



# Framing Energy Efficiency as a Smart Stimulus Investment

Communications Guide

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*making the  
environment matter*



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### Introduction

More than \$32 billion from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) is flowing to state and local energy efficiency programs and projects. The flood of stimulus projects breaking ground over the next 12 to 18 months offers an unprecedented opportunity to promote energy efficiency as a forward-looking investment that saves energy and money for consumers and taxpayers while creating jobs.

Every project announcement, launch and completion offers an opportunity to reinforce the values of energy efficiency in concrete ways that people can relate to their own lives. Promoting positive stories can also help keep energy efficiency above the fray of skepticism and attacks on the ARRA as a whole.

While stimulus spending itself may not be the top priority for energy efficiency advocates, perception of how stimulus dollars on energy efficiency are spent will leave a lasting impression on media, policy makers and the public and will have an influence on the debate over local and state policy initiatives.



This guide offers some background information on public support for stimulus spending on energy efficiency and makes recommendations on how to promote positive media coverage of energy efficiency stimulus projects. We also provide a case study and sample materials of how Resource Media and our partners put these strategies to work in Montana.

### Americans Support Efficiency Spending Despite Skepticism of Stimulus Overall

Current public opinion and media coverage trends offer a favorable climate in which to promote positive stimulus stories. Amidst a sea of skepticism about ARRA, energy efficiency stimulus spending is enjoying top honors as a good use of stimulus funding, evident in recent polling and news coverage of ARRA.

A January 2009 *Wall Street Journal*/NBC poll found that while only 43 percent of respondents said the stimulus package was a good idea overall, a whopping 89 percent said they liked the idea of creating jobs by increasing production of renewable energy and making schools and public buildings more energy efficient. A May 2009 Pike Research study found that while only 41 percent of Americans approved the entire stimulus package, 57 percent approved spending on energy efficiency and 61 percent favored

spending on smart grid. An August 2009 poll by Burson-Marsteller found that 70 percent of Americans approved stimulus spending on “green” technology and the majority say even more should have been allocated to green energy projects.

### Energy Efficiency Rises Above Stimulus Skepticism in Media

Criticism of ARRA showing up in media coverage runs the gamut – from the potential for fraud, abuse and waste, to the inability to track, report or even spend stimulus funds, to missing the mark on job creation and retention. Media have given ample airtime to critics, such as Sen. Tom Coburn’s (R-Okla.) “Top 100 Wasteful Spending” campaign and Rep. Denny Rehberg’s (R-Mont.) “Waste Watch” Web site. Some media outlets have launched their own ‘stimulus waste’ investigations. Sean Hannity tracks stimulus spending through his “Waste 101” series and ABC’s “Good Morning America” took aim at a \$17 million stimulus-funded project to shore up U.S.-Canadian border outposts in Montana.

Stimulus spending on efficiency falls into some of the same traps as do many ARRA-funded programs and initiatives – namely the lack of state and local capacity to spend (and track) funding within the mandatory 18-month timeframe, lack of trained workforce to conduct energy audits, weatherization and other building retrofits, and concerns that efficiency funds and jobs are not being doled out fairly or locally.

Much of the coverage of energy efficiency, however, touts its positive economic impacts, from immediate job creation, to helping households hit hard by the recession save money through weatherization, to reducing energy costs in schools and government buildings – stimulus investments that actually return money to taxpayers.

“The state’s weatherization partners — agencies and nonprofits — are ramping up hiring to help meet increased goals for weatherization work. ‘That’s expected to lead to some 200 additional jobs,’ said Todd Hartman, spokesman for the Governor’s Energy Office.” *The Denver Post*, June 2009

“Retrofitting city buildings to reduce energy consumption will likely mean long-term taxpayer savings, (Morrison) said.” Jennifer Morrison, sustainability manager for the city of Chandler, *The Arizona Republic*, April 2009

“(Angeline Zalewski) constantly worried about how much energy she was using, and whether she would have enough money for bills that month... After her home was weatherized by CAP Services, she should see a savings of between 25 percent and 30 percent, with no cost to her. ‘Now, I don’t have to worry about it,’ Zalewski said.” *The Stevens Point Journal* (Wis.), September 2009

### Recommendations to Promote Positive Coverage

#### “Show Me the Money”

The first rule of persuasive communications is to meet people where they are. The economy remains the top concern among most Americans. Even before the recession, public opinion research showed saving money is the primary perceived benefit of energy efficiency among consumers and policymakers.



