

A photograph of two construction workers in safety gear shaking hands. The worker on the left is wearing a dark hooded jacket and a safety harness. The worker on the right is wearing a blue short-sleeved shirt and a safety harness with yellow accents. They are standing outdoors with a blurred green background. A large orange semi-circle is in the bottom right corner.

**How energy efficiency
programs can build momentum
in a time of transition**

veic

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Contents

- The current moment 3
 - 1. Lean into your community and networks 4
 - 2. Get creative with your outreach strategies 5
 - 3. Foster innovation with flexible program designs 6
 - 4. Build equity into your programs 7
 - 5. Invest in workforce development 8
- The road ahead 9
- About VEIC 10

The current moment

There's no way around it: it's a hard time to be in the energy efficiency industry. Federal energy efficiency home improvement credits are expiring, leaving many Americans with less support to update inefficient appliances. At the same time, energy demand is surging—in part because of the expansion of AI data centers—and energy costs are rising fast.

This dual pressure leaves both customers and program managers feeling the squeeze. The challenge ahead is a big one. How do we help people save on energy, meet the growing demand, and minimize grid investments that only drive prices higher?

But there is good news: You don't just have to tread water during this turbulent time—you can innovate, expand your reach, and grow your impact.

Here's how →



1.

Lean into your community and networks

Partnerships and collaboration are more important than ever.

The rapidly shifting policy landscape can be difficult to navigate, but it's easier when we lean on and learn from each other. Your networks can help you not only stay on top of changes and news, but also discover local funding opportunities, take advantage of free toolkits, and (most importantly) expand your impact.



VEIC, for instance, joined Relay Network, a group of mission-driven, energy-efficiency implementers. This network has helped us share and learn industry best practices and introduced us to project partners. Relay Network is just one example of the many impactful networks available to energy efficiency organizations.



Partnerships don't have to be limited to climate organizations. Clean energy work touches all facets of society, from public health to the labor market, so our networks should be just as far-reaching.

One of the energy efficiency programs we administer—the District of Columbia Sustainable Energy Utility (DCSEU)—works closely with faith-based communities to increase engagement with resources like the Worship Facility Building Energy Performance Standards (BEPS) Toolkit. The DCSEU team also attends local school science fairs, visits senior wellness centers, and works with affordable housing communities to deepen community involvement and gain stakeholder feedback. There are countless groups ready to support energy efficiency and affordability.

2.

Get creative with your outreach strategies

When funding is tight, marketing and outreach for clean energy projects are often the first to go. But they're essential to helping people learn about and access energy efficiency program offerings.

Marketers need to do more with less, and that's where creative outreach strategies come in.

Start with your free channels. Even if you can't fund display ads or print mailers, you can meet your audience where they are: on social media, through email newsletters, and at in-person or online community events.

You can also build online resources for residents to drive program engagement and educate your audience about efficiency upgrades.



Efficiency Vermont—Vermont's energy efficiency program run by VEIC—publishes a **blog** covering everything from customer savings stories to technology FAQs. With roughly 280,000 annual views, it's one of the most visited sections of their website (second only to the rebates page).

280,000

customers read the Efficiency Vermont blog annually.

If you do have paid outreach opportunities, you can make them go further through strategic targeting. We've seen this work firsthand with the DCSEU's Solar for All program. This program provides solar energy to low- and moderate-income households living or renting in single-family homes. Because of D.C.'s high cost of living, affordable single-family housing is rare, so the pool of qualifying residents is narrow.

To reach them, the DCSEU launched a **targeted direct mail and canvassing campaign** using census data to identify income-eligible homeowners. The result? The program met its enrollment goals, putting more District residents on a path to offset electricity costs by as much as \$500 per year.

3.

Foster innovation with flexible program designs

Energy efficiency is a proven path to climate progress.

However, traditional energy efficiency measures and methods alone cannot meet the growing energy needs or offset the harmful environmental effects of fossil fuels. Innovation isn't just beneficial for energy efficiency programs; it's essential to addressing market gaps and overcoming funding barriers.

When we think of innovation, we often think of technological breakthroughs, but innovation lives in every part of your program: from outreach strategies to program structures that scale. One way to ensure your program leaves room for innovation is through flexible program designs.

So, what does this look like in practice? VEIC worked with Energy Solutions on TECH Clean California, a statewide initiative to expand the adoption of home climate control heat pumps and heat pump water heaters. We administered the Quick Start Grant program, which provided micro funding directly to local companies and organizations to pilot innovative ideas. Our program team heard time and time again from grant awardees that what they appreciated most about the funding was its flexibility.

Grant funding was not tied to specific project phases or a rigid plan, so grantees had the power to adapt and evolve their programs as they learned what was working (or not working).

