

Energy Efficiency in Latino Households Best Practices for Program Administrators



These recommendations for serving Latino households are the outcome of a multiyear research project conducted for the California Energy Commission by the Center for Sustainable Energy, Research Into Action, Ghoulam Research and Edward Vine. A full discussion of the research can be found at energycenter.org/sociocultural. For more information, please contact Laura Parsons at laura.parsons@energycenter.org or (858) 244-7288.

Outreach Recommendations

- **Partner with community-based organizations (CBOs):** CBOs are trusted sources of information and can help energy efficiency programs reach underserved communities who may have low trust in unfamiliar messengers from utilities or other institutions. Furthermore, CBOs can help screen messaging to ensure it is culturally relevant and to highlight nonenergy services to increase the overall value to households.
- **Go bilingual:** Publishing marketing collateral, websites and enrollment forms in both English and Spanish and hiring native-speaking bilingual program staff can help engage Latino households, particularly those members who are first-generation immigrants and/or less acculturated to the United States. Even for household decision-makers who are fluent in English, the ability to speak some Spanish can help establish rapport and trust with them or, sometimes, older family members who influence decisions.
- **Use relevant imagery:** When designing marketing collateral, use images that resonate with your target audience. Search for stock photography of people and houses that look like the communities you work in – or better yet, request permission from actual program participants to use their images for marketing purposes. Research shows that relevant imagery can increase rates of energy audit enrollments.

- **Use personal stories to demonstrate what's achievable:** Use demonstrations, testimonials or case studies from local homeowners to illustrate the benefits that energy efficiency improvements can make. Case studies can be one or two pages and include images of the home and residents as well as information on upgrades conducted, project costs, contractors used (if any), estimated savings, rebate or financing programs leveraged (if any) and quotes from the residents about the comfort, health or other benefits resulting from the upgrades. But keep it simple and understandable and not too complex or complicated.

Program Design Recommendations

- **Personalize recommendations across all communications channels:** Train auditors, contractors and program staff to leverage personal interactions to identify individual concerns, motivations, barriers and energy use behaviors. Add fields to data collection platforms to record these personal areas of interest and participants' preferred language to enable personalized, actionable recommendations in follow-up interactions. Resources permitting, make follow-up calls to overcome barriers to action.
- **Allow for do-it-yourself (DIY) work:** Offer a pathway for homeowners less likely to hire from a program's participating contractor list. Programs can help ensure the quality of DIY work by providing low-cost training, mentoring, streaming video tutorials, equipment lending libraries, quality assurance checks and audits to inform work scope.
- **Provide options for households with financial constraints:** This can be accomplished in several ways, such as expanding direct install programs, recommending low-cost measures (e.g., lightbulbs, HVAC filters, showerheads) or behavioral changes (e.g., thermostat settings, shower timers, turning off lights or fans), offering phased approaches to whole-house energy efficiency upgrade programs and offering varied financing options such as property assessed clean energy (PACE) financing, on-bill financing or local credit union loans.
- **Integrate energy efficiency with other services:** Look for opportunities to leverage other programs and funding sources to offer more holistic home improvement services both to address urgent health and safety issues (e.g., asbestos, lead and mold) and to achieve zero net energy and climate resiliency goals through multiple technologies (e.g., solar, storage, demand response and water efficiency).
- **Track demographic data:** Collect demographic data through optional questions on enrollment forms or a voluntary program participant survey to evaluate the degree to which your program serves Latinos and other groups over time.