

ENERGYFIT PHILLY RETROFITS ENTIRE BLOCKS OF LOW-INCOME HOUSING

Location	Philadelphia
Sector	Single-family retrofits
Highlights	<p>Conducted retrofits in entire blocks in low-income neighborhoods</p> <p>Taking a neighborhood rather than individual home approach increased cost effectiveness and benefits, and made it easier for low-income residents in single-family homes to apply</p> <p>Savings in electric and natural gas bills</p> <p>70 households received upgrades over 3 years</p> <p>Noticeable improvements in indoor air quality, relative humidity, and reductions in chronic disease</p> <p>Preservation and improvement of existing low-income housing</p>

PROGRAM SUMMARY

The EnergyFIT Philly program served more than 70 low-income homes during its three years of operation (Denson and Hayes 2018). Most of these homes were in such poor physical condition that they had been rejected for the standard weatherization program due to leaking roofs or other structural problems. **The program used a unique approach, working with entire neighborhood blocks as opposed to individual households.** To target specific neighborhoods for participation in a contest to select blocks for retrofits, the Energy Coordinating Agency (ECA) partnered with several community-based organizations, including Strawberry Mansion, We Never Say Never, HACE, and the Hunting Park Neighborhood Advisory Committee (Lanier 2017). Winning neighborhood blocks were selected by an independent advisory committee that considered the physical condition of homes, percentage of low-income home ownership, representation of low-income households, and rate of participation on the block.

ECA began the repair and home improvements with a whole-house inspection in combination with BPI energy audits and a Healthy Homes Assessment; it then developed a detailed scope of work. The advanced deterioration meant that many of these homes had health and safety hazards, so devices to measure indoor humidity and temperature were installed in 44 audited homes. The program administrators connected accepted cohorts with analysts or inspectors to initiate repair projects. All homes received home repairs and extensive energy efficiency improvements, including air sealing, insulation, heating system repair or replacement, conversion from heating oil to high-efficiency gas, duct sealing, white roof coating, programmable thermostats, self-help education, and other treatments. Participating households saved an average of 35.5% on electricity bills and 22% on natural gas bills; they



Figure 8. Darlene Pope, EnergyFIT Philly Block Captain.
Source: EnergyFIT Philly.

also experienced improved air quality (Denson and Hayes 2018). This translates into savings between \$500 and \$3,500 annually for each household.

SUGGESTIONS FOR OTHER GOVERNMENTS

Despite initial success, EnergyFIT Philly ended after three years. Program challenges included clarifying home ownership in situations with tangled title holders (addressed by providing legal services) and developing trust with residents (Lanier 2017). EnergyFIT Philly had a significant impact, especially through its whole-block approach. **By targeting blocks, the**

program was able to preserve and upgrade entire sections of low-income homes (Denson and Hayes 2018). Philadelphia's high concentration of row houses also made it easier to retrofit multiple buildings simultaneously (Robinson 2017). Other residential retrofit programs can learn from EnergyFIT Philly's approach to serve more high-use households. If a program is focusing on or including rental housing, it can consider additional practices to overcome trust and ownership issues, such as providing incentives for rental building owners (including escalating incentives for whole-building work), granting renters the right to make efficiency improvements, and adopting rental energy disclosure policies (Samarripas and Jarrah 2021).

Suggested citation:

Dewey, A., J. Mah, and B. Howard. 2021. Ready to Go: State and Local Efforts Advancing Energy Efficiency. Washington, DC: American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. <https://www.aceee.org/toolkit/2021/11/ready-go-state-and-local-efforts-advancing-energy-efficiency>