The flexible funding also left room to make changes based on idea exchanges. For example, one Quick Start Grant recipient (Barnett Plumbing) learned that another awardee (New Buildings Institute) was seeing major success using 120V heat pump water heaters to overcome the barrier of costly electrical panel upgrades. Barnett Plumbing quickly folded that same heat pump water heater model into its own loaner program pilot. **This helped them boost their customers' heat pump water heater adoption rates to over 50%.**

Another Quick Start Grant awardee, the Diversity Coalition, realized that many messages around electrification from state, city, and utility marketers don't adequately consider the background context of low-income communities or communities of color. **They used their Quick Start Grant funding to develop an innovative playbook of messaging strategies to help electrify all California homes.**

Innovation may look different to every program, but it's an essential ingredient to reaching our climate and community goals.



4.

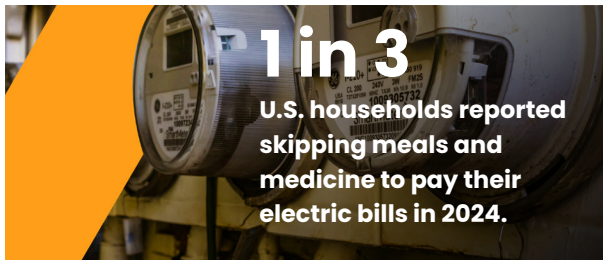
Build equity into your programs

Energy efficiency isn't just about reaching climate goals: it's about providing much-needed relief for households carrying the highest energy burden.

As energy costs grow, so does the burden on households already struggling to afford basic needs. Equity belongs in every aspect of program design to ensure everyone can access vital heating, cooling, and electricity for their homes.

Energy efficiency programs can also help free up household income for food and other essentials—and not just for a small group of people. According to a [2024 U.S. census survey](#), one in three households reported skipping meals and medicine to pay for their electric bills. With many federal safety nets under threat, energy efficiency savings are that much more important.

Equity is about more than serving low-income households. We need programs to support renters, first-time homebuyers, those who do not have funds to invest in clean energy, and other groups long underserved by energy efficiency programs.



We've found that the first step to ensuring your program centers equity is to spend time upfront learning about and tracking who benefits from energy savings (and who may be overlooked). We've conducted energy equity reports across [Connecticut, Maine, and Vermont](#) that program managers can reference, but there are many other studies out there for your organization to learn from if you don't have the time or resources to conduct your own. [The American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy \(ACEEE\) is also a great resource if you're looking for a national picture of the energy burden.](#)

Once you've identified gaps, co-design your programs with community organizations that can be powerful allies in delivering programs that resonate with the residents you serve. In Vermont, we [co-manage an annual weatherization campaign](#) with community partners, town energy committees, utilities, and other nonprofit organizations. This collaborative approach has helped our campaign gain deep local traction, reach more residents, and ensure no underserved groups are left behind.

5.

Invest in workforce development

Energy efficiency and electrification projects are only possible with a strong clean energy workforce.

Even though federal funding for these projects has stalled, residents and businesses still need to weatherize and repair older homes, bring buildings up to code, and switch to smarter, safer appliances. Yet, there aren't enough workers to meet the demand, particularly skilled trade workers like HVAC mechanics, electricians, and solar technicians. That's where workforce development programs can help.



Climate workers report high job satisfaction and receive competitive pay, but these jobs aren't always easy to access. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce created a Talent Pipeline Management framework that outlines the support needed to guide individuals from the learning stage of their careers to employment.



Figure above from: [Efficiency Vermont's blog: "Ask the Expert: Why is developing Vermont's workforce important for energy efficiency?"](#)

As the framework shows, work-based learning is a crucial component that relies on local networks. Energy efficiency programs are uniquely positioned to connect contractors and utilities with aspiring workers, creating a pipeline that benefits everyone.

Workforce development programs not only help people jumpstart new careers that pay well, but they also boost local economies and help improve the quality of our homes, buildings, and air. According to the Building Performance Association, the **energy efficiency industry alone employs 2.1 times as many workers in the U.S. as the entire fossil fuel industry.** Investing in this workforce will help us meet today's demand while supporting a thriving sustainability economy for decades to come.

The road ahead

The clean energy industry may be facing headwinds, but it's also on the edge of an exciting transformation. Rising energy costs, shifting policies, and growing demand are not just challenges—they're opportunities to think differently, collaborate deeply, and champion equity.

The urgency of energy efficiency work is clear. Our research shows that 85% of governments and transportation agencies believe it's never been more critical to aggressively pursue sustainable energy. Yet nearly as many (84%) face significant resource constraints, forcing tough decisions about where to invest.

With a few strategic shifts and help from trusted partners like VEIC, energy efficiency programs can do more than weather the storm. They can build resilient, future-ready programs that uplift households, strengthen local economies, and accelerate our path to a cleaner, more just energy future.

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About VEIC

VEIC helps energy leaders nationwide meet their clean energy goals. As a nonprofit organization, we work in the service of people and planet, designing holistic solutions that grow local economies, improve public health, and strengthen communities.

For nearly 40 years, we have decarbonized the nation's buildings, transportation systems, and utility grids. We do this through our consulting practice and large-scale energy programs. Our consulting work spans program solutions, fleet solutions, decarbonization planning, funding solutions, pilots, and marketing and education.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is just the beginning.

Visit veic.org to learn more. →

Let's start amplifying our impact together.

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