

# Residential Energy Efficiency (EE) Program Communications Focus Groups

*Qualitative Insights into Program Language Optimization to Improve EE Program Participation*

*Presented to:*

**nationalgrid**

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# Specific Insight Objectives & Discussion Sequence

- A. Establish customer context: **Household energy concerns, energy saving/efficiency** activities in past 5 years
- B. Explore general EE language interpretation, reactions, and brainstorming
  - **Energy efficiency** and **energy conservation** interpretation and reactions
    - Interpretations and reactions to the term “**energy efficiency**” (visual imagery, meaning/direction it takes, other ways to describe it, level of positivity on 10-point scale)
    - Differences in meaning and appeal between “**energy efficiency**” and “**energy conservation**”
    - Examples of household “energy efficiency” and “energy conservation” action items that could or will be taken
  - **Motivational language exploration**
    - “**Power words**” that would be motivating to take an energy efficiency action (unprompted)
    - Reactions to prompted “power words” (National Grid provided: **control, choice, environment, waste, saving, comfort**)
- C. Identify the most compelling ways to talk about residential EE programs, specifically
  - Prospect-generated ideas for a motivating email subject line and body text describing an EE program
  - Past-Participant suggestions for describing the programs in which they personally participated to motivate others
  - 10-point importance rating on key words and phrases (written then discussed): **savings, reductions in energy, control bills, comfort, convenience, environmental responsibility, energy independence**
  - Preferences for how to highlight money/costs savings: e.g. , “**75% off up to \$2,000**” vs. “**you only owe 25%**”
  - RI: Reactions to a **case study** snapshot (E. Wills example) and option of **interactive software assessment** option
- D. Gather reactions to four written National Grid EE Program descriptions: **HeHe (Y), Home Energy Services Program, aka Weatherization (M), Central Air Conditioning and Air Source Heat, aka Cool Smart (P), HEAT Loan Zero Interest Financing (Q)**. For each:
  - Prior to description review, a brief contextual discussion: what participants have done/are planning in this area
  - Customers read and react to the description: circle likes, cross out dislikes (for discussion)
  - Customer-generated name for the program
  - Suggestions for changing/improving the description to make it more motivating
- E. Explore additional ways to build National Grid EE program awareness and understanding
  - National Grid as sponsor of these programs: thoughts on **trust**
  - Reactions to the **Rhode Island Law Notation** on National Grid invoices and a more detailed explanation alternative

# “Energy Efficient” vs. “Energy conservation” Actions

*Fundamental, philosophical, cost and timing differences*

**PROCESS SUMMARY:** Participants generated a list of actions that would be associated with the terms “energy efficient” vs. “energy conservation” (see next slide for specific examples)

	“Energy Efficient”	“Energy Conservation”
<b>Fundamental difference</b>	<p><b>Passive, object-oriented:</b> The majority of energy efficient examples centered on using inanimate objects or things purchased related to energy (devices, appliances, equipment)</p>	<p><b>Active, behavior-oriented:</b> Most examples of energy conservation were expressed as verbs, e.g., the individual doing or using more or less of something related to energy</p>
	<p><i>"One is more of associating conservation with behavior, and efficiency with objects and upgrades to the house, physical changes." (PastPart:All:MA#5)</i></p> <p><i>"Energy Conservation are things that you have to be mindful of, things that you have to be actively doing vs. Energy Efficiency, this may be more passive. It's kind of things that are passively taken care of vs. actively." (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)</i></p>	
<b>Philosophical, cost, and timing differences</b>	<p><b>Buy something that is more expensive (spend money) to save energy immediately; over time might recoup cost, save money</b></p>	<p><b>Do something now and long term (at no cost to you) to save energy (and money) over time</b></p>
	<p><i>"Energy conservation, well conservation is more like a verb. It's something you <b>do</b> to save energy or money. Energy efficient is something that you may purchase that will, in the long run, save you money." (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)</i></p> <p><i>"Energy Efficient means I need to <b>buy</b> something. I need to either throw away what I already have and buy something for hundreds of dollars so it can save me \$20 extra per month or something. So I need to do some up-front spending...(Vs.) these (energy conservation) are all free." (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)</i></p> <p><i>"The energy efficient things cost money for the most part and the energy conservation really don't cost any money." (LowP:All:MA#4)</i></p> <p><i>"This (energy conservation) is elective, while this (energy efficiency) is selective, someone is trying to sell it to you." (HighP:CoolSmart:MA#6)</i></p> <p><i>"This, energy efficiency, you're spending money so that something can save you money in the long run. But yet it's up front. This, conservation, no money involved, but (there's) more action." (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)</i></p> <p><i>(Energy Efficiency) seems an economic decision....and the Conservation seems a lifestyle decision." (HighP:Weatherization: MA#2)</i></p>	

# The push/pull of “Energy Efficiency” and “Energy Savings Solutions”

*In-group easel rating exercise*

- Many participants found the term “**Energy Savings Solutions**” more appealing, positive and motivating than the term “**Energy Efficiency**,” and felt they would more likely read further if “Energy Savings Solutions” were the header /title of a communication piece
- For many, the term **Energy Efficiency** has some negative connotations - an outlay of money (e.g., a more expensive alternative), the need to be very attentive to usage; others find it an overused term that has been drained of meaning

