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Title: Be More than a Fly on the Wall: How to Use Mobile Participant Diaries to Experience Programs with Customers in Real Time

Abstract: The landscape of energy efficiency is volatile, and the stakes continue to rise as climate change predictions worsen. Energy efficiency programs need to affect behavior more rapidly than ever before. Thus, real-time feedback on programs and products is necessary to understand what works for people and what needs to change to be effective. In addition, there is a need for rich data to better understand energy program participants within their daily lives. Mobile participant diaries provide a unique window into people's lives, in real time. Our team used a platform, called dscout®, to understand people's perceptions about lighting in their homes and how they interact with an upstream lighting program in a southeastern U.S. state.

The participant diaries allowed our team to gather data on 42 people's homes and their lighting needs, accompany them on a shopping trip to purchase a utility-discounted bulb, and install the new bulb in their home over the course of two weeks. Using this research collection methodology has several key benefits, including:

- Gathering feedback in multiple mediums (survey and open-ended questions, photos, and videos) Interacting with customers for a longer period of time than a survey or in-depth interview would typically allow
- Understanding how customers interact with the world and energy-sponsored programs outside of a traditional research context
- Aiding in the recruitment of a diverse population from across the state

This presentation will detail our findings from this study and how this methodology allowed us to better understand participant behaviors outside of traditional energy research methods. We will discuss the benefits of this type of research and the applications within energy program research and evaluation. As programs scale up to reach broader audiences, integrating new research methodologies such as mobile ethnography platforms into evaluations and market research efforts allow utilities and their implementation partners unique opportunities to better understand the participant perspective on the program experience. Participants in this session will leave with detailed knowledge of the methodology, key benefits and considerations in its use, and opportunities for incorporating it into their own research.