

Increasing Access to Energy Efficiency: Piloting community engagement & program adaptation initiatives

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Introduction and Background

Ensuring that energy efficiency programs are accessible and widely adopted is in everyone's best interest. Energy efficiency projects lower costs for both customers who complete them and all Vermont ratepayers by reducing the need for electric system investments. Every three years, via the Demand Resource Plan (DRP), which governs the work of Vermont's Energy Efficiency Utilities (EEUs), state regulators structure EEU goals to try and maximize these benefits and encourage as many Vermonters as possible to participate in programs. These are important goals because customers who take part in energy efficiency programs enjoy lower bills and unlock additional benefits like improved health, safety, and reduced maintenance costs.

It is, however, widely recognized that many people struggle to access EEU programs. Renters, for example, often have limited control over building improvements. While they can swap out lightbulbs or add draft blockers to their doors and windows, bigger upgrades—such as installing new appliances, heat pumps, or weatherizing their space—are usually out of their hands. Even if they could make those upgrades, the upfront cost may not be worth it if they won't be in the home long enough to benefit from the long-term savings. Similarly, those in rural areas often struggle to access information and contractors to complete projects.

Efficiency Vermont's 2024-2026 DRP aimed to improve the accessibility of energy efficiency programs, through two key pathways: increased resource acquisition (RA)¹ support for equity programs, services and incentives; and a new development and support service (DSS)² Equity initiative focused on engaging with customers and partners to gather feedback and inform the design of programs and services. Over the three-year performance period, Efficiency Vermont staff coordinated efforts to reach and serve customers who traditionally have struggled to engage in programming.

Over the last several years, and in addition to the work directly supported by the new Equity budgets, Efficiency Vermont has also taken steps to advance accessibility throughout its portfolio of programs while seeking to ensure customer and partner perspectives are integrated throughout the program design and implementation process. This report summarizes:

- Deployment of DSS and RA Equity Funds
- Program improvements and adaptations made for improved accessibility
- Recommendations for how to maintain and integrate this important work in the 2027-9 performance period

¹ Resource acquisition are EEU services designed to directly achieve resource savings.

² Development and support services are EEU services designed to build customer awareness, knowledge, and motivation; support efforts to shape energy efficiency policies; provide necessary support for EEU operations; and identify approaches for EEU service development, delivery, and improvement.

Section A: Deployment of DSS and RA Equity Funds

To better serve historically underserved and hard-to-reach customers, Efficiency Vermont implemented a dynamic and responsive engagement process grounded in continuous learning and improvement. This process included the following key components:

1. Identifying Customers and Markets

We gathered and analyzed both internal data and external stakeholder feedback to identify customer groups that face persistent barriers to accessing EEU programs.

2. Building Community Trust through Partnerships

Leveraging our DSS equity funds, we established and deepened relationships with individuals and organizations embedded in the communities we aimed to reach. These trusted partners serve as vital bridges to customers who may be unfamiliar with or hesitant to engage with our programs.

3. Understanding Barriers and Opportunities

Through ongoing dialogue with partners and community members, we worked to uncover the specific challenges these customers face—whether logistical, cultural, financial, or informational—as well as the opportunities to better meet their needs.

4. Adapting Programs for Greater Accessibility

Insights gained from this engagement directly informed programmatic updates designed to reduce barriers and improve accessibility for underserved populations. Updates were funded in several ways including traditional EEU funding (where possible), other state and federal funding, and RA equity funds when necessary.



Importantly, this process was not linear. Its success depended on a reciprocal and iterative approach—one in which we listened actively, responded quickly, and demonstrated a genuine

willingness to learn and adapt. This agility allowed us to build trust and show our commitment to equity in action.

1. Identifying Customers and Markets

Based on extensive internal analysis and stakeholder feedback, Efficiency Vermont prioritized our outreach and program development with five key customer groups that face persistent and often overlapping barriers to accessing energy efficiency services. These barriers are rooted in structural, economic, and geographic challenges, and addressing them is essential to advancing our goal of making sure all Vermonters can directly participate in efficiency programs. The five focus markets and customer groups were:

- **Renters** – Rental properties have long been among the most difficult to serve due to the “split incentive” problem, where property owners are often reluctant to invest in energy upgrades that primarily benefit tenants.
- **Mobile Home Residents** – These customers frequently live in older, inefficient units that are costly and technically challenging to retrofit. Many mobile homes also fall outside the scope of traditional weatherization programs.
- **First-Time Homebuyers** – Often purchasing older homes in need of upgrades, first-time buyers face high upfront costs, limited access to financing, and a lack of awareness about available energy efficiency programs and technologies.
- **Nonprofit Organizations** – Nonprofits that deliver critical health and safety services to vulnerable populations typically operate with constrained budgets and limited staff capacity, making it difficult to prioritize or invest in energy efficiency improvements.
- **Small Businesses** – With lean budgets and small teams, many small businesses struggle to allocate the financial or human resources needed for energy efficiency projects. Additionally, their projects often have a higher cost per unit of energy saved, which has historically limited their eligibility for program participation.

