

Growing a Community of Practice to Support Ambitious Building Performance Standards: How Building Resource Hubs Can Drive the Transformation of Our Built Environment

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ABSTRACT

Buildings are at the center of the world’s most urgent societal issues, including climate change, affordability, resiliency, and public health. Over the past decade, U.S. state and local governments have adopted revolutionary policies to dramatically improve building performance based on measured energy and emissions to mitigate public and environmental impacts. However, implementing this kind of bold policy requires a fundamental change to the ways we build, finance, and operate our buildings.

Cities and regions can overcome these challenges by creating local knowledge exchange “hubs” that mobilize businesses and residents in support of public policy goals and rapidly scale competitive markets for high-performance buildings. These hubs can also promote equitable outcomes by partnering with community organizations on program direction, particularly related to support for workforce development and protection of affordable housing. Most importantly, hubs can act as a neutral, trusted entity that can facilitate relationships and collaboration between the disparate parties involved in commercial real estate, the local government, utilities, residents, and community groups.

In this paper, Building Energy Exchange (BE-Ex) and the Institute for Market Transformation (IMT) propose a framework for hub development based on experiences deploying and scaling hubs in a variety of U.S. markets, identifying process elements and assets critical to the success of a new hub within its local context. This framework promises to support and accelerate the development of local hubs that can benefit from tested best practices in policy implementation and market engagement, enabling them to conserve limited resources without sacrificing programmatic excellence.

Introduction

Buildings are built, occupied, operated, and regulated locally, yet have a fundamental role in successful global climate action. The total share of emissions from buildings and construction worldwide is 37% (UNEP 2023); while buildings account for 75% of the electricity consumed in the U.S. (Shoemaker 2023). Addressing this challenge head-on, many cities and states are rapidly adopting ground-breaking climate policies to reduce building-related emissions – policies to make buildings healthier and dramatically more energy efficient. These policies are challenging the status quo. They require building stakeholders to adopt new best practices, new technologies, new business and financing models, and create long-term capital plans with strategically staged energy improvement measures. A *new* business-as-usual is required for effective climate policy to succeed.

In a landscape of federal inaction on climate change and building decarbonization, the efforts of city and state actors are even more critical. There exists long-term evidence to demonstrate state policy's potential to drive national emissions reductions even in the absence or weakening of national legislative approaches (Hultman et. al. 2020). Existing commitments from U.S. cities, states, and businesses combined have the potential to reduce national emissions 35% below 2005 levels by 2030 (Hultman et. al. 2020).

However, changing the way we design, build, and operate our buildings requires a coordinated and comprehensive approach. The building industry has a particularly diverse and often siloed set of stakeholders. Building owners, developers, managers, architects, engineers, energy consultants, contractors, building operators, and tenants all have a stake in building performance, each with their own sets of priorities and sources of information. Each of these stakeholders has an important part to play in improving our buildings and reducing their emissions.

Improving Building Performance Through Policy Innovation

While improved building codes and a wide variety of incentives are driving increased efficiency in new buildings, new construction represents only 1-2% of the building stock each year (DiNola 2022). Among the challenges and market failures in existing buildings are long timelines for new capital investment, existing contracts to replace equipment with similar equipment, presumed inflation factors for utility cost increases over time, lack of awareness of energy use by tenants and new buyers, and an absence of regulatory levers to require mid-cycle improvements. Energy benchmarking and building performance standards aim to address a number of those market failures by providing clarity and certainty, while still allowing building owners to retain control and flexibility in how individual buildings achieve performance targets over time. The combination of short- and long-term targets enables owners to demonstrate success and to confidently make investments in energy efficiency improvements, while discouraging new investments in long-lived, inefficient technology. At least twelve cities and four states have passed building performance standards (BPS) policies for existing buildings, and forty local governments and six states have committed to building performance policies and programs as part of the National BPS Coalition (IMT 2025; IMT 2026). The long-term glide path that is a feature of building performance policies for many building owners can be an additional challenge for owners that do not have the resources or experience to assess what building improvements are feasible or necessary. Additionally, many buildings have unique physical, financial, or governance issues that make significant improvements to energy efficiency additionally complex.

