



# CREATING AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITY ENERGY EFFICIENCY TEAMS

A GUIDEBOOK FOR RURAL  
MICHIGAN COMMUNITIES

Prepared by:

Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region (WUPPDR)

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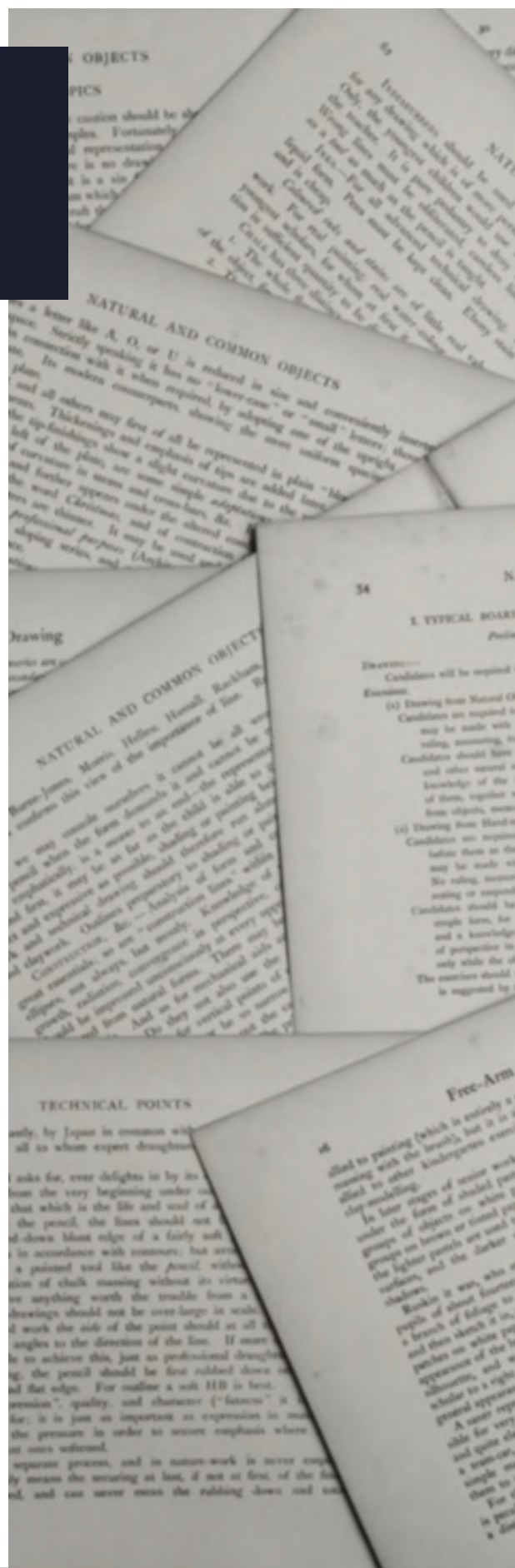
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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Brad Barnett** is the Executive Director of the Keweenaw Convention & Visitors Bureau in Calumet, MI and former Senior Planner with the Western Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Region in Hancock, MI. He holds a PhD in Environmental and Energy Policy from Michigan Technology University and was named to Midwest Energy News' 40 Under 40 Emerging Clean Energy Leaders in 2018 and a 2017 U.S. Department of Energy Solar in Your Community Sunshot participant. His work includes enhancing low-to-moderate income communities' access to solar technology and programs that lower barriers to energy efficiency investment.

**Angela Yu** is an Assistant Regional Planner with the Western Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Region in Hancock, MI. She holds a M.S. in Environmental and Energy Policy from Michigan Technological University. Her work includes assisting local communities with developing community energy plans.



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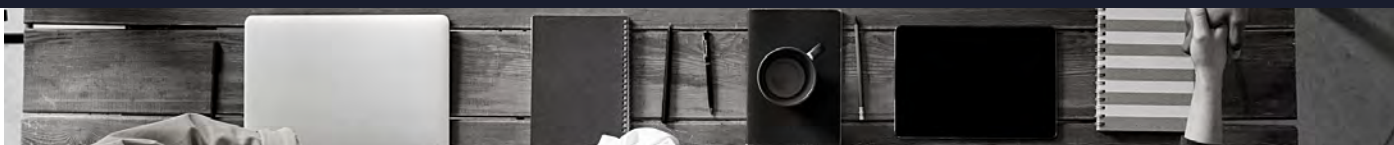
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# INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY ENERGY EFFICIENCY TEAMS



Community Energy Efficiency Teams (CEETs) are an effective way to improve a community's access to the benefits of energy efficiency. The benefits include financial savings from lower utility bills, avoided carbon emissions from fossil fuels, and health benefits associated with warmer homes and better lighting. This guide will help your community form a CEET and provide recommendations and resources to tackle some of the biggest challenges to energy efficiency for residents, businesses, and community organizations.

## WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ENERGY EFFICIENCY TEAM?

A CEET is a group of volunteers dedicated to assisting their neighbors, community organizations and local businesses overcome challenges to pursuing energy efficiency. CEETs use *community-based outreach* to accomplish the four “E’s”:

- **Educate:** Increase community members' awareness of the financial, environmental, and social benefits of energy efficiency and identify opportunities that exist within the community for energy efficiency improvements.
- **Engage:** Tap into social networks to generate enthusiasm and secure resources (e.g. financing, volunteers, technical expertise, etc.) for community energy efficiency initiatives.
- **Enact:** Leverage these resources, with the support of local experts, to complete energy efficiency projects.
- **Empower:** Create opportunities and venues to allow individuals to complete their *own* energy efficiency projects and *support* projects benefiting their neighbors, friends, families, local businesses, and community organizations.

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## WHAT IS COMMUNITY-BASED OUTREACH?

Community-Based Outreach (CBO) is a strategy that focuses on leveraging social networks within a community to promote positive change. Social networks are the formal and informal connections between members of communities like your friends, neighbors, families, co-workers, classmates, etc. Communities can be physical location like a neighborhood, city, village, or town, but they can also be based on shared interests between people who live in different places. CBO efforts tap into these social networks to share information about a cause, program, or project and to recruit participation in activities and initiatives. They are often labeled as "grassroots" efforts because they are typically organized and led by local community members. The CBO strategy is different than many business or government run initiatives which typically use outreach methods that lack a peer-to-peer connection.

## EXAMPLES OF CEET PROGRAMS

Community energy efficiency is a broad concept and can entail a lot of different types of programs, strategies, and stakeholders. CEETs can pursue an almost unlimited number of initiatives based on their specific goals. Below is a list of common programs other CEETs have launched to help their communities reduce energy consumption and transition to a more sustainable way of life.

