

An abstract graphic composed of several overlapping, rounded, organic shapes in various colors including blue, purple, pink, red, and yellow. The shapes are layered, with some appearing in front of others, creating a sense of depth. The background is a solid dark blue.

AESP ANNUAL

**Inclusive Program Design with Communities at the Center:
Moving from Lip Service to Meaningful Actualization**

February 27 - March 2

2023

The Situation

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- **Utilities and states are seeking how to better serve all customers:** how to expand the reach of clean energy or energy efficiency programs to underserved customers?
- **Utility programs have not always benefitted customers equally:** Energy efficiency programs have benefitted many, but not all, customers.
- **Community-based organizations (CBOs) can help utilities bridge this gap, but the partnership needs to be done right:** Utilities often turn to community-based organizations (CBOs) for input on how to best reach these populations but fail to include them in critical decisions about program design and implementation.



This discussion draws on...

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Primary research across 5 evaluation and market research projects

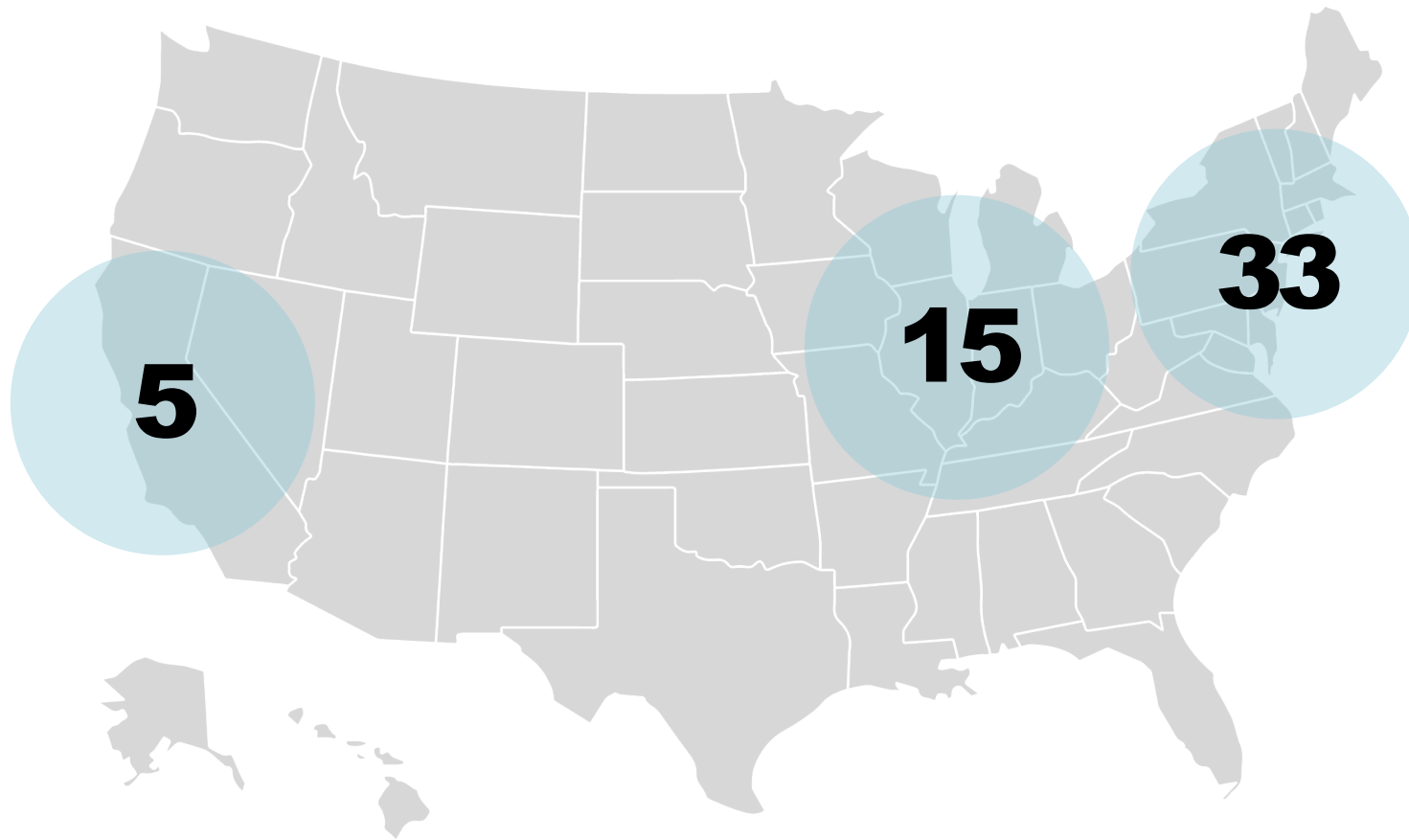
- Interviews with 53 CBOs across the country (both orgs already partnering with utilities and those who aren't)