Opportunity: Building Resource Hubs

To rapidly scale demand for high-performance buildings and boost compliance with building performance and energy efficiency regulations like BPS, a local building resource hub is a uniquely potent tool. Working in tandem with, but also independent of, local government officials, these hubs can conduct broad outreach to building owners and other stakeholders, spearhead community engagement efforts, provide feedback to improve policies over time, and act as trusted intermediaries for individual building owners to understand and meet local performance requirements. As independent nonprofits, hubs can uniquely assist with workforce

development and vendor matchmaking programs, develop and maintain community relationships, and, over time, attract diverse sources of funding to sustain and expand their efforts. A hub can engage and support key stakeholders by providing critical resources while developing a new ‘community of practice.’

The model described here is informed by successful hubs created and managed by Building Energy Exchange (BE-Ex) and the Institute for Market Transformation (IMT), in New York City and Washington, D.C., respectively. These hubs deliver customized best practice and educational resources that support stakeholder policy compliance and connect decision-makers with business tools and financial resources that help build a thriving local high-performance market. In order to provide independence from the local government, a hub is typically created and managed by an existing local nonprofit, albeit in collaboration with the local jurisdiction and private sector partners. As an independent, neutral, trusted entity, a hub can convene a range of experts and stakeholders to build local knowledge, trust, and capacity, as well as to provide an important feedback loop for policymakers.

Building Performance Partnership

In New York City, BE-Ex is a decade-old center of excellence for high-performance buildings that works closely with the City and State governments, the real estate industry, utilities, and other partners to support both policy-driven and market-driven improvements to building energy and climate performance. In Washington, D.C., IMT operates the Building Innovation Hub, a solutions and collaboration center for high-performance buildings supported by the District of Columbia government. Both hubs are strategic partners to their respective local jurisdictions in achieving BPS compliance and long-term climate progress. Furthermore, these hubs have provided the foundation for a growing network of similar, but locally specific, hubs to support the effective implementation of bold climate policies in cities, states, and regions throughout the country.

Leveraging their extensive experience, BE-Ex and IMT created the Building Performance Partnership (BPP) Network in 2021 to aid in and accelerate the development of local hubs throughout the country. Through this partnership, BE-Ex and IMT have been actively working with local jurisdictions and nonprofits to consult on and actively support hub development and deployment. By engaging with the BPP Network, local organizations can benefit from best practices in policy implementation and market engagement that have been tested and proven in other U.S. markets, enabling them to conserve limited resources without sacrificing programmatic excellence. While created and operated locally, hubs can participate in this new national network, transferring knowledge, programming, and experience between communities across the country. They can share and leverage resources amongst the growing network of BPP hubs currently established in New York, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Aspen, St. Louis, Kansas City, Illinois, Massachusetts, and California, as shown in Figure 1 (BPP 2026).

