



NYSERDA Residential Market Advisory Group (RMAG) Quarterly Meeting

**In-Person Meeting: October 11,
2023**

Meeting Summary

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NYSERDA RMAG Quarterly Meeting Meeting Summary Wednesday, October 11 at 10:00am ET

Background

On October 11, 2023, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) hosted an in-person meeting of the Residential Market Advisory Group (RMAG) at the Crowne Plaza – Desmond Hotel in Albany, New York.

Stakeholders convened to discuss NYSERDA's planning and implementation for Federal Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Home Energy Rebate programs. NYSERDA staff presented information on New York State's goals for the residential sector and outlined best available information regarding implementation of IRA Home Energy Rebate programs. Stakeholders then participated in topic-specific breakout sessions to inform NYSERDA program updates and development.

Meeting Agenda

- *Group Introductions and Opening Remarks*
- *NYS Residential Climate Goals and Overview of Existing Programs*
- *Inflation Reduction Act's Home Energy Rebate Programs*
- *Breakout Sessions*
 - *The Customer's Journey Toward Efficiency and Electrification*
 - *Developing Clear and Concise Messaging*
 - *Economic Benefits of IRA's Home Energy Rebates*
- *Breakout Session Overviews and Closing Remarks*

Group Introductions and Opening Remarks

Trevor Reddick, facilitator for the meeting from Kearns & West, opened the meeting by thanking participants for their attendance. He introduced Courtney Moriarta, Director of Single Family Residential at NYSERDA who provided opening comments. Courtney outlined how the meeting was designed to solicit broad perspectives and that it represented a critical step in NYSERDA's stakeholder engagement process supporting its proposal to the U.S. Department of Energy Office of State and Community Energy Programs (DOE) for Federal Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Home Energy Rebate program funding.

After the opening remarks, Trevor reviewed the ground rules and meeting agenda, noting that topics for presentations and breakout sessions were informed by RMAG membership priorities. He closed with a review of the group's purpose and structure, detailed here as [Appendix A](#)

NYS Residential Climate Goals and Overview of Existing Programs

Courtney provided an overview of the role that NYSERDA plays in state efforts to achieve the greenhouse gas emission reduction and equity requirements under the 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act). She reviewed New York's energy efficiency and building decarbonization targets and the Authority's four strategic focus areas: (1) Building an inclusive clean energy economy, (2) Supporting clean energy jobs, (3) Accelerating the transition

from fossil natural gas to a low-carbon future, and (4) Fostering healthy and resilient communities.

Courtney provided an overview of NYSERDA's existing programs for the Single Family Residential (1-4 unit) and Multifamily (5+ unit) markets, detailing how they deliver energy efficiency and electrification improvements to consumers and technical assistance services for market participants across the value chain. She outlined NYSERDA's vision of a streamlined customer journey, offering a frictionless user experience with clear, direct guidance for consumers on home electrification decisions and their relative value propositions. By "meeting people where they are", the residential market can empower the customer as they travel the path toward climate-friendly homes via energy efficiency, electrification, and decarbonized distributed energy resources improvement projects. Building on NYSERDA's existing programs, Courtney noted that the IRA Home Energy Rebate programs are a valuable opportunity to layer or "braid" federal funds with other funding streams to maximize the value proposition for consumers.

In late July, the U.S. Department of Energy Office of State and Community Energy Programs released initial Home Energy Rebate [program guidance](#) for states. Courtney indicated that NYSERDA is currently following this guidance to develop New York State's proposal to DOE for funds to develop and implement two rebate programs: the Home Efficiency Rebates (HER) Program, and the Home Electrification and Appliance Rebates (HEAR) Program. NYSERDA wants to hear from key residential market stakeholders on how programs can be tailored to most effectively support delivery of home improvement services aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and delivering benefits to residents and businesses including those that are located in [disadvantaged communities](#). Based on input from RMAG members and from other interested residential market actors, the RMAG meeting was designed to solicit feedback on key design and implementation considerations.

For Courtney's full presentation on NYS Residential Climate Goals, see the NYSERDA RMAG webpage, slides 10-15.

Inflation Reduction Act's Home Energy Rebate Programs

Courtney outlined the two home energy rebate programs created by the IRA: Home Efficiency Rebates (HER, formerly HOMES), and Home Electrification and Appliance Rebates (HEAR, formerly HEEHRA). The HER program is performance-based, with incentives tied to energy savings for the entire home or building. The HEAR program offers prescriptive rebates focused on delivering beneficial electrification for Low-to-Moderate Income (LMI) homes.

