

BETTER BUILDINGS RESIDENTIAL NETWORK

Better Buildings Residential Network case studies feature members that share best practices so other members can learn from one another to increase the number of homes that are energy efficient. Community Home Energy Retrofit Project (CHERP), based in Claremont, California, is a Residential Network member with limited resources, but with passion and determination, created an impactful program through community engagement. CHERP Executive Director Devon Hartman explains how a nonprofit organization supported almost entirely by local volunteers engaged more than 10 local communities to invigorate energy efficiency in California homes.



How did CHERP come about?

After 30 years running an architecture and construction company, I read an article in 2003 by Ed Mazaria that revealed the building sector is the largest contributor of greenhouse gases. In studying further, I learned that at least 50% of the energy currently used by buildings is wasted. To begin addressing these issues, I created [a new home performance division in my construction company](#) to help homeowners save money and energy while increasing comfort, indoor air quality, durability, and resilience. Then, in 2010, I retired to work full-time on promoting the opportunities and benefits of energy efficiency, which are typically not known by homeowners. To formalize this effort, I founded CHERP as a nonprofit, social enterprise that creates educational and social engagement initiatives that are scalable and replicable in cities throughout California and beyond.

How does CHERP recruit and retain its volunteers?

We make engagement simple, exciting, and empowering. People's growing sensitivity to sustainability and resource conservation has given us the opportunity to go into any community and educate and empower literally hundreds of volunteers because they want to help. All they need are the basic steps to engage, which include:

1. Start with a core group of influential or interested individuals.
2. Educate them on energy efficiency's benefits and encourage them to promote these benefits.
3. Provide resources to encourage energy upgrades (e.g., ideas, contractors, materials, incentives).
4. Encourage satisfied customers to spread the word.

Established CHERPs

Claremont
Huntington Beach
Monrovia
Sacramento Region
Carmel
San Clemente

Coming Soon...

Culver City
Redlands
Whittier
Upland

Who or what do you feel has contributed most to CHERP's success and growth?

Success has come from showing people a way to engage with us and making that engagement simple. People want to help, but they don't necessarily know what to do. When we target a city, we start with the city council or with interested individuals, and we show them how to create a core group of engaged people who form a local CHERP city. Through a series of workshops, we educate the core group on the benefits of energy efficiency, and we encourage them to extend their reach to others.

Then we provide access to resources—branded collateral materials, website templates, customer relationship management and accounting systems, relationship agreement forms for contractors, organizational job descriptions for beginning committee members, workshop materials, and training

sessions—to promote energy efficiency. Core group members begin to upgrade their homes, and at that point, become raving fans. We have heard people say “I am providing a better quality of life for my family,” or the factors that impact “my kids’ asthma and hay fever have been reduced dramatically since my home was air sealed.” Once they experience things like that, along with a reduction in their energy costs, and a dramatic increase in the comfort of their home, they get excited. We provide the organizational framework for people to engage with all these issues.

How is CHERP staffed?

I am the only full-time staff member. We have three regional directors and our core groups of volunteers in each CHERP city. While we are constrained by limited funding, we are demonstrating that a lot can be accomplished through volunteer passion. We’ve upgraded almost 300 houses in Claremont alone—closing in on 3% of our 10% goal to upgrade of all households in the community.

We have also engaged with several local colleges and universities, which provide paid interns, giving us an extraordinary boost in our capabilities and organizational capacities. Students are looking for viable internships with academic and social engagement opportunities, which CHERP provides, so we are attracting a lot of talent. Dozens of students have signed up to help; this summer, we had nine full-time student interns.

“We have heard people say ‘my grandmother can actually come stay with us in the winter now because our floors aren’t freezing.’ These are life-changing things that many people are not aware are directly connected to energy efficiency.”

— Devon Hartman,
Executive Director, CHERP

Recently, we were accepted into the \$5 million Georgetown University Energy Prize competition, which provides an additional way to build excitement in our community around energy efficiency. And we continue to form strategic partnerships with other national and regional organizations. Much of my time is spent building these partnerships, along with recruiting, training, and managing volunteers, which is particularly well spent and enjoyable time, because these efforts are the most important to our success at the local level, and are where we gain the most leverage.

What other partnerships does CHERP have?

Our primary strategic partner in California is with Los Angeles County through the Energy Network, with whom we work closely in integrating their programs into our city efforts. We are partnering in one way or another with more than 40 other local and national organizations in order to engage all existing energy efficiency programs in each CHERP city. We are absolutely inclusive—there is tremendous synergy in deploying all available initiatives and programs in one city. In the energy efficiency world, there are lots programs operating in parallel without an interconnection strategy. We see ourselves as a clearinghouse and educational resource for all programs, across all demographics within each city.

How does CHERP market to targeted communities?

We have about 15 different initiatives that serve as our marketing and outreach channels. One example is Walk the Town. This initiative started in summer 2015 with the goal to visit all 13,000 homes in Claremont to talk to homeowners about CHERP and the Georgetown University Energy Prize competition with 50 communities across the United States. In addition, Walk the Town provides an opportunity to talk about our Roadmap to Net Zero energy usage, which is a high performance home that is so energy efficient a renewable energy system can offset all or most of its annual energy consumption, and let them know about and recruit homeowners as CHERP volunteers so they can engage with their neighbors.



We are also creating a LED the Town initiative for homeowners to swap their incandescent bulbs for more efficient LED lightbulbs.

The [Claremont Energy Challenge](#) is our brand name for the Georgetown competition and CHERP Claremont. Its website provides an opportunity to engage the community through the “Roadmap to Net Zero.” On the website, homeowners can first sign up for the CHERP Home Energy Analytics software program, which provides twice monthly reports that show where energy is being used in their home. The reports also offer monthly suggestions on the top three things homeowners can do to start saving energy immediately, and to proceed, when possible to a whole-house energy upgrade, and solar PV.

You recently participated in an Independence Day parade in Claremont. How were you able to participate, and was the parade a success for CHERP?



In each CHERP city, our goal is to become an institutionalized nonprofit like local Kiwanis or Rotary groups, so having a presence at all local events is important, and we always have a booth at these events. The parade is well attended, and all recognized community organizations are able to participate in the parade. Our CHERP volunteers and homeowners created signs and marched to demonstrate our commitment to the community. We wanted to be visible and have a good time. It was very simple, and it has become a wonderful tradition.

What has been the most successful way to promote CHERP at these events?

CHERP is designed to match the personality of the city in which it operates. We partner with respected, like-minded organizations, develop local leadership, talk to people one on one, and explain opportunities for energy savings. Since energy efficiency is not a topic you can explain or discuss quickly, we follow up with people that are interested in upgrades and connect them with a contractor so they can easily undertake home energy upgrades. From the Independence Day event alone, we received leads for and were able to complete 15 home energy upgrades.

What advice would you give to an energy efficiency program administrator who is looking to engage with a community?

It is very important to embed your program into the community and have ongoing opportunities for the community to engage. In July 2015 alone, CHERP not only marched in the parade, but also had five community coffee events, three building science workshops and lectures, and four walk-the-town volunteer trainings that led to 20 new volunteers who are out working in the community. Also, leverage your volunteer base. There are hundreds of people in each city just waiting to help.

Learn more by visiting the [CHERP](#) and [Claremont Energy Challenge](#) websites, or [send questions to them via email](#).

Explore more tools related to marketing and outreach and program design by visiting the [Better Buildings Residential Program Solution Center](#). Contact us at bbresidentialnetwork@ee.doe.gov concerning this case study, sharing your efforts for recognition, or to join the Better Buildings Residential Network.