

Timely Industry Research to Make Your Program Better, Faster

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ABSTRACT

Program administrators seek to reach more customers, achieve deeper savings, and run their programs more effectively, but frequently they receive valuable evaluation data long after they can best utilize this information. Taking a page from the business world, program administrators need quality data in real-time on industry trends and innovative solutions in the program marketplace to identify strategies for their programs to improve and grow.

This paper will describe how research completed in a few months, rather than over a longer period, was performed to inform the continued evolution of the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)'s multifamily energy efficiency programs. The research focused on market trends and best practices through analysis of the program design, implementation, and performance of fifty programs serving the multifamily building market.

For NYSEDA, TRC used publicly available resources to categorize the programs by key metrics such as delivery method, incentive structures, and customer types, and this categorization revealed the prevalence of various approaches. The research also highlighted market trends, strategies, and innovative features other programs are adopting. Interviews with program administrators provided valuable insight into typical roadblocks and ways programs are grappling with common challenges. This up-to-date industry research allowed NYSEDA to better understand other programs in the market, how their program stacks up, and what innovations they should consider. Applying this strategy during the course of a program can arm program administrators with the information needed to build and continuously improve energy efficiency programs that will have sustained, long-term impact.

Introduction

Administrators of energy efficiency incentive programs continuously seek to reach more customers, achieve deeper savings, and run their programs more effectively. However, the traditional cycle of program design, implementation, and evaluation often results in program administrators receiving valuable evaluation feedback after program completion and after the next program cycle has been put in place. Program administrators can break from this delayed feedback loop by adopting certain "business world" strategies. The business community recognizes the importance of on-going industry research to understand their product's place in the market. Accordingly, a business strategy applied to program management uses on-going feedback and research during a program's implementation to influence timely improvements. Both business managers and program administrators can use industry data as an essential tool in making on-going corrections and planning for updates to their product or program.

The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) used this tactic of gathering real-time industry research to support strategic planning for the future evolution of multifamily programs at NYSEDA. NYSEDA tasked TRC, the implementation support contractor for the program, to conduct research into the multifamily program industry to better understand NYSEDA's peer programs, what these peer programs are doing, and how

NYSERDA's program compares. The following sections include a discussion of the process, findings from the industry research, and conclusions related to the benefits and challenges associated with this effort. By understanding the potential and the limitations of this type of process, program administrators can effectively apply a similar strategy to improve their own programs.

Considering NYSERDA's programs that serve the multifamily sector to be the "product" to be analyzed and improved, NYSERDA and TRC structured the industry research project to correlate with a standard business product improvement process. This consisted of researching and analyzing three primary questions, which TRC addressed within individual phases of the research project.

1. *How the product compares to similar products in the marketplace:* There are a variety of multifamily program designs with varying features and characteristics in use across the country. TRC researched and cataloged attributes of multifamily programs run by fifty program administrators to highlight the composition of the industry.
2. *How the product works in the marketplace:* To better understand common challenges, trends, and the key issues facing multifamily programs, TRC conducted interviews with a sample of multifamily program administrators.
3. *How the product is priced:* In the case of energy efficiency programs, incentive levels and budgets correlate to product pricing. TRC compiled publicly reported data on budgets, expenditures, incentives, savings, and other performance metrics to illustrate general comparisons between programs for internal use related to program planning.

Several aspects of this approach differentiated the effort from program evaluations and analyses that NYSERDA had completed in the past. First, TRC, the implementation contractor, conducted the research as opposed to a separate consultant contracted specifically for a research task. TRC was intimately familiar with both the day-to-day operations of the program and the long-term program goals, which accelerated the start-up time for the project. Secondly, the research focused on trends and issues directly relevant to challenges and goals of NYSERDA's program, such as matching delivery methods with customer demand and coordinating efforts with other administrators in the region. Some evaluations tend to rely on third-party reports, such as those published by the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy (ACEEE). While those are valuable and served as a tool in TRC's research, they are designed to inform the industry as a whole. As such, they are inherently more general in nature. Lastly, a valuable portion of the research findings was information identifying and comparing peer programs to NYSERDA's multifamily programs. In such a rapidly changing and growing market, other comparisons to peer programs that had been done in past evaluations needed to be updated. Understanding programs that utilize a similar program delivery structure, programs that operate with budgets and targets of a similar scale, and programs with similar administrative structures provides a direct application to improving one's own program.