Messages and messengers (see below) for energy efficiency stimulus success stories should focus first on energy efficiency's immediate economic benefits – to consumers, homeowners, business owners, taxpayers and job seekers.

### *Showcase projects with clear and compelling values*

Look for projects that – in addition to their money-saving benefits – add value to people's lives in other essential ways. Improving energy efficiency in schools does mean reduced energy bills and more money for books and teachers, but it also means healthier, more comfortable students through classrooms that are



warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer. In other words, energy efficiency means a more productive learning environment for students and teachers. Energy upgrades in hospitals – many of which are public and eligible for stimulus help – mean more money for doctors, nurses and life-saving medicines. Energy efficiency equals better healthcare.

**Showcase energy efficiency projects in places people care about – like schools and hospitals.**

### *Help reporters cut through red tape*

The myriad stimulus spending programs for energy efficiency are mind-numbing. Helping reporters navigate the multi-layered red tape of how ARRA funds are allocated will help them focus more on the real benefits on the ground. Provide reporters a short fact sheet explaining how different energy efficiency stimulus programs work, their dollar amounts and contact information for program administrators who can answer any questions they might have. Outline a rough timeline of grant award announcements, project groundbreaking and completions and other news coverage opportunities. Follow up with them as dates for these events firm up.

### *Match your message with the right messenger*

Identify and recruit trusted, influential spokespeople outside of the advocacy community who can speak credibly to the economic, job creation and taxpayer benefits of energy efficiency stimulus projects. Energy service companies, weatherization agencies and other employers in the energy efficiency field are hiring workers to meet anticipated demand for their services. They are among the most credible spokespeople to deliver the job creation message. City and county officials can speak to local economic benefits and lower costs for taxpayers and provide supporting anecdotes and statistics. Homeowners and renters can put a human face on the statistics, providing real-life stories of how increased efficiency helps them save money and improve living environments.



### Case Study: Montana schools lead the way on stimulus

During Montana’s 2009 legislative session earlier in the year, Resource Media worked with our partners, including Montana Conservation Voters and Northern Plains Resource Council, to pass legislation (HB 645) that included Quick Start Energy Grants for schools, a \$15 million state-directed stimulus program to complement ARRA spending on energy efficiency. Resource Media began promoting positive stimulus stories in Montana in May 2009.

Working with our advocacy partners and state agency allies, Resource Media developed a fact sheet on stimulus funding for energy efficiency that detailed key programs and agencies responsible for allocating stimulus dollars in Montana and a timeline of key news hooks such as grant award announcements and project groundbreakings. We also provided interview sources and background information on the benefits of energy efficiency investments for students, teachers, job seekers and taxpayers.

We distributed the fact sheet to reporters to coincide with the first Quick Start grant awards in June. That initial news hook generated a story in the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* and an *Associated Press* wire story that ran in outlets across the state. Just as importantly, however, it set the stage for additional coverage throughout the summer as the Quick Start projects broke ground across the state.

In early July, the [Helena Independent Record](#) editorialized in favor of stimulus spending for infrastructure with specific emphasis on energy efficiency, saying:

“...(T)here have been some questionable projects to receive (stimulus) funding, such as vinyl walls on state-owned bathrooms in Oregon...(b)ut there are some valuable projects in the lining, too. Forward-looking, energy-saving projects are among them.”

We continued outreach to reporters as Quick Start grants were awarded and projects broke ground throughout July and August, resulting in strong, in-depth coverage framing energy efficiency as an effective use of stimulus funding that helps students.

