

Build your own BPS: Engaging stakeholders in building performance standard development

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ABSTRACT

Stakeholder engagement is key to successfully developing energy policies for existing buildings. This is especially true for a building performance standard (BPS), which requires buy-in and cooperation from a wide range of stakeholders. However, jurisdictions currently lack practical tools for educating and engaging local stakeholders in BPS development. To address this gap, this paper describes a series of interactive stakeholder engagement workshops for use in developing a BPS. The workshops were originally created and used in Ohio through a project funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. First, we present the overall stakeholder engagement strategy for the project. Then, we detail the content and structure of the workshops, which were used in a series of advisory group meetings of key stakeholders. Each workshop centers around a theme: BPS basics, policy design, financial incentives, and enforcement and compliance. The workshops were highly interactive, and we highlight the discussion exercises as a core component. Third, we synthesize lessons learned from running the workshops across Ohio. Finally, we share results from adapting one of the workshops for professional development at an industry conference. Overall, this paper provides a framework and practical tools that can serve as a starting point for other jurisdictions engaging stakeholders in BPS development.

Introduction

Stakeholder engagement is key to successfully developing energy policies for existing buildings. Policies that mandate energy benchmarking, audits, or tune-ups all require buy-in and cooperation from a wide range of stakeholders in the built environment. These include building owners, facility managers, tenants, design professionals, utilities, and local and state government, among others (U.S. Department of Energy 2016). These entities each have varying interests in tracking and improving building energy performance, and bringing them all together to develop a policy is such a substantial undertaking that entire guides have been published on this topic alone (City Energy Project 2018; U.S. Department of Energy 2016).

Stakeholder engagement is especially important for developing a building performance standard (BPS). A BPS is a mandatory policy requiring existing buildings to meet a performance target by a specified date. Buildings that do not meet the target must take action to improve their performance, and owners that fail to comply may be subject to penalties or fees. Their potential to achieve large energy and emissions reductions have made BPS an increasingly popular policy in recent years, with 16 cities, counties, and states in the U.S. having enacted a BPS to date (Institute for Market Transformation 2026), and many more committed to one through the National BPS Coalition (Institute for Market Transformation 2021). Because the success of a BPS is predicated on individual building owners enacting retrofits at scale, gaining their

perspectives, trust, and support in the policy development process is essential. In the absence of broad stakeholder buy-in, there is a risk of low compliance rates, diminished savings, and even potentially triggering statewide preemption of local BPS policies. An incomplete understanding of stakeholder perspectives has also been identified as a key risk when developing a BPS (Engelman, Langlois-Romero, et al. 2023).

However, jurisdictions currently lack practical tools for educating and engaging local stakeholders in BPS development. Existing BPS guides (Simon 2024; American Cities Climate Challenge 2021) and case studies (Brinker et al. 2022; Eash-Gates and Takahashi 2022) provide an overview of the stakeholder engagement process and key considerations. Earlier stakeholder engagement guides, written prior to the advent of BPS, discuss logistics and major decision points (City Energy Project 2018; U.S. Department of Energy 2016). While useful references, these documents are all missing the kind of actionable, detailed information required to do this work in practice. What is needed is a basic set of tools for stakeholder engagement around BPS, so that jurisdictions trying to do this work do not need to start from scratch.

To address this gap, this paper describes a series of interactive stakeholder engagement workshops for use in developing a BPS. The workshops were originally developed and used in three of Ohio's large cities—Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati—through a project funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. First, we present the overall stakeholder engagement strategy for this project, developed in partnership with each city. Then, we detail the structure and content of the workshops, describing our approach to facilitation and highlighting the discussion exercises as a key component. We reflect on lessons learned from running the workshop series across all three cities and provide recommendations for future facilitation. Finally, we share results from adapting one of the workshops for professional development at an industry conference.

This paper offers two major contributions to the existing literature on BPS. First, it provides a framework and practical tools—in the form of workshop outlines, discussion exercises, and facilitation tips—for stakeholder engagement around BPS. Second, it takes a retrospective approach, synthesizing our experience running these workshops multiple times and in different locations into valuable lessons learned. The intent is to provide a useful starting point for other jurisdictions engaging stakeholders in BPS development.

Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

The stakeholder engagement workshops described in this paper resulted from a collaborative project that began in early 2024, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. The goal of the project was to support the development and implementation of BPS in four of Ohio's large cities: Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Dayton. The project consisted of three workstreams: (1) data collection and analysis to help understand each city's building stock and inform BPS design; (2) a landscape analysis to identify potential legal pathways, financial incentives, and workforce development programs to support BPS in Ohio; (3) stakeholder engagement in each city to help shape and build support for the policy. The workstreams were interdependent, with results from data collection and landscape analysis informing stakeholder engagement, and vice versa. For a detailed overview of the project, see Webb et al. (2024).