Secondary research including a best practices literature review and evaluation report review.



This study draws on...

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Northeast: Non-implementer CBOs that serve limited English-speaking populations (LEP); organizations participating in utility community partnership programs

Midwest: CBOs working in community, environmental, and policy advocacy, as well as economic development

West: CBOs that received grants from the utility for customer education on energy efficiency



What is a CBO?

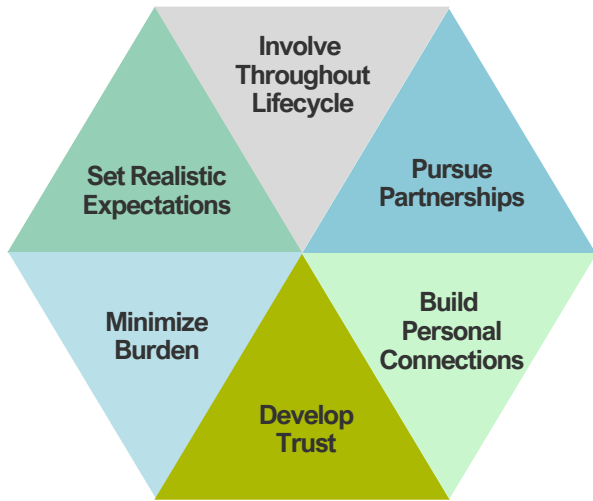
Non-profit that provides specific services to a community or targeted population within the community

A CBO is driven by community residents in all aspects of its existence, meaning:

- Most of the governing body and staff consists of residents,
- The main operating offices are in the community,
- Priority issue areas are identified and defined by residents,
- Solutions to address priority issues are developed with residents, and
- Program design, implementation, and evaluation components have residents intimately involved.



Best Practices for Community Partnerships Programs



Develop Trust

Work with trusted community messengers to overcome customer-utility trust barriers.

Build Personal Connections

Focus on one-on-one conversations with customers to understand their needs and build credibility as a trustworthy partner.

Minimize Burden

Provide financial, logistical, and technical resources that help CBOs accomplish their stated goals.

Involve Throughout Lifecycle

Involve CBOs throughout the project lifecycle beginning with problem definition through evaluation of outcomes.

Pursue Partnerships

Pursue partnerships with CBOs with a non-energy focus to develop a holistic understanding of community needs and provide a greater range of benefits.

Set Realistic Expectations

Set clear and realistic expectations for CBOs to ensure partners have adequate time and resources to support utility efforts.



Rethink Utility-CBO Relationships

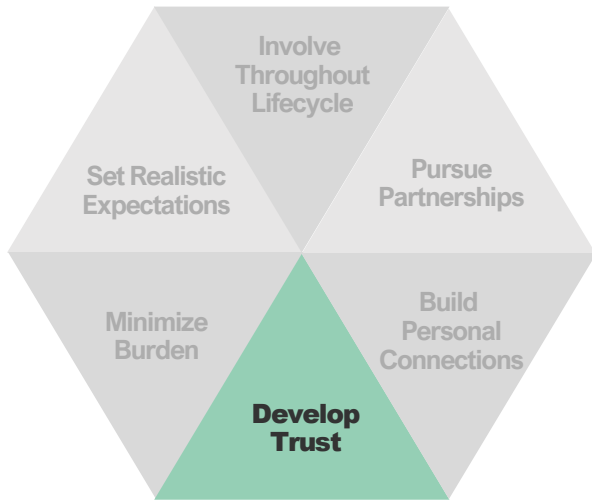
Historic utility-CBO relationships			Potential future of utility-CBO relationships		
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION

International Association for Public Participation's Spectrum of Public Participation



Develop Trust



“Where you have the least success, is where you want to try more.”