2. Building Community Trust through Partnerships

Efficiency Vermont deployed DSS equity funds to build strong partnerships with trusted individuals and organizations deeply connected with communities historically difficult for us to reach and serve. Through these relationships, we gained insights that would help design and implement programs that not only met customer needs but also enhanced the overall benefits to the electric system.

In service of this goal, Efficiency Vermont partnered with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) that advocate for and serve these communities, helping to identify their needs and improve outreach and service. A “community-based organization” is a public or private nonprofit organization of demonstrated effectiveness that— (A) is representative of a

community or significant segments of a community and (B) provides educational or related services directly to individuals in the community.³

To foster long-term, mutually beneficial relationships, Efficiency Vermont created an account management framework to strategically engage with CBOs. Additionally, a three-tiered paid partnership structure was introduced to compensate CBOs for their time, expertise, and efforts, allowing them to participate at a level that matched their interest and capacity:

1. **Sponsorships (up to \$2,000)** – Focused on outreach and education, leveraging CBOs' networks to connect and inform their service users of energy efficiency programs and opportunities.
2. **MOUs (\$2,000–\$5,000)** – Supported outreach and education while providing feedback to help inform and iterate program design.
3. **Contracts (\$5,000–\$9,500)** – Structured partnerships with defined deliverables related to program design, outreach, and metric development.

Over the 2024-2026 performance period, we established working relationships with 23 CBOs including⁴:

- 20 Sponsorships
- 7 MOUs
- 0 Contracts

A summary of the type, location, and scale of CBO partnerships is provided in Appendix A.

Through these strategic partnerships, we implemented a wide range of outreach and engagement initiatives aimed at increasing awareness and access to Efficiency Vermont services. Key activities included:

- **Staff Training:** Delivered targeted training sessions to CBO staff, equipping them to provide one-on-one support to customers navigating Efficiency Vermont programs.
- **Tailored Social Media Campaigns:** Developed and deployed customized digital outreach efforts to reach diverse audiences across multiple platforms.
- **In-Person Events:** Participated in and hosted community events to engage directly with customers and promote available services.
- **Product and Information Distribution:** Provided free energy-saving products and informational materials through established distribution sites such as foodbanks.
- **Newsletter Promotion:** Leveraged CBO newsletters to share updates, success stories, and program opportunities with community members.

³ https://www.law.cornell.edu/definitions/uscode.php?width=840&height=800&iframe=true&def_id=20-USC-1991540508-1493090985&term_occur=2&term_src=title:20:chapter:70:subchapter:I:section:6303b

⁴ Accurate as of June 2025

These efforts significantly enhanced our ability to connect with underserved populations and improve access to energy efficiency resources.

3. Understanding Barriers and Opportunities for EEU Program Engagement

Our collaboration with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) provided valuable insights into engaging to effectively serve hard to reach communities in Vermont.

In terms of outreach best practices, we learned that:

1. **Psychological safety and trust are essential.** Community members are more likely to engage when they feel heard, respected, and that their concerns are genuinely acknowledged.
2. **Creating safe spaces requires trusted partnerships.** Working alongside community leaders and organizations already embedded in these communities is key to building credibility and fostering participation.
3. **Language, cultural, and informational barriers limit access.** Many individuals, especially non-English speakers, face challenges navigating EEU services without adequate translation and culturally relevant support.
4. **Many customers rely on CBOs for support in meeting basic needs** - but these organizations are stretched thin, many unable to fully meet the demands of the communities they serve.

We also found that in terms of programs:

1. **Basic needs take precedence over energy efficiency.** For families facing housing insecurity or struggling to pay rent and utilities, immediate financial relief must be prioritized over investments in long-term energy-saving measures.
2. **Renters have limited control over energy upgrades.** Effective outreach to drive projects must therefore include strategies to engage landlords and offer compelling incentives to improve energy efficiency in rental properties, for the benefit of their tenants.
3. **Mobile and manufactured homeowners encounter unique barriers.** These include difficulty finding contractors willing to work on their homes and limited access to effective and tailored energy solutions.
4. **Upfront costs remain a significant hurdle.** Both residential and commercial customers, such as small businesses, often lack the financial capacity to invest in energy-efficient technologies without substantial support.
5. **Non-profits** do not have the capacity or funding to take on long term energy efficiency investments.

6. **New home buyers** are often too overwhelmed, financially and psychologically, to take on energy efficiency upgrades even though prior to moving into a new home is an optimal time to make upgrades.

Section B: Improvements for Increased Accessibility

This initiative came at a uniquely opportune time to maximize benefits for customers by leveraging new time-limited sources of funding. Thanks to the vision and commitment of regulators and policy makers and the availability of unprecedented federal support for states in the wake of the pandemic, Efficiency Vermont had access to one of the most diverse and flexible funding portfolios in our history from 2021-6. This allowed us to respond to customer needs with agility and significant financial resources. In addition, the DSS equity funds enabled us to conduct the most expansive and inclusive outreach we’ve ever undertaken—engaging with partners and communities that had historically been underrepresented in our work. This flexibility empowered us to design and deploy a suite of targeted offers that addressed both long-standing and newly emerging barriers to program participation. The following section summarizes these updates.

