Case Study #9

Supporting Housing and Clean Energy Investments in Gwinnett County, Georgia

EXPLORE POTENTIAL COLLABORATIONS

This case study focuses on a partnership between the Southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance (SEEA), Georgia State Representative Marvin Lim, the Gwinnett Housing Corporation, and the Georgia Hispanic Construction Association to leverage anticipated federal funding to expand the supply of healthy and efficient housing in House District 98, addressing the barriers faced by low-income and BIPOC residents in accessing energy assistance and building technologies.

Contributed by:

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In 2022, Georgia State Representative Marvin Lim contacted SEEA to identify ways to leverage anticipated federal funding to expand the supply of healthy and efficient housing in his district (House District 98), which is the most diverse and underserved part of Gwinnett County and one of the most diverse and underserved districts in the entire state. Low-income and BIPOC residents in this district face steep barriers to accessing energy assistance and building technologies to mitigate high energy costs, improve health, and enhance resilience to disasters.

Together with the Gwinnett Housing Corporation (GHC) and the Georgia Hispanic Construction Association (GHCA), SEEA developed and carried out an energy and housing landscape analysis and stakeholder engagement process to better understand the needs of residents, to identify federal investments that could address these priorities, and to support communities in applying for these funds. Based on data analyses and stakeholder engagement, the project team completed an extensive housing needs analysis for HD98 that identified energy and housing interventions that would have maximum affordability, health, and emissions impacts.

First cohort of scholarship awardees from this project. All awardees work in the construction industry and will use the scholarships to obtain training that will enable them to expand their work into energy efficiency and clean energy
Credit: William Bryan

The team paired community needs and assets with available federal and philanthropic funding and developed a guide to applying for this funding for community partners. Additionally, the SEEA team provided technical and grant-writing assistance to project partners to support the opportunities identified in the assessments.

LESSON LEARNED

"Identify and work with community partners who are already trusted in their communities, if resident engagement is within the scope of the project. Continually build trust with project partners by employing the three dimensions of trust: benevolence, competence, and reliability.

Because a large proportion of HD98 residents work in the construction industry, the project team also incorporated workforce development opportunities that can ensure the benefits of energy efficiency and clean energy investments flow to workers in the district and to build energy efficiency and clean energy minority job pipelines. Through more than $20M in federal and philanthropic funding secured during this project, our team supported the development of a housing resource

center, headquartered at GHC, that provides support to residents for accessing housing assistance programs, and will be the location of a one-stop shop that SEEA is developing to streamline energy and housing assistance applications. Additionally, the project team has supported access to energy efficiency and clean energy workforce development opportunities by awarding scholarships for contractors to support certification and training.

LESSON LEARNED

"Be flexible! Adapt project goals and design based on input from local partners. Build in space (where possible) to grant/funding proposals to facilitate stakeholder-driven changes to project scope."

Grace Parker and William D. Bryan spoking about a regional, intersectional stakeholder collaborative that SEEA manages at the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE).
Credit: William Bryan

Principles in Action

- *D1 - Asset-Based Approach:* Start with community culture, assets, and goals rather than problems, and center the voices of people and groups who are marginalized within communities.
- *D2 - Mutuality:* Listen to each other, come up with ideas together that build on mutual areas of interest and expertise - and then start planning.

Farming the project in terms of community assets reoriented the project from addressing a negative (closing community vulnerabilities through housing interventions) to a positive (expanding clean energy job pipelines in scalable ways) and broadened the project beyond what we initially envisioned. This way of thinking about the community and this change in project direction was only possible by listening to community partners and adapting as they identified key assets. It was ultimately a result of building a trusting relationship between SEEA and community-based organization (CBO) partners, as well as between CBO partners and residents.

Early in the project, we developed a wide-ranging data analysis that focused mostly on community needs and vulnerabilities, ranging from the high rate of households who lack insurance coverage to negative air quality impacts from nearby transportation infrastructure. While this research allowed us to establish key community needs that we could pair with federal funding for energy and housing, we realized that this was not the full story after having in-depth conversations with local stakeholders about our findings.

Local decision-makers and community members (CBOs, residents, and decision-makers) led us to see the ways that this analysis missed key community assets. Community stakeholders, for instance, identified the significant number of residents who worked in the construction industry as a key asset. Through these conversations, we recognized that there were opportunities to deploy energy efficiency and clean energy while ensuring that these technologies could provide new business opportunities for HD98 residents who worked in the construction industry. To this end, we included workforce development opportunities that could position local contractors and construction industry stakeholders to take advantage of new work in energy efficiency and clean energy through scholarships and training opportunities.

Related Resources:

- The 3 Elements of Trust
- Revolutionary Power: An Activist's Guide to the Energy Transition
- Energy Democracy: Advancing Equity in Clean Energy Solutions