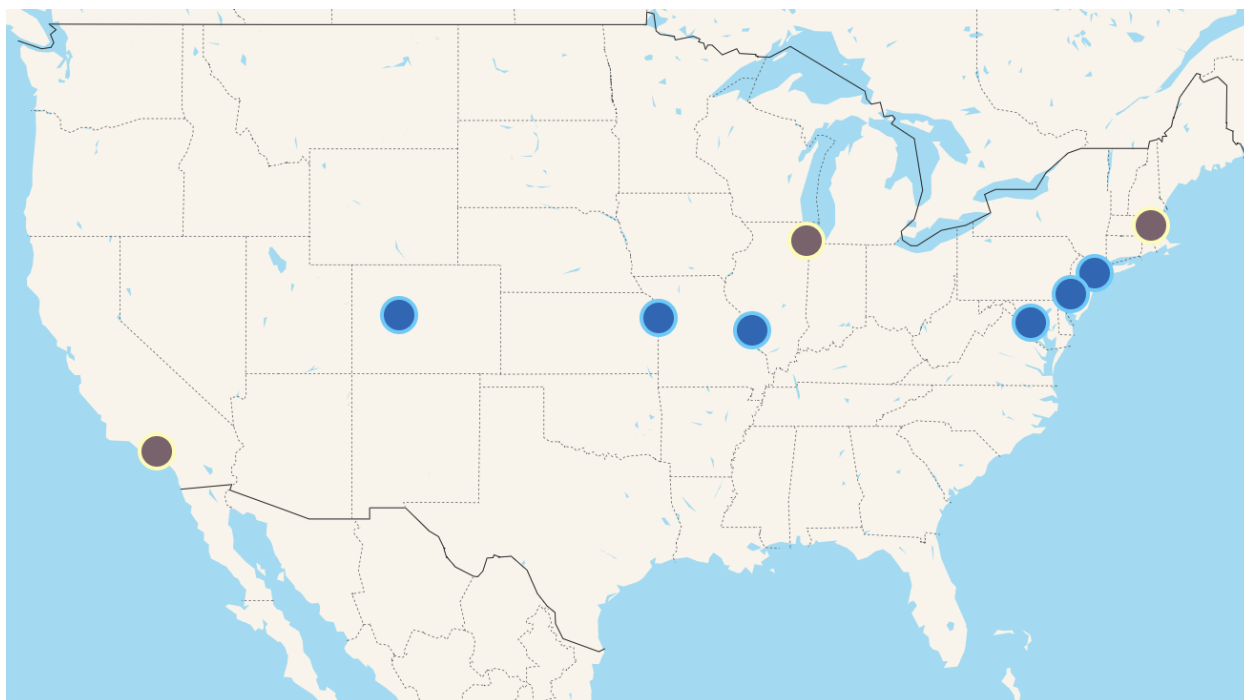


Figure 1. Locations of the regional and statewide hubs that are the current members of the Building Performance Partnership (BPP) Network. Blue denotes regional hubs, and brown denotes statewide hubs. *Source: BPP 2026.*

Hub Development & Keys for Success

Hubs engage local and regional stakeholders to advance building energy efficiency and decarbonization (Figure 2). Hubs provide education, training, and other critical resources to regional building industry practitioners and communities to help building owners advance the jurisdiction’s climate goals, including but not only BPS. A hub’s goal is to remove obstacles that prevent the implementation of high-performance building strategies by spotlighting best practices of local market leaders and by aiding those who may not have the necessary resources—be it information, expertise, or finances—to act and improve their buildings’ performance.

Hubs ensure building owners and communities make healthier, more affordable, and more comfortable buildings, through a centralized repository of plain language resources and trainings for building performance solutions. Hubs often support local public policy advancement, but they are independent, trusted third parties for solutions, best practices, and policy compliance. They also help grow demand for building improvements and can align building owners, operators, service providers, utilities, and community members for near-term successes that support lasting change.

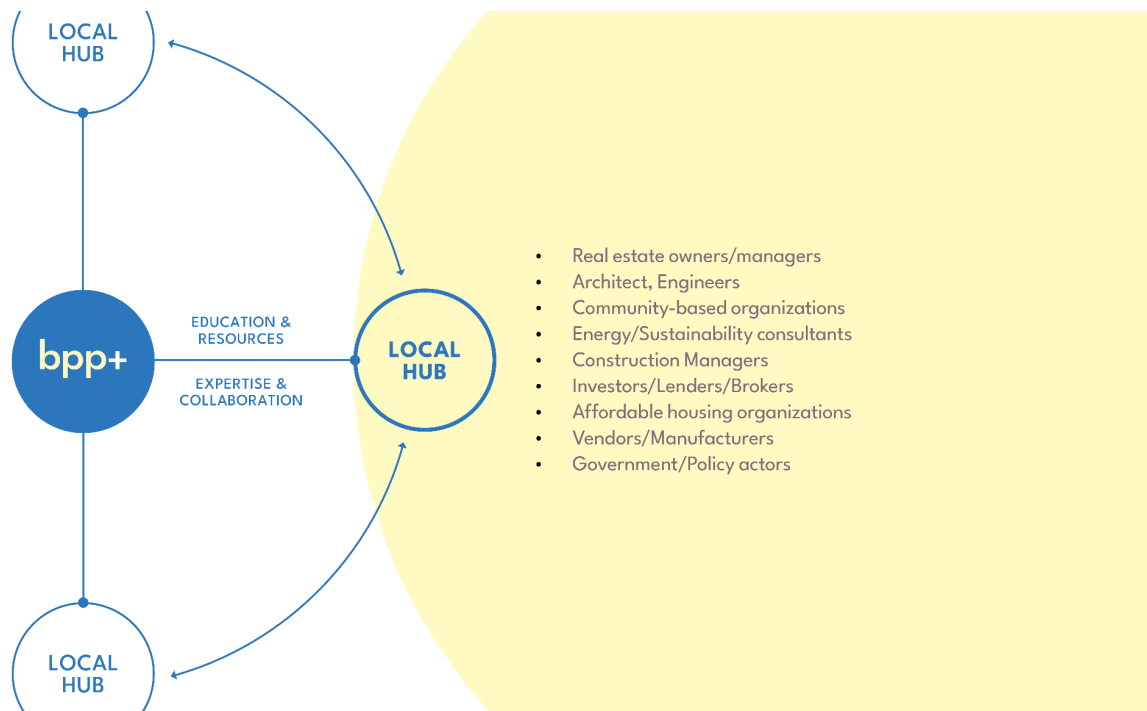


Figure 2. The Building Performance Partnership (“BPP”) supports a network of local hubs that each connect individual stakeholders and actors involved in the ownership and operation of buildings.