### HOME AND BUSINESS ENERGY AUDITS

Energy audits help identify opportunities to reduce energy consumption in a home or business. A trained energy professional identifies potential projects and makes recommendations on investments that will save the property owner money and reduce the amount of energy used. Audits can be incredibly helpful for homeowners and businesses to understand cost-effective solutions to energy reduction. CEETs can help property owners connect with auditing programs or even train community members and employees to help conduct energy assessments.

**Example:** Western U.P. Energy Audit Program—Western Upper Peninsula, MI  
<http://kweenawnow.blogspot.com/2018/05/wuppd-r-offers-program-to-help-reduce.html>



## HOME WEATHERIZATION TEAMS

Home heating, particularly in northern climates like Michigan, account for a large share of residential energy costs. This problem is exacerbated when homes are older or poorly maintained. CEETs can take steps to work with homeowners through education programs or even “weatherization” blitzes to make improvements to their fellow community members’ homes.

**Example:** Houghton County residents cutting energy use, saving money on utility bills—Houghton County, MI

<http://keweenawnow.blogspot.com/2017/05/heet-houghton-county-residents-cutting.html>

## UTILITY CONNECTIONS

Heat and power utilities offer a variety of energy efficiency programs. CEETs can help business and residential customers connect with these utility programs through community-based marketing efforts. CEETs can also partner with utilities to help conduct community or utility scale energy projects, collect and understand community energy data, and access grants and other financial resources to implement utility infrastructure upgrades.

**Example:** 2020 Utility Programs for Income Qualified Residents—Keweenaw Region, MI

<https://newpowertour.com/programs/>

## ENERGY EDUCATION EVENTS

CEETs often host public events to help the community learn about the benefits of energy efficiency and connect them with resources to help consumers implement energy efficiency projects. These events can range from small “house parties” to large public symposiums featuring guest speakers, entertainment, games, and more. The events can also be held online through social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram using live streams to help connect with people who are unable to attend in-person events.

**Example:** Old appliance collection popular part of energy show—Houghton, MI

<https://www.miningjournal.net/news/region/2015/10/old-appliance-collection-popular-part-of-energy-show/>



## ENERGY COACHING

Partnerships between CEETs, economic development organizations like Chambers of Commerce, and energy specialists can help businesses identify ways to reduce operating costs through energy efficiency investment. Energy “coaches” conduct business site visits to give recommendations on specific projects and help connect them with financing resources.

**Example:** Energy Coaches help cut energy bills at Taqueria La Hacienda on Lake Street - Metro, MN

<https://www.cleanenergyresourceteams.org/energy-coaches-help-cut-energy-bills-taqueria-la-hacienda-lake-street>

## MULTI-FAMILY PROPERTY EFFICIENCY PROGRAMS

Multi-residential rental properties (e.g. apartments) face a unique challenge to energy efficiency called the “donut hole” problem. In cases where tenants pay their utility bills, there is little incentive for property owners to invest in energy efficiency. Tenants avoid making investments (e.g. adding insulation) since it cannot be taken if they move. CEETs can help connect these properties with special financing programs offered by utilities and government agencies to reduce overall energy consumption.

**Example:** Multifamily efficiency programs benefit building owners and tenants - Metro, MN

<https://www.cleanenergyresourceteams.org/multifamily-efficiency-programs-benefit-building-owners-and-tenants-0>

## COMMUNITY ENERGY EFFICIENCY PLANS

Some CEETs work with their local communities to develop comprehensive plans, adopted by local governments, to guide municipal and community energy efficiency actions. CEETs work with community stakeholders and their local governments through a structured planning process to help formulate goals, strategies and projects pertaining to energy efficiency. The plans may help shape investments in public infrastructure, new programs offered by local governments, and even help create new policies like building codes.

**Example:** Program to save energy costs in Ontonagon County—Ontonagon, MI

<https://www.mininggazette.com/news/local-news/2019/05/program-to-save-energy-costs-in-ontonagon-county/>

# WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

Each CEET will look a little different based on the volunteer-base, needs, and interest of the local community. Some CEETs are initiated and supported with funding and technical assistance by local governments and third-party organizations. Some states like Minnesota publicly fund “[community energy resource teams](#)” to support state energy and sustainability goals. Other CEETs are completely volunteer driven like the [Houghton Energy Efficiency Team \(HEET\)](#) in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. The goals of your CEET, combined with the unique characteristics of your community, will affect who participates. However, it is a good idea to include community members such as:

- Local energy specialists
- Business community representatives (e.g. the local Chamber of Commerce)
- Local government representatives
- Utility representatives
- Civic groups (e.g. Rotarian groups)
- Religious organizations
- Human service organizations
- Public housing authorities
- Education organizations (e.g. local schools, universities, etc.)
- Regional planning agencies
- Anyone enthusiastic about saving energy!



# CEETS IN ACTION

The Houghton Energy Efficiency Team (HEET) was formed in the summer of 2014 to help residents and businesses of Houghton County, Michigan save money on their utility bills. HEET worked with volunteers from the local university, energy service nonprofits, faith-based organizations, area businesses, and the region's utilities to address the high cost of energy. Adopting a CBO approach, HEET identified residential weatherization as a means to save on utility bills and address home heating challenges caused by the region's cold northern climate and aging housing stock.

## HOUGHTON ENERGY EFFICIENCY TEAM (HEET)

In less than two years, HEET helped nearly 3,800 residents in some form, which is about 27.5% of all Houghton County households. HEET also:



Replaced 79 inefficient refrigerators with new, Energy Star refrigerators



Distributed 6,921 LED light bulbs



Replaced 35 electric water heaters with energy efficient heat pump water heaters



Conducted 5 gas on-demand water heater replacements



Conducted 199 Department of Energy "Home Energy Scores"



Completed 55 volunteer home winterizations



## GETTING STARTED

There is no “best” method for creating a CEET program. However, programs initiated by utility companies and governmental agencies often do not achieve the desired results because they fail to consider social barriers to energy efficiency adoption. These barriers can include things like poor understanding of the energy efficiency benefits, distrust of utility/government agencies, economic insecurity, limited time, and more. Efforts that demonstrate a high level of community engagement, supported by strong planning and outreach, can overcome these challenges. This section will provide recommendations to help get your team started.