This industry research approach is not a replacement for a formal program evaluation, rather it was intended to complement these evaluation processes. By utilizing an accelerated, pragmatic process, this effort produced valuable comparisons and resources for program management within a short time period. It provided conclusions from the program implementation perspective, and it got the information to the decision makers in time to inform early plans for program improvement.

The Approach

NYSERDA’s Multifamily Performance Program, the flagship program in NYSERDA’s multifamily program portfolio, offers incentives for new and existing multifamily buildings in New York State to achieve comprehensive, whole building energy savings of at least 15%. The current version of the program was launched in 2012. By mid-2013, NYSERDA started planning for the next program cycle which will begin in 2016. TRC started providing program implementation support for the Multifamily Performance Program in 2007, and as part of implementation support, TRC has continually assisted NYSERDA with strategic planning for future efforts in the multifamily sector. As part of this strategic planning, NYSERDA identified the need to acquire a broad perspective of the current multifamily program marketplace and tasked TRC with conducting this research. The primary goals were 1) to identify how NYSERDA compared to its peers running other multifamily programs and 2) to gather quality data on trends and innovative solutions in the marketplace. The effort needed to be focused, efficient, and completed quickly to allow the results to be incorporated into a planning process that was already underway.

The first phase of research focused on comparing NYSERDA’s multifamily program portfolio to similar “products” - other multifamily programs across the United States. By reviewing secondary source references, including industry group reports and program websites, TRC compiled a list of fifty program administrators who offer energy efficiency incentive programs specifically designed to serve the multifamily market. To be included on the list, the program administrator needed to serve multifamily customers in a designated multifamily program in order to limit the study to multifamily-specific programs. Programs that served multifamily customers as part of either commercial or residential programs were not included.

For each program, TRC gathered data on program structure and a set of program characteristic metrics to the extent that the information was publicly available, as shown in Table 1. Program websites, marketing materials, articles, and published evaluation reports were useful sources for gathering this information, although not all metrics were readily available for each program. Throughout this process, TRC placed emphasis on larger, more sophisticated programs when prioritizing research efforts.

Table 1. Program characteristics metrics

Program administrator	Technical services provided
Program name	Use of trade ally networks
Affiliated organizations	Year program was launched
General program description	Incentive structure
Geographic area served	Required cost effectiveness tests
Fuels included in the program	Funding source
Building type served (Existing Buildings, New Construction)	Building characteristics (# of units, High-rise/Low-rise)
Program delivery type (Rebate, Direct Install, Whole Building)	Customers served (Affordable, Market Rate)
Financing associated with the program	

A separate component to characterize the marketplace included a high-level survey of energy efficiency initiatives in countries outside the United States. This research was qualitative rather than quantitative, and it focused on strategies that are less utilized in the U.S.

Once the initial phase was completed, TRC then set out to better understand the state of the multifamily program industry, or “how the product works,” to apply the business analogy. To do so, TRC spoke with program administrators and consultants representing multifamily energy efficiency programs in California, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon, and Washington. The sample group represented a variety in geography, program delivery method, age of the multifamily program, organizational structure, building types served, and other characteristics to reflect the program marketplace as a whole. The interviews covered program administrators’ first-person perspective on their programs, including program successes, innovative ideas, challenges, and recent or planned program changes. These conversations illuminated the strong similarities of issues, goals, and barriers that are shared by multifamily programs across the country. Additionally, the interviews included discussion of key topics relevant to NYSERDA’s program implementation, including marketing strategies, the use of trade ally networks, and relationships with key program partners to encourage participation.