Timeline for Development of a Hub

Developing a hub can begin with simple interest and awareness from an appropriate city or state agency to build support for funding initial planning and a formal launch. Building awareness and internal support for a hub can continue until a city or state decides to take action to plan and ultimately launch a hub. Planning can take 3-6 months, including meaningful community engagement, local building stock analysis, and individual stakeholder interviews (Figure 3). The initial launch period may take 3-6 months, including the identification of a trusted host organization and hiring of an initial staff member. The first year or two of start-up activities build staff and visibility while demonstrating success. This provides a rationale for expanding the resources offered and strengthening organizational capacity and funding.

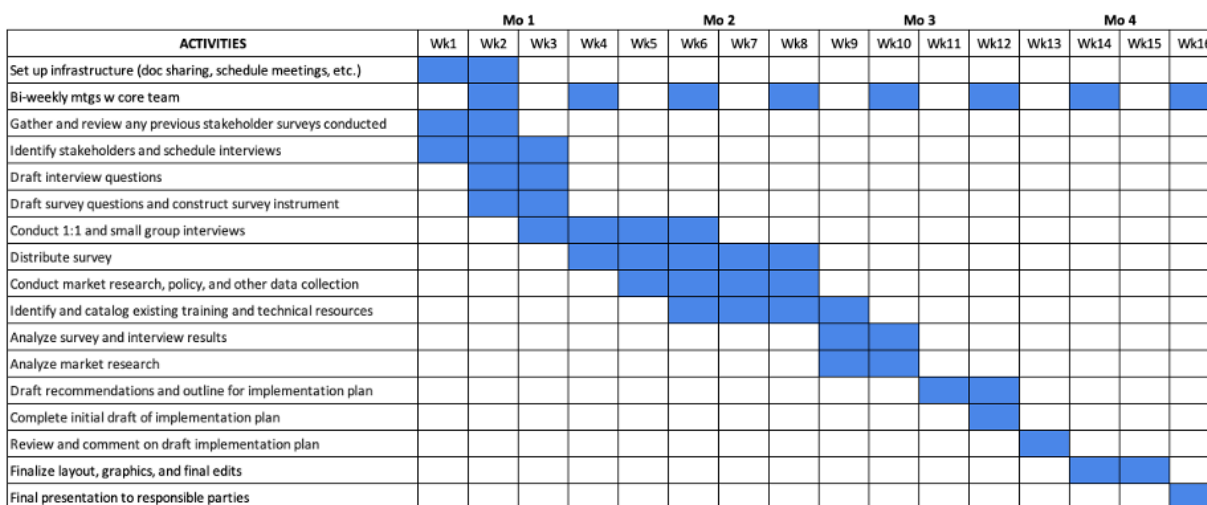


Figure 3. Sample timeline for the planning phase of hub development.

Stages and timing for hub development (Table 1) vary based on the stage of development for local policy, as well as local government capacity and the strength and development of related industry and community organizations. Often, a hub is funded and launched concurrently with a new or expanded local building performance policy, but establishing a hub first can also help build community support and practical information to help advance and inform future policies. Other times, a hub may be designed to help implement local utility programs. Even in the very early stages, the BPP Network can help build awareness and understanding for city agencies considering starting a hub but without sufficient commitment or resources yet to plan and launch one.

Table 1. Stages and timing for hub development

	Stage	Timing	Activities
0	Interested	Open-ended	Core interest from a city department Staff member contact
1	Planning	3-6 months	Proposal development, including funding Clear city, utility, or philanthropic leadership Community engagement structure <i>Note: Ideally hub planning is aligned with BPS or other policy work</i>
2	Launching	3-6 months	Needs assessment, local partner Building stock and local policy analysis Community engagement and CBO outreach Business plan development with 1-3 years of funding Initial staff hire Metrics identification

3	Start-up	1-2 years	Graphics and communication strategy Website and other resources launch Industry outreach and training activities Board of Directors/Advisors Additional staff hires Reliable funding sources identification Impact metrics assessment
4	Established	3+ years	Expanded resource development Strengthened community leadership Established industry presence and events Ongoing fundraising, with diversified income Expanded/renewed board membership Updated strategic plan

The critical steps involved in starting a hub include conducting market research, drafting a business plan, developing a communications strategy, and delivering initial resources, with assessment and further development planning over time.

