

KEY LEARNINGS

2022-2023 Focused Communities | Winooski and Brattleboro, VT

# Can Efficiency Vermont help advance diversity, equity, and inclusion?

This was the question we asked ourselves. The current energy system doesn't allow for all Vermonters to access affordable energy. Rural, Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), and low-income communities pay a lot for energy, relative to their income. Vermont has one of the highest home ownership racial gaps in the country, and efficiency service providers struggle to help renters save. Communities such as these also tend to experience the "first and worst" consequences of climate change.

We don't have all of the answers, but we believe that the best way to bring equity to energy efficiency programs is through a community-based approach. Every year Efficiency Vermont focuses our outreach on a group of communities. From 2022 to 2023, we focused our efforts in **Winooski** and **Brattleboro**.

**Winooski** is the most diverse community in Vermont, with 31 languages spoken in schools. It is a designated refugee resettlement community. 60% of Winooski's housing stock is rented, and housing costs make up more than 50% of income for 19% of households, compared to the state average of 15%.

**Brattleboro** is located on the native land of the Elnu, an Abenaki tribe, and Brattleboro's Multicultural Community Center is the largest refugee center in the state. Brattleboro's housing costs make up more than 50% of income for 22% of households. The renter population is estimated to be over 50%, and Vermont's largest mobile home park is located in Brattleboro.

By dedicating more of our time in Winooski and Brattleboro - places with higher housing cost burdens and higher populations of renters, lower-income, and BIPOC residents - we gained a deeper understanding of the ways we can support the community and help reduce household energy burden.

## Engagement results

- Created unique landing pages with **6,000 views from over 4,800 unique users**.
- Participated in **32 events** across the two communities (17 in Winooski, 15 in Brattleboro), speaking with over 800 individuals.
- **Established working relationships with 14 organizations** serving frontline communities.
- Completed **22 walk-throughs** of Small and Medium Size Businesses across both communities.
- Performed five walk-throughs of rental properties in Brattleboro. Additionally, established relationships with 14 rental property owners across both communities, resulting in **6 referrals to services** provided in partnership with 3E Thermal.
- **Distributed 1,166 energy savings kits**, including 432 kits, which were handed out in person at community events.
- Completed **50 home energy visits**.
- Served 73 customers through EVT's primary low-income programs, delivering \$128,800 in technologies and services and an **estimated \$7,425 in customer cost savings** in 2022 and 2023 alone.
- **Issued over \$17,000 bonus incentives** to non-profits, women and minority-owned businesses, and publicly owned buildings across both communities.

# Building Trust



## LEARNINGS

### Psychological safety and trust are critical when working with frontline communities.

- Because of systemic injustices, including lack of representation, outside entities must evolve to earn trust from frontline communities.
- It is challenging to create a safe space for members of these communities when most of our staff does not reflect the frontline communities we are trying to reach. Most of Efficiency Vermont's staff are white, moderate/high-income, and native English speakers.

### Creating a safe space for frontline communities requires partnerships with community leaders and organizations already embedded in the communities.

- Building relationships with community leaders takes time and requires honest, deep listening that results in incorporating feedback promptly.
- Representation of different communities is essential in our marketing materials, website, and advertising; it helps communicate that we are welcoming and affirming to all communities and that our services are for all.

### To effectively engage with frontline and impacted communities, showing up to places and spaces where they already gather is critical.

#### **Starr Latronica**

**Brooks Memorial Library  
Director, Brattleboro**

Starr Latronica, Director of Brooks Memorial Library, partnered with Efficiency Vermont to create a space for the community to gather and learn about the ways Efficiency Vermont can help make their homes more comfortable and energy efficient.



"The Brooks Memorial Library was excited to partner with Efficiency Vermont and provide an accessible venue for community learning around energy efficiency and cost savings," said library director Starr Latronica. "The library hosted several Efficiency Vermont presentations, plus multiple 'open office' events where residents could come and learn one-on-one about reducing their energy costs. Nearly 60 people participated, and they also learned about incentives and rebates that could help make these changes more affordable. The partnership between the Brooks Memorial Library and Efficiency Vermont provided help for the whole community, and that's a win for everyone."

