

The Better Buildings Neighborhood View

How energy efficiency is improving lives, neighborhoods, and the economy

From the U.S. Department of Energy Better Buildings Neighborhood Program

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"Home energy efficiency is one area where doing the right thing is also a matter of doing the smart thing: over the long haul, you're putting less stress on the earth and your pocketbook."

-Lee H., homeowner who implemented energy upgrades through BetterBuildings for Michigan

Proven Approaches Help Boost Program Success

Looking for new ideas to encourage more energy upgrades? Offering an upgrade completion certificate to home and business owners is one approach that some Better Buildings Neighborhood Program partners have been using to motivate progress. The new Promising Approaches section of our website offers samples of these and other innovative activities our partners are using to improve energy efficiency uptake. Let their ideas inspire you to boost your program's success. Check out the [Better Buildings Neighborhood Program website](#) regularly for new promising approaches and let their ideas inspire you to boost your program's success.



A Better Buildings Promising Approach from Wisconsin.

Consumer Energy Tip

Plug your cable or DVR box into a power strip, and switch the strip off when not in use. These devices consume more than 17 watts of electricity even when they are turned off.

Innovation Nation

[Rutland County, Vermont](#), is using a training truck that provides mobile lessons on installation procedures, such

Building a Brighter Future

Fayette County Training Makes All the Difference for Pennsylvania Business Owner

Fayette County, Pennsylvania, resident Geno Gallo started his green building business with many ambitious goals. Unfortunately, the county's depressed economy forced him to scale those goals back. When he heard about a training program for underemployed and unemployed residents, Gallo realized the impact this opportunity could have on his future business.

"In this economy, for a business to start up and be growing, it's amazing."

- Geno Gallo, owner of Fayette Energy Consultants

Sponsored by the Private Industry Council under a subgrant through the Fayette County Better Buildings Initiative, the Pathways Out Of Poverty program helped Gallo develop building science skills to improve homes with energy efficiency upgrades. "In this economy, for a business to start up and be growing, it's

as installing insulation, to contractors in the field.



Related Events

ACEEE National Symposium
on Market Transformation
April 1–3, 2012
Washington, DC

Good Jobs, Green Jobs
Regional Conferences
April 3–4, 2012
Philadelphia, PA

Policies to Drive Greater
Energy Efficiency Market
Penetration in Middle Income
Households Webinar
April 3, 2012
3:00–4:30 PM EDT

National Association of Home
Builders (NAHB) National
Green Building Conference
and Expo
April 29–May 1, 2012
Nashville, TN

ACEEE Energy Efficiency
Finance Forum
May 7–8, 2012
Boston, MA

Good Jobs, Green Jobs
Regional Conferences
May 10–11, 2012
Detroit, MI

Better Buildings Conference:
Home Energy Efficiency
Solutions: From Innovation to
Market Transformation
July 9–11, 2012
Arlington, VA

amazing," Gallo says. [Learn more](#) about Gallo's journey from unemployment to business owner.

Success Through Partnerships

Local Partnerships and Policies Support Energy Efficiency

The Energy Efficiency Strategy Project of the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has released a white paper showcasing how local governments and organizations promote energy efficiency through policies and program partnerships. "[The Role of Local Governments and Community Organizations as Energy Efficiency Implementation Partners: A Review of Trends and Case Studies](#)" presents eight case studies from communities across the country, including two Better Buildings Neighborhood Program partners. [Clean Energy Works Oregon](#), for example, has partnered with several organizations to simplify the process of energy efficiency improvements. The Chicago-area Energy Savers Program has partnered with [Energy Impact Illinois](#) to provide low-interest energy upgrade loans to low- to moderate-income homeowners. [Read the full white paper](#) to learn more.

Forward-Thinking Financing

Motivating Middle America with Creative Financing Methods

Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory recently published a policy brief describing the creative energy efficiency financing methods that programs use to help financiers and borrowers combat the challenges presented by the current economy, including lower home equity and higher risk loans. The report, "[Scaling Energy Efficiency in the Heart of the Residential Market: Increasing Middle America's Access to Capital for Energy Improvements](#)," features innovative approaches from Better Buildings partners, including:

- The Indianapolis Neighborhood Housing Partnership EcoHouse Project provides fixed-interest rate loans in the mid-single digits that are an attractive way for energy improvements in households that would otherwise finance them on credit cards.
- The New York State Energy and Research Development Authority recently launched a Green Jobs-Green New York Initiative. The program employs a two-tiered underwriting process that offers households with low credit scores or high debt-to-income ratios a second opportunity to qualify for financing under the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® program.

In addition to outlining ways to make standard loan products more accessible, the policy brief discusses a number of new financial products that may be effective at serving middle income households, including:

- On-bill financing

- Loan products that are paid off when properties transfer
- Paycheck-deducted loans
- Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Financing

For more ideas on how to bring more middle-income financing to your program area, [read the full policy brief](#).

Impacting Multi-Family Buildings

Feedback Sought on Multifamily Upgrade Specifications

The [Guidelines for Home Energy Professionals](#) project is a collaboration between DOE and industry professionals to create standards for home energy efficiency upgrades through voluntary work specifications, accredited training programs, and national worker certifications. As part of this effort, DOE invites industry professionals to submit feedback on the "Standard Work Specifications for Multifamily Energy Upgrades."

By gathering input on these guidelines, DOE hopes to add valuable perspectives from contractors, manufacturers, and program implementers. To provide comments, first create a user account for the [online commenting tool](#). From this site, you can also monitor other comments, read a list of frequently asked questions, and watch a short instructional video.

Beyond the Neighborhood Program

Better Buildings Challenges Students in Case Competition

Seven university teams are helping energy efficiency programs solve real-world problems by winning the Better Buildings Case Competition. The competition, part of DOE's [Better Buildings Challenge](#), provided the next generation of engineers, entrepreneurs, and policymakers a chance to develop and present real-world solutions to tackle some of the most common and challenging obstacles to improving energy efficiency across the country.

During the competition, 19 university teams analyzed case studies consisting of real scenarios, background information, and data provided primarily by Better Buildings Challenge Partners. Winning proposals included:

- The University of California, Berkeley team, which proposed using Qualified Energy Conservation Bonds for private owners to provide affordable financing for energy efficiency upgrades to buildings in the city of Houston.
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which developed a proposal for a multi-tenant office building to install energy efficiency measures and engage with its occupants to help meet sustainability goals.



Secretary Chu with students from MIT at the Better Buildings Case Competition finale. *Photo credit: Ken Shipp*

Read the full list of Better Buildings Challenge [winners and the solutions](#) they developed.

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