The project brought together more than a dozen partners, each with their distinctive expertise and perspective. Four main technical providers supported all four cities: the University of Cincinnati (UC), an academic institution and the prime awardee, the Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (MEEA), a regional energy efficiency organization, Power A Clean Future

Ohio (PCFO), a statewide nonprofit supporting local governments, and Go Sustainable Energy, an Ohio-based energy consulting firm. Local organizations provided additional support in each city, including the Cleveland 2030 District, Cincinnati 2030 District, and Dayton Regional Green. All project partners were Ohio-based or Midwest-based (MEEA). The project's collaborative design was intended to build momentum and facilitate peer learning by advancing BPS across all four cities, while also recognizing that each city had different starting points, needs, and political environments. At the start of the project, each city had a climate action plan with ambitious goals for the buildings sector, but Columbus was the only city with a mandatory benchmarking ordinance (enacted in 2020) and to have signed on to the National BPS Coalition.

The first step in the stakeholder engagement work was an initial planning phase. A project kickoff meeting was held in early 2024 engaging leaders from each participating city and all the other project partners. At this kickoff meeting each city was asked to identify, group, and map on an influence/interest matrix all the stakeholders that might be impacted by a BPS. This initial exercise was shaped into a Stakeholder Engagement Plan for each city, with milestones and target dates. Figure 1 shows a generic representation of these Stakeholder Engagement Plans. The top of the timeline shows key deliverables, and the bottom shows the major stages.

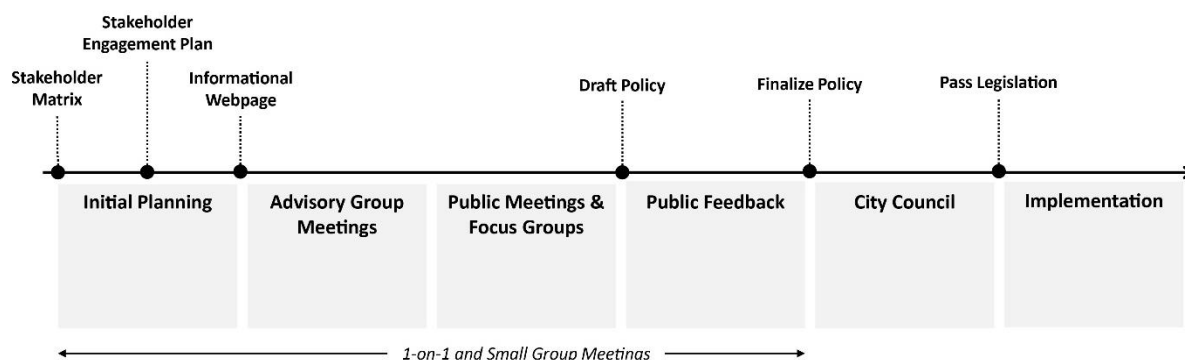


Figure 1. Overall stakeholder engagement process adopted in Stakeholder Engagement Plans

While the details and timing in each plan were specific to each city, they all follow the same basic stages: (1) An initial planning stage to identify relevant stakeholders, develop a Stakeholder Engagement Plan, and launch a webpage for keeping the public informed.¹ This stage also includes internal meetings with various city government departments that will be impacted by a BPS. (2) A series of meetings with an Advisory Group, a leadership group intended to help shape the development of BPS in each city. This group is by invitation only and represents a diverse set of key stakeholders. (3) A series of public meetings to make residents and businesses aware of the policy and solicit feedback. This stage also includes concurrent focus groups to explore specific topics in detail (e.g. affordable housing). Based on stakeholder feedback, the city drafts a policy. (4) An additional public comment period to get feedback on the draft policy. Throughout the first four stages, targeted one-on-one and small group meetings are held as needed, and City Council members are kept regularly briefed and actively engaged. (5) Presentation of the policy to City Council for passage. (6) Continue to engage stakeholders in the implementation phase to inform rulemaking, resolve complicated issues (e.g., vague policy

¹ For an example webpage, see the one developed in Columbus: <https://www.columbus.gov/Services/Columbus-Water-Power/About-Columbus-Water-Power/Sustainability-at-Columbus-Water-Power/Energy-and-Water-Benchmarking-and-Transparency-Policy/Building-Performance-Standards>

language), and evolve the policy as needed, as noted in Engelman et al. (2023). This approach follows the hybrid meeting structure described by the City Energy Project (2018), in which the city hosts invite-only meetings (the Advisory Group), followed by public meetings.

At the time of writing, Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati had completed the Advisory Group Meetings, and Columbus had started public meetings and focus groups. The Advisory Group Meetings are the focus of the remainder of this paper, as they provided an opportunity to work with a core stakeholder group in detail over an extended engagement period.

