

Market Position & Business Model – Communicate Impacts

Description

Communicating organization-level impacts is critical to sustaining long-term support. Many communications to business and community stakeholders will be focused on program-level impacts. This kind of communication can help build support for your home energy upgrade activities and is further described in the Program Design handbook on [communicating impacts](#). You also need to communicate your organization's impacts to business and community stakeholders. These stakeholders—such as thought leaders, funders, and policymakers—are often in a position to support or hinder an organization's efforts. As a result, sharing achievements and milestones with them can help you achieve your organization's overall [mission, vision, and goals](#).

This handbook describes:

1. Key methods for publicizing benefits and lessons learned resulting from organizational and programmatic operations and/or activities
2. How communications can support your organization's efforts toward policy and market changes
3. How to define the purpose and identify the key audiences for each communication
4. Common communications products and channels you can use to publicize your organization's work
5. How to evaluate the impacts of your communications and improve results over time.

The specific steps to communicating impacts covered in this handbook include:

- Link events, milestones, and activities to your communications strategy
- Define the purpose of your communication
- Identify audiences
- Decide on key information and messages
- Choose and develop products
- Choose and use communication channels
- Assess and refine your communication strategy.

Market Position & Business Model

Stages:

[Overview](#)

1. [Assess the Market](#)
2. [Set Goals & Objectives](#)
3. [Identify Partners](#)
4. [Develop a Business Model](#)
5. [Create a Business Plan](#)
6. [Develop Evaluation Plans](#)
7. [Develop Resources](#)
8. [Assess & Improve Processes](#)
9. **Communicate Impacts**

Find related information across other program components:

- **[Marketing & Outreach – Communicate Impacts](#)**
Communicate marketing and outreach results internally and to partners.
- **[Program Design & Customer Experience – Communicate Impacts](#)**
Develop a strategy for communicating program impacts and benefits to key audiences to create and sustain support and engagement.
- **[Financing – Communicate Impacts](#)**
Communicate the results of your financing activities to internal and external partners.
- **[Contractor Engagement & Workforce Development – Communicate Impacts](#)**
Communicate program results to contractor partners and workforce development stakeholders.

Step-by-Step

Communicating organizational-level impacts to business and community stakeholders is a critical component of establishing a strong market position. The steps below describe how to develop and implement an effective communications strategy focused on the organization. For information on communicating program-level impacts, see the [Program Design handbook](#).

Link events, milestones, and activities to your communications strategy

Before crafting any communication about impacts, you need to identify how possible events, milestones, and activities relate to your overarching communications strategy. This strategy defines your goals for communications, the key audiences and themes you will be including in your communications, and the primary products and channels you will be using.

You should develop one overall strategy for your organization and the programs you operate, recognizing that you will be communicating different impacts to different audiences in different ways. The process for developing a communications strategy is described in detail in the [Program Design handbook](#).

Example: If you reach an organizational milestone and hire your 25th staff member, you could publicize that fact in many ways, depending on your communications strategy.

At a high level, if your strategy is to use communications to grow support for your organization among potential funders, underscore themes of workforce development, and reach audiences through social media platforms, you might develop a post for your Facebook page and tweet about it on Twitter. The tweet may look something like this, “Continued job growth at XYZ Company: We’re building on a strong record of success and ready to grow our impacts.”

On the other hand, if your strategy is to use communications to push for policy changes related to home energy upgrade financing and you use traditional methods of communication to achieve that, you might issue a press release and seek to get it placed in a leading state policy weekly paper. The communication about the new employee may include the following headline, “Market demand for residential energy financing surges: Critical new hire made at XYZ Company.”

Define the purpose of your communication

Next, you will need to define the goal of your communication and clearly relate it to your organization’s [vision, mission, and goals](#). From an organizational perspective, there are two main reasons why communicating impacts to stakeholders is important:

1. Influencing policy changes, and
2. Influencing market changes.

An additional benefit is to attract new talent to the organization, thereby increasing capacity.

Policy Change

Many energy efficiency organizations benefit from a favorable policy environment to achieve their missions. As your organization begins to yield impacts and achieve successes, communicating these achievements to policymakers can show the value of your organization and demonstrate the impacts of policy changes or maintaining complimentary existing policies. In either case, documented successes can often help expand support and spur action.

Example: If your organization's mission is to reduce the energy burden on low-income households, a statewide policy that provides an ongoing funding stream for home energy upgrades would greatly improve your likelihood of achieving that mission. To encourage such a policy, you might communicate to policymakers in your state about the beneficial impacts of your organization.