The third research component related to product “pricing” - how much program administrators are paying to incentivize energy savings, how overall program budgets compare, and the savings each program aims to achieve. This performance information was less consistently obtainable than the program characteristic data. TRCs able to collect the data from program reports, evaluation studies, and third-party publications for approximately two-thirds of the fifty-program research group, and this sub-group was used for the pricing metrics analysis.

Once TRC completed the research, the final deliverables to NYSERDA consisted of a presentation of findings, a written report, transcript notes from the interviews with program administrators, and a program matrix spreadsheet that presented the program characteristics and program performance data. The program matrix was configured to allow for filtering, sorting, and other dynamic analysis of the large data set. These items will serve as a useful directory of references for additional research as the strategic planning progressed.

Key Findings

The research provided information about the composition of the multifamily program marketplace and illustrated some key industry trends. As designed, the effort led to a compilation of qualitative and quantitative information about peer programs that was relevant to NYSERDA’s program operations and planning for future updates. Although the research focused on issues relevant to NYSERDA’s multifamily programs, many findings applied to the broader multifamily program market as well. Since TRC was conducting the research for internal use and planning purposes only, not an academic paper or a report prepared for public records, TRC conducted the research and compiled documentation in a simplified manner. Due to this, conclusions drawn from numerical results highlighted big picture trends rather than exact figures, and the research was able to progress more quickly.

Comparing “Products” in the Multifamily Program Industry

To analyze how NYSERDA’s multifamily programs compared to other programs in the industry, TRC compiled and reviewed program characteristic data for fifty program administrators who offered programs specifically designed to serve the multifamily market. TRC

compiled these metrics for each program to the extent that the information was available on websites and in public reports. The findings allowed TRC to identify the general composition of the multifamily energy efficiency program market from several angles. Samples of the findings related to program characteristics across the industry are presented in Table 2 and Figures 1 - 4.

Table 2. Distribution of program delivery options in multifamily programs

Delivery Options Offered in Multifamily Programs	Distribution ¹
Direct Install ² and Rebates ³	28%
Direct Install, Rebates, and Whole Building ⁴	22%
Rebates only	16%
Whole Building only	14%
Direct Install only	6%
Other ⁵	6%
Rebates and Whole Building	6%
Direct Install and Whole Building	2%

¹ Sample size of 50 Program Administrators

² Direct Install: free or subsidized installation of low-cost measures such as CFLs and low flow fixtures

³ Rebates: funding provided for individual upgrades; generally prescriptive, but could also include individual custom measures

⁴ Whole Building: incentives provided for comprehensive upgrades with a minimum savings requirement and/or a mandate to upgrade substantially all systems in building

⁵ Other: alternate delivery method, such as financing-only, or paying incentives to contractors to implement energy efficiency projects

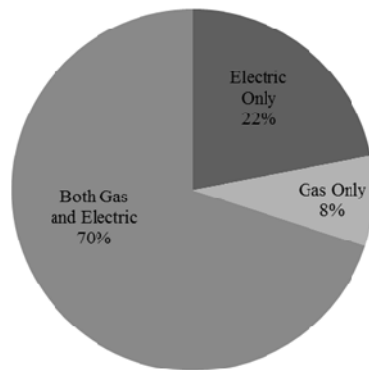


Figure 1. Distribution of fuel type served by 50 multifamily program administrators.

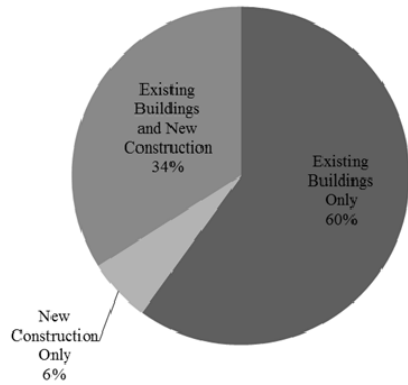


Figure 2. Distribution of building type served by 50 multifamily program administrators.

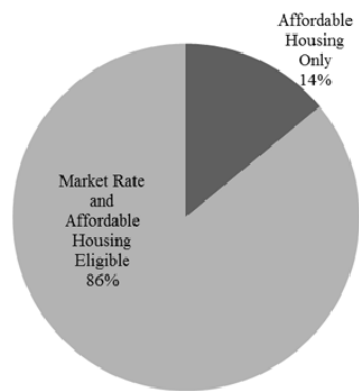


Figure 3. Distribution of market rate type served by 50 multifamily program administrators.

