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Engaging Latinx Businesses in Electric Efficiency Programs

This project aimed to understand implementation rates of commercial energy efficiency utility programs among Latinx-owned businesses in Minnesota, identify and document participation barriers, and assess the potential to improve participation in these communities. The project team also increased understanding of existing utility programs with business owners.

For this project, the term Latinx includes:

- People from or descending from a Latin America country, including Mexico, Central America, South America, and islands of the Caribbean.
- People who identify as Hispanic.
- People who speak Spanish predominately or solely.

Methodology

Insights for this study were gained through:

1. Study Advisory Committee (18 members)
2. Utility interviews (4)
3. Community organization interviews (5)
4. Business interviews (19)
5. Survey to businesses (54 responses)

Outreach, interviews, and survey were available in English and Spanish.

Research was conducted in four communities across Minnesota. These communities were selected from demographic analysis, advisory committee insights, and utility willingness:

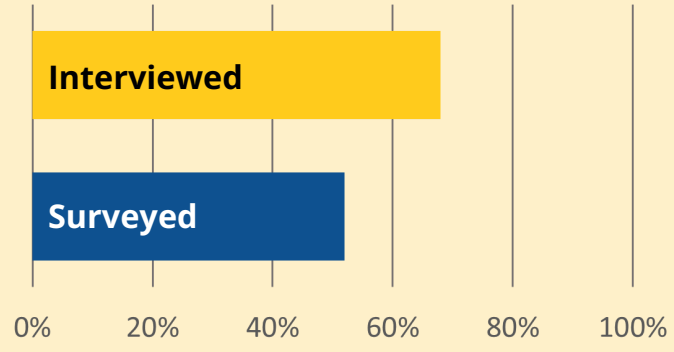
- Austin
- West St. Paul
- Wilmar
- Worthington

Findings

Key findings of Latinx business owner perspectives related to utility energy efficiency programming are as follows:

- **Leasing:** Many Latinx-owned businesses lease their space, most of which are responsible for their electricity bills. Those leasing space were the most likely to have done no energy projects in the past five years and have no plans for doing so in the next five years.
- **Home businesses:** Half of businesses surveyed (27 out of 54) are operated out of homes.
- **Very low rebate awareness:** 75% don't know about utility rebate programs.

High energy costs: 68% businesses interviewed and 52% businesses surveyed think energy costs are significant to their operating expenses.



This study – *Electric Utility Energy Conservation Program Participation Rates and Barriers to Participation among Latinx-owned Businesses across Minnesota* – was funded by Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources through the Conservation Applied Research and Development (CARD) program.



Findings (continued)

- **Planned energy projects need funding:** There are 90 different energy projects at 45 businesses planned in the next 5 years and the biggest barrier to complete them is money.
- **Spanish-speaking:** Nearly all businesses interviewed (17 out of 19) mainly or only speak Spanish compared to 5 out of 27 surveyed. Some know they have the option to speak in Spanish with their utility, though the utility staff aren't as fluent as they need sometimes.
- **Spanish-language materials:** Latinx businesses want to hear about programs and opportunities through a variety of communication channels (phone, email, paper mailings, radio, text), but noted it's important that they're in Spanish.

Recommendations

This set of recommendations aims to improve participation rates in utility energy efficiency programs by Latinx-owned businesses, some of which require many partners beyond the electric utilities. Some of these recommendations can be implemented immediately and others will take time and additional steps to manifest.

1. Collect demographic data of participants in utility programming
2. Track small business identities in general
3. Target outreach, education, and marketing with Latinx-owned businesses on utility programs
4. Hire staff that is representative of the demographics of the community served
5. Provide interpreter and translation services for utilities to use
6. Translate information about utility programming
7. Increase capacity to form new or deeper connections with Latinx businesses by partnering with others already connected and directly creating relationships with businesses
8. Ensure that businesses leasing space and those operating out of their homes understand which rebate programs are available to them and how they use them
9. Partner with Natural Gas utility programming
10. Continue to explore ways to reduce upfront project costs and make it easier/streamlined

Project Partners

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Contact CERTs at info@CleanEnergyResourceTeams.org for the full report.