Market Change

Promoting your successful strategies can increase the pace of service delivery and rally more organizations to the cause of energy efficiency. Sharing best practices with the many types of organizations working in the home energy upgrade market allows all participants to benefit. For example, sustained consumer demand for high-quality energy efficient services and products should naturally lead contractors to hire more staff and manufacturers to produce more goods to meet that demand. Communicating your organization's lessons learned and best practices to other organizations involved in the home improvement market and helping them understand how to apply that information to their own circumstances will ultimately provide a favorable business environment for your organization's efforts to grow and expand.

Example: If your organization has realized significant process improvements from implementing a software-based program management tool, such as decreasing the number of days needed to process contractor incentives and reducing the staff time needed to conduct customer follow-up calls, you might communicate that to other home energy upgrade program administrators. By doing so, you will not only help your fellow organizations improve the results of their efforts, but also help grow the market for home energy upgrades.

Identify audiences

Once you have established the purpose of your communications, you should identify which audiences are most important. These generally include business and community partners who have a stake in your organization's success, such as:

- **Policymakers:** Promote your organization's impacts to policymakers when you have demonstrated success in a particular area, reached an important milestone, or whenever you have information that could improve policymaking efforts related to energy efficiency.
- **Community leaders:** Community leaders—such as elected officials, heads of large business and nonprofit organizations, and other influential citizens—can help direct resources to your effort and connect you with other organizations that could partner with you on jointly held goals. As such, you should communicate with them whenever you launch a new initiative or whenever you have a major success to report.
- **Funders:** Communicate strategically with funders regarding information about how your organization is using their funds, what results you have generated, and what your plans are to capitalize on successes and overcome challenges. Some funders may require that you submit reports detailing outcomes (e.g., quarterly reports on activities and impacts associated with grant funds). While there is typically a minimum amount of reporting that most funders require, communicating more frequently can lead to greater engagement and buy-in for your work. You will want to carefully balance the frequency of communication with the quality of what you are communicating. In other words, do not flood funders with minor bits of information; rather roll up that information into key takeaways that you then share.

Also consider the purpose of the communication and which events, milestones, and activities you wish to publicize. For example, if your organization is partnering with your city government to sponsor an upcoming contractor training and you would like to leverage additional resources from your local government in the future, the primary audience for your communication would be the mayor and any city councilors involved in setting the city's budget priorities for the coming year.

Decide on key information and messages

Information and messages should be tailored to the audience to the extent possible. This process is extensively described in the Marketing & Outreach handbook on [creating effective messages](#). In effect, identifying your audiences and developing messages to target those audiences is a parallel process.

Kinds of information and messages to share include:

- **Major organizational milestones:** It is important to communicate externally whether you are on track to meet the [goals you have established](#). Meeting organizational milestones such as establishing a strategic partnership with the local workforce center and operating one joint training event each quarter presents a great opportunity to communicate your impacts externally.
- **Relevant information about your program results:** This can include both quantitative program results (e.g., total upgrades completed, number of jobs created, and energy saved per home upgrade), qualitative results (e.g., insights and lessons learned about successes and failures), and customer feedback (e.g., testimonials). More information on these types of results is provided in the Program Design handbook on [communicating impacts](#).
- **Information from your organizational assessment activities:** Key performance indicators (described in the handbook on assessing and improving processes) can enable organizations to quickly and easily understand progress toward goals. Sharing these indicators—such as the percentage of home energy upgrade customers served by your organization or the strength of your relationships with key partners—with relevant external audiences helps keep them informed of your progress as well.

Example: Using the example about hiring your 25th staff person, you should publicize that differently to different audiences. For a funder, you might emphasize how this new staffer will help your organization operate more efficiently and achieve greater impacts. For a policymaker, you might stress how your organization's efforts are resulting in new jobs in his or her jurisdiction. For a participating contractor, you might explain how the new staffer will streamline reporting requirements, speed payment timelines, expand training capabilities, or otherwise help them.

Choose and develop products

Several kinds of [communications products](#) can be used to illustrate the impact of your organization. In choosing from among these products, you should be guided by:

- Your target audience, ensuring that the product you choose is appropriate and relevant to them.
- The kind of information you intend to communicate, ensuring that the product will clearly convey key messages and provide the right level of detail.

Common communications tools include case studies, lessons learned documents, press releases, policy bulletins, media stories, and social media tools (e.g., videos, status updates). Tell a compelling story about the impacts of your organization's work.

As you consider which products to use, keep in mind that communications are most powerful when they have a compelling and easy-to-follow narrative—with a protagonist (often the program administrator, but also a homeowner or contractor), a problem to be overcome, barriers faced along the way, and a resolution that will resonate with your audience, as described further in the Program Design handbook on [communicating impacts](#).