*"I feel like Energy Efficiency has this front loaded cost to it." (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)*

*"I think it's buzz words, Energy Efficiency. You hear it all the time." (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)*

- In contrast, the phrase **Energy Savings Solutions** seems softer, more beneficial/active, even suggesting a partnership where ideas will be exchanged and the consumer will be the beneficiary

*"... **Efficiency** says it is going to cost you money. But **Solutions** is probably not going to cost you money. They're going to give you the ideas." (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)*

*"The **Solutions** creates an idea of partnership almost, so that somebody's trying to help you or help yourself." (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)*

*"But I'd place Energy **Efficient** as like going to Whole Foods. It's really good for you but it's expensive. Energy **Conservation** is like going to the regular supermarket with maybe some coupons, Stop & Shop, but using coupons. And this one, Energy Saving **Solutions**, is someone writing an article about it, how to do these coupons at Whole Foods." (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)*

# Power Words: Words to Motivate Customers to take Energy Efficient Actions

## Most Motivating

**PROCESS SUMMARY:** Following spontaneous mentions of motivating words, participants rated the appeal and explored connotations of six client-supplied words (choice, control, comfort, savings, waste, environment)

Word	Appeal and Connotations	Quotes
“Savings”	<p><b>Very high appeal</b> across all segments</p> <p>Connotes personal, financial benefits that all seek</p>	<p><i>"I love that one!...First of all, dollars and cents come to savings. But they would like to think of all the savings, you know, as community and as part of the bigger thing." (HighP: HeHe:MA#1)</i></p> <p><i>"I'm thinking about the money, the dollar savings. So somewhere the suggestion that efficiency will pay me back." (LowP:All:RI#7)</i></p>
“Comfort”	<p><b>High appeal</b> for most, though a potential conflict with “energy efficiency” or “savings” for some</p> <p>Expresses some of the home imagery that emerged as positive in the ‘design a brochure’ exercise</p>	<p><b>Positive</b></p> <p><i>"Comfort is actually feeling what you're paying for, feeling the difference." (LowP: All: MA#3)</i></p> <p><i>"It's your home, the one place you should always feel comfortable." (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)</i></p> <p><b>Conflict</b></p> <p><i>"I think we are all a little too comfortable. I think we need to give a little bit more to be responsible." (LowP:All:MA#4)</i></p> <p><i>"Comfort is a trade-off thing, the more comfort, you are paying more. You are paying less you are getting less comfort." (HighP:CoolSmart:MA#6)</i></p>
“Choice”	<p><b>Appealing</b> conceptually, but off-putting for some in this context – the “choice” could be costly, and/or utilities tend to be monopolies so “choice” feels limited</p>	<p><b>Positive</b></p> <p><i>"Positive, anything with choice is a positive." (PastPart:All:MA#5)</i></p> <p><i>"I like personal responsibility so I think that puts that responsibility back to the consumer, that they have the <b>choice</b>. It's <b>their</b> decision of how they're going to manage their energy." (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)</i></p> <p><b>Conflict</b></p> <p><i>"Well I think if it's a utility ... even if it's pretty much of a monopoly in terms of which utility we can choose. The word choice may circle back around as a negative." (HighP:HeHe:MA#1)</i></p> <p><i>"I feel like I don't have the choice because... if the choice is attached to a major change that costs a lot of money, then I don't really have the choice." (HighP: Weatherization: MA#2)</i></p>

# Power Words: Words to Motivate Customers to Take Energy Efficient Actions

## Least Motivating

**PROCESS SUMMARY:** Following spontaneous mentions of motivating words, participants rated the appeal and explored connotations of six client-supplied words (choice, control, comfort, savings, waste, environment)

Word	Appeal and Connotations	Quotes
“Control”	<b>Limited appeal</b> , because for many, requires additional contextual language to turn into a “positive” (e.g., “gives you control”)	<p><i>"It feels negative to me because I have so little control." (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)</i></p> <p><i>"I think it would be different levels of control. Something that would be <b>out of</b> my control, something that <b>would be</b> within my control, so there would be different levels." (LowP:All:RI#7)</i></p> <p><i>"I think of controlling the savings, for controlling my usage." (HighP:Weatherization:MA#2)</i></p>
“Environment”	<b>Limited appeal</b> to many except a few “green” advocates. When interpreted as the “global environment” – just too broad, not personal enough in meaning or benefits	<p><i>"I don't have a strong feel for Environment necessarily. By lowering my thermostat I'm not thinking, "Oh, I'm killing whales in Alaska right now!" I just want to save money. Money, money, money." (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)</i></p> <p><i>"It's important to me but at the same time, it is far away..." (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)</i></p> <p><i>"...not only just about saving energy but it's also about saving the planet. And some people might just see saving money and think it's a scam, but if you put something in there about the environment, too, they might take the time to read it." (LowP:All:RI#7)</i></p>
“Waste”	<b>Very limited appeal</b> because the word evokes negative connotations, no matter where the mind takes it	<p><i>"I think that it is a scary word. I think people want to eliminate waste. I think you have to use it in the correct way of how we can turn it around." (HighP:CoolSmart:MA#6)</i></p> <p><i>"It is inherently negative itself, I would try to word it a different way that didn't have a negative to it." (HighP:CoolSmart:MA#6)</i></p> <p><i>"I would see that as kind of a criticism. I might take that personally. Like, "Are you wasteful?" I try not to be. So it has both a positive and a negative. I would react to it negatively." (LowP:All:RI#7)</i></p> <p><i>"I associate that with spending, wasting money. Throwing money away." (HighP:Weatherization: MA#2)</i></p>