## DESIGNATE A CEET MANAGER

It is important to have a person(s) responsible for overseeing the day to day affairs of your team and to manage the overall CEET effort. Your CEET manager is both a figurative head coach and cheerleader-in-chief. The CEET manager should be passionate and enthusiastic about your team’s mission and goals. Key responsibilities often include:

- Coordinating regular team meetings
- Serving as the point of contact for general inquiries
- Tracking CEET progress and providing updates to key stakeholders
- Event planning and coordination
- Budget management
- Volunteer recruitment and engagement

While this can be a dedicated volunteer, supporting it with a salary will help recruit and retain the position. Potential financial support for this position include:

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- **Grants:** State agencies and private/public foundations may offer grants.
- **Agencies with overlapping missions:** Some communities may already have local organizations or government agencies that work to enhance community energy efficiency adoption or broader sustainability or economic development goals. These organizations may agree to reallocate a portion or all an employee's time to help coordinate the CEET effort.
- **Federal Paid Volunteers:** Federal programs like AmericaCorps and VistaCorps place highly qualified, long-term volunteers in communities to perform public service.

## BUILDING A TEAM

Ideally, your team would be comprised of a series of paid professionals with the experience and specialized expertise to help achieve your community's energy efficiency goals. But few communities have the necessary financial resources to field this model. Instead, most rely significantly on a mix of committed pool of volunteers and paid staff. **Table 1** identifies suggested team members and responsibilities to help with a broad community effort.

Position	Key Responsibilities
Energy Efficiency Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works with contractors and distributors to implement cost effective efficiency energy projects</li> <li>• Technical expertise for energy efficiency programs</li> </ul>
Media/Marketing Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plans and organizes community based outreach activities</li> <li>• Develops communication channels and marketing materials</li> </ul>
Community Organization Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connects human service organizations with energy efficiency programs</li> </ul>
Funding Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works with regional economic development organizations to identify financial opportunities</li> <li>• Assists with grant proposals and other funding requests</li> </ul>
Utility Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinates with utility to increase participation in utility energy efficiency programs</li> </ul>
Government Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds connection between municipal and county government leaders</li> <li>• Works closely with fundraising coordinator to generate government and regional financial support</li> <li>• Engages with government leaders on energy issues</li> </ul>

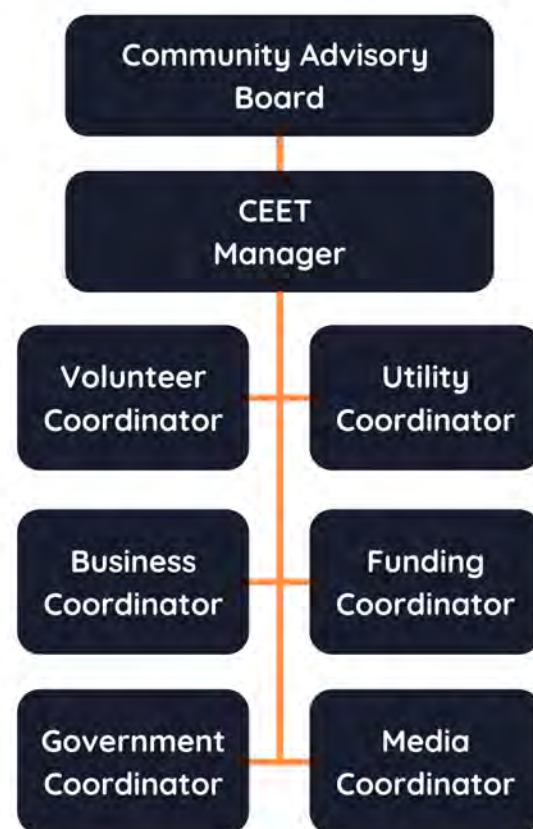
**Table 1:** CEET Position Descriptions

# CREATING A COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

Establishing a Community Advisory Board will help your team build stronger connections with local stakeholders and infuse your efforts with additional expertise and resources. As the name implies, the board provides guidance and feedback to your team's efforts, particularly on how you can accomplish key objectives. Board members can also help recruit additional volunteers (particularly from the businesses or organizations they represent), identify funding resources, and help your team create strategic partnerships with other organizations. They also serve as key CEET representatives and advocates, giving your team credibility with other community organizations and leaders.

The board typically consists of volunteer members with specialized knowledge of important topics (e.g. energy efficiency, economic development, etc.) or represent key segments of the community (e.g. schools, local government, religious organizations, etc.). Service on the board is normally voluntary.

When recruiting board members, be sure to have a clear idea of how much of their time you need (e.g. one meeting a month) and be prepared to explain how their expertise and resources will be used.



*CEET Organization Structure*

## SHOULD YOUR CEET FORM A 501(C)(3)?

Many successful community initiatives are led by informal, voluntary efforts. However, your team may find that it is necessary to create a legal entity for your efforts (e.g. like a 501(c)(3) nonprofit) or establish a strategic partnership with another organization to gain administrative and legal resources to operate effectively. Creating a legal entity like a 501(c)(3) does take time and effort, but the advantages include:

- Acceptance of public and private grants
- Tax exemption from federal, state and local income taxes
- Tax-deductible donations from third parties
- Limited personal liability for founders, directors, members, and employees

For CEETs that do not wish to create a new nonprofit, you can create partnerships with other community organizations who are willing to allocate some of their resources to help with these issues.

# DEVELOPING A PLAN

Once your team is assembled, the next step is to identify programs and projects based on your community's goals, needs, and resources. Going through a strategic planning process will help your team and community identify these items while creating relationships with pivotal stakeholders. There are already several good resources and examples to help your team create a plan:

- A Guide to Energy Efficiency Planning for Rural Michigan Communities
- [U.S. Department of Energy Guide to Community Energy Strategic Planning](#)
- [Rocky Mountain Institute Community Energy Resource Guide](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy in Low-Income Communities: A Guide to EPA Programs](#)
- [Energy Efficiency in Local Government Operations: A Guide to Developing and Implementing Greenhouse Gas Reduction Programs](#)
- [International Energy Agency Energy Efficient Communities: Case Studies and Strategic Guidance for Urban Decision Makers](#)



# TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Your team's capacity to reach and partner with different community groups and networks is what makes the CEET-process so effective. **Community engagement** is a collaborative process between your CEET and the different segments of your community (e.g. residents, businesses, local governments, etc.) which result in an exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. There are many different reasons why your CEET would participate in community engagement activities, but the most common reasons are:

- **Knowledge-Building:** Seeking answers, information, and input from target groups to help CEETs accomplish goals and objectives.
- **Awareness:** Enhancing different groups awareness of energy efficiency benefits, opportunities to participate in programs, or increasing community members capacity to implement energy efficiency projects.
- **Recruitment:** Requesting resources (e.g. volunteers, donations, support, etc.) and participation from target groups.
- **Decision-Making:** Engaging target members in activities that help establish CEET goals, objectives, milestone, etc.
- **Celebration and Community Building:** Gathering groups together to celebrate community successes and build social connections to help enhance the community's capacity to achieve goals and objectives.