Identify Local Market Needs

Before determining exactly what resources and services a hub should deliver, the jurisdiction should begin by assessing current market gaps and obstacles through a needs assessment process. This process should identify key stakeholders and community partnerships, conduct stakeholder interviews and surveys, catalog local/state policy, and include a building stock analysis to identify key building types either for energy savings or for equity and other community priorities.

Draft a Business Plan

Using the information gleaned from the needs assessment, the next step is to draft a business and operations plan to define, target, and prioritize the hub's offerings to deliver impactful outcomes for the jurisdiction, its community members, and its stakeholders. A hub business plan should include an organizational structure, staffing plan, partnership plan, funding plan, initial budget, and priorities, including target audiences, types of buildings, services offered, and metrics for success. Additionally, substantive and ongoing community outreach is crucial for long-term effectiveness and support.

Develop a Communications Strategy

A hub communications strategy should break down different stakeholder needs, interests, motivations, and challenges. It should include strategies for both the messaging and for how to deliver those messages (format and messenger) and include timelines for when outreach will occur to each key stakeholder group. An initial website should be simple and describe the hub and its mission, provide access to any resources developed by the hub, and include a calendar of relevant events of the hub or its partners. Ideally, the website would also showcase relevant regulatory developments and provide plain-language explanations.

Deliver Resources and Education

The hub should develop and deliver comprehensive programmatic resources that educate stakeholders on local policy objectives and requirements and connect them to best practices and high-performance building solutions. Successful hubs direct the industry to services, supporting organizations, and best-in-class and practical implementation solutions; they do not create or directly modify policy. As such, it is important that the hub resources have a distinct brand and graphics to distinguish them from the government programs. Additionally, having access to a physical space to host in-person trainings and events is desirable, but this is often done through a larger host organization for the hub, or in partnership with other affiliated organizations.

The types of resources and services offered are determined by the needs assessment and the business plan. Many of these resources can be adapted from hubs operating in other markets to fit the jurisdiction's specific needs. Types of resources may include the following:

- Policy compliance checklists and FAQs
- Playbooks and templates for implementing improvement strategies
- Contract templates and toolkits
- Case studies
- Funding and financing guides
- BPS compliance presentations
- Peer-to-peer activities
- Help desk contact information
- One-on-one consulting services
- Workforce development programs
- Financing resources

Improve Over Time

After initial development, in years 2-3, the hub will need to assess initial progress, diversify overall funding, expand advisory or governing boards, and update the strategic plan based on local political context and market realities. Regarding diversified and sustainable funding sources, funding from the public sector is likely to remain central to continue to pursue a public mission. According to an informal 2026 survey of BPP members, all hubs receive some funding from either the public sector or utilities, with roughly two-thirds receiving funding from philanthropy and about half with some private sector sponsorships. Half of all current hubs report relying on just 1-2 sources for at least 60% of their annual revenue.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is central to the short-term and long-term success of hubs. These partnerships go beyond typical industry stakeholders to local communities of color, Native communities, immigrants, undocumented people, and other people with low incomes, whose neighborhoods often lack basic infrastructure to support them, whose daily work or living environments are polluted or toxic, and who will be increasingly vulnerable as our climate deteriorates. These communities are crucial to build and maintain political support for climate policies including energy efficiency, particularly where those policies could increase housing costs, commercial rents, or otherwise cause displacement. The purpose of engaging one or more community-based organizations (CBOs) to collaborate at the beginning of any hub needs

assessment process is to ensure that the perspective of these communities is actively centered in the activities and language of the hub's work.

In the hub needs assessment process, CBOs should provide advice and directional perspective on the process, identify and connect with a wider range of stakeholders to survey and interview, participate in stakeholder interviews and distribute surveys, and review final recommendations to check for bias or to uplift additional gaps and strengths. Once the needs assessment is completed, CBOs should have an ongoing role in supporting and collaborating with the hub, including providing outreach to help identify additional partners, building owners, or contractors; developing, hosting, or delivering workforce development programs or entrepreneurship programs related to building-serving trades; and outreach to building owners, commercial and residential tenants, or other community groups to help build understanding and support for building policies and investments that improve health and resilience, provide operating savings and increased durability, and benefit the climate.