Communicating Workforce Development Benefits

In 2012, early on in their program launch, [RePower Kitsap](#) initiated a communication campaign about its workforce development benefits to get the word out to the community about their new program. This effort included a suite of communication media, including social media a [video](#) entitled "Repowering Our Workforce", and a [news story](#) on the Climate Solutions website highlighting RePower's success in creating local jobs. The Climate Solutions website belongs to a non-profit organization in the Northwest that builds constituency for local, regional and national action on climate and clean energy. The website already hosted messaging for RePower Bainbridge Island, another nearby residential energy efficiency program, so RePower Kitsap chose to use the website as its media platform in order to maintain consistency of messaging with other existing local efforts.

RePowering Our Workforce

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RePowering Our Workforce

Solutions Story: Kitsap County, WA

In an economic downturn, a community-based effort is helping create local jobs for contractors and improving energy-efficiency of local homes. Watch the story of how in just one year, RePower has created 28 contractor jobs in Kitsap County—43 percent of the goal:

Share Your Story

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Videos

- Repowering Bainbridge
- RePower Bainbridge Bainbridge Island, Washington
- The Big Chiller - Granger, WA
- The Big Chiller Granger, Washington

Bremerton, like many towns in the country, has been hit hard by the economic downturn. RePower (which currently has three initiatives in Bainbridge, Bremerton and Kitsap County) is —a community-based effort—helping create local jobs for contractors by offering in-home assessments and energy-efficiency improvements which increase the comfort, health and safety of local homes.

“The push to energy efficiency has created a lot of work that wasn’t there for me as just a remodeling contractor... It’s really helped my company be able to provide living wage jobs to seven individuals that weren’t there before.”

Matthew Stefnik, Matthews Energy Services

The Underlying Problem: Although newer Kitsap County homes built during the mid-1980s through

Source: [RePowering Our Workforce](#), Climate Solutions, 2014.

Choose and use communication channels

Common channels to communicate your organization’s impacts include:

- Website
- Social media
- Press releases
- Hard copy materials (brochures, annual reports, etc.)
- Direct communication (email, phone calls, dinners, etc.)
- Industry events.

Base your choice of communication channel on the purpose and the audience type.

For example, sending out a general press release and hoping that your largest funder sees any resulting press coverage is not as effective as meeting with the funder to talk through the content of the press release in advance, then following up after you secure coverage to show them the community’s interest in your organization’s efforts.

Assess and refine your communication strategy

Reflect on your communication strategy, and identify any needed changes over time. This should be done on an ongoing basis, with structured time for reflection set aside periodically.

Monitor the reach of your communications in real time. For example, after you send out a press release, you can assess whether any news outlets publicized your story and whether they emphasized the points you had intended by setting up an automatic news alert online with your organization’s name or some key words from the release.

A structured review takes more time and attention. To do this, you should list all of the communications from the recent past, their purpose, the product, the communication channel, and the result as shown in the example table below.

Example Structured Communication Assessment

EVENT, MILESTONE, OR ACTIVITY	PURPOSE(S) OF COMMUNICATION	AUDIENCES	PRODUCTS	CHANNELS	RESULTS
Hired 25 ⁺ employee	Show we can operate more efficiently and achieve greater impacts	Funders	Talking Points	Direct Communication (phone calls to funders)	Positive feedback during phone calls
	Demonstrate job creation impacts	Policymakers	City Council Meeting	Press release	Press release picked up by local paper; 25,000 impressions
	Increase participation by showing how we are ramping up incentive payment timelines	Contractor	News Bulletin; Email	Website, Direct Communication (email to contractors)	3 contractors responded to email within 1 week

Source: U.S. Department of Energy, 2014.

After you have compiled this information, you can compare results and begin to understand what products and channels have been most effective. This will help you determine how well you are meeting communication goals and where to spend limited resources in the future. Depending on the frequency of your communications, you can undertake this exercise on a monthly, quarterly, or biannual basis.

Tips for Success

In recent years, hundreds of communities have been working to promote home energy upgrades through programs such as the Better Buildings Neighborhood Program, Home Performance with ENERGY STAR, utility-sponsored programs, and others. The following tips present the top lessons these programs want to share related to this handbook. This list is not exhaustive.