Advisory Group Workshop Series

The Advisory Group was an invited leadership group of key stakeholders in each city. The stated role of the group was to “provide feedback that will be used by the city to set goals and objectives for the implementation of our BPS.” More specifically, Advisory Group members were told that they would: (1) Collaborate with industry leaders, building owners, and policymakers; (2) Provide input on energy performance targets, compliance pathways, and incentive structures; (3) Help shape public engagement efforts to ensure broad participation and support. Members were selected and invited by each city with input from local project partners. The count and makeup of each group differed slightly across the cities but generally ranged from around 20-40 participants across a variety of stakeholder groups: large building owners, developers, tenant groups, design professionals, utilities, and various local government departments. In Columbus and Cincinnati, city council staffers also participated.

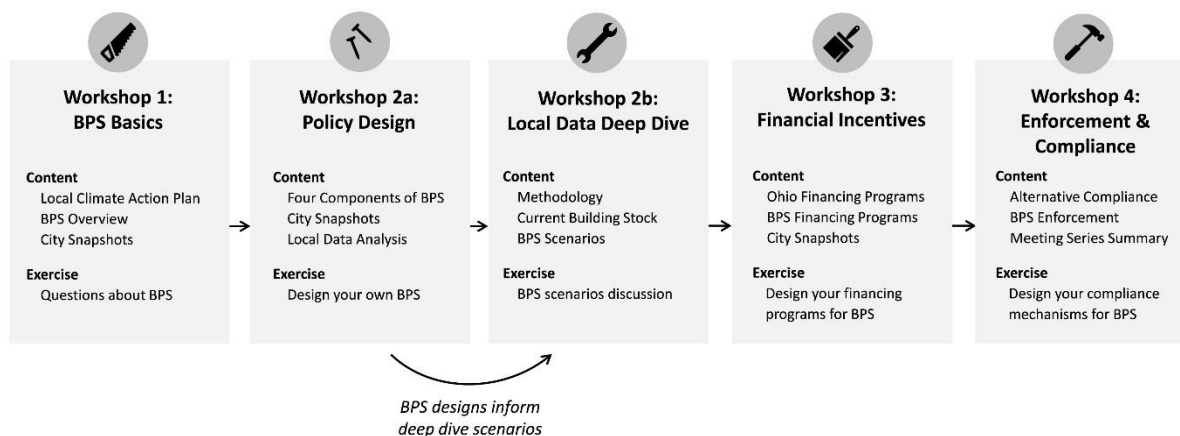


Figure 2. Overview of the structure and content of the Advisory Group meeting series

The Advisory Group met over a series of four meetings (five in Columbus) held monthly. The meetings were developed and facilitated collaboratively by UC, PCFO, and MEEA in partnership with each city and their local partners. The meeting series structure is shown in Figure 2. Each meeting covered a different topic: BPS basics, policy design, financial incentives, and enforcement and compliance. Columbus was the only city to hold two meetings on policy design. The first (Workshop 2a) addressed the major elements of a BPS policy and the second (Workshop 2b) discussed potential BPS scenarios in detail. The meetings were typically two hours long and had a similar format, first providing informational content, and then engaging participants in an interactive exercise. All meetings were held in person, with no virtual or hybrid options for attendance. Cleveland began their meeting series first, starting in April 2025, then

Cincinnati in June 2025, and Columbus in July 2025. Dayton decided to delay its stakeholder meeting series until the completion of a BPS pilot program that is currently in development.

Each meeting followed the same outline of context, content, exercise, context. Figure 3 illustrates this structure in detail using Workshop 2a on policy design as an example. Typical timings (in minutes) are also shown. Each meeting consisted of:

- **Context:** A recap of the city’s climate action plan goals, the role of the Advisory Group, what a BPS is, and key takeaways from prior meeting(s). While brief, this section helped orient the group, reinforce foundational BPS concepts, and ensure that the city had accurately understood previous feedback.
- **Content:** An informational component, educating the group about BPS. This was typically a mix of BPS concepts, relevant local information, and examples from peer jurisdictions who have already adopted BPS (we called these “City Snapshots”). The content was driven by the needs of the exercise; the goal of the exercise was determined first, and we then worked backwards to develop the necessary educational content.
- **Exercise:** The highly interactive core of each meeting, which took up the most time. The larger group divided into small groups or pairs and worked through a discussion prompt. The prompts asked participants to design solutions themselves, instead of presenting a starting point for comment. This helped facilitate open discussion and allowed the group’s collective ideas, priorities, and needs to emerge. At the end of the exercise, the groups came together for a report out and reflection.
- **Context:** A reminder of upcoming meeting dates and topics, a link to a standing feedback form where comments could be provided at any time, and a thank you.

Ample time for questions and comments provided space to help resolve misunderstandings and allowed participants to reiterate their priorities. While not shown with specific timing in Figure 3, this often took up substantial time. It was not limited to time between the blocks but occurred throughout the meetings.