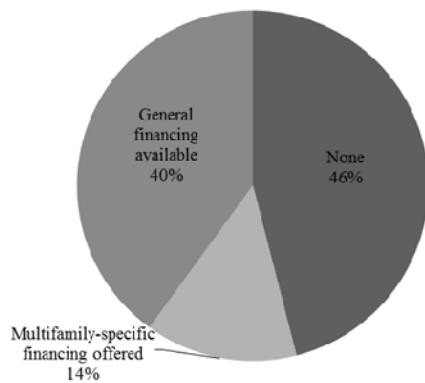


Figure 4. Distribution of available financing through 50 program administrators.

Overall, most program administrators offer multiple program options, provide incentives for both electric and gas measures, serve both affordable and market rate properties, and do not offer multifamily-specific project financing offerings. Program administrators with designated multifamily programs included in the analysis are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Multifamily programs administrators included in analysis

AEP Ohio	Maryland Department of Housing & Community Development
AEP Southwestern Electric Power Company	Mass Save
Alliant Energy	MidAmerican Energy
Ameren Illinois	National Grid – New York City and Long Island
Ameren Missouri	National Grid – Rhode Island
Arizona Public Service Company	National Grid – Upstate New York
Austin Energy	NH Saves
Bay Area Regional Energy Network	NJ Green Homes Office & New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency
Black Hills Energy (Iowa)	NYSERDA
CNT Energy (now Elevate Energy)	Oncor
Commonwealth Edison Company & Nicor Gas Company	PECO
Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund	Pennsylvania Housing Finance Authority
Consolidated Edison, Inc.	Pacific Gas and Electric Company
Consumers Energy	PPL Electric Utilities
District of Columbia Sustainable Energy Utility	Public Service Electric and Gas Company
DTE Energy Co.	Puget Sound Energy
Efficiency Maine Trust	Questar Gas
Efficiency Vermont	ResourceSmart
Energy Outreach Colorado	Rochester Gas and Electric & New York State Electric and Gas Corporation
Energy Trust of Oregon	Southern California Edison
Entergy Arkansas, Inc.	Southern California Gas Company
Focus on Energy	San Diego Gas & Electric
Georgia Power	Seattle City Light
Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity	Sacramento Municipal Utility District
Indianapolis Power & Light Company	Southern California Regional Energy Network

How Multifamily Programs Work in the Current Marketplace

The interviews with program administrators and research on program characteristics provided valuable insight into how energy efficiency programs in the multifamily market operate and how they are evolving.

Full-service programs. One of the primary trends noted is that program administrators throughout the industry are moving toward offering a full-service suite of programs. The market is demanding comprehensive offerings, and administrators are recognizing that their customer base grows when building owners looking for varying levels of upgrades have ways to participate. Across the country there are new programs serving the multifamily market, existing

programs are offering new options, and programs are giving incentives for more measures. Programs that previously only utilized a certain program delivery model, whether it was prescriptive, direct install, or a whole building approach, are trending toward offering an expanded program portfolio with a variety of participation options. Whole building programs are adapting to offer options with a lower barrier to entry. Programs that have historically focused on a direct install model need to overcome market saturation and diminishing savings returns, so they are adding prescriptive and/or whole building options to their portfolios. For example, Energy Trust of Oregon received 90% of their savings from direct install measures as recently as 2010. By mid-2013, they offered a more balanced portfolio for multifamily customers that included a number of prescriptive measure options and a whole building program serving affordable properties (S. Van Swearingen, Senior Project Manager, Energy Trust of Oregon, pers. comm., October 9, 2013). Additionally, many administrators are trying to coordinate multiple program offerings so customers have a single point of entry into various program options, rather than running program options independently. NYSERDA was evaluating offering a diverse set of programs to serve different types of multifamily customers as part of its strategic planning, so it was useful to review examples of how others implement that strategy.