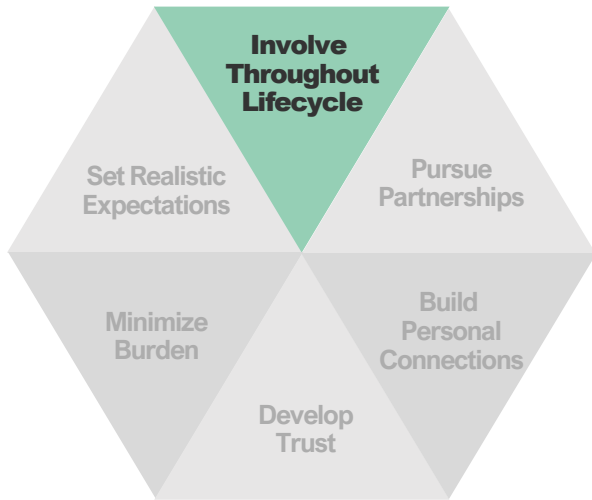
- CBO on their outreach approach in the face of community distrust

“Utilities should make their work relatable, not complicated, and on the ground. When this doesn't happen, people shut down, breeds cynicism, lack of trust.”

- CBO on the current state many utilities grapple with



Involve Throughout Lifecycle

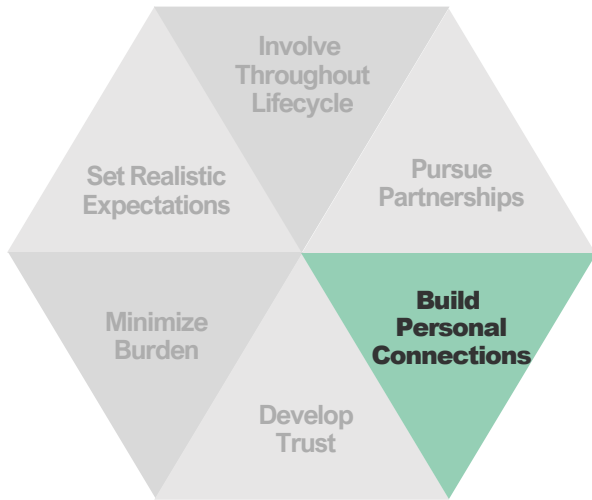


“ Don't come in with a plan. Oftentimes there is this push to focus on strategies that have been evaluated and shown to be successful. Doesn't leave room for new strategies. ”

- CBO on the need for utilities and CBOs to co-create (and iterate) to find new solutions



Build Personal Connections



“

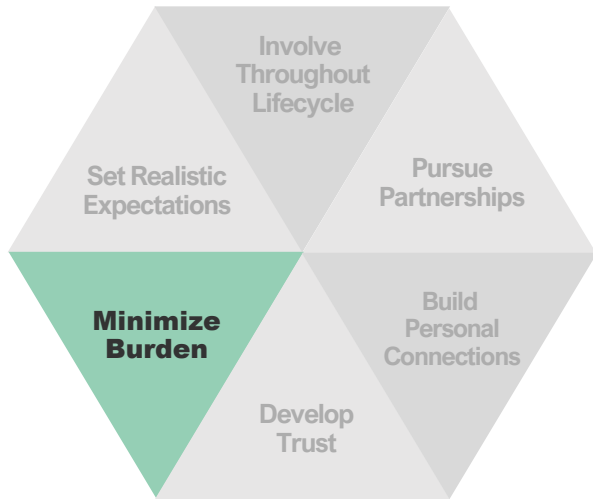
What's worked well has been being honest on each other's self-interests, and that took some doing, so over the years we've developed relationships with particular people.