The HER and HEAR program funding allocations are being administered as formula grants. In total, New York has been allocated \$317.7 million dollars by DOE for these two rebate programs. It was noted that if other states opt out of the programs additional funding could be allocated to New York. The proposal requirements are substantial, requiring detailed plans covering everything from budgeting through goal setting and performance management. NYSERDA must deliver a separate proposal to DOE for each program.

Laura Geel, Assistant Director Single Family Residential, provided a detailed look into DOE's guidelines of the HER and HEAR programs. She explored eligibility considerations, rebate amounts, preliminary thoughts on how IRA funding may be "braided" with existing NYSERDA programs and services, proposal requirements, and a prospective timeline for proposal development and program implementation.

For Courtney and Laura's full presentation on IRA Home Energy Rebate programs, see the NYSERDA RMAG webpage, slides 16-34.

Breakout Sessions

After the presentations, three facilitated breakout sessions were hosted. Topics for breakout sessions were:

1. The Customer's Journey Toward Efficiency and Electrification
2. Developing Clear and Concise Messaging
3. Economic Benefits of IRA's Home Energy Rebates

Each session was designed with input from RMAG membership and the active participation of cross-program NYSERDA staff to encourage robust, interdisciplinary conversations. Details of each session, including the process, themes, and detailed response information from participants, are included below. The notes provided in this document reflect feedback from participants, not specific guidance or direction from NYSERDA.

For presentation materials related to the breakout sessions, see the NYSERDA RMAG webpage, slides 35-44.

Breakout Session: The Customer's Journey Toward Efficiency and Electrification

Introduction and Context

This breakout session focused on ways the industry can help customers through the decision-making process towards electrification. Topics for discussion included customer awareness and education needs; energy audits geared to electrification; and tactics to encourage customers to go deeper with their energy efficiency and clean energy options. The Inflation Reduction Acts Home Energy Rebate Programs were discussed including ways to braid available incentives together to provide the best options for customers; impacts on using both Home Efficiency Rebates (HER) and Home Electrification and Appliance Rebates (HEAR) by a single customer; and maximizing funding toward electrification.

For the session, six whiteboards were stationed around the room, each representing a stop along the customer journey toward efficiency and electrification.

1. Lead Generation: Information is shared on programs with potential consumers to generate interest via digital and terrestrial channels.
2. Information Collection for Eligibility: Interested consumers submit information and are evaluated to identify what incentives they qualify for.
3. Assessment and Quote: Contractors receive leads, complete a home energy assessment, and produce a scope of work.
4. Sale of Services and Work Starts: Customer executes an agreement, and the energy efficiency or clean energy improvement project begins.
5. Work Completes and Project Close Out: Scoped project is completed, including quality assurance check and administrative close-out for incentives.
6. Follow-up and Follow-on: Continuing data collection, education, and assessing interest in new projects along the building electrification journey.

Using post-it notes, participants circulated to each station, responding to five prompts, and engaging in discussion with NYSERDA staff and other attendees.

1. Success: What does success look like at this stop on the customer journey?
2. Examples: Who is doing this right? Whose work should we be aware of? Why?
3. Barriers: What are the greatest barriers to achieving success?
4. Solutions: Who should be part of solving these barriers? What can they do?
5. Data: What datapoints should be tracked to help drive results? How should they be tracked?

Key Themes

At the conclusion of each breakout session the facilitator conducted a walkthrough of themes across whiteboards, soliciting group feedback on priorities and themes. Key themes identified across both sessions include:

1. Streamlined Communications across the Market: Messaging is inconsistent across the customer journey due to a variety of factors and there is a role for residential market actors across the value chain to educate consumers. Opportunities noted include making engagement opportunities available both in-person and virtual to increase accessibility,

and engaging multiple parts of the value chain to meet people where they are. For example, home inspectors can begin education during the real estate sales process, green home tours can incorporate contractors to answer technical questions, and contractors can use repair/replace calls to educate consumers on clean energy and energy efficiency options. Messaging should build on existing resources and influential market actors, including NYSERDA, should have a role in establishing preferred materials.