Develop partnerships based on an alignment of goals, strong collaboration, and consistent communication

Programs that have developed strong and lasting partnerships have done so by identifying shared goals and seeking ways in which programs and partners can mutually benefit by advancing each other's missions. Even if partners don't have the same goals as your program, you can still try to find ways to work together that improve the success of both efforts. Several programs have established forums for regular communication with partners, such as a steering committee or stakeholder group that meets monthly or quarterly, to maintain collaboration and communication. Informal events—such as engaging with partners after hours in a social setting—have proven to be successful at building trust and camaraderie. One key lesson from programs that have established robust partnerships: remember that partnership development often takes more time than planned.

- The [Better Buildings Program San Jose](#) leveraged local, well-known organizations that delivered non-energy services to low-income residents to help the program reach interested homeowners. Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church and the local Boys and Girls Clubhouse offered the program space for events where they could meet with homeowners, teach them more about the program, and schedule home energy assessments. To help low-income residents cover the cost of home energy evaluations and upgrades, the program also created a partnership with Pacific Gas and Electric's Moderate Income Direct Install program (which offered free home energy assessments and weatherization services to income-qualified residents) to allow all program customers into the utility's program. To learn more about the Better Buildings Program in San Jose, see the case study "[San Jose, California, Partners with Established Community Groups to Win over Homeowners](#)".
- Early in its program, [EnergyWorks](#) in Philadelphia established a partnership with its local gas utility, Philadelphia Gas Works (PGW), to share lessons learned and customer information, including sharing energy use data once customers authorized its release. This partnership helped PGW enhance its own energy efficiency programs by applying the knowledge learned about home energy upgrades from EnergyWorks. The partnership also provided PGW customers with access to EnergyWorks' loan program. For EnergyWorks, the partnership gave it access to PGW customers for marketing. Learn more about the partnership from the case study "[In the City of Brotherly Love, Sharing Know-How Leads to Sustainability](#)". EnergyWorks found that by the end of their Better Buildings Neighborhood Program grant period, they had identified a successful formula of marketing, outreach, and contractor interface. They wanted their lessons learned to be useful in the future continued working with the city-owned utility, Philadelphia Gas Works (PGW) to develop a new [utility-run energy efficiency program](#). This program built off and mirrored the design of the EnergyWorks program by incentivizing comprehensive, whole-home residential energy efficiency projects. EnergyWorks' role changed to providing training and acting as a general contractor, which gave it more flexibility. PGW was able to provide bigger incentives than EnergyWorks could. In addition, PGW benefited from increased customer satisfaction by offering the program, so the program involvement and partnership was a win-win for everyone involved. For more information, see the U.S. Department of Energy's [Focus Series Interview with Philadelphia Energy Works](#).
- [Michigan Saves](#), formerly BetterBuildings for Michigan, established a partnership with Grand Valley State University (GVSU) to take the program's community-based approach to a new type of community—university staff—through a semester-long, employer-assisted initiative. The program found that the sustainability staff members at GVSU were interested in the program, and program staff described a "sustainability ethic ingrained in the school's culture." GVSU employees were receptive to the energy efficiency message. University leadership joined in as well, with the provost's office and university president writing letters to staff in support of the program. The school's human resources department helped the program develop a database to manage services to employees. As a result of the program, 215 people working for GVSU (nearly 10% of total employees) signed up for the program. By going through the university, these sign-ups cost one-fourth to one-third of the program's normal marketing cost per person. Sixty percent of the homeowners who participated in the GVSU program undertook home upgrades, which was higher than Michigan Saves' average rate of 44%. To learn more about the effort, see the interview with program leads: "[It's Academic: BetterBuildings for Michigan Partners With University to Reach Employees](#)".

Leverage the many complementary benefits of energy efficiency programs to broaden your organization's reach and partnership opportunities

Home energy assessments and upgrades can offer more than just energy savings benefits. They can make homes safer, enhance home value, and reduce health risks for residents. Better Buildings Neighborhood Program partners found that emphasizing the full range of benefits that upgrades offered helped them to identify new partnership opportunities they might not have otherwise considered. They found that their organization's work to improve resident's quality of life and reduce energy costs was often consistent with the mission of other organizations focused on public health, low-income housing, or local economic development. Working together provided an avenue for expanding both organizations' reach, as well as providing multiplied benefits to residents. They also found that focusing on other benefits of energy efficiency could lead to access of additional funding sources and partners.