Program Adaptations for Residential Customers

1. Expanded Eligibility for Appliance Replacement Vouchers

Funding Source: Electric Low-income Budget

Target customers/market: Rental and Low-Income Households

Overview: Since 2019, Efficiency Vermont has offered appliance vouchers to low-income homeowners with energy burdens over 6%, helping them replace inefficient or broken appliances like refrigerators, washers, and air conditioners.

The program was designed to support those who don’t qualify for the Targeted High Use (THU)⁵ program that has been in place for many years. The goal was to help more customers reduce energy costs and improve comfort—while also steering them away from unreliable or predatory appliance sources.

Through outreach with CBO partners, we identified barriers preventing renters and low-income households with low energy burdens from accessing the existing THU program. One example involved a mother unable to replace a failing fridge due to apartment’s lease terms that required her to replace any broken appliance, resulting in significant food and breast milk loss. In response, we made two key updates:

⁵ Targeted High Use (THU) is a low-income program offered through Efficiency Vermont that started around 2014. Qualifying residents receive a home energy walk-through by an Efficiency Coach to identify efficiency upgrade opportunities, and free installation of energy-saving products and appliances. Eligible customers include people whose income is less than specified annual limits and meet annual electric use thresholds. Efficiency upgrades have included clothes washers, refrigerators, freezers, dehumidifiers, hot water saving devices, LED bulbs, and heat pump water heaters.

1. Renters who own their appliances can now qualify to participate in the program by submitting a Declaration of Ownership.
2. To further increase low-income customers' access to the Appliance Replacement Voucher Program to address critical appliance replacements, the program team restructured the eligibility criteria for both THU and the Appliance Replacement Voucher. A customer's calculated energy burden no longer factors into their ability to qualify for a voucher. Rather, any low-income customer who does not qualify for THU based on high electrical usage may screen for the voucher program. In an effort to deliver further value and benefit, any customer who receives a voucher may opt to also receive a free Energy Savings Kit (for homeowners) or the Free Products Platform (for renters). The Free Products Platform is an online resource that allows renters to select and purchase (with full coverage of costs) a range of energy efficient products, such as LED light bulbs, low-flow shower heads, and faucet aerators.

These changes expanded access to essential resources and improve quality of life for more Vermonters.

Impact: Since the changes were implemented on October 1, 2024, 99 renters have received a voucher. ⁶

2. Window Heat Pump Pilot for Renters

Funding Source: Electric Low-income Budget

Target customers/market: Rental and Low-Income Households

Overview: Window heat pumps address a key barrier of workforce challenges and costs associated with thermal electrification since they can be installed without the assistance of a heat pump contractor. Additionally, because they are designed to plug into a standard 15A 120V shared outlet, they negate a noted barrier with panel capacity and other electrical system upgrades that are often necessary with heat pump installations. Finally, window heat pumps require no modification to the building and are fully portable, making them particularly well

Customer Story: Appliance Vouchers

A retired, low-income homeowner in North Hero was struggling with a 30+ year-old refrigerator that had become so inefficient it was spoiling her food—threatening both her health and her limited budget. Living on a fixed income, she reached out for help through a voucher program, only to be initially denied due to outdated eligibility criteria.

But when the program was updated to better reflect the true burden of electrical energy costs, she qualified. Today, she has a reliable, energy-efficient refrigerator—and she couldn't be more grateful. This change didn't just preserve her food; it restored her peace of mind.

⁶ Accurate as of June 2025

suited to renters. This product has tremendous potential to make electrification and energy cost savings accessible to entire populations that have not had that opportunity or access in the past.

Priority enrollment is offered to customers living in multi-family residences, BIPOC customers and those whose monthly rent is at or below low-income threshold. The pilot program is based on self-installation of the unit and will gather basic usage data through plug load meters that will remain installed until they are collected at the end of the pilot period. Customers will also participate in two interviews so that Efficiency Vermont can learn about the installation process and customers' experience using and operating the window heat pump.

Impact: The Window Heat Pump for Renters Pilot program first launched in December 2024 and enrolled 9 participants. Efficiency Vermont has also engaged with affordable housing partners to explore additional installations for participants leveraging the assistance of property managers.

3. Cost Coverage for Flood Recovery

Funding Source: Time limited additional funding (state grant)

Target customers: Flood Impacted Low- and Moderate-Income (LMI) Households.

Overview: The Cost Coverage Plan was developed to support flood-impacted customers who identified upfront costs as a barrier to accessing Efficiency Vermont's \$10,000 flood recovery rebate in 2023-2025. Efficiency Vermont reviewed and pre-approved customers for rebate eligibility, enabling the pre-approved rebate amount to be applied directly to reduce the total project cost.

This offer was made possible through the existing Efficiency Vermont Home Energy Loan (HEL) , in partnership with lender EastRise Credit Union and the Vermont Community Foundation. Funds were sent directly to EEN contractors, and any remaining balance was financed through the HEL. If the rebate covered the full project cost, no loan, credit check, or income documentation was required from customers. This offer was especially valuable for low- and moderate-income homeowners, helping many move forward with essential heating and hot water projects without delay. For those needing a loan to cover incremental costs beyond the rebate, the remaining amount financed was significantly reduced, and the borrower was able to take on a shorter loan term for a lower interest rate. In October 2025, the last Flood CCP project closed.