Use of data. Another trend that the research illustrated was increased efforts to use various types of data to increase participation, focus marketing efforts, and improve reporting. Several administrators mentioned that they are working to improve their internal data tracking systems to better understand the buildings they have historically served to help their programs moving forward. Additionally, in regions where there is mandated energy disclosure or benchmarking regulations, administrators are working to find ways to leverage this wealth of data to benefit their programs. This benchmarking information can help program administrators identify potential customers who would most benefit from energy improvements, and if the process for the mandated energy disclosure is coordinated with program requirements, the entry point for customers to participate in the incentive program can be streamlined. For example, Austin Energy has coordinated their efficiency incentive program to align with the municipal Energy Conservation Audit and Disclosure ordinance so that the required energy audit can be used to determine a facility's eligibility for rebates and to direct the facility into the program (Johnson 2013). This trend is relevant in New York, as New York City was one of the first cities to enact local laws that require benchmarking and energy audits for large multifamily buildings. NYSERDA has collaborated with the city to assist with the implementation of those laws, and it was helpful to see how other program administrators were accessing benchmarking data, utilizing it to improve their programs, and leveraging the data to increase program participation.

Marketing. As marketing and driving customer participation is such a critical component to the success of a program, the interviews included questions to review the outreach goals and strategies for other programs. Although outreach budgets and tactics differed, program administrators consistently agreed that fundamental outreach principles include 1) targeting the correct audience with the correct message and 2) matching program offerings with customer demand. Also, as the owners of multifamily buildings are typically more involved in an energy efficiency upgrade project than the tenants, the administrators of several programs expressed the desire to increase tenant awareness and engagement in the process and project outcomes (S. Wymer, Program Manager, Consumers Energy, pers. comm., September 25, 2013). NYSERDA shares many of the challenges and goals for marketing that the other program administrators

identified, and this is a potential area where it would be beneficial for administrators to continue to share successful strategies.

Integrated programs. Although the administrative environment for energy efficiency programs differs across the country, and there are some exceptions, the research identified a general trend for increased cooperation and integration between utilities and other administrative entities. The nature of these relationships and the organizational structures varies. There are cases where independent utilities cooperate on independent programs to streamline the process for customers in overlapping service territories; utilities that collaborate on a shared program; state-wide entities that act as a single point of contact for multiple utilities running separate, but coordinated, programs; organizations that run independent programs on behalf of a group of utilities; and other variations. For example, Mass Save, the umbrella name for all program administrators in the state of Massachusetts, provides a single point of contact for multifamily customers to participate in coordinated programs run by several utilities. The Massachusetts program administrators have recognized that the consistent state-wide offering with a single-point of contact significantly improves customer service (B. Lonergan, Lead Analyst – Residential Strategy, National Grid, pers. comm., September 25, 2013). This trend of integration parallels the related movement by individual program administrators to integrate their various program offerings into a single entry point. Whether it is driven by regulatory order or recognition of mutual benefits, consolidation is occurring with the intent to simplify the market for the customer. There is a growing regulatory push in New York for increased collaboration between utilities and NYSERDA, so examples of regions where successful collaboration has occurred are useful case studies for what can happen in New York.

Mandated building energy labels, Net Zero Energy, and other international trends. By conducting high-level research into energy efficiency efforts outside the United States, TRC was able to identify several interesting approaches that offer potential but that are not yet widely used in the multifamily market in the United States. In the United Kingdom, all residential buildings, including multifamily properties, are required to have an energy audit to model and disclose the energy consumption of that building. In the European Union (EU), the European Council's Directive 2010/31/EU for the energy performance of buildings is a significant driver behind a number of progressive initiatives enacted in EU countries. The directive mandates member states to establish minimum requirements for energy efficiency in buildings, adopt standard calculation methodologies, put in place national plans for all new buildings to be nearly net-zero energy consumption buildings by 2020, and implement a system for the energy performance certification of buildings, among other targets. The details of the plans, requirements, and protocols are left up to the individual member states. Member nations, such as France and Germany, are implementing the components of this directive through tactics such as mandates, stringent minimum energy performance standards, certifications, required inspections of the efficiency performance of building equipment, and extensive zero or low-interest financing for energy efficiency upgrades. These initiatives establish a precedent for a number of the topics NYSERDA has been discussing as part of the strategic vision for the multifamily program portfolio, including building labeling, net zero energy standards, and achieving deeper savings. Further research can be conducted to identify specific implementation tactics for these initiatives as well as to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives to date.