”

- CBO around the important of relationship-building

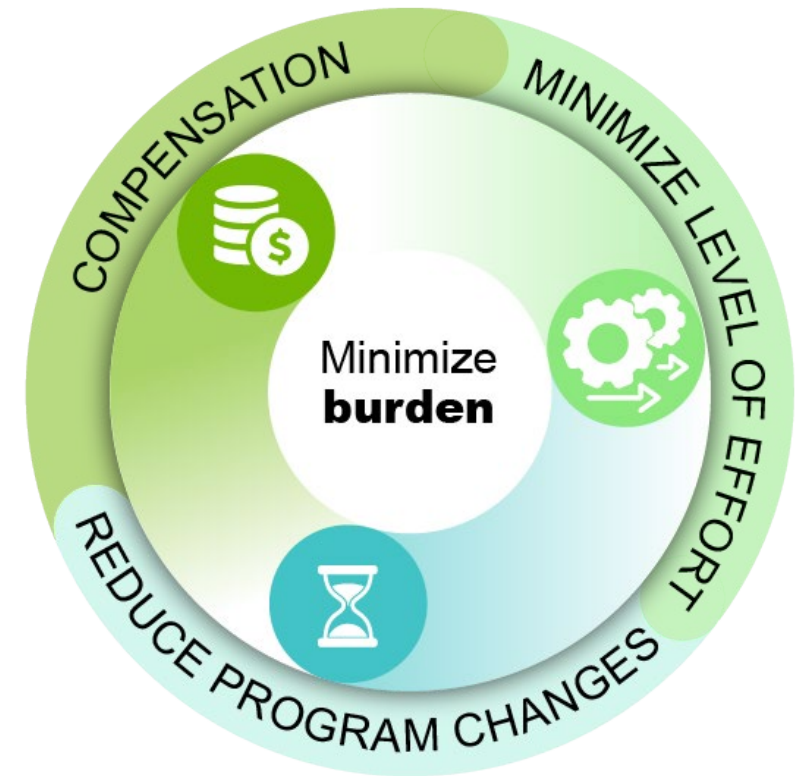


Minimize Burden



“ Don't tell me to create something, and then change, and change, and change, and change. I don't have the time to waste to do that. ”

- Community Partner Organization on the approval process for co-branded materials



Minimize Burden: Case Study

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The Situation:

Often, utility-led community partnership programs involve cobranded materials.

The Problem:

Community partners in two states noted that the marketing material approval process is slow and involved a lot of back and forth.

The Solution:

Simplifying the process with pre-approved templates, stock images, logos, and wording would expedite this process.



Pursue partnerships with non-energy focus

“

Broaden the voices and understanding of who is representing an environmental justice community. Look at what those partners can do to provide equitable distribution... Look throughout the region – different people and ways of communication.

”

Environmental non-profits or clean energy committees already committed to expanding access to weatherization found participating in the Initiative relatively easier than those whose focus was elsewhere, such as housing or health.

