

When shopping for a new home, homebuyers look to real estate agents for advice on everything from the best school districts to the name of a good local plumber. Because new owners make many home improvements after purchase, real estate agents have the opportunity to continue as trusted messengers after the closing date.

Nonprofit organization Build It Green (BIG) saw an opening: if real estate professionals understand the importance and benefits of energy efficiency, then they can advise clients on how to incorporate efficiency into their home improvements. This helps owners save money for years to come and sets agents apart in the marketplace. To turn this idea into reality, BIG partnered with the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR) to deliver its Green Designation trainings free to Southern California real estate professionals, thanks to the support of The Energy Network.

NAR's Green Designation

NAR created the Green Designation for real estate professionals who want an in-depth training on sustainability issues. To earn this designation, agents must attend two days of comprehensive classes that cover topics such as what incentives are available to help pay for energy efficient upgrades and what green home improvements can boost a home's value. In the first two years, BIG certified 745 real estate professionals under the NAR Green Designation.

Encouraging Participation

BIG faced challenges encouraging real estate professionals to take time out of their schedules to take NAR's Green Designation classes. They overcame this barrier by hiring an outreach coordinator who was a licensed and experienced REALTOR® who also held the Green Designation, and was well-versed in green home and energy upgrade opportunities. The outreach coordinator used this range of experience to build relationships with local Associations of REALTORS®. The Associations are vital to reaching real estate professionals because they have access to members, their trust, and reliable communication channels to reach their members.

Key Results and Noticeable Market Changes

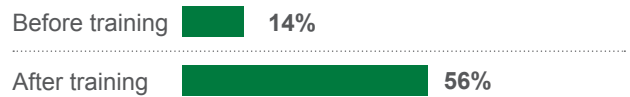
Since 2014, BIG has certified 745 real estate professionals under the NAR Green Designation.

Results from a 2014 survey of real estate agents who completed NAR's Green Designation through BIG's outreach.

Table 1. Percentage of Agents that Highlight Green Building Experience



Table 2. Percentage of Agents that Referred Clients to Energy Upgrade California



Before training (N=150) After training (N=50)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **How can real estate agents help promote energy efficiency?**
They are often trusted sources of information for their clients and can introduce them to energy efficiency programs.
- ▶ **How do you build trust with agents?**
By building relationships with parties that real estate professionals trust, like Associations of REALTORS®.
- ▶ **Why is ongoing support so important?**
To reinforce learning, build confidence, and strengthen relationships.
- ▶ **Why is NAR's Green Designation attractive to agents?**
It can help agents differentiate themselves from their peers.

The outreach coordinator educated Association leadership by explaining the benefits of becoming a Green Designee to the agents.

Once the Associations were on board, they spread the word about the free trainings to their membership through events, newsletters, and emails. Much of the outreach coordinator's success was due to her ability to bring her REALTOR® sales perspective to the table, understanding what motivates real estate professionals, and how to connect these motivations to a desire to learn about energy efficiency.

Many of the agents who participated in the training wanted to differentiate themselves from other real estate professionals. On the buyer's agent side, they wanted to help their clients access new financing, consider the total cost of home ownership, and to maximize their client's comfort in their new home. On the seller's agent side, agents wanted their clients to get fair market value for already installed upgrades by ensuring that green features are captured in the MLS listing and marketed correctly. Many of these professionals wanted to be on the leading edge of the growing energy efficiency trend and to help their clients access the benefits.

Ongoing Support

While the trainings successfully increased the number of REALTORS® with the NAR Green Designation, by communicating with the Association it became clear that they needed additional support to feel comfortable applying what they had learned. In response, BIG's outreach coordinator established monthly peer-to-peer education meetings. At these meetings, newly minted Green Designees can ask questions, troubleshoot, role play, and learn new strategies and tips that will be helpful in the field.

BIG realized that real estate professionals were more likely to refer clients to energy efficiency specialists when they had their own network of these trusted contractors on hand. To strengthen in-person relationships, BIG holds mixers for contractors and agents to help them feel comfortable about adding the contractors to their circle of reliable professionals. In addition, BIG created a toll-free Smart Homebuyer Support Line to which agents can refer clients to find energy efficiency professionals and learn more about energy rebate and financing programs. Callers to the Support Line can receive a free list of all the rebate and financing programs available in the city where they're house hunting.

Additional Information:

Builditgreen.org/training-events/green-real-estate
Builditgreen.org/training-events/upcoming-events



At a NAR Green Designation training in Laguna Hills, CA, instructor John Shipman explains how to take their green building knowledge and use it to differentiate themselves and win new clients.

“REALTORS® leave our NAR trainings very excited about green homes. But in order to translate what they learned to their clients, they need to feel comfortable with the subject matter, and that takes practice and ongoing engagement. That’s why our monthly peer-to-peer meetings for Green Designees are so valuable.”

Marcia Tolentino, Senior Real Estate Outreach Manager
at Build It Green, REALTOR®, GREEN