

Executive Summary

Small Business Program Process Evaluation (RI-22-CX-Proc)

Rhode Island Energy (RIE) operates a long-standing Small Business Program (SBP) that provides deeply discounted retrofits to business customers who consume less than one million kWh/year. The program subsidizes the installation of efficient equipment, including custom and prescriptive measures. In September 2022, RIE contracted with Cadeo to conduct a process evaluation to assess program activities and identify opportunities for program enhancement. Although the SBP has successfully reached thousands of Rhode Island small businesses, it will need to adapt as low-cost savings from lighting change outs decline.

Key Findings:

1. The RIE SBP operates effectively and has many features that can support the program as it adapts.
2. Program contractors are completing projects on schedule, but customer-directed projects need more attention.
3. Increased labor costs are affecting the program's ability to retain skilled labor.
4. Main Street canvassing approaches can be effective for reducing the cost of serving very small businesses and may help the program engage underserved small businesses (including those minority- and women-owned).
5. There are opportunities to customize marketing materials for small businesses and further support program contractors in outreach.

Methods

Interviews

with three program staff and seven program-affiliated contractors

Survey

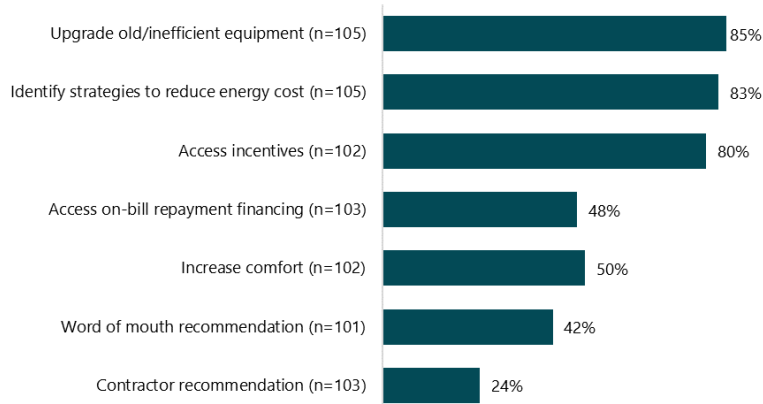
with 106 participant and 139 nonparticipant businesses

Focus Groups

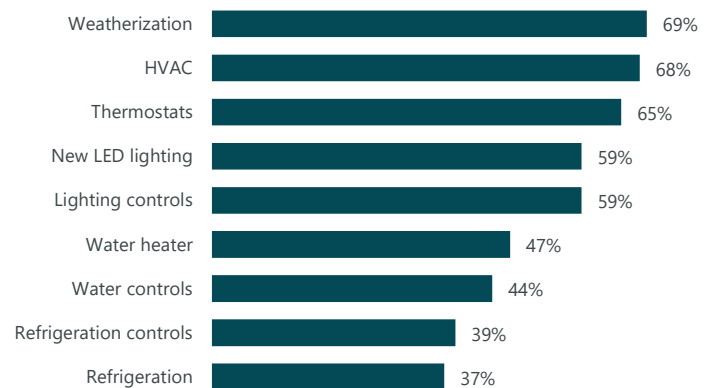
with 12 nonparticipant small business representatives

Literature review and jurisdictional scan

Motivations to Participate



Measure Interest Among Nonparticipants Who Are Likely to Participate (n=59)



Participants are satisfied with their program experience and sought to improve the efficiency of their spaces. Nonparticipants face challenges paying for upgrades, especially when they lease their space however they are interested in comprehensive projects, including weatherizing their space and obtaining HVAC.

Recommendations

- ✓ Promote the on-bill financing path to encourage wider adoption and overcome first cost barriers.
- ✓ Use financing to expand access to measures that offer energy savings and other benefits.
- ✓ Increase tracking and follow up for customer-directed projects
- ✓ Ensure the labor rates and reimbursement schedule reflects recent cost increases.
- ✓ Deploy strategies that expand the effectiveness of Main Street outreach efforts.
- ✓ Expand marketing and collateral tools to support a range of communications and promotion of measure packages.