Common program design and implementation challenges. One of the striking findings from the general research and from speaking with other program administrators was the extent to which common challenges were shared among those running energy efficiency programs that serve the multifamily market. Some of the most commonly identified challenges include:

- Addressing owners' focus on costs, particularly short term costs;
- Adapting to code and calculation changes that reduce savings that can be claimed;
- Managing split rate structures that occur when part of a multifamily building pays a commercial utility rate and part pays a residential rate, complicating the distribution of incentives funded through public benefit charges;
- Overcoming split incentives between building owners and building tenants;
- Managing trade allies who offer various degrees of expertise and quality of service;
- Serving condominiums; and
- Managing frequently changing program rules and short program cycles.

Additionally, as programs change, grow, include more options, and add more measures, it is a challenge to keep programs simple to understand and easy to participate for the customers. Many of these issues are faced by NYSERDA and have been identified through other analyses of the multifamily program market, so the concerns expressed by other administrators were quite familiar. Continuing discussions about these shared challenges offers opportunities for future collaboration as those across the industry identify and implement solutions.

How the “Product” is Priced

While collecting program characteristic data was relatively straightforward, obtaining and understanding the performance and financial metrics of programs, the equivalent to product pricing, was more challenging. Although one of the primary metrics sought through this research was the ratio of costs and/or incentives per unit of energy savings for other programs in the industry, the way program data is reported prevented TRC from drawing confident or exact numerical conclusions. Factors that made this metric so elusive are discussed in detail in the following section, “Challenges to the Research Process.”

Recognizing that exact figures were not obtainable for sophisticated data crunching, TRC utilized summary graphs to illustrate relative trends in budgets, expenditures, electricity savings, gas savings, and number of units served for the multifamily programs for which this information was available. These graphs identified programs with large budgets, programs with savings targets comparable to NYSERDA's, and interesting high-level correlations between program costs and savings. It was particularly useful to see comparisons between NYSERDA's multifamily programs' financial and performance data with other programs in the New York State market and in neighboring states. For example, NYSERDA's program targets as compared to allocated budget were relatively high compared to many peer programs. The general pricing information gathered from this research served as a useful point of reference for the planning process in relation to a review of incentive levels and budgets.

Challenges to the Research Process

As this short-term, business-style research process was new to the NYSERDA and TRC team, certain aspects of the research were more challenging than expected, specifically variations

in reporting timeframes and metrics. The factor of time complicated the collection of program information due to the rapid rate at which many programs change and the delays in the publications of reports and data. Programs are constantly reinvented to address budget changes and implement program updates, and recently published information may or may not reflect the current program in place at the time of the research. For example, many of the most recent evaluation reports that were available during TRC's research period covered the timeframe where program budgets were supplemented by significant amounts of federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding. That data does not correlate to program budgets and/or program structures that have been in place since the ARRA funding has expired.

Variations in data reported by different program administrators made it difficult to compare performance metrics between programs with confidence. In particular, savings totals and financial metrics, such as budgets and expenditures, were defined and tracked differently from program to program. In many cases, a report listed a program budget without specifying what that budget total included. That budget may have included incentives, implementation, administration, technical assistance, evaluation, and/or other program costs, in any combination. It would be useful for programs to identify what the budget numbers include – incentives, administrative, etc. – and which program, calendar, or fiscal year to which the numbers apply. Savings results were also often reported with insufficient background information to identify what was being reported: gross versus net savings, projected versus verified savings, or the calculation methodology used. More clarification regarding the source of the reported savings numbers would improve the quality of data analysis, future industry review, and inter-program collaboration. Also, reported data specifically related to a multifamily program may not be publicly available if an administrator includes multifamily budgets and/or savings in totals for either commercial or residential programs. TRC found that the available reported data included a variety of performance metrics that were not consistently reported across the industry, including units served, buildings served, per unit savings, and others. While it is likely that program administrators internally track industry-specific and detailed metrics, such as number of units, these metrics are only occasionally included in public reports.