Impact: Between December 2023 and May 2025, 24 customers accessed the cost coverage plan. The average amount of rebate dollars applied to total project costs through Cost Coverage Plan was \$9,645. 83% of projects enabled the customer to replace a damaged heating system or install a supplemental heating system.

4. Weatherization Home Repair

Funding Source: Time limited additional funding (state contract)

Target customers: Low- and Moderate-Income (LMI) Households.

Overview: Efficiency Vermont’s Home Repair Program provided income-eligible Vermonters with financial and technical support to address critical health, safety, issues in their homes that needed to be addressed before weatherization was possible. The program helped fund essential repairs—such as moisture mitigation in basements, foundation repairs and remediation of asbestos and lead—to ensure homes were safe, comfortable, and energy efficient. Services were delivered in partnership with local contractors and community organizations.

Impact: The Home Repair for Weatherization Program was launched in October 2024. All funding set aside for Efficiency Vermont had been allocated or spent by April 2025, which will serve 168 households in Vermont allowing them to complete weatherization work that would not have been possible without this funding.

5. Home Electric Supply Upgrades (HESU)

Funding Source: Time limited additional funding (state grant)

Target customers: Low- and Moderate-Income (LMI) Households.

In Feb. 2024, the HESU program was initially launched as part of Efficiency Vermont’s Flood Recovery offers.

In late 2024, it was expanded to include all income-eligible single family residential customers and eligible rental property owners statewide. This limited-time program supports electrical system upgrades in LMI households. Low-income customers are eligible to receive 100% of eligible project costs up to \$10,000. Moderate-income customers are eligible to receive 90% of eligible project costs up to a maximum incentive of \$10,000.

Burlington Electric Department (BED), Vermont Gas Systems (VGS), and Green Mountain Power, each served as HESU subgrantees.

Impact: Over 653 customers served as of November 2025. Including 420 low-income households and 233 moderate-income households. The average incentive was \$7,376 for single-family projects and \$11,700 for rental property owners.

Customer Story: HESU

In the aftermath of the devastating 2024 floods, a low-income family in Washington County was left without heat after their oil furnace was destroyed and their electrical panel severely damaged. To prevent future flooding risks, the panel needed to be relocated upstairs—an urgent but costly fix. For weeks, the family endured cold temperatures, relying on unsafe space heaters that strained their compromised electrical system.

The HESU program enabled the family to upgrade and relocate their electrical panel. Additionally, through Efficiency Vermont’s flood recovery rebate program, they were able to purchase an efficient pellet stove to replace their furnace.

6. Switch and Save

Funding Source: Time-limited additional funding (state grant)

Target customers: Low- and Moderate-Income (LMI) Households.

Originally launched in September 2023 as a flood-relief initiative, the Switch and Save program was designed to support low- to moderate-income (LMI) households in replacing existing water heaters with high-efficiency heat pump water heaters (HPWHs), with a particular focus on displacing fossil fuel systems. Due to its early success and strong demand, the program expanded statewide in April 2024.

The program is administered by Efficiency Vermont, with Burlington Electric Department and Vermont Gas Systems serving as subgrantees. Eligible participants can receive up to \$5,000 in incentives toward the cost of replacing their current water heater. Low-income households are eligible for 100% cost coverage, while moderate-income households receive 90% coverage. For projects exceeding the \$5,000 threshold, prior approval from Efficiency Vermont is required to ensure alignment with program goals and budget constraints.

Impact: As of June 2025, over 1,200 customers have participated in the program, including 793 low-income customers with an average incentive of \$4,333.

7. Home Performance with Energy Star (HPwES) for Low-income Households.

Funding Source: Time-limited additional funding (state grant and contract)

Target customers: Low- and Moderate-Income (LMI) Households.

Overview: The HPwES program provides a comprehensive, whole-house approach to improving energy efficiency through weatherization and air sealing, delivered by participating contractors in the Energy Excellence Network (EEN).

Historically, Efficiency Vermont offered the same enhanced incentive levels for both low- and moderate-income households. However, as project costs have increased in the wake of the pandemic, it became clear that low-income households needed additional support to access these energy-saving improvements. In response, Efficiency Vermont increased the incentive coverage for low-income households from 75% to 90% of project costs (up to \$9,500), effective January 2024.

Customer Story: HPwES for Low-income Households

A low-income homeowner in Fayston, Vermont had long wanted to make her home more energy efficient—but the cost of weatherization upgrades kept the project out of reach. That changed when Efficiency Vermont introduced increased incentives under which she now qualified for \$9,500 up 90% of the project cost, the highest available incentive.

Thanks to this support, she was able to complete a full weatherization project—something she couldn't have done without the enhanced rebate. Her home is now more comfortable, and efficient.

Impact: Since changing the rebate to 90% coverage in January 2024, Efficiency Vermont has served 433 low-income customers.

8. Low-Income Fuel Switch

Funding Source: Electric budget (Energy Efficiency Modernization Act)⁷

Target customers: Previously weatherized Low-Income Households.

Overview: The Low-Income Fuel Switch program was launched in Fall 2022 to provide barrier-free access to the benefits of fuel switching and home heating electrification while providing more cost-effective ways for these customers to heat and cool their homes.

