

Language matters – use words that resonate with your target audience

Words have power, so many programs decided to use language with positive associations. For example, the Better Buildings Neighborhood Program encouraged use of the term "assessment" instead of "audit" to avoid the negative connotation of a tax audit. "Home energy upgrade" sounds more positive than "retrofit," a term that might not be clear to the average consumer or may imply something old that underwent makeshift improvements in order to work.

Programs found it was important to create messages and materials that resonated with homeowners. Messages were more likely to be well received if the messenger sounded and looked like the target audience. Vivid examples (e.g., "home performance professionals are mechanics for your home") and statements of avoided loss rather than gain (e.g., "until you get the flue fixed, your hard-earned cash is flying right up that chimney") worked better to inspire potential customers to participate. A comprehensive [evaluation](#) [1] of more than 140 programs across the United States found that successful programs were more likely than others to promote upgrades on the basis of increased comfort.

- [Michigan Saves](#) [2] program staff who spoke directly to residents while canvassing homes during neighborhood "sweeps" initially found little success convincing homeowners to sign up for the program. The problem was that their messages were framed around energy savings and environmental benefits, and they used energy efficiency jargon, such as "reducing leakage" in the home. Once the program reframed its messages around comfort and lower heating bills, canvassers felt better received by the homeowners; they also talked about specific neighbors down the block who were feeling fewer drafts since their participation in the program.
- Philadelphia's [EnergyWorks](#) [3] married comfort with value in their online advertising's weather-focused messaging, which included phrases like "Lower utility bills, warmer cocoa breaks." From October 15 through December 15, 2011, when these advertisements ran, the program received 9,350 website visitors, 77% of who were reported as new visitors.

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Links

- [1] <http://energy.gov/eere/better-buildings-neighborhood-program/accomplishments#reports>
- [2] <http://michigansaves.org/>
- [3] <http://energy.gov/eere/better-buildings-neighborhood-program/philadelphia-pennsylvania>