



**BEST PRACTICES FOR ENERGY RETROFIT PROGRAM DESIGN**

# **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

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This document is part of a series of reports developed by the Best Practices Committee of the Home Performance Resource Center to aid program managers, program designers and policymakers in the design and implementation of successful home energy retrofit programs. The series is based on nine case studies of state and local programs in California, Colorado, New Jersey, New York, Oregon and Texas, with analysis by four separate working groups focused on financing and incentives, marketing, workforce development and business models. Additional documents in the *Best Practices for Energy Retrofit Program Design* series are available online at [www.hprcenter.org](http://www.hprcenter.org).

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

Home Performance is a new and growing field – one that is creating jobs even in a down economy. As the industry scales to meet rising consumer demand for energy retrofits, Home Performance contractors will need to hire additional trained workers. Because the pool of qualified workers is currently much too small to meet anticipated demand, energy retrofit programs should include workforce development initiatives designed to draw good workers into the industry, increase opportunities for field training, and help trainees transition into Home Performance jobs. Job creation in the Home Performance industry will be driven by company growth, so workforce development activities should be planned in direct collaboration with industry representatives.

The Workforce Development Working Group considered the following questions when developing recommendations:

- What can programs do to increase worker awareness and interest in the industry?
- How can programs conduct worker training in ways that are most beneficial for the industry?
- What should programs do to promote quality work?
- How can programs work to maximize job creation?
- What program elements are key to long-term, sustainable employment?
- What kind of jobs data should programs track?

## INCREASING INTEREST AND AWARENESS ABOUT THE INDUSTRY

**Conduct marketing campaigns to increase awareness about Home Performance jobs:** Paid and earned media campaigns will increase awareness of the industry and publicize employment opportunities.

**Engage in outreach to partners that work with the unemployed:** Programs should partner with workforce investment boards, high school guidance offices, community organizations and military-to-civilian transition offices to recruit prospective Home Performance workers. These partners can incorporate awareness efforts into counseling services and curriculum design, and distribute recruitment materials to target populations.

**Market the required skills, not just the industry:** Some potential workers may not yet view themselves as part of the “green” economy. Outreach to these individuals should emphasize the need for workers with applicable job skills: construction and building trades, leadership and team management, customer relations, etc.

## TRAINING

**Engage industry representatives to join curriculum development teams:** In New York State and Washington State (among other places), contractors are participating in curriculum development teams, helping to ensure that training programs are geared to meet real industry needs. Program designers can reach out to Efficiency First members and chapter organizations to participate in curriculum development activities.

**Provide funding to support workforce training initiatives:** For many prospective Home Performance workers, the cost of training and certification programs can present a considerable barrier to entering the field. New York Home Performance with ENERGY STAR provides 75-100% rebates for those who complete BPI training. Targeted educational incentives can be an effective way to encourage new workers to get the training they need.

**Supplement certification with on-the-job training:** Most training programs focus on certifications (HERS, BPI, etc.) with little or no field training. While certification is important, mentoring and apprenticeships are needed to prepare graduates for actual work duties. Programs should collaborate with industry representatives, educational institutions and nonprofit workforce development groups to provide paid field internships, apprenticeships and other forms of experiential learning.

**Provide subsidies for initial employment:** In some cases, public subsidies are available to employers who hire and train new workers. For example, some contractors are taking advantage of 50% labor reimbursement for six months available through some training programs with funding from the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development. This helps employers pay for time and resources devoted to on-the-job training of inexperienced new employees. Isles, a training center in Trenton, New Jersey, that works alongside New Jersey's Home Performance with ENERGY STAR program, provides this subsidy, and contractors have indicated that the program has been very successful. These types of subsidies should be made more available from DOL and other local, state and federal funding sources.

**Design training programs to screen out unqualified workers:** To alleviate contractors' concerns that graduates will lack the aptitude or desire to succeed in the industry, training programs should be designed to focus resources on trainees who are truly interested in and suited to Home Performance work. Programs should include early-stage field training – or at least simulations of on-the-job experiences – so participants who lack aptitude and motivation can opt out and make space available for better-qualified trainees.

**Train more trainers:** As the industry scales up, there will be a need for more experienced trainers. There are concerns that the lack of experienced trainers nationally has resulted in placing new entrants into the field – including individuals who have just completed training – in teaching positions. Programs should work with contractors and auditors to recruit experienced professionals into full- or part-time and temporary trainer roles.