The program combines EEMA and electric utility funding to support fuel switching/offset from a fossil fuel heating source to a ductless heat pump in LI homes that have been previously weatherized through the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) or HPwES. Heat pumps are installed at no cost to the customer (contractor invoices are reimbursed by Efficiency Vermont) and the installation may also cover electric panel or service upgrades needed to install the heat pump. As of July 2024, all customers enrolling in the program will also receive a first-year maintenance visit by the installing contractor at no cost.

Impact: Since November 2022, over 370 customers have received heat pumps through this program at no cost. Enrollment continues to soar, with more than 170 customers qualifying for the program since March 2025 alone.⁸

9. First-Time Homebuyers Support

Funding Source: RA Equity Funds (Electric and Thermal)

Target Customers: First-Time Homebuyers

Overview: The First-Time Homebuyer Program launched in September 2025 and aims to support individuals who have purchased their first home in making informed, energy efficient choices that reduce long-term energy use and costs. Recognizing that first-time buyers often face challenges such as purchasing from an older housing stock, homes with inefficient systems, limited access to inspections, and unclear energy expenses, the program offers targeted resources to address these issues.

There are three distinct offers within this program. First, a Virtual Home Energy Visit that provides guidance on key homes systems, including identifying systems details like make, model, and estimated age, discussing maintenance needs, and helping homeowners plan for future replacements. This visit also includes education on general building science to deepen understanding of how homes function as systems.

⁷ Act 44 (signed into law on June 1, 2023) enables up to \$2M per year of EEC on programs that reduce GHG emissions in thermal and transportation sectors:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/Docs/ACTS/ACT044/ACT044%20As%20Enacted.pdf>

⁸ Accurate as of June 2025.

Second, participants can receive an Energy Saving Kit focused on simple weatherization improvements that can be completed independently. These upgrades help improve comfort and efficiency without requiring professional installation. As part of the kit, participants also have the option to receive an air purifier or a dehumidifier.

Third, the program includes an appliance replacement voucher, which allows homeowners to replace one existing, functioning appliance with a more efficient model, helping reduce energy consumption. Eligible appliances for replacement include refrigerators, freezers, clothes washers, window air conditioners, and dehumidifiers.

Impact: As of November 2025, the program has issued 20 appliance replacement vouchers, 21 energy-savings kits, and conducted 34 Virtual Home Energy Visits.

Program Adaptations for Commercial Customers

1. Redesign of Rental Property Owner Outreach and Support

Funding Source: Electric and Thermal Efficiency Budgets

Target Audience: Rental Property Owners

Overview: To effectively improve the housing conditions of renters, Efficiency Vermont recognized the importance of engaging and supporting rental property owners. Traditionally, Efficiency Vermont has approached rental property owners as small business operators. However, while they manage their properties with a business-like mindset, their role as housing providers sets them apart from other types of businesses in fundamental ways. To more effectively engage and support rental property owners, Efficiency Vermont implemented an account management structure designed specifically to connect with them and support them in completing projects.

In 2024, we deployed two employees to conduct outreach and provide support for rental property owners.. The insights gained from this initiative, combined with our existing knowledge of the sector, led to significant updates and improvements to our programs, including:

1. A redesigned rental property owner rebate form which is more user-friendly.
2. The introduction of a "Do More Bonus" to incentivize owners to complete multiple projects at once.
3. The establishment of a per-unit incentive structure for HPwES, encouraging greater participation from small rental properties. Funding for these enhanced incentives was made possible by a state contract, from time limited additional funding which will expire at the end of 2026.
4. Expanding eligibility for rental properties to participate in the weatherization home repair program. As noted above, the weatherization home repair program was made possible by time limited additional funding provided through a state contract.

These enhancements aim to better serve rental property owners and support improved housing conditions for their tenants.

Impact: Beginning in March of 2024, through October 2025, these employees provided one-on-one consultations to more than 130 rental property owners, representing over 405 housing units. Referrals were made to HESU, HPwES, other EVT incentive programs, and WAPs.

2. Equity Strategy Sessions

Funding Source: RA Equity Funds (Electric and Thermal)

Target Audience: Small Businesses

Efficiency Vermont's commercial custom incentives have traditionally been determined based on a project's savings, cost, and return on investment. This approach allows us to balance the benefits to the customer with the need to manage the cost per unit of energy saved and ensure that Efficiency Vermont's overall savings targets are met. However, this approach can result in a limited view of a project's broader impact on the community, and prevent enough resources being provided to customers who need additional support in order to move forward with projects.

To address this, Efficiency Vermont created an approach called the Equity Strategy Session (ESS)—a dedicated space and time where staff supporting any commercial customer projects, regardless of size or incentive amount, can seek additional support in order to advance equity and customer accessibility. These considerations include ownership type (Is the owner part of a disenfranchised community?), community service (Does the company provide critical services to a disenfranchised population?), and location (Is the business situated in a rural or high-need community?). By integrating these equity-based evaluations, we have enabled a more flexible and inclusive approach to incentive distribution.

Impact: As of October 2025, Efficiency Vermont has supported 15 businesses using this approach.