# Awareness of National Grid’s Residential EE Programs

- Unaided awareness of residential EE program/solution offerings was modest overall. Not surprisingly, Past Participants were the most aware of EE program offerings (often aware of several programs besides the ones they participated in), and Low Propensity customers least aware; High Propensity in-between
- After becoming aware of a program, Past Participants said they either called National Grid or visited the website for more information. Their **initial** awareness of programs came from other sources, however, including:
  1. **Word-of-mouth** (main source), e.g., co-workers, neighbors, contractors, home inspector (often after the decision to do some work has been made, a contractor or inspector makes the suggestion to look into a relevant program)
  2. Materials available at **supply houses** (a couple of mentions), e.g., plumbing supplies
  3. **Advertising** – either a direct mail piece or radio announcement (several mentions)
- Virtually **none** in any group identified programs by the names used by National Grid in communications or the website (see next slide for reactions to program names and their own suggestions)
  - While some were familiar with certain offers/programs from National Grid, they always referred to them in more colloquial terms. Even Past Participants did not know the formal names of programs they had participated in
  - When mentioning energy audits, by far the most frequently mentioned of the programs, some participants referenced RISE or MASS SAVE, not National Grid

**Moderator’s probe: What energy related programs have you heard of?**

	High Propensity Customers (6 groups)	Low Propensity Customers (4 groups)
<b>Most Mentioned</b>	• Energy audit (over half aware)	• Energy audit (awareness in two groups)
<b>Occasional Mentions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebates for replacements (e.g., furnaces, windows)</li> <li>• Refrigerator buy-back</li> <li>• Light bulb replacement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water spout replacement</li> <li>• Solar panel discount (1 mention)</li> <li>• HeHe (1 mention)</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appliance rebates</li> <li>• Light bulb replacement</li> <li>• Water spout replacement</li> <li>• “Expensive” smart programmable thermostat (1 mention)</li> </ul>

## EE Program Name Reactions and Suggestions

- When presented with the four EE program descriptions (un-titled, referenced by letter code only), these residents consistently recommended short, easy-to-remember, self-explanatory program names, often including a mention of the most salient benefits as part of the name (e.g., ‘savings’ – see below)
  - A short, catchy name would help identify programs at-a-glance and could serve as a motivator to read further
  - In contrast, participants across groups felt current program names (see below) were unnecessarily obscure – too lengthy/complicated, used unfamiliar terms (e.g., ‘heat pumps’) – and possibly could, if presented in messaging communications, actually push them away from learning more about even the most interesting programs

*“(Heat Loan Zero Interest Financing) just seems stilted. It’s not very catchy.” (HighP:Weatherization:MA#2)*

*“I don’t think I would even open it (with that name – Heat Loan Zero Interest Financing).” (LowP:All:MA#3)*

	Program M	Program P	Program Q	Program Y
Current Program Name	<b>Weatherization and Audit Program</b> <i>(Day 2:Bos: Home Energy Services Program)</i>	<b>Central Air and Heat Pumps Program</b> <i>(aka: Central Air Conditioning &amp; Air Source Heat Pumps; Cool Smart)</i>	<b>Heat Loan Zero Interest Financing</b>	<b>High Efficiency Heating and Hot Water Program</b> <i>(aka: High Efficiency Heating &amp; Hot Water Heating Controls Program; HeHe)</i>
Participants’ Program Name Suggestions (Selected)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free Home Energy Assessment</li> <li>• (Home) Insulation Rebate Program</li> <li>• Energy Savings Assessment</li> <li>• Insulation Assessment</li> <li>• Customized Home Assessment</li> <li>• Insulation Upgrades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A/C Savings!</li> <li>• AC Rebate</li> <li>• A/C Upgrade Rebates!</li> <li>• Savings Offer Central Air</li> <li>• Cooling System Rebate Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 0% Energy (Efficient) Loans</li> <li>• Interest-Free Energy Loan</li> <li>• 0% Loans for Energy Efficiency Improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebate on New Energy Equipment for Gas</li> <li>• Heat Savings (House &amp; Water)</li> <li>• Gas Heating Rebate Program</li> <li>• Rebates for Energy-Efficiency Systems</li> <li>• High Efficiency-High Savings</li> <li>• Conversion Rebate</li> </ul>



# Reactions to Program Description M

## Weatherization and Audit Program

(Day 2: Bos: Home Energy Services Program)

**Green** = many consumers like this language or idea (keep)  
**Red** = many consumers dislike this language or idea (remove)  
**Blue** = ambiguous, confusing, or mixed reviews (revise)

**M** Schedule a **no-cost** in-home energy assessment. After **viewing** your home and talking with you in person, an Energy Specialist will assess your current energy use, develop **customized money-saving** recommendations, and (if applicable) set up an appointment with a contractor for insulation and air sealing. If insulation is recommended by your Energy Specialist, you **may** qualify for an **incentive of 75% of the cost, up to \$2,000**, towards the installation of approved insulation upgrades – plus, no cost air sealing! Insulation and **air sealing may save** you up to 20% on your heating and cooling bills each year.