Topic	Context	Q&A	Content	Q&A	Exercise	Q&A	Context
Policy Design	(15 minutes)		(30-45 minutes)		(45-60 minutes)		(15 minutes)
	Recap Climate Action Plan Role of Advisory Group BPS Overview Prior Meeting(s)		Informational Content Four components of a BPS City Snapshots: Policy Design Local Data Analysis Current building emissions Scope considerations Metric considerations Target considerations Timeline considerations		Exercise: Design your own BPS policy What buildings should be included? What metric should be used? How should the targets be set? What timeline should be established?		Moving Forward Next Steps Feedback Form Thank You Contact Info

Figure 3. Typical outline for an individual workshop using Workshop 2a on policy design as an example

The design of the meeting series was informed by the technical partners’ unique perspectives. UC brought skill designing curriculum and teaching in higher education, as well as technical engineering and energy policy expertise. Active learning practices informed the structure of the workshops, which interspersed content with interactive and cooperative processing time (Smith et al. 2005). PCFO brought experience working with Ohio jurisdictions on climate action planning, including prior work facilitating public engagement sessions. MEEA, through their work with jurisdictions across the Midwest, brought knowledge of how

benchmarking and BPS policies have developed in peer cities. Each city and their local partners brought a nuanced understanding of the roles and relationships of each stakeholder in the room. This consistent set of partners and blend of perspectives provided a network of support for each city throughout the stakeholder engagement process and allowed us to learn from and improve on the workshops with each iteration across locations.

Facilitating the Workshops

Workshop 1: BPS Basics

The goal of Workshop 1 was to explain what a BPS is and why the city is considering enacting one. It began with an account of the city's climate action plan, and the specific goals and actions relevant to the buildings sector and BPS. This served as a kind of brief keynote and was usually given by a city official who was not a regular participant in the meeting series. Then, BPS was explained by focusing on three main points: highlighting how it differs from benchmarking (which many participants were already doing or had heard of), outlining the four main components of the policy (scope, metric, targets, timeframe), and noting its potential benefits beyond addressing the city's climate goals. To provide peer context, the meeting then discussed how many other jurisdictions had already adopted or committed to adopting a BPS, and briefly reviewed examples of what a BPS looks like elsewhere (the City Snapshots).

Workshop 1 did not have a small group exercise, but instead had two large blocks of time for participant reflection and discussion as a larger group. The first block asked participants to share their initial thoughts about a BPS. The intent was for the city to understand how a BPS might support stakeholders' goals, in addition to the city's climate goals. In Cleveland and Cincinnati, participants were asked the question:

How do you see a BPS policy aligning with your organizational goals?

In Columbus, the question was framed differently in order to gauge the initial level of support for a BPS among participants:

What sentiment does your organization have about a healthy buildings policy?

The second block was an opening for any questions about BPS. When possible, these questions were answered right away, otherwise they were addressed at later meetings. Participants were asked:

What questions do you have about BPS?

Participants were asked to respond to questions using Menti, an online polling program, which anonymously recorded participant answers. These were displayed live on a screen in the room and used to facilitate open discussion.

Workshop 2: Policy Design

The goal of Workshop 2 was to discuss the components of a BPS policy in greater detail, and for participants to ideate potential policy designs. First, the discussion was framed using the

four key components of a BPS as outlined by ASHRAE (2023): the scope of buildings covered by the policy, the metric used to measure performance, the level of performance used to set the targets, and timeframe for compliance. These components determine the total energy and emissions savings from the policy, as well as the level of effort required to comply. They also provide a clear and simple framework for policy discussions. Peer context was then provided by reviewing examples of the four components in other jurisdictions. To ground the discussion in data, an analysis of the current performance of the local building stock was presented. UC developed building stock models for each city using tax assessor data and metered utility data; for an in-depth discussion of the methodology for assembling these models, see Bohn, Nordloh, and Webb (2026). The analysis provided a breakdown of building count and emissions by sector (commercial, residential, industrial), property type, and floor area for the entire building stock.

The exercise for Workshop 2 asked participants to think through each of these policy components via a design exercise. Participants were divided into small groups and were given the prompt shown in Figure 4. The exercise ran slightly differently in different locations. In Cleveland and Cincinnati, each group was asked to focus on just one element (e.g., metric), while in Columbus each group was asked to talk through all four elements. At the end of the exercise, the small groups came together for sharing with the larger group.

Exercise: Discuss BPS policy elements

Based on the common policy features discussed today, design a policy to improve energy performance in existing buildings in your city.

Scope	Metric	Targets	Timeline
What buildings should be included and why?	What metric should be used and why?	How should the targets be set and why?	What timeline should be used and why?

Figure 4. Exercise prompt for Workshop 2 on policy design

In Columbus, an additional policy design workshop was held to provide more time for data-driven discussion with the Advisory Group (Workshop 2b in Figure 3). Using the ideas and feedback collected in Workshop 2a, a set of BPS scenarios were developed for detailed analysis. These scenarios were structured similar to prior work by Walter and Mathew (2021) analyzing BPS scenarios in Seattle, which started with a baseline policy design and iteratively changed one component (e.g., scope, targets) to show the difference between scenarios. Each scenario was evaluated using four outcomes of interest to the cities and stakeholders: the number of covered building not meeting the target, the total energy savings (as a percentage of the total building stock energy use, which could be compared to local climate action plan goals), and the median energy reduction needed to meet the target. In addition, the stakeholders were shown photos of buildings in their city and their corresponding square footage, a simple exercise that grounded potential BPS scope options in recognizable, physical landmarks. After reviewing the results, participants were asked to reflect on three questions together:

What findings stuck out to you the most?