3. Nonprofit Enhanced Rebate

Funding Source: RA Equity Funds (Electric and Thermal)

Target Audience: Nonprofit organizations

Nonprofits across Vermont play a vital role in supporting frontline and impacted communities. However, many (particularly smaller organizations) face challenges when it comes to investing in their facilities, as their primary focus remains on delivering essential services.

To help address this issue and reduce energy costs—allowing nonprofits to allocate more funds toward their services—Efficiency Vermont developed the Nonprofit Bonus. This incentive covers 100% of project costs, up to \$7,500, for energy efficiency upgrades, with a limit of four products, in addition to standard rebate offers.

Customer Story: Nonprofit Enhanced Rebate

The Onion River Food Shelf, in Marshfield, is a vital resource for low income households, providing essential food and personal care items with compassion and care. Yet, behind their daily efforts was a pressing challenge: outdated refrigeration equipment that severely limited their ability to store fresh, nutritious food. When they first reached out to Efficiency Vermont, we wanted to help—but with a standard rebate of just \$1,000, the support simply wasn't enough to make the project feasible. The upfront cost of new, efficient equipment was too high for the food shelf to manage on its own.

With \$3,200.86 in support from the Nonprofit Enhanced Rebate, Onion River was finally able to purchase four high-efficiency refrigerators and freezers—dramatically expanding their storage capacity and enabling them to serve more families with dignity, reliability, and care.

This initiative was strategically designed based on years of feedback from nonprofits that sought support but struggled to access programs. Recognizing that nonprofits often lack additional funds for facility upgrades—typically relying on donations of materials or labor—we prioritized covering full project costs to remove financial barriers. Additionally, insights from a similar bonus offered during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that many projects fell under \$10,000 and focused on small-to-medium upgrades, such as equipment replacements, improved lighting, and heat pump installations.

Impact: As of October 2025, Efficiency Vermont has supported 55 nonprofit organizations providing health, safety and welfare services through enhanced rebates.

Workforce Development

Funding Source: RA Equity Funds (Electric and Thermal)

Target Audience: Contractors, Workforce Development Partners

A well-trained and accessible workforce is essential to achieving Vermont's energy efficiency goals. However, workforce availability continues to be a significant barrier, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Efficiency Vermont recognizes that without a strong pipeline of skilled professionals, the state's ability to deliver energy-saving services equitably and effectively is at risk.

In response, Efficiency Vermont has implemented a series of strategic initiatives aimed at strengthening the clean energy workforce and expanding access

to energy efficiency services across the state, particularly focusing on the weatherization workforce:

- **Clean Energy Career Pathways Resource**
To inspire interest in clean energy careers and support workforce development, Efficiency Vermont created a Clean Energy Career Pathways guide. This resource

outlines potential career trajectories in the energy efficiency sector and is distributed at public events and career fairs. It was launched at the beginning of the 2025 event season to coincide with increased outreach efforts.

- **Subsidized BPI Training for Contractor Staff**
Efficiency Vermont continues to invest in workforce training by subsidizing Building Performance Institute (BPI) certification courses for HPwES contractor staff. Participants are only required to pay 10% of the training course cost, with the remaining 90% covered by Efficiency Vermont. In cases where cost remains a barrier, full financial support is available to ensure equitable access to training opportunities. All courses can be completed online. BA-T course sessions are also offered in-person at the VIEW training center in Barre, for those who prefer a hands-on approach to training and testing.
- **Subsidized BPI Training for Career Technical Education (CTE) Instructors**
Efficiency Vermont worked with the Vermont Agency of Education to approve BPI's Building Science Principles Certification as an Industry Recognized Credential for CTE Construction Trades programs. To encourage CTE uptake of this credential, Efficiency Vermont is subsidizing the course fee for VT CTE Construction Trades Instructors.
- **Equipment Purchasing Support for HPwES Contractor**
To help contractors grow their businesses and improve operational efficiency, Efficiency Vermont launched an equipment purchasing offer for HPwES weatherization contractors. This initiative provides up to \$10,000 per company to support the purchase of auditing tools, insulation and air sealing equipment, or other business-related needs.
- **Support Vermont Sustainable Job Funds to host two rounds of the Tools of the Trade Program**
Efficiency Vermont has funded Vermont Sustainable Job Funds to host two rounds of their Tools of the Trade Program which is an in-person, 9-month business training program designed to support the needs of weatherization contractors to improve their executive business skills, enhance core operations, expand their workforce and improve their work-life balance.

Impact: The equipment purchasing program was fully subscribed within three months of launch and enabled 24 contractors to purchase equipment for their businesses which included (but was not limited to) Blower Door Kits, Manometers, Trailers, Fiberglass Blower Machine, IR Cameras, etc. In addition to equipment purchasing, the Everblue BPI agreement has allowed over 50 contractors to sign up for the BPI Building Science Principles (BSP), Building Analyst Technician (BA-T) and/or Building Analyst Profession (BA-P) with a completion rate of 50% year to date. This certification allows new contractors to join Efficiency Vermont's Efficiency Excellence Network (EEN) and existing contractors to maintain their enrollment in the EEN. There were seven graduates of the first cohort of the Tools of the Trade program, with enrollment underway for the second cohort.