**Offer a selection of training providers that are vetted through the program:** This approach enables a centralized quality control system to ensure that approved trainers

meet industry standards. Allow these training entities to offer subsidized training to participating contractors (as opposed to the efficiency programs only). In New Jersey, contractors are waiting up to four months to get their employees trained. Such training bottlenecks can delay worker readiness and hamper the success of energy retrofit programs.

**Allow an array of training providers:** In some areas, programs limit (or are considering limiting) training providers to certain kinds of entities, such as organized labor groups. To maximize training opportunities and meet program and industry needs, programs should allow and support any training providers that conduct effective training programs. Because energy retrofit work requires a unique set of skills, programs should support training providers whose offerings are specifically tailored to the Home Performance industry. Programs also should allow companies to hire graduates of any qualified training program.

**Encourage trainees to invest in their careers by covering some training costs:** Some contractors have reported that employees who have paid for a portion of their training are more committed to the work.

**Publicize training subsidies for low-income trainees:** In some instances, training grants are available for unemployed or low-income workers, but qualified individuals frequently are not aware of these subsidies. Programs should conduct outreach activities to help qualified workers take advantage of available scholarship opportunities.

**Establish local training partnerships:** Workforce development initiatives can benefit greatly from close collaboration between workforce investment boards, Home Performance contractors, Efficiency First chapters and members, community colleges, efficiency program managers, community groups, nonprofit organizations and other related entities.

## CERTIFICATIONS AND ELIGIBILITY

**Require certification and advanced training for field crews:** Contractors should be required to have at least one worker with applicable certifications (BPI, HERS, etc.) on each crew. Companies should also be required to be accredited by BPI or other rigorous accreditation programs.

**Conduct background checks to prequalify trainees:** Because Home Performance contractors typically work in occupied homes, employers are looking for workers with no history of theft or violent crime. Job training programs should conduct background checks to prequalify workers as a part of work-readiness training. Public funding for training programs should include funding for these background checks.

**Coordinate with other programs to develop unified standards:** Certification standards adopted across multiple jurisdictions allow employees and contractors to work in various cities and counties – as well as inside, outside and across programs.

## JOB CREATION

**Conduct consistent and ongoing data collecting on the number of jobs created:** Data should be further defined as a function of hours worked on retrofits (for work performed by incumbent staff members who are stretching to fill the labor gap) or new hires.

**Encourage a performance-based approach:** Performance-based financing and incentive programs can lead to more job creation, because performance-based retrofits typically emphasize work that is more labor-intensive and less product-centered.

**Create a comprehensive outreach program:** Job placement services customized to the Home Performance industry should be established to direct training graduates to job opportunities with all employers (Home Performance contractors, auditing companies, efficiency programs, etc.) in the program.

## LONG-TERM, SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

**Remove the barriers of entry for contractors getting into the Home Performance industry:** Put in place contractor subsidies for training, equipment, etc. Design programs to help eliminate or reduce contractor cash flow problems. Offer co-op advertising to contractors. The New York and New Jersey Home Performance with ENERGY STAR programs have placed an emphasis on providing important subsidies like these to help grow the industry.

## DATA TRACKING

Programs might track the following data for use in evaluating the success of workforce development initiatives and adjusting program design as needed.

**Job creation:** How many people are being hired? How many job hours are being created?

**Ramp-up time frame:** How long does it take for contractors who join the program be fully functioning and producing substantial work?

**Hiring conditions:** What is overall employment in the sector? What are employment rates in other building trades?

**Churn rate:** How many prospective workers are entering training? How many are graduating? How many are securing jobs? How many are lasting a year or longer in the industry?

## CONCLUSION

A lack of properly trained workers would significantly inhibit growth and quality in the Home Performance industry, so energy retrofit programs should incorporate workforce development initiatives to facilitate training (including field training), certification and job placement for workers entering the industry. These activities should be planned and deployed in collaboration with industry representatives – including established Home Performance contractors and Efficiency First – to ensure that training, certification and hiring systems will effectively address the needs of the local energy retrofit market.



The Home Performance Resource Center is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization formed to conduct public policy and market research in support of the Home Performance industry. The Resource Center develops research materials for policymakers, energy program managers and industry stakeholders to promote job creation, economic recovery, lower household energy bills and deep reductions in residential carbon emissions through improved home energy efficiency.

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