Which scenarios do the best job of balancing burden and impact?

Where do you want a deeper dive or additional information?

This additional workshop gave the Advisory Group in Columbus a more detailed understanding of the potential impacts and tradeoffs of different policy scenarios compared to the other cities.

Workshop 3: Financial Incentives

The goal of Workshop 3 was to map the landscape of financial support currently available for energy efficiency projects in Ohio cities, and to envision potential new programs to support BPS. Level-setting was a critical piece of this workshop, given the range of stakeholders in the room and their varied prior experiences with different financing mechanisms. First, existing public and quasi-public financial programs supporting building upgrades were cataloged at the federal, state, and local levels. In each city, brief case studies highlighted recent local projects successfully using these programs. Then, financial programs that other jurisdictions have created to support compliance with BPS were discussed. In Cincinnati, the content section of Workshop 3 also included case studies of innovative municipal sustainability financing programs elsewhere in Ohio, based on the city's suggestion to include proof that creative financing programs can be developed in-state and not just in jurisdictions elsewhere.

The exercise for Workshop 3 asked participants to consider both existing and new financial programs. Participants were divided into smaller groups and given the prompt shown in Figure 5. The prompt served a dual purpose: it allowed us to seek consultation from participants about existing programs, and invited collaboration on visioning possible new programs. It was important in all of the cities to consider the possible role of existing programs in a BPS, as there may be limited capacity to develop and manage entirely new programs. The exercise took different formats in different locations: it ran as a static small group discussion in Cleveland and Columbus, whereas in Cincinnati it was a small group exercise with station-rotation where participants first recorded their ideas and subsequent dot-mapping to vote with dot-shaped stickers on ideas that participants most agreed with.

Exercise: Discuss BPS incentives

Based on the financial landscape mapping, design the financial programs needed for successful BPS implementation in your city.

Key Features	Existing Enhancements	New Programs
What features in existing incentive programs are most important to you and why?	How could existing incentive programs in your city be enhanced to support a BPS?	What new financial programs could be created to support a BPS in your city?

Figure 5. Exercise prompt for Workshop 3 on financial incentives

In Columbus, the city was interested in getting specific input from participants on where to direct financial support. As a result, the exercise was reshaped to focus less on program creation and more on program priorities. The discussion prompt was the same, but the supporting table of questions in Columbus is shown in Figure 6.

Stage of Work	Format	Prioritization
Where should the city prioritize and direct funding? • Planning • Design • Implementation • <i>Add your ideas!</i>	What format should funding be in? • Grant • Loan • Tax Credit • <i>Add your ideas!</i>	Where should funding be prioritized? • Building type • Neighborhood • <i>Add your ideas!</i>

Figure 6. Exercise prompt questions for Workshop 3 on financial incentives in Columbus

Workshop 4: Enforcement and Compliance

The goal of Workshop 4 was to explain the various mechanisms for BPS compliance and enforcement, and to gather opinions on the compliance and enforcement features needed for successful BPS implementation locally. The content in this workshop was framed around four key implementation considerations: (1) Compliance Pathways: What alternative compliance pathways (ACPs) should be provided in lieu of meeting a target? (2) Special Cases: Are there any building/owner types that should have special treatment? (3) Enforcement: How should non-compliance with the BPS be enforced? (4) Assistance: What type of financial and technical assistance should be provided to building owners? The presentation on ACPs drew from IMT’s recent work (Duer-Balkind et al. 2025). Examples from other jurisdictions of ACPs, special cases, penalties, and technical assistance (especially support “hubs”) were then reviewed.

The exercise for Workshop 4 tasked participants with thinking through what alternative compliance pathways are needed, what enforcement measures should be put in place, and what supports will be necessary for a BPS. The discussion prompt is shown in Figure 7. In all cities, both jurisdictions and participants had previously raised concerns about imposing consequences for non-compliance. The exercise therefore encouraged participants to consider ways to link consequences (the stick) with incentives (the carrot). In Columbus, the city was interested in getting more specific feedback on which buildings should be exempt from the BPS. The second question on special cases was therefore altered to read: Are there any building types that should be exempt from a BPS? The exercise again took different formats in different locations: it ran as a static small group discussion in Cleveland, a more mobile small group exercise that included station-rotation and dot-mapping in Cincinnati, and a mix of the two in Columbus.

Exercise: Discuss BPS compliance and enforcement features

Based on the examples from other jurisdictions, discuss the compliance and enforcement features needed for successful BPS implementation in your city.