Individual performance metrics were difficult to identify and understand, so compound metrics, such as savings per expenditures ratios, were even more challenging to accurately compare. The timeframes that were associated with the reported expenditures and savings were frequently unclear. For example, it was difficult to determine if funds spent in 2012 were associated with the savings that were reported in 2012 or a different time period. Some program administrators count savings as soon as a project is enrolled in their program, while others count the savings when the final incentives for a project have been paid. The ambiguity and the variation in accounting methodologies were additional reasons that compiling a cost per savings value for the programs in the research study proved to be difficult.

Conclusions

Although TRC completed the research and presented the data to NYSERDA, the application of the findings to support short-term program implementation and to impact long-term planning will continue throughout the strategic planning cycle. The programmatic changes influenced by this effort will emerge over the next several years. In the meantime, the process itself proved to be useful to NYSERDA in several ways. The structure of the project, focusing on rapid turn-around and business intelligence-style research, allowed TRC to provide useful data and conclusions within a period of a few months rather than a longer timeframe. The NYSERDA

staff overseeing the project was the day-to-day program management team, as opposed to an evaluation or analysis group that often oversees traditional third party evaluations. This ensured the direction of the research was directly applicable to program implementation goals. Also, rather than preparing a stand-alone, static report, TRC presented the research to NYSERDA program staff in a format that served as a directory of information and references to facilitate further topical research and to support updates to the data.

NYSERDA program managers benefited from having compiled, current industry data and the research findings to apply to on-going program operations. Certain findings reinforced assumptions that NYSERDA already held but had been unable to validate through specific data or examples prior to this project. The data on peer program administrators who run programs similar in format, budgets, and/or geography were particularly applicable. By identifying favorable points of comparison, this research was useful to highlight the strengths of NYSERDA's multifamily programs so that those strengths could be articulated to stakeholders and to those responsible for program oversight.

Also, by identifying similar programs and engaging other program administrators in discussions about shared issues, this research project contributed to the development of a peer network. Relationships within a peer network can lead to more collaborative process in the industry moving forward, which is critical in New York and many other regions. With an increase in voluntary or mandated consolidation of programs, understanding the broader marketplace and maintaining industry contacts is a useful foundation for future collaboration and sharing innovative solutions. The high prevalence of common challenges indicates that these challenges are universal and may require new approaches across the board.

Overall, this research provided an informed market perspective that was useful to NYSERDA in the early stages of strategic planning, and it demonstrated the benefit of reviewing one's product and how that product fits in with the broader market. The research helped validate several points that NYSERDA was considering for program changes, giving weight and practical examples to those preliminary ideas. For example, certain findings about initiatives currently in place in Europe and the United Kingdom directly supported topics introduced as part of strategic planning exercises, including net zero energy buildings and building labeling. The real world examples provided valuable guidance and helped these ideas gain traction.

In addition to direct benefits to NYSERDA, this process and this kind of research offers advantages to the industry as well. So much time and effort are focused on the day-to-day operations of a program, but it is useful to take the time to communicate with other program administrators in the industry. Discussions of common goals and challenges can be a foundation for improving programs, customer service, and energy savings across the board. Additionally, sharing information can support the approval process for program updates. By utilizing real world examples of other programs, administrators can improve their proposals to the corresponding regulatory authority. By collaborating on new ideas, sharing lessons learned, and leveraging the experience of a broader group, program administrators can work together to benefit the industry as a whole.

Overall, this up-to-date industry research allowed NYSERDA to better understand other programs in the market, evaluate how their programs compare, and gain insight into innovations to consider for their strategic planning process. Applying this research strategy during the course of a program can arm administrators with information needed to make programs better, faster.

References

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