**NOTE:** Underlined words substituted in the RI description (same position in the paragraph): and provide you with **customized money-saving** recommendations.

Positives – Program Description M	Concerns/Questions – Program Description M
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Customization – meeting <i>your</i> needs, at <i>your</i> home</b>  <i>"I love that it was customized. That they're going to look at my situation, individually. It's not just a general thing." (LowP:All:RI#7)</i></li> <li>• <b>Expertise of an Energy Specialist – coming to you, meeting with you</b>  <i>"Well I loved the fact that they're going to come into my home, at no cost, there's a specialist involved, it's going to be customized for our living situation, and I might be saving money and learning!" (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)</i>  <i>"Talking and in person, those were key." (LowP:All:RI#11)</i></li> <li>• <b>Making contractor appointments in your behalf – saving you time</b>  <i>"I like where it said the energy specialist will do all these AND set up an appointment with a contractor so I won't have to do that." (LowP:All:MA#4)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Repeated use of the tentative word “may” (e.g., <i>may</i> qualify, <i>may</i> save) creates real hesitation to get involved</b>  <i>"The one thing I don't like about it is that ...you <u>might</u> qualify, but they don't know if I'm going to qualify because of the whole process, and they might say, 'You don't qualify.' <b>So that makes you feel what?</b> Well I'm unmotivated to do this because I don't even know if it's going to work out." (HighP:Weatherization:MA#2)</i>  <i>"It's also saying 'you <u>may</u> qualify for an incentive,' I don't really like that so much. I was saying, you know, 'you most likely qualify,' or, 'you will qualify,'... I don't know, I don't want to hear something where I 'may.' <b>What happens when you see 'may'?</b> I kind of question that it's actually going to happen... (and am) less likely to take the next step." (PastPart:All:RI#9)</i>  <i>"<u>May</u> qualify -- I see that as scams all the time." (LowP:All:RI#11)</i></li> <li>• <b>“Schedule” is a blunt opening command; sounds like a time commitment and work for the customer</b>  <i>"I think the call to action comes a little bit too soon in saying 'Schedule' for the first word. I'd change it to 'Benefit from a No Cost...' and then in the end said, 'Schedule yours today,' kind of thing. So do the call to action later and give them the reasons, the sizzle, up front." (LowP:All:MA#3)</i>  <i>"If I look at this, it's like adding to my 'to do' list, and it just makes me tired. ...don't have another 'to do' item. Don't make me stay home from work for three hours." (LowP:All:MA#3)</i></li> <li>• <b>Some do not know what “air sealing” is and question it – <i>Do I need this? Would this disqualify me?</i></b>  <i>"That kind of jumped out of nowhere because I wasn't sure what it meant..." (LowP:All:MA#3)</i></li> </ul>

## Reactions to Program Description Y

### High Efficiency Heating and Hot Water Program

(aka: High Efficiency Heating & Hot Water Heating Controls Program; HEHE)

**Green** = many consumers like this language or idea (keep)  
**Red** = many consumers dislike this language or idea (remove)  
**Blue** = ambiguous, confusing, or mixed reviews (revise)

**Y** Installing **high-efficiency** natural gas heating boiler or furnace **will prove helpful to the environment** and **your wallet** alike by **saving up to 30%** on your heating-related energy costs that equates to hundreds of dollars each year in savings! Plus, National Grid offers **cash rebates** of up to \$1,500 for a boiler or up to \$450 for a furnace, to help make this energy-saving equipment more affordable for you.

Water heating accounts for the third largest energy expenditure of the average household. **Installing a high-efficiency** natural gas hot water system will prove helpful to the environment and **your wallet** alike. In fact, it can **reduce your hot water costs by up to 30%**. Plus, National Grid offers cash rebates of up to \$800 to help make this energy-saving equipment **more affordable** for you.

**NOTE ON REACTIONS TO DESCRIPTION Y:** Although there were many participants who indicated they would be interested in finding out more information about the program following the group discussion, many were critical of the program description itself, due to uninviting dense format and language choices (see below)

#### Concerns/Questions – Program Description Y (See note above)

- **Format is uninviting – wordy, lengthy “run on” sentences**

- **Need to re-prioritize order of environment vs. household savings**

*"I want to say first of all, they have 'helpful to the environment and your wallet' and those are **absolutely** in the wrong order. You might have lost me at environment. You start with my wallet, you've got my attention, I might read on further after that, as far as the priority goes."  
(HighP:HeHe:RI#12)*

- **Lacking ‘pull’: Not enough information about how the overall program helps the household or provides financial benefits**

*"It doesn't tell me that they're going to help out with it." (LowP:All:MA#3)*

*"It says nothing about money." (LowP:All:MA#4)*

- **Missing key information. Past Participants felt this initial description should mention the corresponding loans available and relative savings, as well as include several important messages that resonated with their experience: comfort, clean and space saving**

