

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. Following are some of the key lessons learned from these programs about workforce development. Learn more by exploring the Better Building Residential Program Solution Center and joining the Better Buildings Residential Network.

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

Workforce training alone does not create jobs in the community, but programs found that asking contractors what training topics would be valuable helped to increase the relevance of the training and build an engaged and capable workforce. Programs found success in working with education and training providers, such as community colleges and weatherization training centers, to offer appropriate training. Apprenticeships helped some programs ensure that students acquired the skills that employers want. These programs have also found that these and similar on-the-job training can be a relevant, less expensive, and motivating supplement to classroom training.

Community Power Works in Seattle partnered with South Seattle Community College and the nonprofit Northwest EcoBuilding Guild to offer classes and workshops to entry-level and experienced home performance professionals. In developing classes, Community Power Works gathered feedback from contractors on training options. The program invested in building a robust workforce of trained professionals for the future and established a collaborative partnership with contractors. As a result of these partnerships, approximately 40 training graduates worked 23,000 hours on Community Power Works projects between April 2011 and December 2013.

Help contractors enter the home performance market by lowering barriers to entry.

Expanding contractors' portfolio of services can add risk to their businesses. Many programs took steps to lower barriers to contractors' successful entry into the market. To help contractors learn the trade, enter the home performance market, and participate successfully in the program, many program administrators have offered mentoring and networking opportunities and partnered with contractors to improve work processes, in addition to providing program orientations. Some programs helped lower business entry costs by subsidizing training cost and loaning equipment. Taking steps to help contractors enter the market can help programs establish a trained workforce of high-quality contractors.

Fayette County, Pennsylvania provided grants and financing to minimize home performance startup costs of Building Performance Institute (BPI) certification for their technicians. The program partnered with a local private industry council to train technicians to become BPI certified at no cost to students. The partnership program helped new home performance professionals start new businesses, for example, by providing grants and low-interest loans to purchase computer software and professional equipment. Ninety-four individuals completed the training through the partnership program. Training and certification in the home performance industry provides Fayette County residents with an opportunity for stable and well-paying careers.

Establish a clear system and process for ensuring quality work.

A residential energy efficiency program's success is dependent on contractors completing consistent, quality work in customers' homes. Effective quality assurance (QA) and quality control (QC) programs provide a foundation for quality upgrades. Many programs found success with a tiered quality assurance plan, inspecting the first several upgrades completed by a new contractor and then a specified percentage of subsequent projects. Programs conducted a broad range of additional verifications, including checking contractors' certifications, implementing a mechanism to re-check certifications regularly, and verifying contractors' safety skills (e.g., combustion training). Some programs identified standards for ensuring quality work, including standards for technical work, for diagnostic tools and installed equipment, and for professionalism and customer service.

In New York, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) used a tiered approach for quality assurance. Inspection rates varied based on the contractor's status in the program. The program would inspect the first three projects that all contractors complete. After these initial projects, the program inspected 15% of a contractor's completed projects, and at least one project annually. Customers could also request that field inspections be conducted within one year of the contractor's work. If contractors had repeat QA/QC issues, NYSERDA would increase the field inspection sampling rate, generally to 50% or more. If problems persisted and were not resolved, NYSERDA sometimes suspended contractors from the program according to its QA procedures.

Contractors are your sales team – educate and empower them with the skills to sell home energy upgrades.

Many programs have found it challenging to reach more customers and to improve conversion rates of customer interest into completed upgrades. Realizing that the contractor is a primary face-to-face link between customers and the program, some programs took steps to empower contractors to more successfully sell home energy upgrades through co-marketing and sales training. Programs have found that offering sales training can significantly boost sales and improve customer experience and conversion rates. For programs offering financing, training contractors on how to use financing as a tool to close sales has also been helpful.

Efficiency Maine boosted conversion rates with sales training, which helped contractors communicate with customers more effectively. Through monthly webinars and professional development courses, the program helped contractors improve their skills in targeted communication and selling program options, thereby increasing home energy upgrade conversions. After conducting a two-day sales training course for contractors, coinciding with additional homeowner incentives and a filing deadline, Efficiency Maine's average monthly rate of energy upgrade conversions increased from 10% before the training to 60% a few months afterward.

The **Better Buildings Residential Program Solution Center** (energy.gov/rpsc) is a repository of key lessons, resources, and examples based on the experience of hundreds of communities working to promote energy efficiency upgrades in homes. It helps program administrators and their partners plan, operate, and evaluate residential energy efficiency programs.

Join the **Better Buildings Residential Network** (betterbuildings.energy.gov/bbrn) to connect with fellow energy efficiency programs and partners. Share best practices and learn from one another through regular peer exchange calls and other resources.