Early on, many Better Buildings Neighborhood Program partners focused on providing customers with a range of contractors to choose from, while providing contractors with access to customers. Customer feedback received by some programs, however, indicated that customers were confused or overwhelmed by the choices. A comprehensive evaluation [1] of selected program strategies implemented by Better Buildings Neighborhood Program partners found that programs were more successful when they provided customers with lists of pre-approved contractors; however, offering long lists of contractors without differentiating their products and services often led to inaction. To help customers distinguish between contractors and choose a qualified one, many programs provide customers with information about contractor skills, quality of past performance, proximity, and other factors. Some programs matched individual contractors directly with individual customers.

Customers can provide valuable information about the quality of contractors’ performance, and this feedback can supplement other information, such as field inspections, used to differentiate contractors based on their performance. Many Better Buildings Neighborhood Program partners incorporated customer ratings into the order in which they list contractors online, to help future customers select a contractor. Some programs also used rankings to evaluate contractors, support disciplinary actions, allocate benefits, and identify retraining needs. Through this approach, contractors had the opportunity to improve their standing and reap the rewards when customers saw that they could be relied on to do high-quality work.

- On Maryland’s Home Performance with ENERGY STAR website [2], homeowners can rate and review their contractors. Some contractors choose to reach out to their customers to encourage them to provide reviews. These customer reviews, along with contractors’ accreditations and services, are published on the website as part of each contractor’s information page. Users of the website can search for contractors and sort the results based on homeowner ratings and by geographical location. Users can also narrow their results according to which contractors participate in the customer’s local utility rebate program.

- Efficiency Maine [3] provided customers with a “Find a Residential Registered Vendor” locator [4] on its website. This locator listed the services each contractor offered, sorted the list by distance from the homeowner, and differentiated contractors based on number of projects completed and customer satisfaction. All contractors were added to the list when they met the program’s requirements. The list was sorted by location closest to the customer and number of completed projects, and also noted what services the contractor provides. The website also listed questions [5] a homeowner could use to interview and evaluate contractors, such as “How soon can you begin?” and “How quickly will my work be completed?”

- The Town of Bedford’s Energize New York program [6] learned that selecting a contractor was the primary barrier for homeowners interested in home performance upgrades. The program addressed this challenge by developing a rating system to differentiate high- and low-performing contractors. Contractors’ ratings were calculated using a combination of customer survey results, the number of BPI certifications held by their technicians, and their number of completed upgrade projects. Some contractors were dissatisfied when they received low ratings, and in follow-up discussions, program staff reminded contractors that they would have an opportunity for their score to be updated quarterly and reviewed the scoring criteria. As a result, many of those contractors decided to improve their overall score. The program also set a minimum standard of completed projects (i.e., six completed projects over the last four quarters) for contractors to be included in the program. This narrowing of available contractors made it much easier for customers to select one without being overwhelmed.

- Seattle’s Community Power Works [7] began matching homeowners one-on-one with certified contractors to create the best fit based on homeowner needs, contractor skills, and contractor availability. The program found that its past approach of suggesting two or three contractors led to indecision and that the potential price advantage of competition among these contractors was not an important factor in homeowner satisfaction.
  - Programs should be transparent about the process of matching individual contractors to customers and ensure that all qualified contractors have the chance to participate in the program by competing for upgrade projects.
  - While Community Power Works did not encounter any issues, programs should recognize that this approach can limit competition among contractors and discourage the growth of new contractors in the market. Most programs, including Enhabit [8], Austin Energy [9], Energy Impact Illinois [10], and many others, mitigate this by allowing contractors who bring their own customers to the program to keep them, providing an incentive for the contractor to market themselves instead of relying on the program to generate demand.
Source URL: https://rpsc.energy.gov/tips-for-success/provide-information-help-customers-pick-right-contractor

Links
[8] https://enhabit.org/