# TOOLBOX FOR ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

There are virtually unlimited options for engaging community members. However, it is important for CEETs to recognize that community engagement does not have a one-size fit all approach. Depending on your CEET's specific community engagement objectives, some strategies and activities will make more sense than others. Below you will find a description of some helpful engagement tools that your team can use.

## COMMUNITY MEETINGS AND FORUMS

Community meetings and forums are gatherings generally open to the public. These meeting formats can vary but they are often used to:

- Share information about your CEETs goals, activities, and opportunities to volunteer
- Provide information on energy efficiency benefits and programs
- Gather feedback and ideas from attendees on goals, strategies, and community needs
- Celebrate CEET milestones and accomplishments

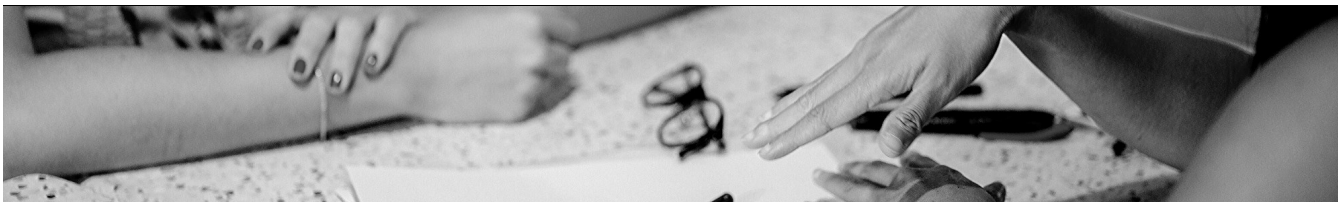
These events can be held in local venues like local schools, community spaces, theaters, and even large restaurants. It is important that the meeting is adequately advertised through a variety of channels such as the local newspaper, municipal website and social media accounts, radio, and mailing efforts.

## VISIONING EXERCISES

Visioning exercises are used to help craft a shared concept of where your CEET or community wants to be in the future. Visioning exercises are often used when developing a community or strategic plan to help build consensus on “the end goal” to develop strategies and actions to get there.

## FOCUS GROUPS

Using a focus group is a strategy to help CEETs gather in-depth information on a question, project, or program. A focus group brings a small group of individuals together to participate in a guided discussion about a specific topic. A facilitator asks the group pre-determined questions and encourages the individuals to provide responses and engage in discussion



while documenting this information. For example, your team may want to know how to best increase energy efficiency adoption by small businesses. By using a focus group, you can gather several small business owners (or representatives) to provide feedback on how to get other businesses to participate.

## **SURVEYS**

A survey (also referred to as a questionnaire) is used to collect standardized information from a specific audience (e.g. general public, businesses, renters, etc.). Surveys can help CEETs efficiently collect information about a target population from a relatively small sample of survey responses. Participating in surveys can be more convenient than other forms of community input like forums or focus groups. Surveys can be distributed through a variety of methods (e.g. online, mail, in-person, etc.). Implementing and analyzing a survey may be a challenge for some communities; however, partnerships with local universities, regional planning agencies, and community groups can help with survey design, distribution, and analysis.

## **SITE TOURS**

A site tour of homes and/or businesses that have adopted energy efficiency measures is a great way for CEETs to both learn about and educate others on energy efficiency best practices. These tours can be led by the property owners or an energy professional to provide local examples and testimonials of energy efficiency investments. It also provides tour participants an opportunity to ask the property owner questions about challenges and benefits they have experienced.

## **STREET STALLS**

Street stalls consist of outdoor displays such as idea or graffiti walls which can be used to capture the views and comments of large numbers of people. CEETs can use these to anonymously generate ideas for programs or collect information on barriers to energy efficiency initiatives. Maps and plans for an area or project can be displayed and pedestrians are asked to comment on issues and themes, generate ideas or vote for particular activities or facilities.



## **WEB-BASED ENGAGEMENT**

There are a diverse array of online engagement processes and tools to choose from such as internet discussion forums and blogs, social media channels (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, etc.), online surveys, ratings and voting, and more. Some benefits of online engagement efforts include:

- People get to choose where, when and for how long they want to participate.
- Costs to reach a large audience can be very low.
- Participants who normally cannot make a fixed meeting time can still participate.
- Encourages participation from those who dislike large group settings or speaking in public.



## TIPS FOR ENGAGING YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Local government operations consume a large amount of energy. Depending on the objectives of your CEET, working directly with your local government can yield substantial energy savings by:

- Tackling aging equipment and infrastructure in public facilities like waste treatment facilities, townhalls and public housing.
- Working with publicly controlled (municipal) electric utilities to influence decisions related to power generation, transmission, and distribution within your community and accessing utility rebates for energy efficiency projects.
- Influencing local zoning and building regulations which can affect how local energy is generated and much energy residents and businesses consume.
- Applying for state and federal grants and funding resources to support your CEET's work.

This section will provide a brief overview on some steps you can take to work with your local government to support energy efficiency initiatives.

## REVIEW EXISTING COMMUNITY PLANS

It is a good idea to review your community's planning documents like master plans, economic development strategies, sustainability plans, and capital improvement plans to better understand how your organization's objectives fit into existing municipal efforts. These documents will outline your community's goals, targets for development, areas for capital investment, and land use planning. Identifying where your CEET's goals overlap with those of your local government creates partnership opportunities for mutually beneficial strategic initiatives.



If you do not already know your local elected representative on the city, township, township, or county board, find out who it is. Invite them to your next CEET meeting or offer to meet with them to educate them on your efforts. Many elected leaders are eager to support their constituencies' efforts, but they need to understand the best way to provide that support. They can be critical allies with trying to engage the broader local government and give advice on programs or departments that can assist with your efforts.

## DESIGNATE A LOCAL GOVERNMENT COORDINATOR



Local governments are a key stakeholder in community energy efficiency initiatives. Not only are they responsible for policies that affect community energy consumption (e.g. building codes) and energy generation (e.g. zoning), but they are also massive energy users! Municipal operations, like waste management, use an incredible amount of energy. Working with your local government on both policy and energy usage reduction may be central CEET goals. It is a good idea to appoint a member of your team to build a strong relationship with your local government. Key responsibilities could include:

Updating government administrators and elected leaders on your CEET's goals and progress.

Suggesting energy efficient policies for municipal operations and policies.

Identifying resources (e.g. grants, programs, education materials) to support municipal investment in energy efficiency.