"This frees up money from our \$50 million budget to use to benefit children," said Helena Superintendent Bruce Messinger to the *Helena Independent-Record* in August 2009.

A highlight was an in-depth television story by [CBS’ Great Falls](#) affiliate about energy upgrades at a local high school, framing the project as a money-saver for the district while showing retrofitters at work.

As students headed back to school in early September, we worked with our partners and key legislators instrumental in creating the Quick Start program to host two press conferences at schools with completed Quick Start projects. Reporters were given tours of energy upgrades and were able to interview school principals, local contractors and legislators.



CBS Great Falls



The events resulted in coverage ranging from NBC and CBS television affiliates in Kalispell and Billings, to print coverage in the *Billings Gazette* and *Whitefish Pilot* and a statewide radio actuality story by [Public News Service \(PNS\)](#) highlighting the cost savings and benefits to students from energy efficiency improvements to schools.

## Sample Materials

*Backgrounder (sent in body of personalized e-mail to key reporters)*

### **STIMULUS FUNDS BOOST ENERGY EFFICIENCY, JOBS IN MONTANA**

**June 2009**

Townsend K12 is getting a shot of stimulus funds that will help the school district save money on energy bills and put local people to work making energy-saving improvements to schools.

This week the Montana Department of Commerce will be awarding Townsend K12 School District a Quick Start Energy Grant for energy efficiency retrofits to school buildings such as upgrading lighting and installing smart sensors in classrooms to ensure heating, cooling and lights are working efficiently. The improvements will help the district save money on energy expenses each year, save taxpayer dollars, improve students' learning environment and create local jobs.

The Quick Start Energy Grants for Schools is a \$15 million program funded through federal stimulus dollars to help Montana school districts kick-start energy-saving planning and improvements to school buildings through the end of September.

Of the \$900 million in total federal stimulus funding allocated to Montana, more than \$80 million is dedicated to programs and services to increase the energy efficiency of schools, homes and public buildings. School districts, state agencies, and cities and counties across the state are now planning how to invest these funds in energy-saving projects, which will start breaking ground and creating jobs this month.

As more projects are approved this summer, your readers may be interested in how stimulus dollars are creating jobs for Montanans and helping communities reduce energy costs. Montana is one of the first states to actually put dollars on the ground for energy efficiency work.

Following are some of the major stimulus programs for energy efficiency in Montana and key deadlines, contacts and timelines for each. I hope you find this useful and please let me know if I can help further in your coverage of stimulus funding for energy efficiency work.

Sincerely,  
Debbie



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#### Quick Start Energy Grant Program: \$15 million

The Montana Department of Commerce (DOC) is accepting applications through Sept. 1 from school districts for energy audits, evaluations and energy efficiency improvements to school buildings. Proposals will be approved and funds awarded on a first-come, first-served basis until money runs out or Sept. 30 – whichever comes first. **Proposals are already being approved and projects will start soon throughout the state.** This program is the result of proposed legislation to establish an energy-efficiency fund for K-12 schools introduced by Rep. Wanda Grinde (D-Billings) that ended up getting rolled into and passed under HB 645.

Key program contacts and interview sources:

- **Kali Wicks**, Quick Start Energy Program Specialist, MT DOC: 841-2874; kwicks@mt.gov
- **Tim Tolman**, McKinstry, energy performance contractor working with Townsend School Districts on Quick Start grant project: 544-8530; timt@McKinstry.com
- **Brian Patrick**, Superintendent, Townsend Public School District. Brian also organized the “Repowering Montana Schools Energy Summit” in January: 266-5512; bpatrick@townsend.k12.mt.us
- **Wanda Grinde**, State Representative, District 48 Billings: 252-3343; wsgrinde@aol.com
- **Ed Gulick**, Clean Energy Task Force, Northern Plains Resource Council: 896-0250; egulick@highplainsarchitects.com