Case Study: The Building Energy Hub

Launched in 2023 by the Illinois Green Alliance (IGA), the Building Energy Hub ('Chicago Hub') serves as a centralized building performance resource center for technical guidance, education, and resources to help building owners, operators, contractors, and local Illinois governments navigate building energy improvements. Although the Chicago Hub was initially conceived as a regional resource in supporting anticipated policy developments in the Chicago metropolitan area; recently, the hub has expanded its mission to serve as a statewide resource. Through partnerships, technical assistance, and resource development, the Chicago Hub is building the market readiness necessary to accelerate building decarbonization across the state of Illinois.

The concept for the Chicago Hub grew out of longstanding work at IGA (formerly the U.S. Green Building Council Illinois chapter). For many years, the organization had cultivated a strong network of green building professionals across the state. However, its audience was largely composed of sustainability champions—professionals already committed to high-performance building practices (Kaluzny 2025). Interviews with local stakeholders (Figure 4) revealed that building owners, contractors, design professionals, and smaller building portfolios who may not have traditionally prioritized green building initiatives needed to be engaged.

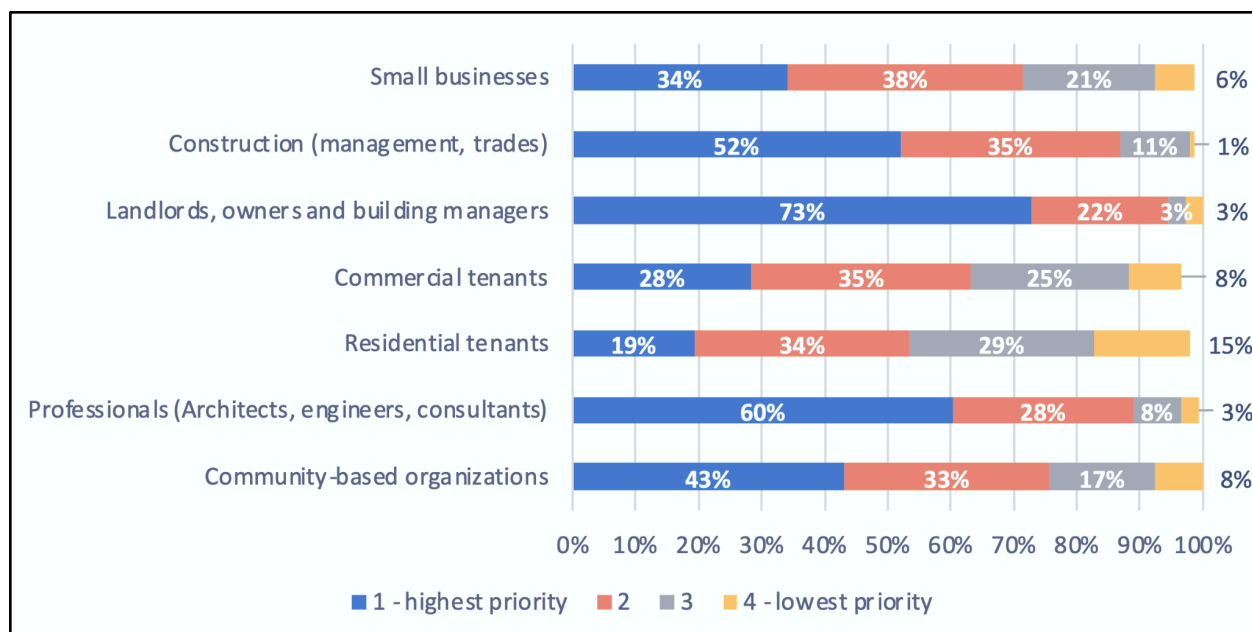


Figure 4. Target audience prioritization for Chicago Hub based on interview responses. *Source: IGA 2022.*

At the same time, policy developments were creating new urgency. Building on the updated Chicago Energy Benchmarking Ordinance passed in 2019, discussions within the Chicago Building Decarbonization Working Group convened in 2021 identified the need for a “one-stop shop” hub that could provide practical guidance to building professionals on energy efficiency upgrades, renewable energy, project financing, and other strategies leading to net zero building emissions (Kaluzny 2022). Additionally, the passage of the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act that same year placed significant responsibility on buildings to reduce emissions by requiring a carbon-free power grid by 2045 (Citizens Utility Board 2026). In the Chicago region largely, there were multiple entities, resources, and programs providing valuable support, but not one central, regional resource to access up-to-date information for those pursuing high efficiency new construction or decarbonization-focused retrofit projects (Kaluzny 2022). Thus, between 2021 and 2022, IGA engaged BE-Ex and IMT to conduct a needs assessment for the feasibility of a hub, finding broad support among multiple segments of the building sector that a hub would support stakeholders in meeting current and future climate goals (including the Chicago Climate Action Plan which passed shortly thereafter).