Reporting back to your CEET opportunities to further engage and work with the local government.



## GET ON THE AGENDA

Contact your local government and offer to provide a public presentation during a regularly scheduled meeting. Presentation formats and time allotments will vary, but be sure to provide information on:

- Motivating factors for your CEET's formation.
- A brief overview of the importance of energy efficiency to residents and businesses.
- Your goals and objects moving forward, and any progress made to date.
- Any services you can provide the municipality.
- If needed, requests for support and/or partnership from the local government and staff.

Offer to provide regular updates to your local government so that they stay up to date on your progress.

## ESTABLISH A TASK FORCE

Local governments are tasked with delivering numerous services and tackling a wide array of public issues; however, many communities lack the staffing and financial resources to focus specifically on energy efficiency. Your CEET can help address this gap by offering to form a task force specifically dedicated to identifying energy efficiency opportunities for municipal facilities or recommending policies and programs to support more community-wide initiatives. Task forces are often temporarily formed to address specific community issues. They can:

- Assist planning commissions in developing energy planning sections of municipal master plans
- Identify and pursue grants and other financial resources to support municipal energy efficiency projects
- Review existing building codes for opportunities to increase energy efficient building design in future building stock
- Work with utilities to access rebate programs and other services
- Host community forums and other public outreach to gather public input for community energy projects



## HOST A WORKSHOP

Most public officials do not have a technical background in energy management. Your CEET can support municipal energy goals (as well as budgetary goals) by hosting a workshop for public officials on the topic of energy efficiency for local governments. By partnering with local energy contractors and state agencies like Michigan EGLE's Energy Services, you can update local department heads and elected officials on best practices to reduce their energy utility bills.







# PARTNERING WITH UTILITIES

In most communities, heat and power are generated and distributed by utility companies. In Michigan, these utilities are required to offer energy efficiency programs for their customers. CEETs can work with their utilities to help residents and businesses gain access to these programs through effective CBO strategies. In return, utilities can achieve greater program participation and energy savings, improve customer satisfaction, and gain new community supporters.

## TYPES OF PROGRAMS SUPPORTED BY COMMUNITY—UTILITY PARTNERSHIPS

The specific utility programs available to residents and businesses will vary from community to community; however, they often fall into one of the following four broad categories:

Education and Outreach	Financial Assistance	Technical Assistance	Workforce Development
 <p>Programs designed to increase customer awareness of the benefits and opportunities of energy efficiency (e.g. education materials)</p>	 <p>Programs which offer financial incentives like rebates and on-bill financing for energy efficiency projects</p>	 <p>In-depth assistance by utility staff to support energy efficiency projects (e.g. home energy audits)</p>	 <p>Programs and certifications that gives contractors an opportunity to gain relevant skills to perform energy efficiency projects</p>



## HOST A WORKSHOP

Despite utility marketing efforts, many customers are often unaware of utility energy efficiency programs or they may not understand specific eligibility requirements. CEETs can play a vital role in connecting residents and businesses with these utility programs. Here are some ideas of how your CEET can work with utilities to maximize the benefits of their programs:

### **Education & Outreach:**

- Host public events (e.g. energy days) to educate public about energy efficiency
- Set up “energy booths” a local community spaces (e.g. grocery stores)
- Conduct peer-to-peer outreach (e.g. door-to-door campaigns)
- Participate in radio or television interviews to share program information
- Share utility education materials through CEET marketing channels (e.g. websites, social media, newsletters, etc.)
- Partner with local schools to offer energy efficiency demonstrations and curriculum

### **Financial Assistance:**

- Share information on financial programs though CEET marketing channels
- Help identify and recruit eligible customers for specific programs (e.g. low-to-moderate income initiatives)
- Identify and recommend financing solutions (e.g. loans, on-bill financing) for community projects
- Partner to identify sources of external funding (e.g. grants, donations) to bridge funding gaps

### **Technical Assistance:**

- Promote utility technical assistance programs through CEET marketing channels.

### **Workforce Development:**

- Coordinate contractor training and certification programs
- Encourage school-utility partnerships to develop career technical education (CTE) initiatives

# TIPS FOR PARTNERING WITH UTILITIES

If your CEET does not already have a good partnership with your local utilities, here are some recommendations to help build a collaborative relationship:

- **Establish a Point of Contact:** Call the local utility and determine the best point of contact for their utility energy efficiency programs. While all Michigan utilities are required to offer these programs, some design and execute them “in-house” while others contract with third-party organizations. Once you identify the point-person, set up an introductory meeting to discuss your CEETs goals and review available programs.
- **Invite Your Utility to Become Part of the Team:** Invite the utility to appoint a staff member to become part of your CEET and participate in regular meetings, strategy sessions, and other activities. This is a great opportunity for the utility to demonstrate its commitment to community energy efficiency. Plus, having a representative on board will help your CEET understand other ways you can partner with utility and get information on future utility programs.
- **Get Familiar with Utility Structures:** In Michigan, utilities generally take one of the following forms: investor-owned/operated (private), municipally (government) owned/operated, or rural co-operative (co-op). These differences in owner-operation structures can influence how and who your CEET connects with. For example, if your community is serviced by a municipal utility, that means your local government oversees the utility. Rural co-ops are governed by a customer elected board. Privately utilities have a fiduciary responsibility to their shareholders which often reside outside the community.

## DESIGNATE A UTILITY COORDINATOR



Having a member of your team designated as the Utility Coordinator will help improve communication between this important stakeholder and your CEET. Ideally, this volunteer would already be a utility employee or have a good working relationship with the utility. Key functions of the position include:

Updating utilities on your CEET's goals, programs, and progress.


Learning about and promoting utility energy efficiency programs useful to residents, businesses, and community organizations.

Working with utilities to secure energy use data for projects like community energy plans.

Identifying technical assistance and partnerships for the utility to assist with developing new energy efficiency programs.



## TIPS FOR ENGAGING YOUR BUSINESS COMMUNITY



Businesses are both energy consumers and potential partners for energy efficiency programs to support residents, community organizations and local governments. Most businesses already recognize the value of reducing their own energy footprint and many are very interested in demonstrating to their customers that they take environmental sustainability seriously. Your team can help businesses make progress toward these goals; however, businesses can be challenging to engage. Businesses are often busy and short staffed, so your first contacts may not lead to immediate results. But with a little persistence, your CEET will develop valuable partnerships and make inroads with the business community. Here are some tips that will help your team connect with businesses.

