Connect home performance professionals to trainings focused on the skills that employers want and the community needs

Effective home performance contractors require many types of skills and expertise. To help individuals develop those skills, programs can target training on the specific topics and skills needed for successful home performance work. Many Better Buildings Neighborhood Program partners found that they could cost-effectively increase their contractors' access to training by engaging with expert partners to provide training, mentoring, and apprenticeship opportunities. A comprehensive **evaluation** [1] of over 140 programs across the United States found that the more successful programs offered multiple training opportunities to contractors, either by delivering training or engaging partners to deliver training. By providing access to training, programs saw enhanced assessment quality, more effective sales approaches, increased rates of conversion from assessment to upgrade, more comprehensive upgrades, more effective and efficient installation processes, improved quality control, and increased revenues for contractors.

Training alone does not create jobs in the community, but you can increase the relevance of your training by using contractor input to select training topics. Several Better Buildings Neighborhood Program partners found that asking contractors what topics would be valuable also helped the program build an engaged and capable workforce. By providing access to the specific training that contractors want, programs can increase their chances of success by ensuring that they have a strong pool of contractors with a deep understanding of building sciences and the ability to install or subcontract a variety of energy-saving measures.

Some programs found success in working with education and training providers, such as community colleges, universities, and weatherization training centers, to offer valuable and appropriate training to their contractors. Apprenticeships, which can be a bridge between classroom training and being hired by contractors, helped some programs ensure that students acquired the skills that employers want. These programs also found that accredited, on-the-job training can be a relevant, less expensive, and more motivating supplement to classroom training.

- **Community Power Works** [2] in Seattle piloted a new training approach to meet contractor needs and the requirements of the city's high-road workforce agreement. The program's original training programs relied on an outdated model of training, failed to prepare technicians properly to be hired, and lacked adequate mentorship and job-finding support for training graduates. The new approach included partnering with South Seattle Community College and the nonprofit Northwest EcoBuilding Guild, which offered classes and workshops, as well as participation by contractors to gather their feedback on training options. Training was available to both entry-level and experienced home performance professionals, and contractors were given the flexibility to hire first and train second (e.g., hire a technician who is not fully trained or certified but can begin or is in the process of completing certifications). In this way, the contractor could select from a wider pool of candidates and then provide supplemental training to those who need it. The training was fully subsidized by the program. By establishing these ongoing collaborative partnerships with contractors, Community Power Works helped to ensure that it has a robust workforce of trained professionals for the future. As a result of these partnerships, about 40 training graduates have worked around 23,000 hours on Community Power Works projects between April 2011 and December 2013.
- **Philadelphia's Energy Coordinating Agency** [3] collaborated with the Community College of Philadelphia to design an apprenticeship program for energy efficiency and building science. Two one-year programs—"Building Energy Analyst" and "Weatherization Installer and Technician"—led to journeyman credentials and BPI certification. These programs trained home performance professionals with the technical building science skills they needed, while also providing hands-on experience with energy efficiency analysis and installation of energy efficiency measures. Program trainees helped residents save an average of 20% to 30% on utility bills through weatherization and energy conservation services.
- **Austin Energy** [4] emphasized making its contractor training locally relevant. The program encouraged trainers to highlight issues that were particularly applicable to the local climate and housing stock, and to focus on regionally-appropriate amendments to energy code. For example, basements are uncommon in Austin houses, so training should avoid seeming out of touch and refrain from discussing basement upgrades. The program also learned that trainers should allow time for participating contractors to raise issues and questions that are specific to their geographic area and most pertinent to the local community in which they work.

- **EnergyWorks Kansas City's** [5] program implementer, Metropolitan Energy Center (MEC), provided training and mentoring for home energy professionals, including training for BPI certification. Training courses included residential and commercial energy assessment, healthy homes, and deconstruction. One training session focused specifically on small and women-owned businesses. To follow up on the training, MEC instituted a mentored practicum experience in which each student was required to complete a full complement of diagnostic tests with the instructor in a dummy house. EnergyWorks Kansas City and MEC also worked with seasoned contractors to provide mentoring to newer contractors in the program. From 2011 to 2014, 90 individuals participated in MEC's introductory home performance training program. The training and mentoring program allowed new technicians to enter the home performance market: from 2009 to 2014, the number of certified residential auditors in Kansas City increased from six to over fifty, almost all of whom have received training from MEC.

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Links

[1] http://energy.gov/eere/analysis/downloads/spotlight-key-program-strategies-better-buildings-neighborhood-program-final
[2] http://energy.gov/eere/better-buildings-neighborhood-program/seattle-washington
[3] http://energy.gov/eere/better-buildings-neighborhood-program/philadelphia-pennsylvania
[4] http://energy.gov/eere/better-buildings-neighborhood-program/austin-texas
[5] http://energy.gov/eere/better-buildings-neighborhood-program/kansas-city-missouri