*"It matches what I participated in but there were two words that came out of this conversation that I don't see here that might be there. One is, comfort. And clean." (PastPart:All:MA#5)*

*"I would (add), 'Continue to use your old system, and this is how much you're going to spend. Use this new system, and this is how much you're going to save.'" (PastPart:All:RI#9)*

*"I added, 'With many interest-free options available..'" (PastPart:All:RI#9)*

*"My new one is about the size of one of those boards." (PastPart:All:RI#9)*



# Reactions to Program Description P

## Central Air and Heat Pumps Program

(aka: Central Air Conditioning & Air Source Heat Pumps; Cool Smart)

**Green** = many consumers like this language or idea (keep)  
**Red** = many consumers dislike this language or idea (remove)  
**Blue** = ambiguous, confusing, or mixed reviews (revise)

**P** National Grid offers **mail in rebates up to \$500 for energy efficient** central air conditioning systems and **air source heat pumps**. A **licensed contractor must install** the central air conditioning system or heat pump in order to qualify for rebate and **only certain equipment** models are eligible.

You can also **take advantage** of **specially trained participating contractors**. These contractors use best practices when installing rebate-eligible high efficiency equipment. They also **test** your systems to be sure they are operating according to the manufacturer's specifications.

Positives – Program Description P	Concerns/Limitations – Program Description P
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Financial incentives. Rebates up to \$500 seem very helpful (to some)</b></li> <li>• <b>Contractor assurances:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Knowing who the specially trained contractors are</b></li> <li>• <b>Time-saving and reassuring to have access to “participating” already approved contractors (to some)</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>More concisely written, easy-to-understand description than others (to some)</b></li> </ul> <p><i>“It is like somebody totally different wrote this one. It is so much simpler, so much easier to understand, a lot of positives that you can take advantage of, just completely different and I personally am interested in it.” (LowP:All:RI#11)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mention of limited model eligibility deflates interest. Skeptics predict the model they want won’t be eligible...so why bother</b></li> <li>• <b>Cap on \$500 rebate sounds low to some, relative to the expected cost of the equipment that would qualify; may not be enough to motivate participation</b>  <i>“I think that this is an expensive thing to do, to get central air. And I don’t think that \$500 is something that would capture my attention.” (HighP:CoolSmart:RI#8)</i></li> <li>• <b>Confused by the “heat pump” mention. Interest decreases, because it sounds like it won’t be applicable to them</b>  <i>“I don’t know what an air source heat pump is, so I don’t know what they’re talking about.” (LowP:All:RI#7)</i></li> <li>• <b>Requirement of a licensed contractor sounds expensive to some; being connected to “participating” contractors raises suspicions from others</b>  <i>“I’m thinking “a licensed contractor <b>must</b>.” = Dollars and dollars and dollars.” (HighP:CoolSmart:RI#8)</i></li> <li>• <b>Having to mail-in to receive a rebate</b>  <i>“I don’t want a mail-in rebate....Because they’re pains! Because a lot of times you put in and you forget... I don’t think a mail-in rebate is efficient.” (LowP:All:RI#7)</i>  <i>“It was the one bad thing, my rebate experience with National Grid, on the boiler. It took a year and if I hadn’t called...” (LowP:All:RI#7)</i></li> <li>• <b>Wordy description (for some) – needs bulleted format</b></li> </ul>



# Reactions to Program Description Q

## Heat Loan Zero Interest Financing

**Green** = many consumers like this language or idea (keep)  
**Red** = many consumers dislike this language or idea (remove)  
**Blue** = ambiguous, confusing, or mixed reviews (revise)

**Q** This loan program provides customers the **opportunity to apply for a 0% loan from participating lenders** to assist with the installation of **qualified** energy efficient improvements in their homes. Loans may be available for up to \$25,000 with terms of up to 7 years. To qualify for a loan, you **must** own a one-to-four-family residence, obtain a **no-cost in-home energy assessment**, and **install qualified energy efficiency measures** recommended by your Energy Specialist after he/she conducts your home assessment.

**Energy efficiency improvements eligible for this loan program:**

- Attic, wall, and basement insulation
- High-efficiency heating systems
- High-efficiency hot water systems
- Solar hot water systems
- 7-day digital **programmable** thermostats
- ENERGY STAR® Qualified replacement windows (MA only)