## FIND THE RIGHT PERSON

It's not always intuitive who the "right" employee is to discuss a business' energy efficiency efforts. Often, if you offer to share information about energy saving strategies, you will be referred to the business' accounts payable department. So, before cold calling a lot of businesses, it is a good idea to try and get the word out about your CEET's business programs by mail, radio or the newspaper first. A direct mailer with some information about ways your CEET can help businesses save money and energy is a good first step. You may have better success by partnering with a trusted economic development organization like the Chamber of Commerce, utility, or local unit of government. Hosting joint programs or sharing information through these organizations' communications (e.g. newsletters) can help get your information past spam and junk mail filters.



## DEMONSTRATE SUCCESS

Many businesses are naturally skeptical of offers for free, no strings attached assistance. They are contacted daily with promises of cost savings solutions which often turn out to be sales pitches. But the local business community is also very close-knit, and it is surprising how much they communicate with their colleagues and competitors. Once you help a business make tangible progress toward reducing energy use, get their permission to share the story with others. These stories give your team credibility with other businesses and increases the likelihood that they will want to work with you.

## WORK WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

As discussed above, local economic development groups can help your team communicate and share information with the business community. Groups like the Chamber of Commerce often make business education a cornerstone of their programming and your CEET can provide valuable content on energy efficiency for their newsletters, websites, and mailers. Consider co-hosting a special energy education event with the Chamber, Convention & Visitors Bureaus, downtown development authorities (or similar organizations). These organizations can also provide insight into which businesses would be most interested in your programs and connect you with the appropriate person.

## IDENTIFY SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Many utilities and state agencies offer business-specific programs to help reduce energy use. But not all businesses are well-versed in identifying and pursuing these programs. CEETs can provide valuable support to businesses by inventorying and sharing these programs. In some cases, CEETs can even help with applying for grants or interpreting eligibility requirements.

# PROMOTE ENERGY CHAMPIONS

Celebrating businesses that implement energy efficiency best practices through your team's communication and marketing channels is a great source of advertising. Many sustainability groups have developed "certification" programs that highlight businesses who meet environmental standards. These programs help encourage customers to shop at these businesses as a reward for adopting these green practices. Your CEET can develop similar programs to encourage energy efficiency adoption and reward businesses with "free" advertising.

# PARTNER WITH RETAILERS AND ENERGY SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

Chances are, there are businesses in your community that sell products or services related to energy efficiency. These are natural partners for your CEET as your team's efforts will drive customers to these businesses and help make them money. It is a good idea to meet with these businesses and coordinate special events (e.g. free LED light-bulb giveaways or free-in-home energy audits) as a way to increase community enthusiasm and energy efficiency investment.

## DESIGNATE A BUSINESS COORDINATOR



Your CEET should designate a member of your team as a Business Coordinator to spearhead business-specific programs and communications. Key functions of the position include:

Meeting with businesses to explain CEET programs and understand their energy efficiency needs.

Working with local economic development organizations like Chambers of Commerce to promote energy efficiency programs and resources.

Identifying partnerships with local retailers and energy professionals to support CEET programs for residential, business and community organization stakeholders.

Developing marketing materials targeting businesses.

Identifying technical assistance and funding resources for business energy efficiency investments.



## TIPS FOR ENGAGING THE MEDIA



Your community's local media is an asset to recruit volunteers, promote public events, attract funding, and communicate your CEET's progress with the broader community. However, many community organizations find it challenging to garner coverage from local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations. This section provides recommendations that will increase media exposure for your efforts.

## CEET MEDIA COORDINATOR

Designate a member of your team as the official "CEET Media Coordinator." Having a single point of contact will help media members know who to work with if they are looking for a news story about local energy efficiency efforts. Ideally, this volunteer will have a connection to local news stations, although this is not necessary. Be sure to post your Media Coordinator's contact information on your organization's website so that they are easily identified if media members need information for an upcoming story.

### SAMPLE CEET MEDIA COORDINATOR RESPONSIBILITIES



Your media coordinator plays a critical role in engaging and informing the local media about your CEET's goals and efforts. This volunteer position can:

Identify and establish working relationships with members of local media

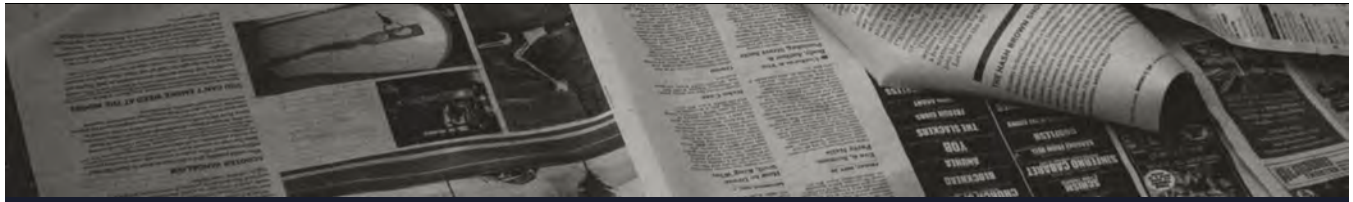
Submit CEET press releases and story pitches to local media contacts

Respond to media inquiries for CEET information

Serve as official spokesperson for CEET public relations

Invite local media to public events

Post public events information to community calendars



## IDENTIFY LOCAL MEDIA OUTLETS

You might be surprised by the quantity of media outlets covering your community. Take an inventory of your local media networks and gather contact information for when it comes time to send out press releases about a major accomplishment or upcoming event. Keep in mind that local news stations are flooded with requests for coverage, so it is important to reach out directly to the station and ask who the proper contact is for stories on community special events, community development initiatives, and local interest pieces.

Do not forget to include non-traditional media like well-followed community blogs, podcasts, social media channels, etc. Many of these community-focused outlets have dedicated audiences, particularly among younger groups, and they can be effective advocates for your CEET.

## MAKE IT EASY FOR THE MEDIA

Local media outlets are constantly seeking content for their next story, but they are often juggling several assignments and under pressing deadlines. Make it easy for them to cover you by:

- **Creating Publish-Ready Press Releases:** A press release (also called a news release, media release, or press statement) is an official statement delivered to members of the news media for the purpose of providing information, an official statement, or making an announcement in hopes of generating news coverage. Press releases cover the five “W’s” of a news story (Who, What, When, Where and Why). There is no definitive template for a press release, but they usually contain specific details about newsworthy event and contact information if a news outlet chooses to cover the story. You can also choose to provide photos, videos, and quotes in the press release to make it easier for reporters to publish the story.
- **Creating Media Kits:** A media kit is a pre-packaged set of promotional materials that provides information about your CEET, its goals, activities, and personnel. Kits can include imagery, videos and written content developed specifically for use by the media



to cover your CEET. This information, which should be easily accessible through a Media Resources section of your website. You can also provide print versions for distribution at public events.