Customer support, Marketing and Outreach

Ensuring that Vermonters are aware of Efficiency Vermont’s offerings—and feel comfortable reaching out—is essential to equitable access. To support this, Efficiency Vermont has taken a range of steps to make its marketing and outreach more inclusive and accessible:

- Redesigned the website with mobile-first functionality and simplified content to meet accessibility standards (WCAG 2.1 AA, Section 508, ADA).
- Applied ARIA techniques to improve accessibility for dynamic content and web applications.
- Reviewed and updated website imagery to reflect greater diversity
- Partnered with a photography agency to build a Vermont-specific image library featuring frontline and historically impacted communities.
- Integrated an equity-focused brand sentiment metric into the Brand Pulse survey to track public perception over time.
- Added equity-related questions to customer research to inform program development.
- Enhanced website readability with updated font colors and sizes, including dark mode compatibility.
- Added translation services and created a multilingual website homepage to engage non-English-speaking audiences.
- Established a goal for 90% of all marketing photos to be non-stock and Vermont-specific.
- Integrated language translation and interpretation services into our customer support team and 1:1 customer support offers, such as virtual home energy visits and business consultations.
- Translated handouts into other languages based on feedback from partners.
- Partnered with Vermont Gas, Burlington Electric Department, and the Vermont Language Justice project to create a series of informational videos on energy efficiency topics translated into multiple languages.

Section C: Recommendations for how to maintain and integrate this work in the 2027-9 performance period

The funds allocated in the Efficiency Vermont 2024–2026 Demand Resource Plan (DRP) to improve accessibility were intentionally designed as a one-time investment, and Efficiency Vermont will not propose an Equity DSS initiative in the 2027-9 performance period. The

purpose was to test new approaches to improving customer access, learn, and generate insights that could be meaningfully integrated into our ongoing programs and services.

The following are immediate and actionable opportunities that can be included in Efficiency Vermont's planning for future DRP proposals, building on the experience of this performance period so far:

1. Dedicate funding in the EEC and TEPF budgets to support programs that may yield low or no immediate energy savings but have proven critical for future-proofing homes and addressing energy burden. This could include weatherization home repair, the Low-Income Fuel Switch program, and flood/disaster recovery. Ensure that the scale and funding for these efforts is balanced against programs that deliver high benefits at low cost.
2. Fully integrate support for Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) into Efficiency Vermont's ongoing marketing, program development, and outreach budgets. CBOs have demonstrated their value by offering critical feedback on new program designs, improving access to hard-to-reach customers, and providing fresh perspectives on existing initiatives.
3. Explore opportunities to broaden the criteria for accessing and calculating commercial incentives beyond traditional project-level energy savings/cost metrics. This should include targeted support for mission-driven nonprofits and small businesses, which often operate under significant budgetary and operational constraints but play a vital role in sustaining and serving communities across Vermont.

If regulators are interested in seeing a higher prioritization of accessibility and equity-focused programs and services, there is one further concept they might evaluate and consider. Exempting low-income program spend and savings from Efficiency Vermont's calculation of electric system benefits requirement (electric MPR#9) could expand Efficiency Vermont's capacity to serve low-income customers, by ensuring that there is less performance risk in allocating resources to these "higher cost, lower savings" programs. This would also recognize that programs such as Targeted High Use, Appliance Replacement Vouchers, and Low-Income Fuel Switch bring a broad range of benefits for customers which are not captured in a straightforward calculation of energy savings and dollars spent. Similarly, these programs can serve more customers with higher and more consistent budget allocations than are currently feasible. This is an important policy question, with cost and benefit implications that would need to be carefully vetted, and which is ultimately beyond the purview of this report.

Section D: Conclusion

Improving access to energy efficiency programs is essential to achieving Vermont's broader energy and climate goals. With the targeted funding outlined in the 2024–2026 Demand Resource Plan and additional state support, Efficiency Vermont has made significant progress in

overcoming long-standing barriers that have limited participation from underserved and hard-to-reach communities.

Through the strategic deployment of the DSS and RA Equity Funds and additional state funding, Efficiency Vermont was able to identify and address persistent barriers that have historically excluded many Vermonters from participating in energy-saving programs. These efforts were not limited to financial incentives alone. They included building meaningful relationships with trusted community partners, listening deeply to the lived experiences of underserved customers, and using those insights to reshape programs in ways that are more responsive, flexible, and culturally relevant.

The results of this work are already visible. Programs have been adapted to better meet the needs of renters, rural residents, and other hard-to-reach groups. Outreach strategies have evolved to be more inclusive and community centered. And most importantly, a foundation has been laid for continued progress—one that centers accessibility and equity as core principles of energy efficiency planning and delivery.

Looking ahead to the 2027–2029 performance period, it is essential that this momentum is not only maintained but accelerated. The lessons learned during this cycle should inform future program design, funding allocations, and stakeholder engagement strategies. Continued investment in accessibility and equity-focused initiatives, coupled with a commitment to transparency, accountability, and adaptive learning, will ensure that Vermont's energy efficiency programs remain a national model for inclusive climate action.

Ultimately, when all Vermonters can access the tools and resources they need to reduce energy use, the entire state benefits—from lower utility costs and reduced emissions to healthier homes and stronger communities. Equity in energy efficiency is not just a goal—it is a necessity for a sustainable and just energy future.