- **EnergyWorks KC** in Kansas City sought partnerships with local government, community organizations, social service agencies and educational institutions to achieve complementary objectives, including: working with local housing development corporations to teach weatherization through hands-on work on houses being rehabilitated; providing free energy assessments for churches and other nonprofit institutions as part of training programs for commercial energy auditors; and partnering with Children's Mercy Center for Environmental Health to provide Healthy Homes for Energy Professionals training as part of most Home Performance training programs, as well as teaching combustion safety to Healthy Homes trainees. The program's partnership with Children's Mercy Hospital focused on opportunities for cross-training and leveraging relationships. The benefits to both partners were related to mission, i.e. EnergyWorks KC taught energy auditors a "whole house approach", looking at buildings as a system. It was to the benefit of EnergyWorks KC that auditors understood the health and safety impacts of this system for its occupants. It was to the benefit of Children's Mercy to ensure that energy professionals, who spend a significant amount of time in homes, understood and were sensitive to environmental health issues, so that they could help to spot and address problems.
- The **Los Angeles Department of Water & Power** took an integrated approach to saving water and energy among its residential customers, recognizing that the two are intricately linked. Water conservation programs in FY15 achieved a savings of 7,000 acre feet of water, equaling an energy savings of 4.3MkWh/year. In addition, since 2012, LADWP has been partnering with the Southern California Gas Company to further capitalize on multiple benefit opportunities and allow electric, gas, and water programs and incentives to be combined into a one-stop shop for customers. In the areas this joint venture operates, customers can see impacts in four areas on their bills: electric, gas, water, and sewer.
- In 2015, **Enhabit**, formerly Clean Energy Works, expanded its portfolio of services to homeowners by adding seismic specialists to its team of local, certified contractors. Enhabit connected homeowners with contractors and provided low-interest loans for those interested in both energy efficiency as well as seismic safety upgrades. By offering an additional home improvement service that was in high demand in the earthquake prone Pacific Northwest, Enhabit was able to fill a niche in the market and expand its customer base.

Examples

The following resources are examples from individual residential energy efficiency programs, which include case studies, program presentations and reports, and program materials. The U.S. Department of Energy does not endorse these materials.

Case Studies

None available at this time.

Program Presentations & Reports

[EnergySmart Program Progress Review](#)

Author: Navigant, Inc. (Prepared for Boulder County)

Publication Date: 2012

This progress report provides community members and others interested in EnergySmart with a clear snapshot of its progress. The report also provides a timeline of energy efficiency policies and programs in Boulder County.

[LEAP Annual Report 2012](#)

Author: Local Energy Alliance Program

Publication Date: 2013

This annual report summarizes the program's accomplishments in 2012, including the number of home upgrades, the cumulative amount of private investment leveraged for energy efficiency improvements, cumulative annual cost savings for building owners, and jobs created. It also includes testimonials from LEAP customers.

Program Materials

[Energy Upgrade California Marketing and Communications Plan \(2 MB\)](#)

Author: Energy Upgrade California

Publication Date: 2010

This marketing and communications plan from Energy Upgrade California includes a goal to reduce aggregate greenhouse gas emissions through energy and resource-saving upgrades of existing building stock. The plan also outlines several objectives the program developed to help them meet this goal.

Toolbox

The following resources are available to help design, implement, and evaluate possible activities related to this handbook. These resources include templates and forms, as well as tools and calculators. The U.S. Department of Energy does not endorse these materials.

Templates & Forms

None available at this time.

Tools & Calculators

[Small Town Energy Program \(STEP\) Toolkit](#)

Author: Small Town Energy Program

Publication Date: 2013

The Small Town Energy Program (STEP) toolkit gives a complete overview of STEP from planning to implementation. It also includes access to a wide variety of materials developed by the program, including: local asset materials, partner materials, personnel materials, program administrative materials, outreach materials, and surveys. STEP has posted these toolkit documents with the hope that it will assist other small towns and communities in building and running more energy efficiency programs.

Topical Resources

The following resources provide additional topical information related to this handbook, which include presentations, publications, and webcasts. Visit [Examples](#) for materials from and about individual programs.

Topical Presentations

None available at this time.

Publications

[\\$20 Billion Bonanza: Best Practice Utility Energy Efficiency Programs and Their Benefits for the Southwest](#)

Author: Southwest Energy Efficiency Project

Publication Date: 2012

This report explores the best practices that utilities should undertake in the development and implementation of energy efficiency programs. The report calculates the impact that investing in energy efficiency will have on jobs, household income, and state and regional economies, along with the other public health benefits such as reducing pollution.

Webcasts

Tips and Tools for Promoting Your Energy Efficiency Project

[Presentation](#), [Media](#) (53 MB), [Transcript](#)

Author: Jim Arwood, National Association of State Energy Officials; Nancy Raca, ICF International

Publication Date: 2010

This webcast provides information on why outreach is important for program success and how programs can promote their efforts.