2. Strategic Partnerships: Successful uptake of improvements and advancing community benefits for residents of disadvantaged communities will require working closely with embedded, trusted community advisors through existing channels like the Clean Energy Hubs. Additional investment into provision of wraparound services to make Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) development opportunities more accessible, coordination with Minority Serving Institutions and local community colleges to align workforce development training availability with needs, and creating vehicles to deliver consistent, predictable partner funding to support scaling were identified as critical planning considerations.
3. Data Access and Data Entry: Concern exists about the burden that data collection and entry have for consumers and contractors alike. By receiving energy use data directly from the utilities, consumers' inability to access information and existing administrative burdens on contractors from duplicative data entry requirements would be alleviated. Existing concerns about duplicative data entry requirements for contractors across programs and questions about the alignment of existing New York program requirements with DOE's anticipated reporting flow down requirements were discussed. Related considerations like privacy concerns/data anonymization, streamlining datapoints tracked to reduce burden while ensuring compliance, and the need to further explore the role of utilities in IRA HER program implementation and reporting, were discussed.
4. Align Incentives with the Flow of Projects: Timelines for project implementation from the consumers side may not align with timeframes for program implementation. Having contractors who conduct clean energy installations also conduct the assessments may incentivize sale of services that can have unforeseen consequences, such as installing a heat pump that is oversized once efficiency improvements are done. Extending the eligibility window for incentives to align better with timeframes for consumer decision making and applying consistent messaging throughout the lifecycle of a program to organically build awareness of the preferred process were noted as highly valuable.

Breakout Session: Developing Clear and Concise Messaging

Introduction and Context

Successful messaging is a function of content and delivery aligning with receptivity of the audience. Communications experts acknowledge the need for homogenous branding but also the need for tailored messaging based upon how a cohort can be subdivided.

This topic was addressed in two identical breakout sessions. The first task was to segment the market. Both groups identified more than a dozen important segments and sub-segments. The three most important segments for each were:

Key Market Segments	
HEAP and SNAP Recipients	Contractors and Installers
Delivered Fuel Households	Delivered Fuel Households
Moderate Income	Low to Moderate Income

Each of the three sub-groups were asked to work together to answer five key questions with regards to their respective market segments:

1. What is the critical information that those in this consumer segment need to know about energy efficiency and clean energy?
2. What are big successes?
3. What needs improvement?
4. How can messaging for Inflation Reduction Act-funded programs be optimized for this consumer segment?
5. Who needs to be part of solving this, and what can they do?

Questions and Responses/Key Themes

Theme 1: What needs to be communicated

Whatever the messaging and whatever the sector, participants were of the mind that messages need to be simple and focus on relatable success stories. One size does not fit all and it is imperative that the messages resonate with the interests of the target segment. Choices may include messaging on technology and functionality (e.g. heat pumps do work in winter), energy efficiency, eligibility requirements and affordability, affordability, funding sources and cost savings. Convening processes like “user centered design” or focus group testing can be helpful in both tailoring unique messages and honing the content.

Theme 2: Big successes

Many participants agreed that the standard bearer for success is Energy Star where both the contractor and the consumer are well-familiar with the program. There have been a

few isolated experiences in Maine but the most significant successes in messaging are less about the message than they are about the delivery system for the message: advice and counsel are most readily accepted when provided by a trusted third party – the contractor, peer to peer testimonials and occasionally another agency like Social Services.

Theme 3: Room for Improvement

Almost every aspect of the programs as well as the messaging could be simplified for both conveying and collecting information. There could and should be more significant and more accessible information available to the public on the meaning and importance of energy efficiency. The programmatic value proposition should be made clearer. People should know exactly why they should buy an efficient appliance or make their household more energy efficient. Messaging in general must be both tailored and targeted: HEAP and SNAP recipients need to have greater awareness of the benefits of programs like EmPower+, perhaps to the point of automatic enrollment in EmPower+ if the consumer is already in HEAP or SNAP.

Theme 4: Communicating with consumers regarding the Inflation Reduction Act

Overall, the sentiment of participants was the IRA HER was certainly a secondary message important more for political reasons than programmatic reasons. Overall, participants felt the need to humanize messaging in such a way that keeps it simple and concise, sticks to the basics and minimizes acronyms and extraneous information. Such reference is best kept available and accessible as supplemental information as only the smallest of segments will find the source of funds to be important in decision making. To the rest of the marketplace, the IRA HER will only be viewed as political advertising.

