

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 marketing and outreach. Learn more by exploring the Better Buildings Residential Program Solution Center and joining the Better Buildings Residential Network.

### **Language matters – use words that resonate with your target audience.**

Words have power, and successful programs learned to use language with positive associations to reach homeowners. 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. Many programs conducted audience testing to create messages and materials that resonated with their specific target audience. In general, vivid examples and statements of avoided loss rather than gain worked better to inspire potential customers to participate.

BetterBuildings for Michigan program staff who canvassed homes during neighborhood “sweeps” initially found little success convincing homeowners to sign up for the program. They found that their messages and language were the problem: the program spoke of energy savings and environmental benefits and 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. The staff also used real customer examples, talking about nearby neighbors who were feeling fewer drafts since their participation in the program.

### **Adapt messages to your target audience’s needs.**

Program audiences have different priorities, concerns, and energy efficiency opportunities. Many programs have used market research to help identify, segment, and characterize target audiences and understand how to prioritize and motivate them to action. Effective audience segmentation in many regions has been based on parameters such as demographics, housing type, fuel source, potential for savings, common problems with homes, property ownership structure, or program entry point (e.g., remodeling opportunities).

In Seattle, Washington, owners of oil-heated homes are ineligible for city-sponsored electric and gas utility rebates. Heating oil has high costs and low efficiency compared to heating alternatives. Community Power Works purchased a mailing list that identified all owners of oil-heated homes in the city, so the program could reach this previously untapped market. The program focused Seattle homeowners on the cost and energy savings potential from replacing oil heaters to motivate them to complete an upgrade. More than 700 customers who received the mailing signed up for upgrades within 5 months. Before the mailing, 20% of Community Power Works’ upgrade projects involved oil-heated homes. Six months following the mailing, 50% of the participating homes were oil-heated, and of those homes, nearly 75% switched from oil heating to high-efficiency electric heating or high-efficiency electric heat pumps.

### **Partner with organizations or individuals customers already trust.**

Credibility and legitimacy are valuable characteristics that programs need when trying to reach new target audiences. Programs across the country have successfully promoted their products and services through partnerships with a range of trusted organizations or individuals including community groups and nonprofit organizations; large employers, such as local universities; respected members of the community (e.g., local elected officials, neighborhood leaders); and utilities or fuel dealers. Programs found that marketing materials were more effective when a potential customer received them from an organization with which they had an existing relationship.

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When Better Buildings San Jose in California set out to encourage homeowners to undertake home energy upgrades, it joined forces with trusted community organizations to accomplish its goals. The City of San Jose had previously worked in these communities as part of their Strong Neighborhoods Initiative, and was able to leverage the trust and goodwill generated by this effort. A local church lent office space for program staff to host meetings with homeowners, discuss their energy upgrade options, and schedule home energy assessments. Additional events were held at a community Boys and Girls Club. Partnering with organizations that already offered services to the community enhanced the credibility and visibility of the program.

### **Communicate with audiences at least three times; once is not enough.**

Before homeowners can sign up for an upgrade, they must have an awareness of the program and what it offers. Residential energy efficiency programs have found that outreach needs to be repeated in order to connect with and remind potential participants about program offerings. A widely used rule of thumb in marketing is that people need to be exposed to a message at least three times before they take action. The more time between communications, the less likely the customer will take action.

Philadelphia's EnergyWorks promoted its program through a multi-phased advertisement plan. The first phase focused on radio and weather-related websites to coincide with specific weather conditions, which resulted in 15,000 visits to the program website and over 300 energy assessments. The second phase used print, online, and regional rail marketing to create a sense of urgency to act on the program's offerings. In its third phase, EnergyWorks' advertising expanded on the previous phase with the introduction of an educational component, in addition to emphasis on the value and comfort of home energy upgrades. In three years, EnergyWorks' efforts resulted in over 1,900 upgrades.

### **Engage media to garner attention and credibility.**

Many successful programs found that media attention for their products and services helped add credibility to marketing efforts and expand their reach. By positioning "green" stories or home improvement mini-segments on local television or radio stations, they were able to provide timely content that generated interest in their programs' services and increased program recognition, laying the groundwork for future leads. Successful programs also tracked where customers heard about their program to understand which outlets were working.

The Solar and Energy Loan Fund in St. Lucie County, Florida, attracted media coverage by refreshing its messages, maintaining a sense of new activity and innovation, and stressing its contribution to the community. The program promoted several "firsts"—its first loan, its first experience with crowd funding, and the county's first PACE financing program. It also emphasized key funding and participation milestones and highlighted the success of its partners and the satisfaction of clients, which kept the program continuously in the news.

The Better Buildings Residential Program Solution Center ([energy.gov/rpsc](http://energy.gov/rpsc)) is a repository of key lessons, resources, and examples collected from 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](http://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, an online discussion forum, and other resources.