Positives – Program Description Q	Concerns/Limitations – Program Description Q
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Easy-to-read format. Clear, concise, and <i>bulleted!</i></b>  <i>"Short and sweet and simple."</i>                      (LowP:All:MA#3)  <i>"I like the whole thing, exactly how it's written, with one exception. It doesn't mention that there's no obligation."</i>                      (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)</li> <li>• <b>Loans available at zero percent...in fact, start with that</b>  <i>"The idea that I might be able to borrow at zero percent as opposed to say taking out a home equity loan, would be of interest."</i> (LowP:All:RI#7)  <i>"Start with the Zero Percent Loan. Put it right at the beginning. Make it bold. Show it. And then I can actually hear it because I missed <b>everything you said.</b>"</i>                      (LowP:All:MA#3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>No loan is motivating for those consumers who are averse to borrowing; prefer rebates</b>  <i>"I was more interested in rebate than I was in the loans."</i> (HighP:HeHe:MA#1)</li> <li>• <b>The words "must" (requirements) and "may" (equivocal promise) are off-putting to some</b>  <i>"The only thing that I didn't like was that word <u>must</u> and how it carries through the rest of the paragraph, ...and <u>may</u> obtain at no costs, and <u>may</u> install."</i> (HighP:CoolSmart:MA#6)</li> <li>* <b>The word "opportunity" sounds conditional regarding chances of loan approval</b>  <i>"Just from the hip, the initial reading. just the word 'opportunity..' because there's a possibility that I could be denied."</i> (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)</li> <li>• <b>Uncertainty about which home energy improvements are "qualified" and/or mandatory to receive the loan is unsettling</b>  <i>"I kept getting hung up on "qualified energy efficient improvements," because I kept wondering what those were. And they go in to start to talk about it, but then the bullet points don't describe the qualified improvements. They call it something else, so I'm still left wondering, "All right, what's a qualified improvement?" I don't know."</i> (LowP:All:MA#3)  <i>"I also thought, is it mandatory to do <b>all</b> of the insulations that the energy specialist recommends in order to qualify for the loan?"</i> (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)</li> <li>• <b>Mention of a 3<sup>rd</sup> party (participating) lender worrisome to a few</b>  <i>"Bells go off in my head ... I don't want anything to do with certain lenders. If it's directly a loan from National Grid, I'm there. But if you're slapping another bank's name on it, Wells Fargo, Bank America, all these other ones, it's kind of tainting the pool."</i> (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)</li> </ul>



# Reactions to Using a Case Study

## *Case Study (on easel, presented to Rhode Island groups only)*

### **E. Wills had a Home Energy Assessment completed at her 1,040 square foot single-family home in Abington, MA.**

- The home was built in 1983.
- The assessment determined that the homeowner could benefit from insulation in the attic and air sealing measures.

**The Need:** Improve efficiency & reduce energy costs. **The Solution:** Air Sealing, Attic Insulation, and Programmable Thermostat.

<b>Savings Summary:</b>	Project Cost	\$2,411
	National Grid Incentives	\$2,009
	Annual Cost Savings	\$ 325

## *Reaction Summary (RI groups only)*

- **Rhode Island participants enthusiastically endorsed Case Study ‘snap shots’ like this in EE program communications; they felt:**
  - Customers like themselves will be able relate to comparable properties, even if not perfect matches to their own, which could motivate participation  
*“You kind of take a look at your situation... and say, ‘Okay, well then I should have somebody come in and take a look.” (LowP:All:RI#7)*
  - Case studies show National Grid in action, “caring” about its residential customers  
*“Yeah. They care. It’s not, “Give me, give me, give me.” It’s, “Let us give you. Let us help you.” (HighP:CoolSmart:RI#8)*
- **Customers recommend that, for even greater impact, more detailed savings and projected cost information be included:**
  - “... because now you’re telling me ‘savings,’ but what is it that I’m going to have to do to get that incentive?.. What is my actual cost going to be? I think that should definitely be included.” (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)*
  - “I think one way to clarify it is to say ‘annual energy savings, \$325, subtracted from upfront cost, and say, ‘This is how much you spend and this is how much you can save in a year.” (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)*
  - “The only thing I would say is if the annual savings look small, so with something like that, (show) what five years are going to save, or (over) ten years you’re going to save \$3,000. People will be like, “Oh, cool.” Bigger numbers are always better.” (PastPart:All:RI#9)*
- \* **Mixed reactions (and muted enthusiasm) to the idea of an interactive software case-study modeling alternative:**
  - Some High Propensity customers liked the idea of customized feedback (akin to entering data on mortgage applications)
  - However, others admitted they would likely not take the time to fill in their data ( ‘too much work’), while still others doubted any software tool could take an accurate read of their energy profile/lifestyle  
*“(Liking it ) If there were a lot of variables, enough so that I could feel like it was enough detail that it pertained to me” (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)*  
*“I don’t trust it because nobody lives my life the way I do and no computer program is going to be able to duplicate what appliances I have plugged in all the time ...what the age of my refrigerator is ...” (PastPart:All:RI#9)*



# Perceptions and Feelings About National Grid's Promotion of EE Programs for Residential Customers

- Though speculation is mixed, based on reactions in this research, customers who are skeptical/cynical about National Grid's motives tend to outnumber those who are neutral or likely to perceive National Grid as acting out of any altruistic environmental, social, or customer interest in promoting residential EE program participation

