

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Bringing the Benefits of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy to Low-Income Communities

EPA's State and Local Climate and Energy Program is developing a series of case studies and program profiles to help officials in state and local energy, environmental, housing, and social services agencies, non-profits, and utilities understand promising practices and successful models that they can use to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by bringing energy efficiency and renewable energy (EE/RE) to low-income communities.

Learning from Effective Programs

The profiles and case studies in this ongoing series highlight effective programs at the state and local levels that have led to the successful adoption of EE/RE in low-income communities. EPA has selected programs for inclusion based on their demonstrated ability to achieve results through on-the-ground implementation; their potential to be scalable, replicable, and sustainable; and to highlight a diverse range of communities (geography, size) and types of EE/RE programs.

The profiles and case studies focus on how these programs have addressed, in a practical manner, the challenges to ensuring low-income households share in the multiple benefits of EE/RE. The practices and approaches described in this growing series highlight only some of the potential strategies for bringing EE/RE to low-income communities.

The series includes two types of publications:

- **Profiles** describe successful EE/RE programs, their key features and approaches, partners, funding sources, and achievements.
- **Case studies** dig deeper into successful experiences with EE/RE programs. Case studies provide more detail and include additional sections covering keys to success and tips for replication and sustainability that can help other organizations.

Readers of these documents should come away with ideas for programs that might address challenges faced by their communities; a sense of what it takes to effectively implement these programs, including partnerships and funding sources; and insights from the featured communities about what made their programs successful.

The Role for State and Local Governments

EE/RE programs create benefits no matter where they are implemented. By investing in EE/RE programs in low-income communities, state and local governments can:

- reduce emissions of GHGs and conventional air pollutants,
- reduce the disproportionate energy burden faced by many low-income households,
- free up household funds to meet basic needs and improve quality of life,
- improve comfort and indoor air quality,
- improve home health and safety,
- reduce the burden on utilities of unpaid or overdue bills,
- create jobs, and
- provide a range of other economic and social benefits for individual households and the communities around them.

EPA is developing this collection of case studies, program profiles, and other resources to help state and local governments bring EE/RE and the associated benefits to low-income communities.

These resources are available at <https://www.epa.gov/statelocalclimate/bringing-benefits-energy-efficiency-and-renewable-energy-low-income-communities>

Program Finder

	Approaches to Addressing Key Barriers						
	Eliminate or reduce up-front costs	Partner with trusted organizations	Create a one-stop hub for energy assistance	Address eligibility gaps	Address split incentives	Adopt a whole-building approach	Consider community solar
Case Studies							
California Multifamily Affordable Solar Housing Program (RE)	✓				✓		✓
Efficiency Vermont (EE)	✓	✓			✓		
EmPOWER Maryland (EE)	✓				✓	✓	
Energy Outreach Colorado (EE)	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Profiles							
DTE Energy's Energy Efficiency Programs (EE) (Mich.)	✓	✓					
Duluth Energy Efficiency Program (EE) (Minn.)	✓			✓			
Duke Energy Neighborhood Energy Saver (EE) (Multiple states)	✓	✓					
Elevate Energy (EE) (Multiple states)	✓		✓		✓		
GRID Alternatives (RE) (Multiple states)	✓				✓		✓
Help My House (EE) (S.C.)	✓					✓	
Santa Ynez Tribal Community (EE) (Calif.)	✓	✓					

Additional Resources

These documents introduce some of the considerations involved in bringing EE/RE to low-income communities, strategies for implementation, and resources for state and local governments.

Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy in Low-Income Communities: A Guide to EPA Programs (U.S. EPA, 2016). This guide helps state and local staff connect with EPA initiatives that can assist them in expanding or developing their own EE/RE and climate initiatives in ways that benefit low-income communities. <https://www.epa.gov/statelocalclimate/energy-efficiency-and-renewable-energy-low-income-communities>

Lifting the High Energy Burden in America's Largest Cities: How Energy Efficiency Can Improve Low-Income and Underserved Communities (American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy and Energy Efficiency for All, 2016). This report provides energy burden values for 48 of the largest U.S. cities, and includes strategies for alleviating them. <http://energyefficiencyforall.org/resources/lifting-high-energy-burden-americas-largest-cities>

Low-Income Solar Policy Guide (GRID Alternatives, Vote Solar, and Center for Social Inclusion, 2016). This online resource provides guiding principles, policy tools, and successful models for expanding access to solar power and solar jobs in low-income communities. <http://www.lowincomesolar.org/>

Program Design Guide: Energy Efficiency Programs in Multifamily Affordable Housing (Energy Efficiency for All, 2015). This guide provides an overview of the EE potential of multifamily affordable housing, as well as best practices for planning, designing, and implementing successful EE programs in this type of housing. <http://energyefficiencyforall.org/resources/program-design-guide-energy-efficiency-programs-multifamily-affordable-housing>

Promising Practices

The approaches below represent some of the most promising current practices for addressing key barriers to bringing the benefits of EE/RE to low-income communities. The **Program Finder** on the left shows that some of these approaches are already widely used, while others are more limited and emerging.



Eliminate or reduce up-front costs

Reducing installation and equipment costs can make EE/RE more attractive to low-income communities. Costs can be covered outright (e.g., by grants) or through loans such as on-bill financing, in which households see immediate bill reductions while repaying the loan.



Partner with trusted organizations

Organizations and agencies that already provide services to low-income communities offer a familiar, trusted conduit for support, information, and education. This facilitates the process of assessing needs and delivering EE/RE services.



Create a one-stop hub for energy assistance

A hub improves coordination across programs that provide energy services to low-income communities, allowing them to work together to serve multiple needs and reach more households. A hub also makes it easier for households to navigate the application processes for various energy assistance programs.



Address eligibility gaps

By providing funding and technical assistance to low-income households that do not qualify for federal energy assistance but still struggle to pay energy bills, programs can reach a wider range of households.



Address split incentives

Using green leases, virtual net metering, and other strategies to address split incentives (in which landlords and tenants have conflicting incentives for EE/RE), programs can ensure that everyone benefits from EE/RE, regardless of who pays the energy bills or the costs of upgrades.



Adopt a whole-building approach

An integrated approach that treats the building as a system can achieve larger improvements in efficiency and comfort than one in which components (appliances, lighting, heating, insulation, etc.) are addressed in a piecemeal fashion.



Consider community solar

Community-shared solar energy systems, in which electricity is generated off-site and distributed to households, can be used to expand the benefits of carbon-free solar power (such as lower energy bills) to low-income renters and for building owners for whom rooftop solar is not feasible.