

## Strength in Numbers: Cities Collaborate to Influence State Policy for Energy Benchmarking

### USDN members align the voices of building owners and public agencies around a common goal: access to building energy data.

With generous support from the Energy Foundation, the Institute for Market Transformation, and funding from a USDN Peer Learning Exchange grant lead by Green Cities California brought together USDN members and partner experts to explore Building Energy Disclosure and Benchmarking in June 2015. These city leaders shared a key concern: monthly, whole building energy data is not easily accessible to owners of commercial and multi-family residential buildings. Building energy disclosure and benchmarking policies are increasingly important tools for driving market transformation towards energy efficiency.

USDN member participants in the exchange included Berkeley, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, and Santa Monica. Partner experts included Institute for Market Transformation, Natural Resources Defense Council, U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Center for Sustainable Energy, California Energy Commission, California Public Utilities Commission California Housing Partnership, Building Operations and Management Association, and U.S. Green Building Council.

The Institute for Market Transformation explains benchmarking as “measuring a building’s energy use and then comparing it to the average for similar buildings. It allows owners and occupants to understand their building’s relative energy performance and helps identify opportunities to cut energy waste.” Building energy disclosure policies require transparency and public access to benchmarking energy consumption data.

#### *Three questions were deeply explored during this exchange:*

#### **1. What are data access and disclosure’s potential benefits to society?**

- Job creation through increased activity related to energy management and efficiency investments;
- Better returns for ratepayers on collective investment in energy efficiency because energy management and efficiency investments will be informed by detailed data; and
- Expanded opportunities to incorporate data access with emerging microgrid technology.

#### **2. What are data access and disclosure’s potential benefits to building owners?**

- Ability to obtain their own data (right to data), so that they can more effectively manage their assets and pursue cost-effective upgrades for their buildings;
- Asset value increases;
- Equity / parity / fairness for all business owners; and
- Facilitated compliance with government mandates (like Disclosure Ordinances) and voluntary programs (LEED, for example).

#### **3. What is the potential harm to individuals and businesses when energy information is disclosed?**

A primary concern, as expressed by utilities -- and convening participants like the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the California Energy Commission (CEC) -- is that expanded data access threatens a fundamental privacy right. However, the examples presented at the exchange demonstrate that there have been no negative repercussions when easy access to data is provided by a utility. To mitigate these privacy concerns, the exchange participants determined that strategies should include:

- Focusing on cultivating the trust of building owners;
- Offering a simple and concise explanation of the benefits and streamlined requirements for data disclosure; and
- Tying funding opportunities to the use of granular data.

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### Next Steps

Exchange participants established two committees to take action, specifically in California. One is focused on legislative options for whole building data access, and the second is charged with (1) communicating updates to those who were invited to the exchange and (2) rallying support for actionable outcomes.

- The legislative committee has been very active; its near-term goal is to propose amendments to [California's SB 350](#), the Golden State Standards.
- The communications committee drafted a template of recommended amendments to SB 350 that is intended for California Governor Jerry Brown, Senate President pro Tempore Kevin de León, and Senate Budget Chair Mark Leno. The Green Cities California (GCC) Regional Network of Sustainability Directors is submitting the letters to the Governor and legislature, and it is anticipated that mayors and organization executives will send letters as well.

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Garret Wong from the City of Santa Monica stated, "I learned through this exchange that local governments and local organizations have the opportunity to lobby the executive, legislative, and regulatory bodies in concert. Attempting to address system-wide change is more productive when approached from both top down and bottom up. The City will contribute to the key messaging necessary to convince lawmakers to make energy data access a priority in achieving the State's targets for energy and water conservation."

The enthusiasm is palpable, and there is optimism that this time, with a broad-based, well-coordinated effort, the voice of the building owners and public agencies will finally match that of utilities and others who claim that the privacy issue overrides the need for data access and disclosure. Neal De Snoo from the City of Berkeley said when expressing his biggest take-away from this peer exchange, "This can be done. We are close. Stay engaged."

