

# Important questions and helpful tips for choosing the right residential contractor

It's important to find the contractor that fits best for you and your project needs. The key is asking the right questions and making sure you understand the answers.

## **1. How much experience do you have completing home energy efficiency work, and have you worked in homes that are similar in style to mine?**

Each contractor has different experiences with the types of homes they have assessed and upgraded. It may be beneficial to ask if your contractor has experience assessing and completing work on your particular home type. This may be especially important if your home has less common architectural features such as original windows on a historic building, a brick exterior, or lots of bump outs.

## **2. What is your particular area of expertise? What kind of work do you sub-contract and how do you ensure quality work?**

Contractors participating in NYSERDA's residential energy efficiency programs may be certified to complete home energy assessment or to complete insulation, heating, cooling/heat pump work, or all of the above. It may be helpful to ask the contractor which type(s) of work they have the most experience with.

Find out if the contractor will perform the work themselves. If they are subcontracting any part of the work ask how they will supervise the subcontractor. It may be beneficial to know how long they have had a relationship with their subcontractor as well. Ask for references.

## **3. What happens during a home energy assessment? What tools will you use?**

Each participating contractor must conduct a specific checklist of procedures, assessments of air leakage, visual inspections of heating and cooling systems, and checks for hazards in your home.

## **4. What can you tell me about discounts and financing for the home energy improvements?**

Based upon your household income and the eligibility of the home improvements you choose to make, you may qualify for a discount of up to 50% or 100%. Plus, NYSERDA offers two loan options to help you pay for the upfront cost of your project. Find out more about available discounts and loan options at [nyserderda.ny.gov/home](https://nyserderda.ny.gov/home)

## **5. What areas of my home will you need to access?**

Contractors inspect the exterior of your home and will also need access to all interior rooms, including all accessible attic spaces, crawl spaces, and basement areas. They will also need access to your heating and cooling systems, so if attic areas or basement areas are cluttered you should straighten up or clear a path so the contractor can effectively complete the assessment.

## **6. Do I need to do anything or prepare my home prior to the assessment? If my house gets dirty, how will it be cleaned?**

If your contractor will be performing a blower door test, any fireplace or wood stove should not be run 24 hours prior to the scheduled assessment. Fireplaces and wood stoves should be cleaned to avoid any ash being blown into the living space due to the negative pressure created.

All contractors are expected to leave the house "broom clean" at the end of each workday. If you have additional concerns, please talk with your contractor about including cleanup expectations as part of your written contract.

## 7. Can you provide me with homeowner references from previous home performance projects?

Contractors should be able and willing to provide you with at least three homeowner references who have completed home performance projects. Ask for references with homes that are similar to yours or within a neighboring community. It may also be helpful to look for testimonials on the contractor's website.

### TIPS FOR CHOOSING THE RIGHT CONTRACTOR:

- ▶ Look for good contractor communication and job specification during the interview stage. If you begin this process looking for a specific solution — such as fixing drafts, getting more heat to a cold room, upgrading specific systems, or are looking to work in stages — it's important to make sure these needs are both communicated to and met by the contractor during the home energy assessment phase.
- ▶ You are not bound to the contractor who completed your home energy assessment. Homeowners who wish to do so may shop around with any of the other participating contractors to complete the project.
- ▶ Looking for more information on your contractor? In addition to word-of-mouth feedback, you may want to research third-party customer review websites such as Yelp, Angie's List, BBB, HomeAdvisor, or WhoDoYou.
- ▶ The contract you sign is an agreement between you and the contractor. Therefore, it's important to take the time to understand everything it includes. All of your agreed work and expectations should be made in writing and included in the contract — a verbal agreement is not binding.
- ▶ **For more information on home improvement contract law in NYS, click below:**  
[The NY State General Business Law Article 36-A Home Improvement Contracts](#)