Appendix A: Community-Based Organization Partnerships

Partner	Agreement Type	Location
Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE) <i>Based in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, CAE provides programs that support food access, farm viability, and working landscapes.</i>	MOU	Hardwick, VT
Winooski Parents & Students Project (WPS) <i>The WPS project assists community members with case management support, advocacy, cultural brokers, interpretation services, and referral assistance.</i>	MOU	Winooski, VT
Northern Border Running Club <i>The Northern Border Running Club's mission is to encourage active and healthy lifestyles in the Northeast Kingdom.</i>	Sponsorship	Newport, VT
Winston Prouty Center for Child and Family Development <i>Provides inclusive education and family support to promote the success of children and families.</i>	Sponsorship	Brattleboro, VT
Vermont Recovery Network <i>Supports member recovery organizations such that they can be world-class establishments empowering all Vermonters and their families who are in recovery from alcohol or other substance use disorders.</i>	Sponsorship	Brattleboro, VT
Consortium for Energy Efficiency (CEE) <i>CEE works to accelerate the development and availability of energy efficient products and services for lasting public benefit.</i>	Sponsorship	Middleton, MA
Springfield Supportive Housing Program <i>Provides resources toward safe, stable, and affordable housing options in Windsor and North Windham counties.</i>	Sponsorship	Springfield, VT
North Country Supervisory Union <i>Provides drop-in social service supports for students and caregivers in order to reduce barriers to learning.</i>	Sponsorship	Newport, VT
Hardwick Area Food Bank <i>A multi-site food share pantry with locations in Hardwick, Craftsbury, and Albany.</i>	Sponsorship	Hardwick, VT
CIDER (Champlain Islanders Delivering Essential Resources) <i>Provides direct services and collaboration with other individuals and groups. CIDER feels a special responsibility to older adults and persons with disabilities</i>	Sponsorship	South Hero, VT
Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity <i>A nonprofit organization that partners with financial donors, local families, and community volunteers to build and sell affordable homes in Northwest Vermont.</i>	Sponsorship	Milton, VT
Root Social Justice Center <i>Prioritizes BIPOC individuals and their communities by shifting resources to BIPOC for leadership, connection, healing, education, and the arts and supports BIPOC-led racial justice movement work.</i>	Sponsorship	Brattleboro, VT
Missisquoi Abenaki Nation <i>Preservation of Abenaki community and culture, as well as addressing gaps in services to the local community.</i>	Sponsorship	Swanton, VT
Nulhegan Abenaki Nation <i>Preservation of Abenaki community and culture, as well as addressing gaps in services to the local community.</i>	MOU	Barton, VT

<p>Rutland County Pride <i>The mission of Rutland County Pride INC is to enhance and sustain the well-being of the 2STLGBQIA+ and allied communities by providing programs and services that cultivate community.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Rutland, VT
<p>Home Share Vermont <i>Facilitates home sharing for northwestern and central Vermont.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Brandon, VT
<p>Age Well <i>A nonprofit that focuses on lifestyle, happiness, and wellness for the aging population of Northwestern Vermont.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Colchester, VT
<p>Vermont Center for Independent Living <i>Supports people with disabilities to live independently and participate in their communities.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Montpelier, VT
<p>Sunrise Family Resource Center <i>A parent-child center serving families in Bennington County.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Bennington, VT
<p>Central Vermont Adult Education <i>Provides adult education and literacy services in Washington, Orange, and Lamoille County.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Barre, VT
<p>Randolph Area Food Shelf <i>Provides quality food and personal care products to individuals and families in need in Randolph, Braintree, Brookfield, and East Granville.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Randolph, VT
<p>Onion River Food Shelf <i>Provides quality food and personal care products to individuals and families in need in Marshfield, Plainfield, Cabot, Calais, and East Montpelier areas.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Marshfield, VT
<p>Family Center of Washington County <i>The state-designated Parent Child Center for Central Vermont, providing child care and parent education and outreach activities.</i></p>	MOU	Montpelier, VT
<p>Vermont Farmers Food Center <i>Increases access and availability of locally produced food in the Rutland region through education, market expansion, aggregation, and distribution of locally produced agricultural products.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Rutland, VT
<p>LISTEN Community Services <i>Provides services and support to meet the critical needs of Upper Valley individuals and families.</i></p>	Sponsorship	White River Junction, VT
<p>Putney Food Shelf <i>Provides supplemental healthy food for area people in need.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Putney, VT
<p>Salvation Farms <i>Builds increased resilience in Vermont's food system through agricultural surplus management.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Morrisville, VT
<p>Center for Whole Communities <i>Cultivates transformative leadership that weaves together and strengthens movements for justice and the environment.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Burlington, VT
<p>Vermont Language Justice Project <i>Creates public service videos in 21 languages to help people with language access needs make informed decisions about their health and safety, and navigating everyday life in the US.</i></p>	Sponsorship	Burlington, VT
<p>Vermont Adult Learning <i>Offers free in-person and online courses to help adults 16+ improve their skills, earn diplomas/GEDs, and advance their careers.</i></p>	MOU	Burlington, VT