## LEARNINGS

### Community leaders and social service organizations have limited capacity and must be financially compensated.

- Individuals and organizations with knowledge of and connections to frontline communities have limited resources and a lot of varied priorities; as such, they need and deserve to be fairly compensated for the support they can provide for our efforts.
- Given the number of organizations and resources available to customers, educating and building trust with these organizations and leaders is critical to reaching frontline and impacted communities.

### Up-front capital and capacity are issues for both residential and commercial customers.

- Customers need support in understanding offers, accessing upfront capital, and navigating contracts.
- Additional support from EVT staff is typically needed to successfully execute projects, including upfront engagement, selecting equipment, speaking with contractors, and navigating the property owner relationship (if applicable).



#### Linda Howe

##### Winooski Food Shelf

Efficiency Vermont has helped the Winooski Food Shelf expand to meet the growing needs of the pandemic, inflation, and higher food prices. Linda Howe, the food shelf's lead organizer, notes the food shelf now serves about 1,000 customers each month, including more than 200 families. That's a more than 300% increase in monthly customers compared to 2020. Efficiency Vermont worked with the food shelf on a new walk-in freezer/refrigerator project, and as a tabling venue for community outreach.



"The walk-in freezer makes it possible for us to store culturally appropriate meats, like halal chicken. Prior to the freezer, we did not have the capacity to store much meat. The walk-in has been critical to our food distribution," Howe said. "We now hand out boxes of fresh vegetables and fruit four times a month. Most of the food we distribute is fresh. We simply could not meet the need prior to this walk-in."



## LEARNINGS

**Language, information, and cultural barriers exist for many frontline and impacted communities trying to access EEU services.**

- These barriers must be addressed with comprehensive educational and translatable language services that may need to include the basics of our energy system.
- “Cultural brokers” (as one partner called them) are often needed to break down these barriers and help people navigate our incentives and their projects (start to finish).

**Translation services must be available and easily accessible across various languages and all engagement touchpoints (the website, call center, working 1:1).**

- The frontline and impacted communities are non-homogeneous; to make our services truly accessible, we need as many types of touchpoints and language as possible.

## ENERGY-SAVING OFFERS FOR RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES!

### Contact us! Multilingual customer support available.



**FREE  
LIGHTBULBS**





**Low-cost tips to save money on utility bills.**

**FREE kits that include lightbulbs, shower heads, and more.**

**Special offers and rebates for renters, homeowners, and businesses.**

**Offres d'économie d'énergie pour les habitants et les entreprises.**  
Contactez-nous! Support client multilingue disponible.

**U yabooha tamarta-badbaadinta ee deganayaasha iyo ganacsiyada.**  
Nala soo xiriir! Taageerada macmiilka ee luqadaha badan ayaa diyaar ah.

**Matoleo ya kuokoa nishati kwa wakazi na biashara.**  
Wasiliana nasi! Usaidizi wa wateja wa lugha nyingi unapatikana.

**बासनिद्रा र ब्यवसायहरूको लागि ऊर्जा बचत प्रस्तावहरू।**  
हामीलाई सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस्। बाढ्छामी गृहक कम्पन उपलब्ध छ।

**မူဝါဒသုညာနှင့် စီးပွားရေးလုပ်ငန်းများအတွက် စွမ်းအင်ချွတ်တော့မည့်အဖွဲ့**  
**ကျွန်ုပ်တို့၏ဆောင်ရွက်ချက်။** ဘာသာစကားမျိုးစုံ ခေါက်သည့် မူဝါဒ ချမှတ်နိုင်သည်။

