

The Better Buildings Neighborhood View

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

From the U.S. Energy Department's Better Buildings Neighborhood Program



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"People I talk to tell me it's so great not to have to sleep under three blankets or avoid certain rooms in the winter or summer because they're so uncomfortable. And when they see how much lower their utility bills are, [they feel] even better."

-University Park, Maryland,
Energy Coach,
Suzanne Parmet

Successful Approaches Are Now at Your Fingertips

Better Buildings Neighborhood Program case studies capture innovative financing mechanisms, demand-driving incentives, tailored contractor training, and more approaches that program partners have implemented with success. On DOE's new [case studies page](#) you can find all of the Better Buildings Neighborhood Program case studies, plus many developed by other organizations that feature the program's partners. The case studies are searchable by topic, title, sector, source, and year published.

Don't reinvent the wheel on driving demand, workforce development, or financing. Instead, learn about the approaches featured in these case studies and how you can adapt these successful efforts to your program.

Building a Brighter Future

Consumer Energy Tip

To ready your home for cooler weather, install exterior or interior storm windows, which can reduce heat loss through the windows by 25% to 50%.

Innovation Nation

Deacon Taylor of Solar City, a company participating in the [Denver Energy Challenge](#), filmed a pilot episode of "[On the Porch](#)" as part of an ongoing video series in which

Energy Efficiency Upgrades Make a Big Difference to a Small Organization

For many small businesses with already tight budgets, energy efficiency upgrades aren't always a top priority. This was the case for the [Pemi Youth Center](#) (PYC) in Plymouth, New Hampshire, where the main focus is providing children with an afterschool and weekend destination that supports and nurtures their talents and interests. However, the center had energy and comfort issues that could no longer be ignored.

After hearing about the success of recent home energy upgrades in their area, PYC directors researched energy efficiency financing options offered through [Plymouth BetterBuildings](#)—one of three communities that collectively make up BetterBuildings New Hampshire's Beacon Communities Project—and decided to



Executive Director Jessica Dutille stands outside the Pemi Youth Center with Mike Turcotte of Turn Cycle Solutions, who installed upgrades to the center.

Taylor stars as the "Comfort Cowboy" and shares energy efficiency tips with homeowners.



Related Events

Affordable Comfort, Inc. (ACI)
Mid Atlantic Home
Performance Conference
2012
October 1–2, 2012
Pittsburgh, PA

ACI New England Home
Performance Conference
2012
October 16–17, 2012
Springfield, MA

Behavior, Energy and Climate
Change Conference
November 12–14, 2012
Sacramento, CA

Greenbuild 2012
November 14–16, 2012
San Francisco, CA

Association of Energy
Services Professionals
National Conference
January 28–31, 2013
Orlando, FL

ACI National Home
Performance Conference
April 30–May 3, 2013
Denver, CO

*Site of the next Better
Buildings Neighborhood
Program conference.*

start PYC's upgrade process. With grants and a loan provided through Plymouth BetterBuildings, PYC was able to install upgrades that will save the center \$900 and reduce its energy use 29% in the first year alone. [Continue reading](#) to learn more about the financing and specific upgrades that will make the center more comfortable and affordable to operate.

Forward-Thinking Financing

Strategic Financing Partnerships Help Jacksonville Program Take Loans From Buydown to Uptake

In early 2011, the ShopSmart with [JEA](#) program in Jacksonville, Florida, began offering an energy efficiency interest rate buydown incentive in an effort to provide more enticing and affordable loans for homeowners to finance energy efficiency upgrades. Using seed funding provided by the Better Buildings Neighborhood Program through the [Southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance](#), JEA was able to "buy down" the interest rate that local lenders offered homeowners for energy upgrades by six percentage points. Despite these lower rates, however, JEA's initial offering received a moderate response rate of 33 loans during the first 14 months.

After several months of trying to market the "buydown" interest rates to homeowners, local lenders suggested it might be easier to explain and promote a 0% interest rate, and offered to subsidize the difference. As soon as JEA rolled out the 0% interest rate offer through its credit union partners, homeowners responded with nearly 13 times as many loans issued per month than beforehand. Even after the 0% financing offer ended, and despite the fact that JEA did not initiate any additional outreach efforts, homeowners continued to show interest in energy efficiency upgrades, and lenders continued to provide energy efficiency loans at market rates. "The process must be simple and manageable for all players," says Bruce Doueck, JEA's manager of customer conservation and energy. "We must all create value in order for others to buy the energy efficiency improvements that we are suggesting people and organizations make." [Continue reading](#) to see how JEA developed this valuable strategic partnership with participating lenders and sustained interest in energy efficiency loans among homeowners.

Federal District Judge Rules on PACE

In August 2012, a federal district court judge in California ruled that the Federal Housing Finance Authority's (FHFA) decision to stop underwriting mortgages on homes with property assessed clean energy (PACE) financing [violated the Administrative Procedure Act's \(APA\) notice-and-comment requirement](#). FHFA must now complete the rulemaking process to determine how homes with PACE funding will be assessed by lenders. The suit against FHFA was brought by the State of California and eight other parties. Although this ruling does not mean organizations can now implement PACE programs that they have postponed, it does mean that FHFA must respond to comments submitted in response to its [notice of proposed rulemaking](#). Comments were due September 13, 2012.

Reports and Studies

The Broader Economic Advantages of Energy Efficiency

A fact sheet published in August 2012 by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, "[Energy Efficiency and Economic Opportunity](#)," delves into the benefits that a community may reap by investing in energy efficiency programs. The benefits range from jobs with good wages for disadvantaged workers, to more opportunities for local businesses to invest in their communities, to lower energy costs for low- and moderate-income families. The fact sheet provides suggestions on how to enact policies to ensure the non-energy benefits of energy efficiency investments remain in local communities. [Read the fact sheet](#) to learn more.

Explore How Smart Meters Influence Energy-Saving Behaviors

ACEEE released a report on how advanced utility meters that let homeowners review and control their energy use can affect their energy-saving behaviors. [The Economy-Wide Impact of Feedback-Induced Behaviors that Drive Residential Electricity Savings](#) explores how smart meters can encourage homeowners to save energy through behavioral changes. The research estimates how the large-scale implementation of smart meter programs will provide utility bill savings for homeowners and lead to economic benefits such as job production. [Read the full report](#) to learn how smart meters can change consumer behaviors.

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