Compliance Pathways	Special Cases	Enforcement Mechanism
What ACPs should be provided in lieu of meeting a target?	Are there any building/owner types that have special treatment?	What are the consequences for non-compliance?
Who should be eligible for them?	How should they be handled?	Can we link the carrot and the stick?

Figure 7. Exercise prompt for Workshop 4 on enforcement and compliance

As the final meeting in the series, time at the end of the workshop was dedicated to recapping the meeting series, informing stakeholders of the next steps and timeline for policy development, and offering continued ways for stakeholders to stay involved.

Similarities, Differences, and Lessons Learned

Reflecting on replicating the workshop series across three Ohio cities, three similarities, two differences, and six lessons learned emerged that provide useful guidance for other jurisdictions and practitioners conducting stakeholder engagement for BPS.

Similarity 1: Climate Action Plans grounded discussion. Each city had an existing community-wide Climate Action Plan (CAP) that had been adopted by City Council. These plans had overall emissions reduction goals, as well as building sector-specific goals. A vested interest in meeting these stated goals served as a continual grounding point throughout the stakeholder meetings. The beginning context portion of each meeting referenced the CAP goals as a key motivation for developing a BPS. The CAP goals also provided an important reference point for discussion and data analysis in Workshop 2, since stakeholders wanted to know how far each potential BPS scenario went towards meeting the CAP goals.

Similarity 2: Statewide context provided shared legal and financing foundations. The three cities share a statewide context. The shared state landscape offered some common themes for legally tenable policy mechanisms, state financing programs for energy efficiency, and workforce development programs. For example, in Workshop 3 on financial incentives, the same core research on shared state funding programs was used across all three cities, which allowed more time to be spent in each city researching locally specific financing and successful case studies. When questions arose from participants about statewide policy and legal issues, the facilitators could respond using shared knowledge applicable to each city.

Similarity 3: Different facilitator voices were intentionally leveraged. The meetings were hosted by city representatives, such as staff and department heads, who opened the meetings, introduced speakers, and spoke to the city's goals, priorities, and programs. By serving as the meeting hosts, they ensured stakeholders viewed BPS as a policy designed specifically by and for the city. In addition, city staff from different departments, and in some cases elected Council Members and their aides, had active roles, which showed stakeholders that the city had a broad spectrum of internal engagement and support to develop a BPS. Subject matter expertise for the content portions of the workshops was provided not only by the technical partners and city staff, but also by supplementary organizations (such as local financing entities), and even Advisory Group members themselves. The workshop activities were typically facilitated by neutral third parties (PCFO and MEEA), which encouraged participants to speak freely. We took care to leverage the right voices at the right time when planning the workshops.

Difference 1: Columbus had a different starting point than the other cities. Columbus was the only city that had a benchmarking ordinance in place and that had committed to the National BPS Coalition. This had three important implications for the facilitation of the workshops. First, a BPS could be framed as a logical next step in Columbus, while in Cleveland and Cincinnati stakeholders spent time discussing creating a benchmarking ordinance prior to enacting a BPS. Second, Columbus often sought narrower feedback in the workshop exercises, as some constraints on BPS were already in place due to the scope of the benchmarking ordinance. Third, Columbus had much more robust energy data and reporting infrastructure. Large building owners were already familiar with submitting their energy data to the city, and we were able to use the benchmarking data to produce a more reliable building stock dataset.

Difference 2: Each city had unique community concerns. Each of the three cities has a different building stock, with specific local concerns and interest areas. These concerns emerged through the workshop discussions and influenced subsequent workshop content. Cincinnati has a robust portfolio of historic buildings and the role and treatment of these in a BPS was important to the stakeholders there. Columbus has a growing population, and with that came an interest in new construction, multifamily housing, and the influx of advanced manufacturing and data centers in the region. Each of these concerns were addressed in the workshops, with ACP examples provided for historic buildings in Cincinnati, and discussions about compliance for manufacturers in Columbus. It is also important to note that the members of the facilitation team (UC, PCFO, and the city staff) live the cities where the workshops were held. This allowed for a deeper understanding of each city's unique context and values, based on personal experience.

Lesson Learned 1: The workshop series structure can be easily adapted across jurisdictions. We believe that the Advisory Group structure (Figure 2) and individual meeting structure (Figure 3) serve as a useful foundation to be adapted by practitioners in other jurisdictions. The individual meeting structure of context, content, exercise, context—with plenty of time for Q&A throughout—proved to be a useful model for meetings in all cities, and was able to be easily adapted for the unique interests and needs of each city. For example, in Workshop 3 on financial incentives, the public financing tools and funding sources available from the state could be replicated across cities, while the discussion of local programs required customization. Using the workshop structure and exercises described in this paper as a foundation, practitioners can then adapt content for their unique needs.