**Uu dăi tiết kiệm năng lượng cho người dân và doanh nghiệp.**  
Liên hệ chúng tôi hỗ trợ khách hàng đa ngôn ngữ có sẵn.

**توفير الطاقة وتوفير المال للمواطنين والشركات.**  
تحتّمنا تواصل مع فريق الدعم متعدد اللغات.

**Ofertas de ahorro de energía para residentes y empresas.**  
¡Contactenos! Atención al cliente multilingüe disponible.

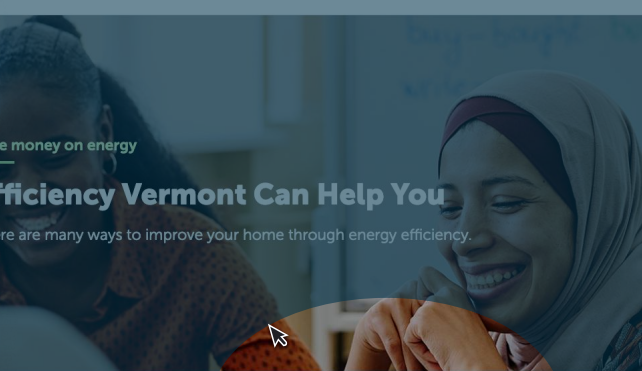
**Ofertas de poupança de energia para residentes e empresas.**  
Contate-Nos! Suporte ao cliente multilingue disponível.



**EfficiencyVermont.com**  
**888-921-5990**

**Efficiency  
Vermont**

**888-921-5990**



Save money on energy

# Efficiency Vermont Can Help You

There are many ways to improve your home through energy efficiency.


Choose your language:

Select Language

Powered by Google Translate

## Who we are

Efficiency Vermont is an organization that provides rebates and advice about saving energy. We assist renters, homeowners, property owners, and businesses in lowering energy bills. For those with limited incomes, [we offer a range of free services.](#)



## LEARNINGS

### A disproportionate amount of frontline and impacted community members are renters.

- Serving renters requires the support and participation of both the tenants and property owners.
- Given the complexity of the relationships between tenants and their property owners, it is challenging to make progress with energy efficiency programming alone – strong partnerships with social service organizations, municipalities, and property owners are needed to make traction.
- Property owners are not a homogeneous group. As such, the challenges of working with them vary based on the number of buildings owned and their desire to invest in those properties.