Following this planning process, the Chicago Hub officially launched in August 2023. From the outset, it was designed to expand beyond the traditional sustainability audience and meet building stakeholders where they are, with a mission to serve as “an objective resource for building professionals of all levels of familiarity with energy efficiency” (Building Energy Hub, 2026). To achieve this, the Chicago Hub intentionally shifted its messaging away from language focused solely on climate or sustainability. Instead, it emphasizes practical guidance and business value, highlighting how energy improvements can support capital planning, reduce operating costs, and prepare buildings for future regulatory requirements (Kaluzny 2025). This approach allows the Chicago Hub to engage a broader range of stakeholders, including those who may not initially view themselves as participants in climate action, but who are responsible for managing and improving building performance.

BEH's offerings include:

- Technical best-practice guidance for improving building energy performance
- Educational workshops and training sessions
- Information on incentives, rebates, and financing opportunities
- Tools to support benchmarking and building energy analysis
- Connections to contractors, service providers, and subject-matter experts

In addition to online resources, the hub provides direct technical assistance. Staff offer one-on-one consultations to help building owners and municipal staff navigate topics such as benchmarking, utility data access, financing strategies, and compliance preparation. This hands-on support is particularly valuable for municipalities with limited staff capacity. By acting as a technical support arm, the Chicago Hub helps local governments increase participation in local building policy programs.

Although the hub launched relatively recently, it has already demonstrated strong engagement from the market. Since 2024, the hub has had 4,700 resource downloads, held 20 educational webinars, received 575 attendees at educational programming, and has held 75 one-on-one technical assistance sessions with building professionals. Importantly, the Chicago Hub's resources are being used even in the absence of widespread policy mandates. While the city considers a future BPS policy, building stakeholders continue to seek out the Chicago Hub's tools and expertise. This highlights an important outcome: market readiness.

By building awareness and providing supportive tools and resources to early adopters, the hub is creating the conditions necessary for successful policy implementation in the future for other municipalities. To be more opportunistic to where policy has progressed, the Chicago Hub has gradually expanded its scope to support other municipalities across Illinois, including the City of Evanston and the Village of Oak Park, which recently passed its own BPS policy and mandated decarbonization of new construction, respectively. In this way, the Chicago Hub has remained relevant to the business community and effective in progressing the State's overall energy transition.

Partnerships have played a critical role in the hub's growth and effectiveness. Rather than relying solely on internal staff capacity, the hub collaborates with utilities, financial institutions, nonprofits, and industry organizations to expand its reach (Kaluzny 2026). The Chicago Hub also has an advisory board representing building owners, operators, contractors, and other industry stakeholders that provides ongoing guidance by validating priorities, identifying emerging needs, and ensuring that the hub's resources remain aligned with real-world market conditions.

Like many of the hubs in the BPP Network, the Chicago Hub's long-term sustainability depends on a diversified funding model. A key source of stability has been continued support from the regional electric utility, ComEd, which initially funded the hub as a pilot project but has since extended this funding for an additional multi-year period. Philanthropic partners also provided general operating support, enabling BEH to maintain flexibility and continue offering its array of services. Currently, the Chicago Hub is launching a corporate sponsorship model that invites industry partners to support its work (Kaluzny 2026).

The Chicago hub illustrates the value of flexible, curated support for advancing building decarbonization at a statewide reach. By adapting its strategy over time—expanding statewide partnerships, refining its messaging, and diversifying funding—the hub has continued to build momentum toward higher-performing buildings across Illinois. Today, the Chicago Hub serves

as a trusted resource for municipalities and industry stakeholders alike. By providing practical tools, technical assistance, and a platform for collaboration, it helps bridge the gap between policy and implementation.

A Knowledge Exchange Network

The BPP Network offers a platform for these hubs to connect with one another, share ideas, leverage resources, and express mutual comradery under similar circumstances. Hubs also serve as local nodes in their respective regions for industry professionals to interact and then share out best practices on a broader scale. This presents an opportunity to disseminate new ideas, technologies, and learnings from other geographies through a hub.