Lesson Learned 2: Participants should be encouraged to think like a policy maker. Instead of asking for input on a draft BPS, we intentionally created open-ended design exercises for the workshops. For example, the exercise prompt for Workshop 2 says “*design a policy...*” and for Workshop 3 says “*design the financial programs needed...*”. This approach effectively asked participants to step into the shoes of policy makers, inviting them out of their silos and asking them to collaborate from a different point of view. This facilitated robust discussion and ideation, allowing collective priorities and new ideas to surface. PCFO often uses the “Spectrum of Public Participation” from the International Association for Public Participation (International Association for Public Participation 2024) in its work, and the workshop exercises generally fell under “Collaborate” on the spectrum, suggesting to the Advisory Group members that the cities were looking to them for advice and solutions.

Lesson Learned 3: Building stock data is essential for understanding policy impacts. Grounding the workshops in actual building stock data for each city was essential for helping Advisory Group members understand the potential impacts of a BPS and for reinforcing that the BPS was a policy designed specifically by and for each city. We integrated this data into the workshops in three main ways discussed under Workshop 2: current building stock estimates, BPS scenarios, and images of covered buildings. The additional “data deep dive” meeting in Columbus (Workshop 2b) was valuable, and we recommend practitioners conduct this extra meeting to provide estimates of policy impacts for stakeholders as early as possible. Even if facilitators do not have access to robust building stock data, meaningful connections to the local building stock can still be made, such as showing photos of potential covered buildings.

Lesson Learned 4: Other jurisdictions' BPS serve as a useful reference point, but flexibility is key. Examples from other jurisdictions' BPS (the City Snapshots) provided a reference point for what BPS can look like, and Advisory Group members often asked about the details, successes, and lessons learned from BPS early adopters. However, it was important to

present these as examples only and for facilitators to highlight the inherent flexibility of BPS. There was a consistent refrain in each city that “we are developing a BPS for [the city].” By presenting other jurisdictions as reference points rather than templates, stakeholders were free to adapt, iterate, and brainstorm what would be best suited to their jurisdiction.

Lesson Learned 5: A regional coalition can help make the case for BPS. The concurrent development of a BPS in the three Ohio cities demonstrated to the Advisory Group members alignment with their peer cities. There is a level of friendly competition amongst cities to enact forward-thinking policies to meet their climate action goals, and knowing their peers were working towards adoption of a BPS encouraged them to pursue the policy and quelled concerns of developers relocating to the state’s other large metro areas to avoid compliance. If there is not a regional coalition of jurisdictions concurrently developing a BPS, facilitators can still leverage lessons learned and examples from peer cities.

Lesson Learned 6: Some stakeholders may not be fully supportive—engage them anyway. Some stakeholders may never fully support a BPS, but this is not a reason to exclude them from the policy development process. Building owners, in particular, may push back, as they are responsible for compliance with BPS requirements. However, making them aware of the policy development process, requesting their thoughts, ideas, and feedback, and integrating their concerns into the policy is essential for building trust and ensuring that the stakeholder engagement process is credible. Moreover, some of the best questions and ideas in our Ohio workshops came from stakeholders who seemed cautious or skeptical toward BPS, as they often put extra emphasis on making the policy as simple as possible and compliance straightforward.

Adapting the Workshops for Professional Development: BYO BPS

To explore how our workshop approach might translate outside of specific cities and into a professional development context, a condensed format workshop was designed for an industry conference. The Midwest Energy Solutions Conference (MES) is an annual conference that brings together energy efficiency professionals from across the Midwest. Adapting our work for this conference was an opportunity to understand its potential use for education and training of professional peers, and also to demonstrate and share our approach with others who might want to adapt and use it in their own work. The “BYO BPS (Build Your Own Building Performance Standard)” workshop was presented at the 2026 MES, and followed the content-then-exercise format, providing an overview of BPS and its key components, and then engaging participants in a BPS design exercise. The workshop used pre-determined options for each BPS component and provided attendees with pre-calculated results for each possible combination of these, so that they could quickly understand the potential impact of each potential BPS scenario.

The BYO BPS workshop was a 75-minute session, consisting of three main sections distilled from Workshops 2a and 2b, shown in Figure 8 below. The workshop opened with a content overview that introduced participants to the four components of a BPS. Then, the BPS design exercise was introduced. The workshop centered on a sample Midwestern city, “Carbon Heights,” a mid-sized city with historic buildings and ambitious climate goals. Workshop participants were seated at breakout tables of 4-6 participants and one facilitator in order to encourage greater levels of engagement and ensure that all voices were heard.