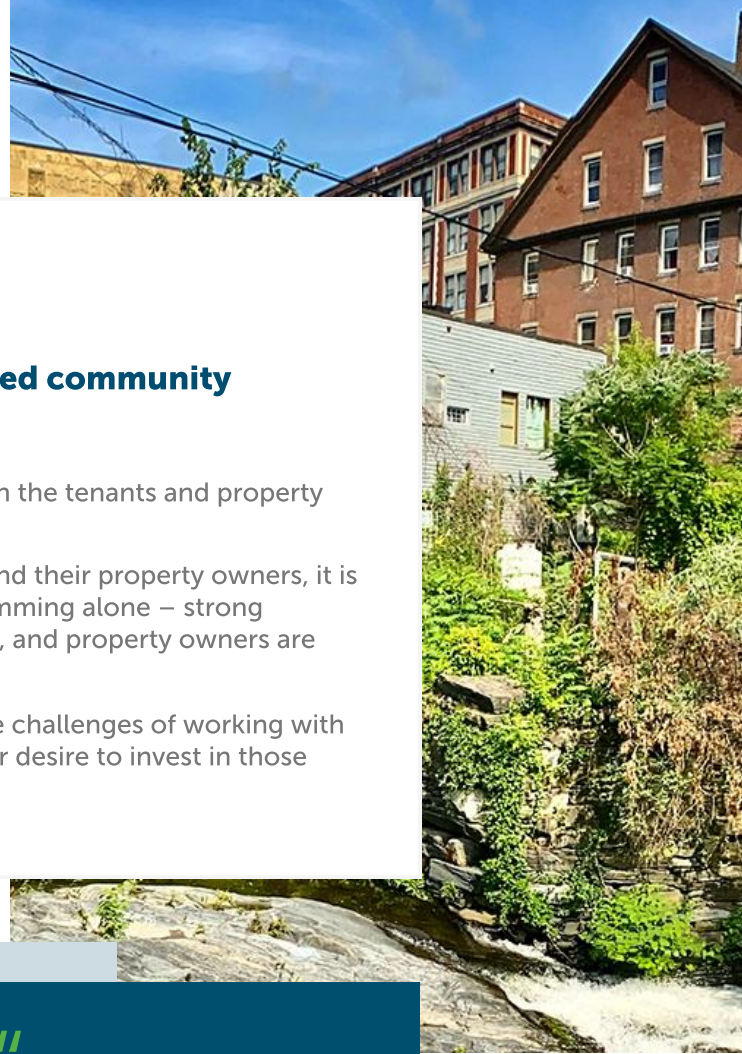
#### Stephen Dotson

Sustainability Coordinator for the  
Town of Brattleboro

Stephen Dotson, the Sustainability Coordinator for the Town of Brattleboro, appreciated EVT's work with renters and property owners.



"Nearly 60% of Brattleboro residents rent their homes, so reducing energy costs requires both renters and property owners to work together," said Dotson. "Efficiency Vermont helped us undertake a multifaceted approach that successfully engaged both groups. Now, multiple property owners are working with their tenants to make their buildings more energy efficient and more weather resilient, all while increasing comfort and security for the occupants. This is a path to a more sustainable future that benefits everyone in Brattleboro."



# Making energy efficiency relevant to those most in need

## LEARNINGS

### While EE technologies can help with basic needs, efficiency is not top of mind for many frontline community members trying to make ends meet.

- For example, if a person's refrigerator is running inefficiently, they may be worried about it failing or the condition of their food. Their priority is to have a reliable, affordable refrigerator to store food and medicine in, and they are often not concerned with finding the most efficient fridge on the market.

#### Elaine Wang

City Manager, Winooski

Winooski is among Vermont's smallest cities—covering just 1.5 miles square—but its more than 8,000 residents live in the most densely-populated urban center in Vermont. Nearly two-thirds of Winooski residents rent their homes. A designated refugee resettlement community, more than 30 languages are spoken in the city's schools and Town Meeting Day ballots are available in 12 languages. This all required Efficiency Vermont's Community Team to work closely with city staff and community partners to implement offers that could meet the residents' unique needs. That included going to places and spaces where they already gather, and making the customer support line more accessible to speakers of languages other than English.



"Winooski benefited from Efficiency Vermont's willingness to adapt its programs to be supportive of our diverse population of mostly renters," said Winooski City Manager Elaine Wang. "Just one example of changes that better served our community was expanding the appliance coupon program to include chest freezers. It was a small but impactful change that better met the cultural needs of many residents, who frequently buy fresh meat and produce in bulk and freeze leftover ingredients and meals. Being responsive to the needs of our residents and businesses allowed for sustainable changes that will help reduce energy costs today, and in the years to come."



# From Listening to Implementing

So what's next? Efficiency Vermont is committed to putting these learnings into action. We are incorporating our takeaways into our program and service design and building strategies for reaching historically underserved customers.

To learn more about this effort and Efficiency Vermont's ongoing DEI work, please call us at:

**888-921-5990**

or email:

**[info@efficiencyvermont.com](mailto:info@efficiencyvermont.com)**



## Meet the organizers

Brad, Bekah, and Michelle worked directly with partners and stakeholders in Winooski, Brattleboro, and around the state to build connections within the community that help Efficiency Vermont learn and evolve to meet the needs of everyone residing in Vermont.



**Michelle  
McCutcheon-Schour**  
Community Engagement Manager



**Brad Long**  
Community Engagement Manager



**Bekah Kuster**  
Community Engagement Manager