## Motives Ascribed to National Grid for EE Program Involvement

Positive	Neutral to Jaded	Skeptical/Cynical
<p><b>A sense of shared environmental responsibility</b></p> <p><i>"I would like to think they're doing it to conserve energy for the environment." (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)</i></p> <p><b>Doing good... while enhancing profits (which is OK)</b></p> <p><i>"I think that if they can have efficient users then they can use <u>their</u> resources more efficiently so they might not have to build more plants to support the needs that they have. So if we can be smarter, <u>they</u> will make more profits with what they have, but <u>we</u> will also benefit from having programs like this to cut down our use." (LowP:All:RI#11)</i></p>	<p><b>Government mandated: National Grid has no choice</b></p> <p><i>"My guess is it's mandated by the government that they spend so much on improvements and research." (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)</i></p> <p><i>"Why are they willing to reduce their corporate profits? Maybe they have a large federal grant or state grant that's enabling them to do this." (HighP:HeHe:MA#1)</i></p> <p><i>"I would think it would be the federal and the law. I don't think there's anything altruistic going on." (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)</i></p> <p><b>Responding to social pressure</b></p> <p><i>"I think society is pressuring, so that they can show the consumer that they are doing what they can do for energy conservation that we would rather deal with a company that is doing that than a company that is not." (HighP:CoolSmart:MA#6)</i></p> <p><i>"They are trying to create a good image. We spend all of our money with them so they don't want to be the bad guy. So this is their way of keeping that good image, so if we do something for you, you are going to like us." (HighP:CoolSmart:MA#6)</i></p>	<p><b>Receive government incentives/"kick-backs"</b></p> <p><i>"I'm sure there's government incentives for them on the other end to produce this... They get rebates or something." (PastPart:All:RI#9)</i></p> <p><b>Ward off defection to competition</b></p> <p><i>"I know also there are other third party, Dominion Electric, or other companies that you can choose and pay a little bit more to use a <b>green</b> company, and I think National Grid is afraid that we're going to switch to... "Hey, I'll pay 3% more and know that I'm using a more efficient company," so if they pitched me that they are energy efficient, I might stay with them instead." (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)</i></p> <p><b>Optimize their own profits</b></p> <p><i>"... (My energy bills have) never gone down. So my gut always tells me that the energy companies are doing something to benefit themselves... they're making us consume less and still try to get the same amount, or close to it anyway." (LowP:All:MA#3)</i></p> <p><i>"I think they are getting you to not use as much energy so they have more to sell to businesses." (HighP:CoolSmart:MA#6)</i></p> <p><i>"I'm a bit cynical. The reason is, I feel, is they're saying, "Oh, save all this, save all this," while in the background they're going to jack up rates anyway. So on one hand, "Oh, we're going to help you save." But on the other hand, they're going to be sneaking in, jacking up the rates." (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)</i></p>



# Reactions to Rhode Island Law Notation on National Grid Invoices

## Short (current) vs. Long (alternative) Versions

### Short Notation Version (current):

*"These programs are funded by the Energy Efficiency charge on all customers' utility bills, in accordance with Rhode Island law."*

### Long Notation Version (alternative):

*"Conserving energy benefits everyone. State law requires National Grid to collect a surcharge on customer bills to fund energy efficiency projects across Rhode Island. Efficiency can delay or even negate the need for new power lines. It also lessens the need for new power generation, reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and cutting down on pollutants and carbon emissions that contribute to climate change."*

### Reaction Summary (RI groups only)

- **Low awareness of mandate:** Despite the note already on National Grid invoices (short version), few customers in the Rhode Island groups were aware that EE programs – or their funding through National Grid surcharges – were mandated by state law
- **Alternative (long version) preferred:** Though the succinctness of the short (current) explanation was appreciated by some, most Rhode Island customers strongly recommend the alternative/longer law notation, which is remarkably effective in dispelling distrust and engendering positive feelings toward both the EE programs and National Grid

#### - Feels more upfront than short version – helpful, new information

*"So it feels much more up front to me, and I know I'm going against kind of the cardinal rule about not being wordy, but..."*  
(HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)

*"I like the saying, "efficiency can delay or even negate the need for new power lines." I know that the cost has to be huge and I'm sure shouldered by us, so that ... that in itself is a reason, that's a really good reason.....It's a **huge**... I mean now that you tell me why, I get it." (HighP:HeHe:RI#12)*

#### - Prompts a genuinely personal, emotionally positive response

*"It's both logical and there goes your heartstrings." (HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)*

*"We all need to know that we're contributing to decreasing the carbon footprint. We all need to know that we're going in the right direction." (PastPart:All:RI#9)*

*"Yeah, it kind of makes you feel good. It's like .."Oh, I'm being more socially conscious, I'm thinking about the environment and..."*  
(HighP:Weatherization:RI#10)

#### - Puts National Grid in a positive light

*"I think that we need to know that the big companies are also looking out for our future for the things that we want to make sure that we have enough of going forward." (PastPart:All:RI#9)*

# Transparency – Key to Establishing Trust and Building a Sense of Partnership

- Customers who are less than fully trusting of National Grid's motives for promoting EE programming suggest a simple solution: National Grid should be forthcoming about the purpose and motive for these programs

*"I think as much disclosure and transparency as possible" (LowP:All:RI#7)*

- These customers argue that greater factual information and transparency about National Grid's reasons for EE program promotion would have multiple levels of benefits to National Grid and its relationship with customers:

## **1. builds understanding, deflates suspicions**

*"This is a company, it tries to make money, so the question is how is it making money by encouraging us to use less of what they sell. So they have to answer that question." (PastPart:All:MA#5)*

*"I think I would just want to know sort of what their long term plan is, what their vision is. Is their vision to have us all do "x, y, and z" ? Is their vision to have us achieve a certain percent of energy efficiency? I guess I would just want to see a little bit more communication about what their intentions are." (LowP:All:MA#3)*

