

# Customer Engagement and Electrification

Energy customer education and engagement is key to the adoption of electrification.

*“It’s incumbent on all [energy stakeholders] to constantly think about the words we use and the messages we send to engage customers to have them walk away with a better understanding of not just the electric system, or the energy industry overall, but how their [energy] choices can benefit themselves, their communities, and their state.”* —Kristin Munsch, Director, Regulatory and Customer Strategy, National Grid from Strategies and Approaches to Addressing Energy Equity at Investor-Owned Utilities — July 14, 2022. [Listen to the discussion](#)

Purchasing and operating new technology requires information, knowledge, and sometimes new skills or broader workforce training. Technology costs are a barrier to electrification adoption, but even when financial incentives are available, some customers hesitate to adopt a new, unfamiliar technology, making customer education extremely important.

## Listen First



Electrification requires utilities to know much more about their customers—and their customers’ businesses—than they have in the past. Energy usage data is no longer enough. Utilities must know their customers preferences, how they make purchasing decisions, and when they are likely to upgrade appliances, equipment, or fleets.

It starts with a conversation between the utility and customers, big and small. While larger customers may be building a new warehouse or electrifying their fleet, smaller customers may also be moving towards electrification. How do these smaller customers want to electrify? What is possible, affordable, and practical? Do they need education, training, technical assistance, or financial incentives?

The same goes for large customers. For example, a customer with a large fleet of vehicles may want to electrify delivery trucks. However, servicing the load from a large electric fleet may require a new substation, which could take several years to build. To meet customer needs, utilities must partner with their customers and include them early in the discussion on how—and when—they plan to expand, electrify, or build their own onsite generation.

## Partner to Build Trust and Provide Needed Information



While utilities provide their customers with accessible, helpful information, partnerships with outside organizations play a critical role in advancing customer knowledge of electrification technology benefits. Utilities are aware that some customers—especially low-income customers—do not trust the utility to look out for their best interests. Partnering with community-based organizations, local churches and schools, will help utilities better understand the communities they serve and build the trust needed to transition to clean energy technology.

A utility needs to be visible in their customers' communities. Hosting a booth at local street fairs, attending community meetings, and establishing a mobile customer service office or bill-paying center that visits disadvantaged communities are a few ways utilities engage with communities.

Utilities should also make information and programs accessible to the customers who need them most. Austin Energy, for example, prints information in 8 languages. Other utilities are reevaluating how customers must prove they are eligible for bill support programs. Is an internet connection required to sign up online? Is a pay stub or tax return required? Some utilities are partnering with other social service agencies to reach their most vulnerable customers. The idea is that if customers are qualified for one program, they likely qualify for others and can be automatically signed up.

## Use Your Employees



All utility employees, not just customer service representatives, can be the best ambassadors for electrification, but they, too, must be educated and prepared for questions about costs and benefits. They must know what programs are available to support electrification and who is qualified to participate. Ongoing communication and training for utility employees is key to successful customer engagement.