

Sample Focus Group Outline

About the Energy Efficiency Market Transformation Project

From 2012-2013 the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Community Innovator's Lab Green Economic Development Initiative (MIT GEDI) partnered with local government agencies¹ on an "action research" project to develop energy efficiency market transformation strategies for commercial buildings in each agency's region. The guidebook and accompanying materials (like this one) draw on this work to present how communities can formulate a commercial energy management market transformation strategy and suggests common policies, approaches, and tools to deploy such strategies. It is intended to support your community's ongoing economic development and environmental initiatives.

About this Resource

This sample outline provides a structured format for a focus group with local property owners as part of a region's energy efficiency market transformation strategy. Structure the focus group to identify how property owners and operators engage in energy management and their views on how the city and region can better support energy efficiency efforts.

About the MIT CoLab Green Economic Development Initiative

MIT GEDI is a project of the Community Innovators Lab, a center for planning and development within the MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP), which focuses on advancing a socially just and environmentally sustainable economy. MIT GEDI conducts applied research; develops tools and resources for practitioners; disseminates knowledge; and partners with economic development organizations to design strategic planning initiatives intended to transform economic development practice. GEDI is generously supported by a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.



¹ City of Minneapolis, MN Department of Community Planning and Economic Development
City of Las Vegas, NV Office of Sustainability
City of Bellevue, WA City Manager's Office
County of Passaic, NJ
City of Cambridge, MA Community Development Department

Sample Focus Group Outline

Introduce the project and purpose of the focus group. Have participants introduce themselves and describe the properties they own in the city/region.

- Have you made any energy efficiency improvements to your buildings in the past several years?
 - If yes, what motivated you to make the investment?
 - If no, why have you chosen not to make upgrades?
- When considering an energy efficiency improvement, are there specific requirements or thresholds you consider such as payback period, cost limits or return on investment?
- Are there building operating practices or tools that you use to reduce energy use?
- How do you identify energy efficiency opportunities for your building?
 - Have you undertaken a comprehensive building audit?
- What types of financing or financial incentives are needed to motivate building owners to undertake energy efficiency improvements?
 - How effective are existing programs for businesses?
 - What would convince more properties to participate in these or the utility's programs?
- If your properties have multiple tenants, do tenants pay their own energy costs? Does this result in pressure from the tenants for owners to adopt energy upgrades?
- How do managers and owners learn about efficiency programs, and other opportunities to improve their properties?
 - What sources of information do they trust?
 - How do you and other property owners network and share information?
 - What would increase owners' awareness of the value of energy performance improvements in tenanted properties?
- What organizations are best suited to provide properties with assistance evaluating energy saving options and navigating energy efficiency programs?
- What specific assistance do properties need?
- What energy management training programs are valuable for property managers and building operators? Are there specific energy efficiency certifications or competencies that you look for in hiring building managers and operations staff?
 - Do you have building staff dedicated to energy management?
 - What are the barriers to employees receiving formal training in energy management?
- How can the city/region and its partners increase interest in improving energy management and participation in energy efficiency programs?
 - Could friendly competition, such as in an energy efficiency challenge, realize stronger energy management? Have you or would you participate in one?
 - Would recruiting a group of similar businesses/properties to participate together in efficiency programs make sense?
 - Besides monetary incentives, how could the city/region reward properties for stronger energy management?
 - How would property managers respond to having a trained intern offered to assist with or coordinate energy upgrade projects?
 - If the city/region hosted periodic lunch meetings for property owners to share experiences around energy management practices would you attend or send someone?