ROCKFORD HOUSING AUTHORITY DEVELOPED A RESIDENT PROGRAM TO CREATE A CULTURE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY

SOLUTION OVERVIEW
Rockford Housing Authority (RHA) joined the Better Buildings Challenge at the end of 2013, committing to reducing energy use intensity by 20 percent across its portfolio of nearly 1,400* units by 2023. By the end of 2015, RHA had completed a $7.2 million energy performance contract (EPC), which improved the energy and water efficiency and quality of life at nine of its 11 public housing developments through water conservation, electrical upgrades, and building system improvements. The green retrofits allow RHA to meet its strategic goal of modernizing its building stock while saving energy and ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of its portfolio. Read RHA’s other published Implementation Model to learn more details about the EPC process.

In addition to implementing physical upgrades across its building portfolio, RHA has adapted the SEED model to encourage energy-efficient behavior among its residents and to prepare them for green jobs. SEED, which stands for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), Energy, and Economic Development, is a cross-agency pilot program that prepares public housing residents for current and future STEM and energy jobs by increasing energy literacy, providing learning opportunities, and training residents for careers in this space. The pilot extended to six Public Housing Authorities (PHAs). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) – along with the Energy Department and Department of Education – designed the offering to complement existing federal efforts focused on financing energy retrofits by adding a place-based program that develops human capital to support energy efficiency. RHA chose to model its program after SEED, since the pilot closely aligned with RHA’s mission of partnering with the community and responsible residents to transform houses into homes while guiding families to self-sufficiency.

*Excludes Brewington Oaks – slated for demolition

ORGANIZATION TYPE
Public Housing Authority

BARRIER
https://betterbuildingssolutioncenter.energy.gov/implementation-models/rockford-housing-authority-developed-a-resident-program-create-a-culture
For more information, visit https://betterbuildingssolutioncenter.energy.gov
Limited capital funding to maintain public housing units and resident services

**SOLUTION**
Create a culture of energy efficiency through several types of resident programming

**OUTCOME**
Residents consume less energy and are better prepared for STEM-related careers

**PROCESS**
RHA began its SEED program in 2015, focused on providing energy literacy, STEM education, and job-driven skills training. From the outset, RHA expanded the STEM concept to include arts education (STEAM). Some of RHA’s key SEED efforts are listed below, categorized by pillar:

1. **Energy Literacy**

RHA began formulating its energy literacy strategy in the spring of 2015 with the goal of reducing energy and water consumption among residents. RHA’s energy literacy program includes three phased objectives that were adapted from Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future’s (SAHF) Resident Engagement Toolkit, which provides guidance to multifamily property owners on educating residents to reduce energy and water waste. Designed to engage all residents, from children to seniors, the objectives are:

   1. Demonstrate a commitment to conservation and raise awareness of conservation opportunities (*by end of 2016*).
   2. Reshape social norms for conservation, expand residents’ knowledge and practice of conservation, and build engagement capacity (*by end of summer 2016*).
   3. Promote deeper and more lasting adoption of conservation behaviors to achieve greater energy and water consumption reductions, and expand residents’ sense of “ownership” of conservation activities (*by fall 2017*).

RHA has demonstrated a commitment to conservation through its energy performance contract (EPC) investments, which included a highly-visible solar installation at their Blackhawk Courts housing development. The agency’s website has been updated to include energy and water efficiency resources, which residents are encouraged to view. RHA has built a reporting and media platform to track annual utility cost savings and to publicize the housing authority’s success in teaching residents about energy and water efficiency and preparing them for green jobs. RHA earned multiple awards for its resident engagement efforts, including a 2017 National Award of Merit and a 2017 Agency Award of Excellence from the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO). RHA will continue to engage residents on water and energy efficiency by incorporating these topics into existing programming, such as classes on budgeting and managing a household.

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II. STEAM Education

RHA partners with multiple organizations to provide STEAM education opportunities to its residents. The agency participates in HUD’s ConnectHome program, which increases digital literacy by providing internet and computers to public housing families. RHA’s goal is to provide internet connection to 900 families through this program in addition to offering them career and college counseling through ConnectHome partner organizations.

Through the New Mix community initiative, RHA collaborates with the Rockford Area Arts Council to offer art classes to public housing youth and workshops for adults. “Promoting YOU” is a 10-week mentoring workshop that teaches adult participants to develop unique promotional plans for their artistic projects or events.

RHA routinely coordinates with the Rockford University Science Club to create science-based activities for public housing youth, such as the well-attended Halloween “Mad Scientist” event. Rockford Career College allows RHA residents to take information technology courses. Finally, Engineers Without Borders is planning an engineering and solar energy learning experience for teenagers at Blackhawk Courts.

III. Workforce Development

Angelic Organics Learning Center coordinates Roots & Wings, which is a local network of community-based organizations committed to community and youth development through urban agriculture in Rockford, Illinois. Public housing youth learn to grow produce using organic and sustainable techniques, while also learning to be leaders in their communities. The primary garden is located at Blackhawk Courts. The kids themselves are leaders in Roots & Wings, with older children teaching younger children about farming and food. “Youth Leaders” work in the garden and sell their produce during the summer through the Roots & Wings CSA, local markets, and direct sale to local restaurants and businesses. Through this experience, Youth Leaders obtain valuable new job skills, including interpersonal communication and public speaking, while earning money. Experienced Youth Leaders attend national and regional youth leadership and urban agriculture events, which further build their expertise and networks in the industry. Adults participate in cooking and nutrition classes at the Blackhawk Courts garden.

RHA partners with the local Workforce Investment Board and provides its own Family Self-Sufficiency specialists to perform career assessments and trainings for residents. These professionals include STEM-related jobs in their career guidance where appropriate and direct residents to RHA’s web-based calendar for upcoming STEM-related career events. Local organization Freedom Field Renewable Energy provides hands-on training and technical skills development to public housing youth, preparing them to eventually fill these highly-paid skilled jobs. RHA also added information on STEM jobs to its website, which lists the top STEM careers.

OUTREACH
Since joining SEED, RHA has reached out to residents in several ways, including:
Offering classes on energy efficiency;
Revising its personal finance curriculum to include energy saving tips;
Adding an energy- or water-saving tip to the monthly resident newsletter; and
Expanding its website to include information on reducing water and energy consumption.

PARTNERSHIPS
The following organizations have contributed to RHA’s SEED efforts:

- Angelic Organics Learning Center
- Rockford Workforce Investment Board
- Rockford University Science Club
- Rockford Area Arts Council
- Engineers Without Borders
- Freedom Field Renewable Energy

TOOLS AND RESOURCES
The following tools and resources have helped RHA implement its SEED program:

- Grants.gov
- Energy is Everywhere Webinar Series

OUTCOMES
RHA has changed social norms around energy efficiency for its residents through multiple new programs and an updated website. RHA staff regularly communicate the importance of energy efficiency to residents through every day interactions, but also in energy efficiency classes and in the monthly newsletter. As the program has matured, RHA has begun researching the most appropriate quantitative indicators of SEED success.

Examples of possible future indicators are the number of youth participating in the BlackHawk Courts garden program or the number of adult residents completing STEAM-related jobs training.

MEASURING SUCCESS
An overarching goal of RHA’s SEED program is to reduce its portfolio-wide energy consumption, which WegoWise tracks on an ongoing basis. RHA also uses a reporting and media platform to track utility cost savings and to publicize the housing authority’s success in teaching residents about energy and water efficiency and preparing them for green jobs. Finally, RHA administers an annual survey to residents, which will be modified to include questions asking residents for SEED feedback and if they have changed their energy consumption behavior since engaging with the program.
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