



How to Implement a BPS Assistance Program for Under-Resourced Buildings

Lessons learned from the Building Innovation Hub's Success with BEPS program.



Supporting Success with the Building Energy Performance Standards (BEPS) in Washington, D.C.

Buildings are essential spaces where we work, live, and play, so it's critical they support our health, wealth, and communities. For too long residents of under-resourced communities have been excluded from efforts to improve the built environment. In practice, this means that buildings are less healthy, and more expensive to operate for residents already struggling under the weight of systemic societal inequities. This situation stems from the fact that communities have all too often been partially or completely left out of the building planning process. People working and living nearby have had minimal decision-making power or influence on how their neighborhoods are shaped.

IMT is working to prioritize the needs and challenges of communities that have been historically excluded from the process and disproportionately harmed by environmental racism. One example is a program providing technical and financial assistance to priority buildings to help them comply with Washington D.C.'s [Building Energy Performance Standards](#) (BEPS). This program, called Success with BEPS, is operated by the [Building Innovation Hub](#) (Hub), a project of IMT. It is a service for building owners, managers, and decision-makers with buildings that need support and which are not currently meeting the performance requirements of BEPS Cycle 1. The program educates these decision-makers on their building's energy performance, informs them of key BEPS milestones, recommends next steps for compliance, and connects them with further policy and financial assistance through partner organizations.

Success with BEPS launched as a pilot targeting multifamily affordable housing, then expanded to include senior care communities, worship facilities, K-12 private schools, healthcare facilities, condominiums, and co-ops. The Hub plans to grow the program to welcome other project typologies, such as class B & C office buildings and other multifamily apartment buildings. This program is not designed to operate as an energy services performance contract or a retrofit service, but instead provides light consulting on policy compliance and recommends next steps to these building owners.

Pilot program participants provided feedback that direct conversations with experts well-versed in the technical details of BEPS, and connections to financing and technical assistance partners, was very valuable. This one-on-one support has helped decision-makers understand their building's performance level, and laid out critical next steps in their BEPS journey.

The following pages summarize the program's key components, implementation steps, and lessons learned.

Defining Priority Buildings

A critical step in launching the Success with BEPS program was to identify key decision makers and stakeholders, then collaborate to determine who most needs additional assistance with energy performance improvements and compliance. The process included:

1. Determine the desired outcomes through collaboration with the [District Department of Energy & Environment](#) (DOEE), and the [DC Sustainable Energy Utility](#) (DCSEU). The primary intended outcomes are to see building owners improve their building's energy performance and increase their ability to comply with BEPS Cycle 1.
2. With these goals in mind, create success metrics to report on the program's impact.
3. Define the eligibility criteria for under-resourced or priority building typologies in the District.
4. Using the District's publicly-available [BEPS Disclosure](#), identify target buildings that do not currently meet the BEPS, that will need to be brought into compliance, and that fit the eligibility criteria defined above.
5. Budget for the cost and scope of the program and enlist local energy consultants, that are well-versed in BEPS and local building operations, to assist.
6. Compile contact information for the building decision-makers and establish a communication outreach process, initiated by DOEE.

Program Implementation

After the program details and intent were established, the next step was to engage, inform, and enroll participants in the program. This included creating emails, newsletter and social media content, webinars, and marketing materials to inform program applicants about the purpose and benefits of the service (improving building energy performance, assisting with BEPS strategy, etc). The materials included specific benefits of BEPS compliance, such as reduced utility bills and energy burdens due to greater energy efficiency, and avoided potential BEPS non-compliance infractions. The goal of this phase was to ensure potential participants had a full understanding of the program offerings at initial outreach.

Once buildings were enrolled in the program, the Hub hosted an introductory webinar explaining the service, then connected the participants to the local energy consultants. The Hub and the consultants worked together to gather information from participating buildings.

Information gathered included:

- Utility account information for all energy sources used in the building;
- As-built drawings, if available;
- Building mechanical and electrical schedules; and
- ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager account read-only access.

After the above information was gathered, the consultants reviewed the building information and scheduled one-on-one calls with each building. These building-specific calls provided opportunities to ask clarification questions of the building representatives, such as equipment age, operating conditions, space usage, etc. The consultants' preliminary findings were then discussed, and recommendations were made as to the building's next steps. The calls also provided another opportunity for building representatives to ask questions of the consultants and the Hub. BEPS Compliance Pathway options, the impact of PV solar on BEPS, timing of Pathway milestones relative to a building's capital improvement cycle, and considerations to future-proof assets relative to potential regulatory changes are just a few of the topics discussed. Sometimes multiple calls were needed, and in rare cases, site visits to the buildings.

As a result of this consulting, a building decision-maker:

- Was able to articulate their building's existing performance relative to the BEPS;
- Understood the BEPS Compliance Pathway options available to them;
- Understood the critical next steps for their building's journey to compliance;
- Was introduced to contacts at key partner organizations for further technical and financial assistance;
- Understood the available incentive program offerings for their building; and
- Was able to request 2019 benchmarking data corrections- in the case of an error- to DOEE.

Progress and Lessons Learned

Impact

As of February 2023, the Success with BEPS program is wrapping up its second cohort. 52 buildings have received free, one-on-one consulting to date, which equates to about 5.2 million square feet across all Wards of the District. 276 other buildings across DC received general BEPS Q&A support through this program, equivalent to approximately 23.4 million square feet. Future plans include expanding the consulting services and building typologies served, continuing to support the buildings that were engaged during the first two cohorts, and factoring in lessons learned thus far:

One-on-one attention is valuable and needed

Building owners, managers, and representatives will have different levels of BEPS knowledge and familiarity. Building representatives are also balancing competing demands for their time and budget, and may not be aware of the BEPS regulations or timeframe within which they must work. One-on-one time spent answering questions, explaining the differences and relationship between Energy Benchmarking and Building Performance Standards, and pointing them to additional resources goes a long way in building trust and, ultimately, increasing building performance (and lowering building-related carbon emissions) across the District. To be effective, this work takes time and should not be rushed.

Collaboration with trusted partners is key

To increase participation in a free program such as Success with BEPS, and to achieve its goals for impact and assistance, it is important to partner with trusted local government, nonprofit, and private sector organizations. Partners can bring prior relationships and history with priority buildings, establish contacts at those buildings, and increase program credibility. Partner tools, funding and financing connections, and technical experts expand the support made available to buildings with limited in-house resources. DOEE, DCSEU, the DC Green Bank, and other local government and nonprofit organizations have supported the Hub since the ideation of Success with BEPS, and continue to serve as extended resources for buildings enrolled in this service. Special thanks also go to [MD Energy Advisors](#), [Baumann Consulting](#), and [Bauer Energy](#) for being the Hub's Success with BEPS private sector partners to date.

For more information on Success with BEPS, contact info@buildinginnovationhub.org.