- CBO around how utilities can broaden CBOs to partner with



Partnerships: Groups to Reach

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**Community
Advocacy**

**Public
Health**

**Environmental
Justice**

**Neighborhood
Communities**

**Food
Security**

**Workforce
Development**

**Housing
Services**

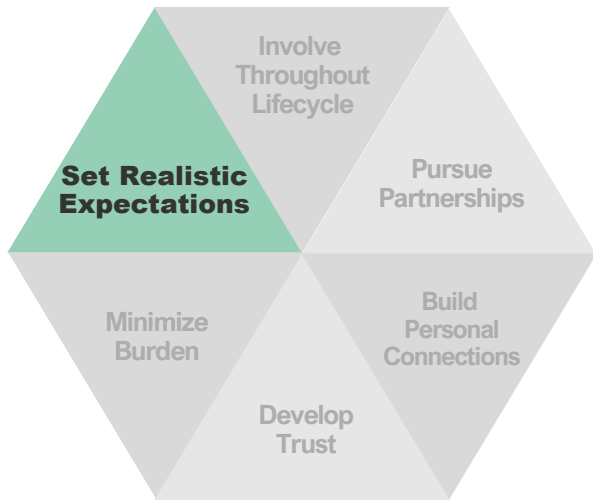
**Youth
Groups**

**Faith
Communities**

**...who
else?**



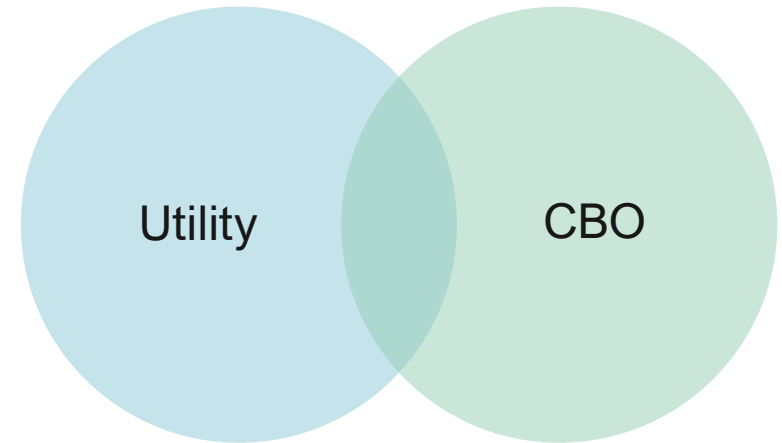
Set Realistic Expectations



“ *There’s a utility role in climate justice. [Utility name] is uniquely suited to make climate actions happen – through partnerships with CBOs and EJ orgs.* ”

- CBO on the importance of partnerships

Sphere of Influence

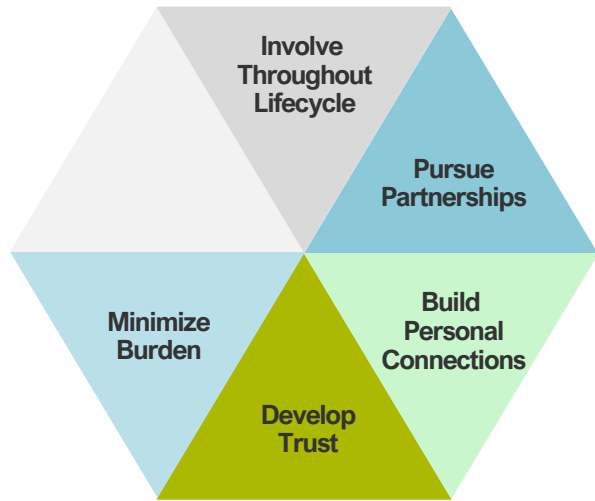


Case Study and Key Takeaways



Case Study: Bronx Healthy Buildings Program

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Involve Throughout Lifecycle

Many community partners engaged

Pursue Partnerships

Energy efficiency upgrades, health and safety remediation, and training

Develop Trust

Strong history within the community

Build Personal Connections

In-person visits to provide education and services

Minimize Burden

Upgrades and services to customers free of charge



Questions for Stronger Partnerships

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Understand community needs

Define equity goal alignment

Articulate mutual benefits

Delineate program improvement from program design

Identify the current partnership state

Explore outreach opportunities and gaps

ASK QUESTIONS TO...



Conclusions

- **Trust with communities wasn't built in a day**
– *but also isn't eroded in a day*
- **Authentic partnerships take time**
– *more than a 1-year program cycle*
- **Reaching hard-to-reach communities requires extra resources**
– *time and money*
- **CBOs are often resource-strapped**
– *making their involvement as easy as possible is key*
- **CBOs should be involved in the entire lifecycle of a program**
– *and this is an iterative process*

How well do the programs you work with engage with CBOs?



Thank you!

Contact

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