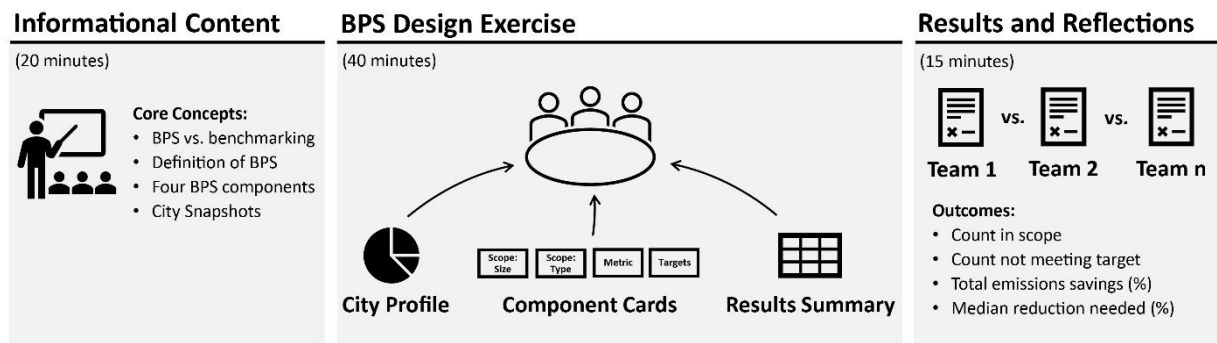


Figure 8. Components of the BYO BPS workshop

The exercise prompt was adapted from the prompt used in Workshop 2, and provided a similar table of guiding questions:

Based on the information for your jurisdiction, design the scope, metrics, and targets for a BPS. Be prepared to discuss your design and rationale with the group.

Each facilitator was provided with a packet that contained the following:

- **City Profile:** A summary sheet listed details about the sample jurisdiction’s emissions goals and building stock.
- **BPS Component Cards:** Index cards were printed with pre-selected options for each of the BPS components (scope, metric, targets). To simplify the discussion and supporting analysis, timeframe was left out of the exercise, and scope was broken into two elements: floor area and building type. These cards served as the basis for each group’s discussion and design of their mock BPS.
- **BPS Scenario Results Summary:** A set of tables provided the facilitators with BPS scenarios for every possible combination of scope, metric, and targets. Facilitators used these tables to share the impacts that the group’s mock BPS design would have, including how many buildings would be covered, how many buildings do not meet the target, the emissions reductions that would be realized, and the median energy reduction needed to meet the target (these were the same outcomes used in Workshop 2b in Columbus).

This adapted, condensed version of our original policy design workshops functioned well as a standalone exercise at MES. While there was no formal assessment of the BYO BPS workshop, informal feedback from attendees and facilitators provided two key themes that reinforced findings from the workshop series in Ohio. First, the BYO BPS workshop reiterated the importance of data analysis results and the iterative policy design process. Many of the groups used the results summary for real-time feedback and iteration on their policy designs, first developing an option and then fine-tuning it after looking it up in the results table and seeing the quantitative impacts. Second, the workshop showed again that encouraging participants to step into the shoes of a policy maker resulted in robust participation. Similar to the advisory group series itself, BYO BPS was designed so that participants were not merely giving feedback or responding to data, but were making decisions themselves and seeing the resulting impacts. The use of a hypothetical (but still realistic) city enabled participants to “learn by doing” and practice

building a BPS in a low-stakes setting. Participants were engaged with the workshop, excited to share their group's policy design, and anecdotally shared afterwards that they enjoyed the workshop exercise. Overall, BYO BPS served as a valuable framework educating and engaging other industry professionals, and several participants expressed after the session that they would like to replicate this exercise in their own jurisdictions.

Conclusions

Existing BPS guidance and case studies from other jurisdictions underscore the importance of effective stakeholder engagement in policy development. Yet, at the outset of this project, there was a lack of practical, readily implementable tools available for doing this work. We offer the content in this paper as a starting point for other jurisdictions and practitioners engaging stakeholders in BPS development. In our experience so far in Ohio, the core topics in the workshop series—BPS basics, policy design, financial incentives, and enforcement and compliance— and the content-then-exercise format provide a foundational education for stakeholders and create the space necessary for collaborative development of a BPS policy. The Ohio workshops, as well as our adaptation for the Midwest Energy Solutions conference, also provide practical examples of how to integrate data analysis into a collaborative BPS ideation process and affirm the importance of encouraging stakeholders to think like policymakers.

There are three important limitations to this paper that can inform future work on BPS. First, this material was developed and applied in the initial stage of BPS policy development. In our Ohio partner cities, BPS development is still in progress and stakeholder engagement will continue through public meetings, focus groups, hearings, and conversations with legislators. We anticipate that the content described here will continue to be useful throughout the remainder of this process, but additional tools may be needed to support later stage work. Second, there was no formal evaluation of the effectiveness of these workshops, as this was not within the scope of the project. Future work should assess what features of the workshops were most useful, and how participants' knowledge and attitudes may have been shaped by the workshops. Third, this work focuses on three cities in Ohio. The workshops should be run in other jurisdictions and by other teams of facilitators, to better understand how replicable they are and what changes might be needed to effectively implement them elsewhere.

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Materials Availability

The materials for the “BYO BPS (Build Your Own Building Performance Standard)” workshop are available from the first author upon reasonable request.

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