- **Getting to Know Your Media Contacts:** Most members of the media know what their audiences are interested in. Become familiar with the types of content each outlet is seeking and then submit story pitches tailored to their needs. Doing so helps to build a good relationship with reporters because it shows you have taken the time to do your homework.

## WHAT'S MEDIA WORTHY

Establishing a working relationship between your CEET and local media will generate a lot of newsworthy content. But not every press release or story pitch will generate coverage. Here are a few examples of events that will pique their attention:

- Announcement of your CEET formation
- Kick-off events for residential weatherization blitzes
- Announcement of large donations or funding awards
- Community updates/reports about CEET progress
- Announcement of energy efficiency programs like lightbulb giveaways, appliance giveaways or rebates
- Seasonal-relevant consumer tips (e.g. Winter “how to save money on utility bills” tips)
- Human-interest stories (e.g. profile on specific residents whose homes were recently weatherized)



## FINANCIAL TOOLS FOR CEETS



There are several financial tools available to your team to help support energy efficiency programs and projects. Many projects can be completed through donations and volunteer efforts, but larger projects often require access to financial capital. This section provides brief descriptions on some unique tools your team can leverage to make those projects happen.

## UTILITY REBATE PROGRAMS

Utilities often offer rebate programs for energy efficiency investments. Under a traditional rebate program, local governments are reimbursed for a pre-determined portion of an energy conservation project after the project is installed. In Michigan, utilities are required to enact energy optimization programs for their customers, and local units of governments can participate. **Efficiency United** is program that many Michigan utilities participate in to meet this requirement and offers a suite of rebate opportunities throughout the year. For an up-to-date list of rebates, visit their website at [efficiencyunited.com](http://efficiencyunited.com). If your utility is not part of the Efficiency United program, contact your utility company directly to identify any offerings.

## GRANTS

State and federal agencies often offer grants and special loan packages to help communities finance energy efficiency projects. Grants are financial awards that do not have to be repaid. Most grants have a competitive application process, and it is important that your team closely review the grant's requirements to make sure your project or program meets the specified criteria.

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Because energy efficiency is important to residents, businesses, nonprofits, and local governments, several different state and federal agencies often offer financial assistance. Private and public foundations are also a good source.

**While the programs offered by state and federal agencies change from year to year, here are a few that your team can explore.**

#### **State of Michigan Resources**

- [Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, & Energy](#)
  - [Community Energy Management Incentive Program](#)
- [Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development](#)
- [Michigan Rural Development Fund Grants](#)
- [Michigan Department of Natural Resources](#)
- [Michigan Economic Development Corporation Community Development Programs](#)
- [Michigan Department of Transportation](#)

#### **Federal Resources**

- [U.S. Department of Energy](#)
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development**
  - [Energy Efficiency & Conservation Loan Program](#)
  - [Electric Infrastructure Loan & Loan Guarantee Program](#)
  - [Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Program](#)
  - [Strategic Economic & Community Development Program](#)
  - [Rural Community Development Initiative Grant](#)
  - [Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program](#)
  - [Multi-Family Housing Direct Loans](#)
  - [Multi-Family Housing Loan Guarantees](#)



# ON-BILL FINANCING

On-bill financing is an umbrella term for a financing program where a charge is added to a utility customer's energy bill to repay a loan from a utility for energy efficiency upgrades. The utility acts as the lender and incurs the upfront costs of the improvements. After the project is installed, the loan is repaid through a small fee (usually around the value of the energy saved) added to the customer's utility bill. Repayment terms can vary, and interest may be added to the total cost of the project.

## ON-BILL FINANCING PROCESS



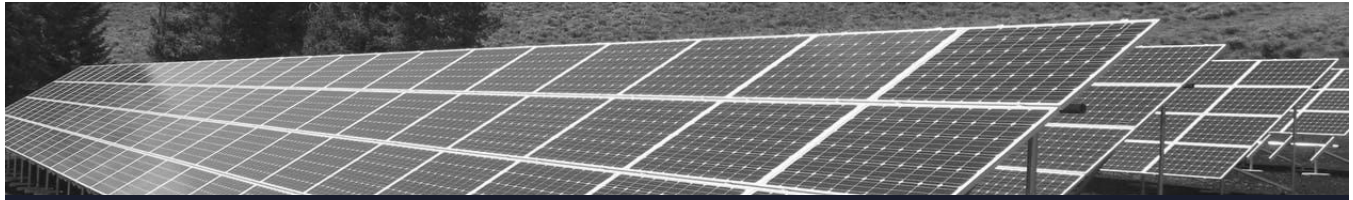
UTILITY CUSTOMER  
GETS LOW INTEREST  
LOAN FROM BANK TO  
PAY FOR PROJECT.



CUSTOMER MAKES  
IMPROVEMENTS  
THAT SAVE MONEY  
ON ENERGY BILL.