BE-Ex in New York City has done this on several occasions, sending delegations overseas to Europe to better understand the advanced policies and technologies driving building decarbonization in that region and bringing back new approaches and solutions to the New York market. In 2015, professionals from the U.S. and Canada traveled to Brussels to study exemplary high-efficiency buildings and learn from the city's pioneering integration of Passive House standards into new construction. In 2023, the Swedish Energy Agency and Smart City Sweden/IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute welcomed a delegation of leading U.S. companies, assembled by BE-Ex and the New York State Energy Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA), to Stockholm that included site visits, presentations, and workshops focused on knowledge exchange and capacity building of New York real estate, engineering, and utility sectors. From these international exchanges, the New York market has become better equipped to accelerate low-carbon solutions by serving as a forum for international solution providers, private sector stakeholders, and policymakers to engage, collaborate, determine barriers, and find paths forward for success.

Not only has this knowledge been disseminated throughout the BPP Network, but other hubs can also build on the success of BE-Ex in New York City to partner with international leaders and engage in global knowledge transfer to improve building performance locally.

Another example of the BPP Network's value is its ability to support hubs in addressing shared market challenges. Cooperatives and condominiums are a particularly difficult building typology to decarbonize, a challenge faced by cities across the network. In response, hubs have collaborated to share and adapt resources and develop joint programming on this topic. As part of an ongoing BPP educational series the New York and D.C. hubs jointly produced "The Future of Multifamily: Positioning Condos and Co-ops for Success in DC and NYC" on November 7, 2024, a moderated panel discussion featuring real-world case studies of successful low-carbon retrofits from both cities. Additionally, the New York hub recently released a new workbook, "Cutting Carbon in Co-ops & Condos," which built on a similar toolkit created by D.C.'s Building Innovation Hub, allowing the hubs to leverage existing knowledge while conserving valuable resources. Similarly, a suite of technology primers that explain key building systems and equipment for low-carbon retrofits has been shared across the network, with each hub customizing the materials to meet the needs of its local stakeholders.

Together, these efforts demonstrate how the BPP Network enables hubs to address shared market challenges more efficiently while adapting resources and programming to the specific policy, building stock, and stakeholder needs of each local market.

Conclusion

The tens of millions of buildings where we work, sleep, eat, learn, heal, and gather have a fundamental role to play in effective climate action. However, buildings are inherently resistant to change. They are expensive to build, operate, and renovate; their equipment and systems often last for decades; and their owners and operators are understandably cautious about adopting unfamiliar technologies, practices, and financing models. Given the local nature of building ownership, regulation, construction, and operation, creating a new paradigm for how buildings are built, operated, and maintained requires sustained local action.

As cities and states grapple with the public and environmental impacts of climate change, building performance has become an increasingly important area for policy innovation. Many jurisdictions are adopting ground-breaking policies to stimulate a transition to dramatically improved building efficiency based on measured emissions and energy use. However, policy adoption alone is not sufficient and may not be a viable option in some jurisdictions. Building owners and other market actors need practical information, trusted guidance, technical resources, and opportunities for collaboration to translate regulatory requirements into durable market transformation. An independent local hub is uniquely situated to provide this implementation support. By serving as a trusted advisor to building decision-makers, providing training and education, supporting BPS and other regulatory compliance, and connecting stakeholders to resources and each other, a hub can help scale the market for high-performance buildings.

By creating a new community of practice, bringing together and educating real estate's diverse and often siloed stakeholders, a hub can also lay the groundwork for future policy success. Most BPP Network hubs were established before the passage of their jurisdiction's building performance standard, providing momentum toward higher-performing buildings and building capacity in the real estate sector to comply with new regulations once adopted. In this way, hubs can support both current policy implementation and the longer-term market readiness needed for future climate action.

Building science does not change when crossing state lines, yet a given city, town, or locality will have different capacities, expertise, market gaps, and stakeholder needs. The BPP Network provides its member hubs with a robust collective set of resources, which can each be customized to address the specific needs of their local circumstances and audiences. Local trusted advisors are often the best channel to effect change with local market actors, while a national network enables local hubs to be nimbler and more efficient. By helping hubs deploy tested programmatic approaches, share lessons across markets, and conserve limited resources, the BPP Network is emerging as an effective tool to accelerate the transition to healthy, high-performing buildings everywhere and for everyone.

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