



## County Government EECBG Success Stories

County governments across the country are utilizing the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) to fund sustainability projects. These projects are saving counties money, driving demand for local "green" jobs, and protecting precious natural resources. Most important, the use of these funds has spurred innovation in America's counties and served as a proving ground for many counties delving into emerging renewable energy and energy efficiency practices.

Since 2009, the National Association of Counties (NACo) has been working with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO) to provide assistance to counties who are both direct and indirect recipients of EECBG funds. In doing so, NACo has observed trends and innovation among county projects. This publication highlights best practices NACo has observed in counties utilizing their EECBG funds.

### Why Did the Congress Establish the EECBG Program?

- Assist eligible entities in implementing energy efficiency and conservation strategies;
- Reduce fossil fuel emissions created as a result of activities within the jurisdictions of eligible entities;
- Reduce total energy use; and
- Improve energy efficiency in the transportation, building, and other appropriate sectors.

### What Activities Are Eligible Under the EECBG Program?

When implementing the EECBG Program, the U.S. Department of Energy set parameters for eligible activities within EECBG funds. Considering project eligibility, America's counties utilized these funds to make significant innovations and progress, but within set areas. Listed here are the eligible activities.

- Developing/implementing an energy efficiency and conservation strategy
- Retaining technical consultant services to assist in the development of such a strategy
- Conducting residential and commercial building energy audits
- Establishing financial incentive programs for energy efficiency improvements (e.g., loan programs, rebate programs, waive permit fees)
- Providing grants to nonprofit organizations to perform energy efficiency retrofits
- Developing/implementing programs to conserve energy used in transportation (e.g., flex time by employees, satellite work centers, promotion of zoning requirements that promote energy efficient development, transportation infrastructure)
- Developing/implementing energy efficient building codes and inspection services
- Implementing energy distribution technologies
- Public education to increase participation and efficiency rates for recycling programs
- Purchasing/implementing technologies to reduce and capture methane and other greenhouse gases generated by landfills or similar sources

## Examples of Success Utilizing EECBG

Depending on perspective, success can be defined in many different ways. For the purposes of this work, NACo defines successful projects as projects that achieve one or many of the following:

- Save counties money over a projected period of time
- Leverage EECBG funds into an effort that continues beyond initial funding
- Create and sustain county jobs
- Change the way county officials, staff, and local residents think about energy use
- Protect natural resources

## Utilizing EECBG to Think Comprehensively About Energy Use

One of the most effective methods for leveraging EECBG funds into the future is to utilize them for comprehensive planning efforts. By organizing integrated County-wide Energy Plans, counties are making the first round of EECBG funds fit within broader, longer-term goal structures and holding internal county and community stakeholders accountable long into the future.

Loudoun County, Virginia's *Integrated Energy Management Plan* is one of the best examples of a county-wide energy planning effort. They have established goals, including that the county will be recognized as a model for effective energy and climate management and be among the counties with the lowest greenhouse gas emissions. To accomplish their goals, each of the county's 10 EECBG projects are aligned with specific criteria of the Energy Strategy, and projects are phased in stages with clear targets.

## Leveraging EECBG into Ongoing Projects

Counties appreciate receiving federal support for many of their programs, but for most, the ideal scenario is not to need any federal funding at all. With that in mind, many counties are establishing programs with their EECBG funding that re-circulate funds and sustain themselves long into the future.

### *Establish a New County Sustainability/Energy Office or Staff Position*

Many counties have used the infusion of EECBG to temporarily hire new sustainability or energy management staff, with the intention that those hired would fund savings across county government beyond the cost of their position and prove the value of making their positions permanent in county government.

Volusia County, Florida has created an Office of Sustainability and Energy Management (OSEM) whose mission is to collaborate with other county departments, businesses, non-profits, and other partners to ensure long-term economic, social, and environmental sustainability within Volusia County. Initially, the County provided \$116,000 in general funds to supplement EECBG. The county secured grant funding to maintain the permanent positions within a year of their creation.

### *Re-circulate Savings to Support Additional Programs*

Depending on the strategies available to counties and what is selected, EECBG projects can generate significant revenue. Many counties are utilizing that savings to support additional sustainability goals.

Will County, Illinois is expecting to generate nearly \$1M in annual revenue from their new landfill gas-to-energy plant. The revenue will fund other county energy efficiency investments, including hiring an Environmental/Sustainability Educator position and the development and promotion of a highly interactive web-based education program.

#### *Establish Revolving Loan Funds*

A revolving loan fund is a source of capital used to provide loans to local residents and businesses. The name “revolving loan fund” derives from the fact that as loans are paid back, they fully replenish the fund and are loaned out over and over again—in a revolving process. Counties almost always partner with financial institutions to set up these funds. Regardless, they require a level of knowledge and sophistication within county government. Revolving loan funds are proving to be a great method for counties to extend the life of their EECBG fund and support community-wide projects.

In September 2010 Miami-Dade County's Office of Sustainability announced the launch of the new Renovation for Energy Efficiency Loan program, a \$1.5 million revolving loan fund. The program's initial funding is from EECBG. Loans are available to local businesses for between \$50,000 and \$100,000. To qualify, businesses are required to have operated for at least four years and must contribute to the Miami-Dade economy. Applications and a full list of requirements and details are online at [www.sfrpc.com/REEL.htm](http://www.sfrpc.com/REEL.htm).

### **Community Engagement**

County government exists to provide services to local residents. They must be responsive and ensure that their service delivery matches the priorities of their local citizenry. With that in mind, starting up a new initiative requires public support. The availability of EECBG funds has enabled many counties to engage their local communities in educational and marketing efforts to support energy efficiency and renewable energy generation goal. These efforts have built support for county investment in itself and garnered resident and business participation in energy efforts.

When Douglas County, Colorado learned that they could apply to receive EECBG funds, they surveyed residents and the business community to learn how they thought the funds should be used. County staff held public meetings and set up a blog to collect feedback. The EECBG projects finally submitted to DOE for approval reflected the community's top four projects. To learn more, visit <http://blogs.douglas.co.us/eecbg>.

#### *Raise Awareness of Internal County Energy Efforts*

Many counties chose to utilize their EECBG funds to retrofit county facilities. These efforts reduce the cost of doing business and present the opportunity for county governments to expand services in other areas. But without good marketing of these efforts, local residents are really unaware of the benefits that are accruing to them. Some county officials are finding ways to engage communities in internal facility upgrades with media, tours, and web-based tools. These efforts not only promote energy efficiency and the EECBG program, but also represent good governance—saving taxpayer money and maintaining transparency.

Franklin County, Ohio undertook extensive retrofits and incorporated photovoltaic solar panels into their six-building government complex. The County will be creating a website where residents can track the complex's energy savings and solar energy generation.

### *Provide Technical Assistance*

Community residents and business owners are eager to know how they can upgrade their homes and offices in the same manner that county government has. As a result, many counties are offering technical assistance on how to apply for rebates, tax credits, and grants. Some counties are even offering free or reduced-cost energy audits and efficient appliances, while others are leading “challenges” or certification programs to drive innovation and codify change.

Clackamas County, Oregon offers a portal on their website that allows residents to enter their utility account information and sign-up to receive tips on energy use and coupons. Earth Aid, a third party residential energy measurement tool, provides County residents with the first step toward efficiency—understanding their energy use. The site then offers tips to residents to making improvements. County staff publicizes the tool at community events and ensure sustainable local businesses are featured in the coupons.