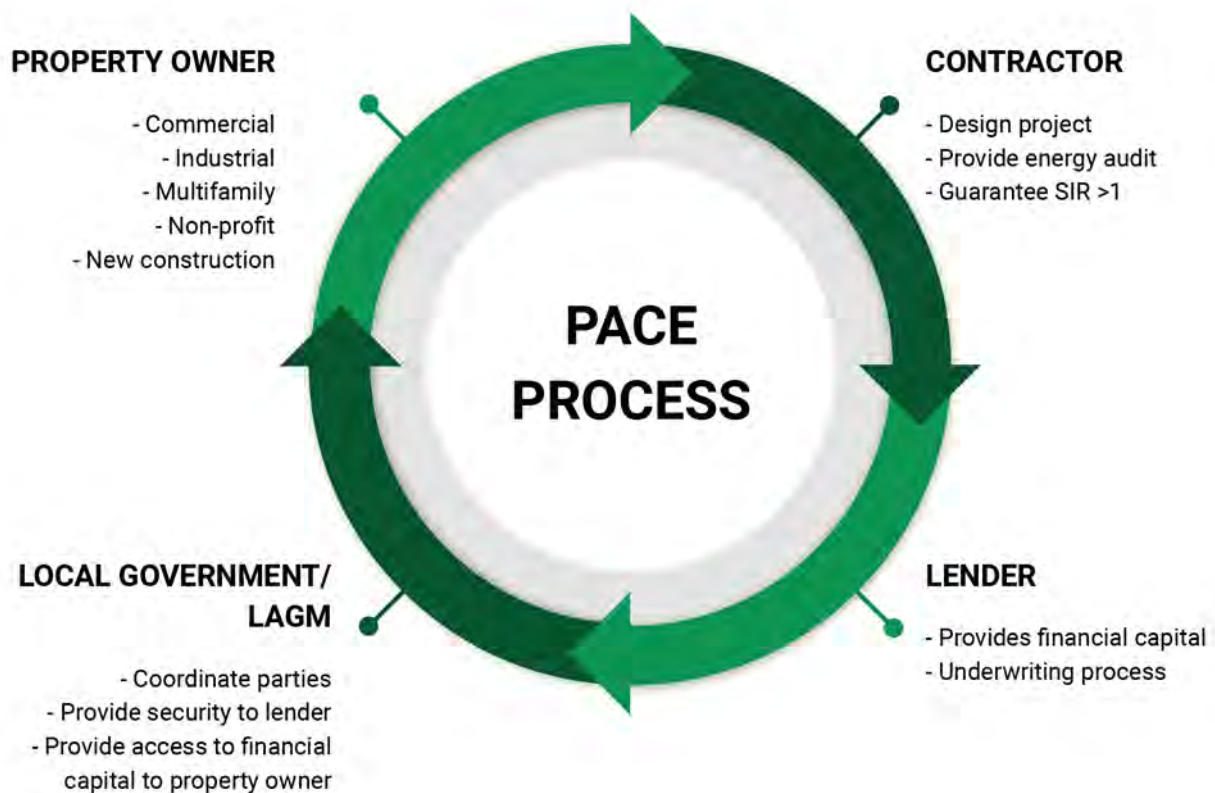


CUSTOMER USES  
ENERGY SAVINGS BILL  
CREDITS TO PAY BACK  
PROJECT COSTS.



## PROPERTY ASSESSED CLEAN ENERGY (PACE)

Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing enables property owners to finance efficiency upgrades through private lenders. The loan is then repaid through a special assessment on the property's tax bill using the energy savings from the project. In Michigan, PACE financing can be used for commercial, industrial, nonprofit, new construction, and multi-family housing projects. Because the loan repayment comes from a special assessment on the property, the local unit of government where the project is located must establish a PACE "district" first. For more details on PACE in Michigan and how to set up a PACE district in your community visit [www.leanandgreenmi.com](http://www.leanandgreenmi.com).



**Source:** Lean & Green Michigan



## ENERGY PERFORMANCE CONTRACTING (EPC)

Under an Energy Performance Contract (EPC), an energy service company (ESCO) coordinates installation and maintenance of efficiency equipment in a customer's facilities and is paid from the associated energy savings. The ESCO typically provides a savings guarantee. The improvements are usually owned by the customer and may be installed with little or no upfront cost if the EPC is financed. These types of contracts are well suited for large commercial and industrial projects, but smaller-scale projects have also used this form of financing.

## LEASE AGREEMENTS

In Michigan, tax-exempt lease purchase (TELP) agreements allow *local governments* to enter a multi-year energy installation contract with an ESCO. This tool is a great advantage for CEETs working with local governments. What makes them attractive for local governments is the fact that they are not considered debt and payment can be stopped if the local governments do not have the necessary funding or the project does not achieve the promised results. Upon completion of the agreement's payment terms, the local government usually assumes ownership of the equipment. Unlike bonding initiatives, no referendum vote is required.

## IN-KIND SERVICES

While not explicitly a "financial" tool, in-kind services provided by local businesses and volunteers are likely one of the most valuable aids available. In-kind services are services performed by a third party at no charge to the property owner. For example, if your team enacts a home weatherization program, you may be able to recruit volunteers to supply much of the labor greatly reducing the expense of the project. It is important to track the amount and value of these services as some businesses can use this to reduce their tax liability. In-kind services can also be used as "cost-share" or matching dollars required by some grants.



## KEEPING YOUR TEAM ENERGIZED



Once you have your team organized and making progress, it is important to take steps to keep them engaged. It is not uncommon for community efforts to cycle through periods of 1) high enthusiasm and growth (especially at the start-up phase), 2) stability and maintenance, and eventually 3) decline or reinvention. Consider taking some of the following recommendations to avoid team member burnout and keep your CEET moving forward.

### ROTATE LEADERSHIP



Many CEETs are volunteer driven thanks to a local community champion(s) with a strong passion for sustainability and energy efficiency. But even the most ardent volunteer can burn out. Rotating leadership positions can help balance the time and responsibilities of key positions to avoid volunteer fatigue and help introduce new ideas and different perspectives to your CEET. Plus, it is a great way to cultivate new community leaders!

### FORM SUB-COMMITTEES



Sub-committees help to re-distribute work to small groups within your CEET based on special projects, interests, and skill sets. It helps to reduce the length of general CEET meetings because specialized topics can be discussed in more detail during sub-committee meetings.

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## SET GROUND RULES



It is important to create some mutually agreed upon ground rules for group and peer-to-peer interactions. Yes, it may seem a little elementary. However, creating a list of dos (treating everyone with respect) and don'ts (interrupting others while they are speaking) will help to reduce conflicts which can drive away great team members. As interpersonal and inter-group challenges come up, be sure to update your ground rules.

## CELEBRATE SUCCESSSES



Taking the time to celebrate successes (both large and small) will help to invigorate your team members and remind them of the valuable work their time and dedication is helping to achieve. This can be done through social gatherings, award ceremonies, or simple thank you cards.

## LEARNING EXPERIENCES



Embrace team challenges as learning experience. As your CEET moves forward, you are bound to run into some roadblocks. It is easy to get disheartened when things do not go as planned but remind your team that this is a learning opportunity and a chance to grow.

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## HOST DREAMING SESSIONS



Have your team take a break from the daily grind and spend some time dreaming about what you are working to achieve. Think big and bold. Talk about what your CEET can accomplish, even if it is a little outlandish. This helps team members connect with some of their motivations for joining in the first place. Plus, you might just come up with some amazing ideas!

## MAINTAIN GOOD COMMUNICATION



Communication tools like newsletters, social media groups, and peer-to-peer meetings (like a quick cup of coffee) help volunteers stay aware of your CEET's activities and opportunities to pitch in. Not everyone is able to attend regularly scheduled meetings or perhaps they need to take some time away from the team. These communication tools will help to keep them connected to your work so they can jump back in when the time is right.

## DON'T WASTE THEIR TIME



The best way to lose a volunteer is to waste their time. Make team meetings productive and only if necessary. Setting and adhering to time limits can help along with meeting agendas. For special activities (e.g. residential weatherization work), do not over recruit volunteers. If you do, you may have some volunteers standing around with nothing to do after they sacrificed valuable free time to contribute to your cause.