Theme 5: Who should be included in Problem Solving

Participants noted everyone in the entire value chain needs to be brought in as part of the solution. This includes NYSERDA, manufacturers, distributors, contractors, utilities and even the Public Service Commission. Consumer-facing groups such as the regional hubs need to be well trained and educated on clean energy technology and rebate programs. Community-based organizations are essential partners in getting these programs on the ground. Focus groups and other market testing should be used to validate the conveyance of key messages before they are rolled out regionally or statewide.

Breakout Session: Economic Benefits of IRA's Home Energy Rebates

Introduction and Context

For this breakout session topic, the discussion focused on the economic benefits of the IRA's Home Energy Rebates that NYSERDA could consider as they develop their IRA application. For both break-out conversations, the discussion started with the group sharing their reflections on how economic development can benefit communities, while simultaneously investments can exacerbate the status quo of community inequalities. While the groups differed in their composition of attendees, there were four main themes that emerged between both sessions. The first session was primarily composed of community organizations working to support energy efficiency for low-income communities and NYSERDA staff, while the second session was mainly contractors, as well as NYSERDA staff.

Key Themes

Theme 1: Use a localized ecosystem approach

In both sessions, the groups zeroed in on the opportunity to leverage the Regional Clean Energy Hubs connectivity between local organizations, contractors, schools and other local stakeholders. There was shared awareness that many of these groups are siloed and are not currently working with each other, which leads to missed opportunities. In both sessions, the groups pointed out that local businesses often have a good pulse on the other businesses who are within the supply chain of energy efficiency, but that those contractors may not be linked into NYSERDA programming because they do not focus on energy efficiency. It was also noted that in many cases, these smaller contractors are very familiar with the dynamics in the community and have a great pulse on relationships that can be leveraged.

Theme 2: Create a portal to streamline processes, resources and relationships

Both sessions agreed on the value of small contractors, and they identified that there were multiple ways to increase the participation of these small businesses in this area of work. The main suggestion was to improve systems to reduce administrative burden associated with participating in programs. Further, it would be helpful if small businesses were able to connect to each other to support one another for work that is above their current capacity level. Several suggested various ways to increase small business capacity through a portal system that would connect these small businesses to each other, provide them information, and simplify a way for them to understand which programs would be available to them. A portal could also include training programs to help increase awareness of local resources.

Theme 3: Improve communications by leveraging local resources

Both groups noted that regardless of location, in general, there are several on-the-ground trusted partners in communities that residents trust. In both sessions, there was broad agreement on the value to leverage these trusted partners to increase the awareness of NYSERDA programs for both homeowners and contractors. Some specific examples include churches, community-based organizations, local banks, real estate brokers, and small contractors. It was pointed out that that for sharing messaging that was related to the benefits of these energy efficiency efforts, using trusted local partners to communicate that message was essential to building trust of the message. Other suggestions included simplifying messaging to make it easier for groups to understand the opportunities of the programs as well as the jobs that are part of the effort.

Theme 4: Build a talent pipeline to increase access to the industry

In both sessions, there was agreement on the importance of developing and sustaining a diverse and trusted talent pipeline for the industry and community. Examples raised in both sessions include leveraging local training programs that connect disadvantaged residents to energy efficiency work opportunities, to working with trade schools. Several pointed out the need to strengthen relationships between the industry to the local education systems. It was suggested that having templates and communication materials would help the industry be able to explain their work in a way that could reach broader educational audiences and make it easier for them to do outreach. Several in the groups shared opportunities to create connections through career fairs to help shift the only-college position of most schools to accept alternatives to the four-year college path. All agreed that taking a holistic approach to supporting the talent pipeline needs of the industry was needed.

Breakout Session Overviews and Closing Remarks

The Kearns & West facilitators provided high-level overviews of the key themes and major outcomes from their respective breakout sessions. Laura Geel then sincerely thanked participants for spending their time to provide this invaluable feedback to NYSERDA. Laura concluded the meeting by reminding participants that more engagement opportunities are forthcoming as NYSERDA continues to develop its DOE application.

Participants were urged to stay in touch by signing up for the RMAG Listserv by visiting the [NYSERDA RMAG webpage](#) or by emailing resmarket@nyserda.ny.gov.

Any questions or comments specifically about IRA Home Energy Rebates should be directed to residential.ira@nyserda.ny.gov.

Appendix A RMAG Process Diagram

