● Pre NewOrg   ● Post NewOrg
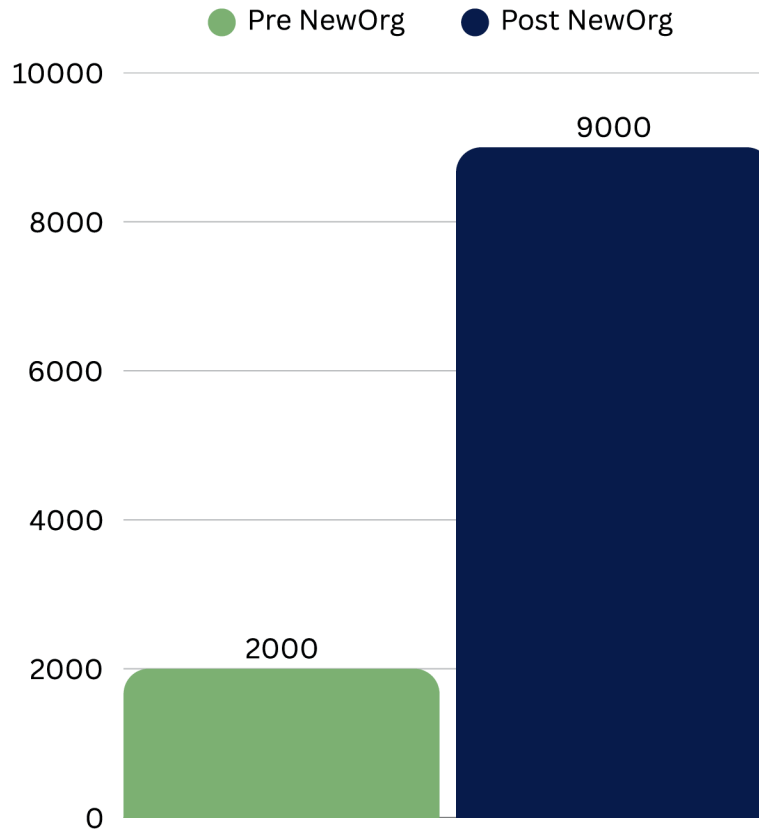
Prioritizing Vulnerable Clients

NewOrg's system has revolutionized how Operation Fuel addresses urgency in energy assistance by prioritizing applications based on critical criteria:

- **Pending Shutoffs:** Immediate priority to prevent service interruptions.

- **Medical Conditions:** High priority for clients dependent on powered medical devices or sensitive to temperature extremes.

- **Age Vulnerability:** Special focus on elderly clients and families with young children, who face higher risks in adverse conditions.

Implementation and Impact

The prioritization mechanism includes:

- **Data Integration:** Client information is directly inputted into NewOrg, triggering automatic categorization based on urgency.

- **Real-Time Updates:** Staff can update client statuses as situations evolve, escalating priority as needed.

- **Automated Alerts:** Alerts notify staff of high-priority applications, ensuring rapid processing.

Client Impact Example

Gannon Long highlights the system's effectiveness:

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> " During a severe cold snap, a single mother faced imminent heating shutoff. Thanks to NewOrg, we processed her application and disbursed funds within 24 hours, preventing her family from enduring potentially dangerous conditions. "

3.2 Financial Management and Grant Allocation

Spending Down Restricted Grants

Operation Fuel has experienced significant advancements in financial management with NewOrg's automated grant-matching capabilities, which have been instrumental in utilizing over $100,000 of previously untapped funds. This automation ensures that each grant is aligned with the appropriate client needs without manual oversight, streamlining fund distribution and greatly enhancing financial efficiency.

Improved Financial Reporting

With integrated QuickBooks capabilities, financial reconciliation is faster and more accurate. For instance:

- Invoice Accuracy: Reduced discrepancies to a mere $0.15 over an entire season.

