

Community Engagement Chat: Supporting Environmental Resiliency in Middle Neighborhoods

Building eco-friendly initiatives into community engagement plans not only has positive environmental impacts but helps household budgets too. This chat's topic of conversation was strategies to support environmental resiliency in middle neighborhoods and below are some tips and takeaways, plus excellent resources!

Strategy #1: Tap into Existing Programs. Many communities have local organizations that already have repair or rehabilitation programs in place, which directly or indirectly support energy efficiency. This is an easy first place to start! Research programs that already exist and start an informational campaign to share details with residents. Common initiatives include:

- Energy efficient window replacements
- 'New Doors' initiative to keep out the cold
- Installation of low-flow toilets
- Adding insulation
- Light bulb giveaways
- Rainwater collection initiatives and landscaping approaches that are drought resistant
- Winterization giveaways such as weather stripping or window coverings

Strategy #2: Going Solar, Together. Collaborative solar initiatives can be quite beneficial, even though they may seem dubious to potential participants. Solar cooperatives and bulk procurement options exist, and larger groups can often negotiate better values for installation and warranty. To get community members on board, focus on the energy savings and health benefits. Some neighborhood associations are supporting the effort further by rounding up matching grants for participating households.

Strategy #3: Host a Community Cleanup. We didn't have time to dig deep but heard from one organization in Louisiana that is targeting cemetery cleanups, which beautifies the space *and* provides a great local history lesson. We will spend time on this topic during our next chat!

Other Ideas and Resources:

Gathering Energy Data	
The GEM platform (Greenlink Equity Map) helps community development practitioners, policy makers, and program designers discuss energy burdens and build a shared vocabulary around environmental indicators. It also helps to build strategies and develop policies that reduce emissions and create a cleaner environment.	https://www.equitymap.org
Building Pollinator Gardens	
Pollinator gardens help beautify a neighborhood and serve a larger purpose	https://www.fws.gov/story/how-build-pollinator-garden

<p>by supporting sustainability and agriculture.</p>	
<p>Creating Nature Based Solutions</p>	
<p>Tree planting is an environmental asset that helps offset carbon emissions but can also help reduce energy consumption by providing shade and decreasing cooling expenses. Building a tree canopy takes time and can be a hard sell to homeowners since trees require ongoing maintenance and can be problematic to roofs and other components of the property. Still, tree planting is a worthy initiative. Find planting and maintenance tools that can help residents feel more comfortable with intentional planting.</p>	<p>Planting trees after disaster: https://www.retreet.org/</p> <p>Building Communities Resilient to Climate Impacts https://www.usdn.org/resilience-hubs.html</p>
<p>Example Cooperative Solar Initiative</p>	
<p>This collaborative project in Cleveland, OH helps lower income households install rooftop solar panels at no cost to the homeowner, which makes solar affordable, improves energy efficiency, and saves the homeowner money in utility costs.</p>	<p>https://coops.solarunitedneighbors.org/coops/cleveland-lmi-solar-co-op-2022/</p>