*"I'm going to jump on. I wasn't one in the skeptical group **but** I think the transparency is important. ... having enough transparency to where you can see the business model and you can actually see what's supplied to them, what's supplied to us." (LowP:All:MA#3)*

## **2. can help build a sense of partnership**

*"I want to know, in a bigger picture, that we are on the same team and that this is what we are doing, not only for your households but that we are doing this for the environment at large and that that is the ultimate goal." (LowP:All:MA#4)*

## **3. can boost program participation**

- *"Maybe more people would participate if they were more transparent. Some people are very skeptical "* (PastPart:All:MA#5)

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## “Pre” and “Post” Research EE Program Awareness & Interest

- **Prior to coming into the focus groups, familiarity with EE programs available to residential customers was *moderate to low* in this sample of National Grid customers**
  - Predictably, customers in two segments – Past Participants and High Propensity – were more knowledgeable about National Grid’s programs than were Low Propensity customers
  - None across the segments (even Past Participants in said programs) referred to any programs by the names used on the National Grid website
  - Of the four programs eventually discussed in the groups, the Weatherization and Audit program seemed to be the only one already familiar to customers (outside of a few Past Participants in other programs), though it was usually referred to as a “home energy audit” (from “MassSave”, “RISE” and National Grid). Other most mentioned EE “programs” referenced in groups were free energy efficient/fluorescent bulbs, and energy efficient appliance rebates
- **For the customers in this small sample, this lack of program *awareness*, not program *disinterest*, was the key barrier to participation**
  - Following in-group program discussion, *customers in all segments* expressed strong interest in learning more about these programs, and offered suggestions for how they can best be reached
  - Past Participants in National Grid programs already had, or said they likely would, recommend the program to others. They referred others to National Grid’s website or printed out applications for them (as some contractors/suppliers had done for them)
- **Having been made aware of these programs, customers say program involvement will likely be conditional on two key factors: perceived ease-of-participation and manageable (if any) up-front expenditures**
  - The Zero Percent Loan program was attractive to *many* in abating costs

# Key EE Messaging Content & Language Insights

- **The key benefits to communicate to the attention and interest of residential customers, in the order of priority, are as follows:**
  - **Savings** – the economic benefit to the customer is absolutely paramount and critical to interest in reading further, and should lead the message, most say
  - **Easy** – ease-of-engagement is a program hook; customers must feel confident that program participation will not be burdensome to them
  - **Greater good** – energy use reduction for the sake of the environment/overall social good is important but by far the lowest of these three priorities for residential customers, this research indicates. Customers suggest it be placed last on the list of reasons for participation in EE programs
- **Language sensitivity issues that surfaced in reactions to the program descriptions presented indicate nuances to avoid in re-crafting EE communications**
  - Avoid/minimize conditionals, e.g., “may qualify,” “might be eligible”
  - Avoid controlling/demanding words, e.g., “must”
  - Avoid cumbersome and/or time-consuming “to do’s”
- **Other terminology insights gleaned:**
  - Choose “Energy Savings Solutions” over “Energy Efficiency”
  - Use “%-off” discount (=savings) messages instead of “%-owed” (=debts) messages
- **More disclosure as to why National Grid was championing these energy efficiency programs (seemingly counter-intuitive to some) was strongly recommended**
  - Customers were largely skeptical as to the motives for National Grid’s participation in/promotion of EE programs for residential customers, which in turn contributed an element of hesitation to their interest/engagement in participation
  - When Rhode Island customers were shown two statements disclosing the government’s mandate and funding through customer service fees, this skepticism palpably softened after reading the more complete version, which, they felt, included a highly credible, thoughtful explanation of the programs, National Grid’s reasons for involvement, and broad-reaching benefits to its customers

# Recommended EE Program Communications Channels & Messaging Format

- **These customers recommended four channels for disseminating program information:**
  - Digital messaging (targeted emails)
  - Print materials (bill enclosures, separate targeted mail)
  - Radio
  - Social media – recommended by a small, but possibly growing, number of customers
- **Although discussion probes focused primarily on nuances of *language choice*, participants across all segments brought presentation *style* issues to the forefront, indicating that the style in which the current descriptions are written would very possibly result in their being ignored (if print) or deleted (if email) without being read**
  - A key learning in this research is that the overall look and at-a-glance perceived readability of any communication message will be the *initial determinant* for customers to read or ignore/delete any message from National Grid
  - Customers in all groups were emphatic that given their time-pressed lifestyle, lengthy paragraphs would be glossed over or dismissed entirely; for many, the program descriptions explored were too dense
  - Rather, a bulleted format, with short phrases introducing a program would motivate them to read further
  - A short, catchy/self-explanatory program name would aid recall (e.g., for accessing additional information later or spreading-the-word to others) and bolster familiarity
- **In addition to a concise program description, customers indicate that a case-study snapshot would be very helpful and motivating as a component of program information**
  - The case study (E. Willis) shown in Rhode Island satisfied customers' interest (expressed in all groups) for specific examples of actions, costs, and savings (in dollar terms) to which they personally can relate – even if the examples are not perfect matches to their own residential situations
  - In contrast, the option of an interactive software energy assessment received mixed to moderate reviews