#### State Buildings Energy Conservation Program: \$22.7 million

Federal stimulus funds are providing a huge boost to the Montana Dept of Environmental Quality (DEQ) State Buildings Energy Conservation Program, which also received \$3 million in state funding this year. Now through April 2012, the SBEC will fund energy efficiency audits and upgrades to 50 state-owned buildings, including universities and community colleges, and use cost savings from reduced energy bills to reinvest in future projects. This program will help meet the Governor’s 20X10 Initiative that directs state agencies to reduce facility energy use 20 percent by 2010. The state expects to invest nearly \$24 million to save \$1.9 million in energy spending annually. A full list of projects can be found on the [MT DEQ website](#) (see ‘state plan’ at bottom of box on right.) **Many projects are already underway.**

Key program contacts:

- **Georgia Brensdaal**, Section Supervisor, Public Buildings and Renewable Energy, MT DEQ: 841-5240; Gbrensdaal@mt.gov
- **Ken Phillips**, Energy Engineer, Public Buildings and Renewable Energy, MT DEQ: 841-5241; KPhillips@mt.gov

#### Energy Efficiency Conservation Grants: \$14 million

This funding opportunity is split into to pots:



- \$4.4 million in formula block grants from the U.S. Dept of Energy to the biggest (by population) 10 cities and 10 counties in the state (click on MT for list of municipalities and funding allocations from the [DOE website](#)). Municipalities must apply for funds with the DOE by June 25; **many cities and counties are now holding meetings to decide work plans before submitting to the DOE for approval.** Some have already done so, including the city of Bozeman and Cascade County.
- \$9.6 million in competitive grants to smaller cities and counties (that did not receive funding directly from the DOE) administered by the Montana DEQ. **The Montana DEQ is currently working on competitive grant guidelines and plans to submit them to the DOE for approval by June 25** and issue an RFP in late summer.

Key program contacts:

- **Bonnie Rouse**, Ombudsman, Business and Community Assistance Programs, MT DEQ: 841-5251; [BRouse@mt.gov](mailto:BRouse@mt.gov)
- **Brian Green**, Section Supervisor, Energy Planning and Technical Assistance, MT DEQ: 841-5230; [Bgreen@mt.gov](mailto:Bgreen@mt.gov)
- **Paul Driscoll**, Public Education Specialist, Energy Planning and Technical Assistance, MT DEQ: 841-5231; [PDriscoll2@mt.gov](mailto:PDriscoll2@mt.gov)

**Timeline: Tracking Stimulus Funds for Energy Efficiency Work**

Next 1-4 Weeks:

- The first Quick Start Energy Grant projects break ground at schools throughout the state, including the Townsend School District.
- Energy efficiency upgrades to state-owned buildings are underway throughout the state funded through the State Building Energy Conservation Program.
- Largest 10 cities and 10 counties hold public meetings to finalize spending plans for Energy Efficiency Conservation Block (formula) Grants and submit plans to U.S. DOE by June 25.
- MT DEQ submits competitive grant guidelines for Energy Efficiency Conservation Grants for smaller cities and counties to U.S. DOE by June 25.

Next 1-3 Months:

- MT DEQ issues Request for Proposals for competitive grants to smaller cities and counties for the Energy Efficiency Conservation Grant program.
- U.S. DOE approves and/or requires revisions to municipal proposals for Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grants.

**Background Information**

Quick Start Energy Grants:

<http://commerce.mt.gov/QuickStart/>

2008 Montana Schools Facility Report (see pp 27-36 “Energy Use”):

[http://opi.mt.gov/PDF/Facilities/Final\\_Report\\_7-1-08.pdf](http://opi.mt.gov/PDF/Facilities/Final_Report_7-1-08.pdf)



State Buildings Energy Conservation Program:

<http://www.deq.state.mt.us/energy/buildings/StateBuildings.asp>

Governor's 20x10 initiative news release:

<http://governor.mt.gov/news/pr.asp?ID=513>

Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grants:

MT DEQ website: <http://deq.mt.gov/Recovery/energy/blockGrants.asp>

U.S. DOE website: <http://www.eecbg.energy.gov/>

American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy:

[Energy Productivity - Critical Benefits for Both the Montana Economy and the Global Climate](#)

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