- Faster Payments: Vendors now receive payments within days instead of weeks.

> " Before, we couldn't find clients that matched grant restrictions. With NewOrg, the system does it for us. "

3.3 Enhanced Vendor and Fuel Bank Collaboration

Fuel banks and vendors have embraced the new system enthusiastically:

Simplified Vendor Processes:

Vendors can upload invoices directly to the portal and track payment statuses in real-time.

Improved Fuel Bank Access:

Clients now benefit from a simplified application process that guides them through eligibility, household information gathering, and document upload, providing the simplest workflow possible depending on the vendor, fuel type, documentation requirements, and special circumstances. This has led to much lower support burden on staff, fewer rejected applications, and significantly fewer incomplete applications requiring follow-up.

> " Uploading invoices is so easy! It's faster and more reliable than mailing them "

> " Our partners can see application progress instantly. It's saved everyone so much time. "

Section 4: Quantifiable Metric of Success

The impact of NewOrg is evident in Operation Fuel's metrics

Metric	Pre-NewOrg	Post-NewOrg
Application Process Time	3-6 Months	1-4 Weeks
Application Processed (per month)	~500	1,500+
Outstanding Invoices at season-end	800+	~70
Vendor Payment Time	2-4 Weeks	2-7 Days
Grant Allocation (Unused Funds)	$100,000+ Annually	Fully Allocated
Call Volume During Peak Season	Overwhelming	Drastically Reduced

Section 5: Looking Ahead

With NewOrg in place, Operation Fuel can now focus on long-term growth and strategy:

- **Expanding Programs:** *Plans for an energy efficiency program are already underway.*

- **Targeted Outreach:** *Real-time reporting helps identify gaps, such as clients who qualify for water assistance but have not applied.*

- **Strategic Financial Management:** *Leadership can now proactively plan for funding needs and advocate for resources based on precise data.*

Brittany Bergstrom, Director of Assistance Programs, concluded:

> **"** NewOrg has freed up our bandwidth.
> We're not just surviving peak seasons—
> we're planning, strategizing, and
> expanding our impact. **"**

Conclusion

NewOrg's implementation at Operation Fuel demonstrates how the right technology can transform nonprofit operations, enabling organizations to deliver their mission more efficiently and effectively. The improvements —faster processing, smarter financial management, and better collaboration—have directly enhanced the lives of thousands of Connecticut residents.

As Gannon Long Aptly Summarized:

> **"** We've gone from always being on the
> defensive to being proactive. NewOrg didn't
> just improve our systems; it transformed how
> we serve our community. **"**

Company Overview

NewOrg was launched in 2006 to provide software solutions focused exclusively on the needs of small to mid-sized nonprofit organizations and local government service providers.

Today, we serve a growing community of hundreds of nonprofits, social services organizations, government agencies, and communities in the US and Canada with a platform that adapts to our community's needs.

Our team brings together diverse experience from many fields and backgrounds to provide our partners with unparalleled implementation success and support. Our 18 years of experience working with almost every kind of organization helps us craft personalized solutions quickly, effectively, and at a low cost.

Headquartered in Washington, D.C. and Toronto (with secure data centers in the US and Canada), the NewOrg team is ready to help you get control of your data so your team and mission can thrive.

Certified

B

Corporation

This company meets high standards of social and environmental impact.

Certified B Corporation

At NewOrg, we're proud to be a Certified B Corporation, recognized for meeting high standards of social and environmental impact, accountability, and transparency.

This certification reflects our long-term commitment to balancing purpose and profit by:

- Prioritizing stakeholder impact in our business decisions

- Completing rigorous verification through B Lab

- Maintaining public accountability on our performance

B Corp Certification confirms our ongoing mission to serve our clients, communities, and employees with integrity. Learn more at bcorporation.net

Contact Us for a Demo and to Discuss Your Organization's Needs.
Discover how NewOrg Can Help

Schedule a Demo ➤