

## ACEEE Technical Assistance Program

ACEEE's [Energy Equity for Renters](#) initiative is offering no-cost technical assistance for at least five local governments and community-based organizations (CBOs) to help tackle the challenge of reducing energy waste in rental housing. This opportunity is available for communities seeking to improve the energy efficiency of rental housing while also preserving or expanding housing affordability. Technical assistance work must involve CBOs working alongside local governments to ensure that any initiatives supported through this work are community-driven.

## Energy Navigator Training Pilot

Design and pilot an Energy Navigator Training focused on energy efficiency access to income eligible renters. ACEEE technical assistance would supplement and enhance URI's 2026 proposal.

### Summary / Objectives

- Pilot a **renter-focused Energy Navigator train-the-trainer program** to help income-eligible renters participate in weatherization and energy efficiency programs.
- Strengthen and operationalize URI's proposed Energy Navigator model through **targeted ACEEE technical assistance**, with a focus on program design, training materials, and replicability.
- Develop a **Digital RI Home Weatherization Roadmap** as a core tool used by Navigators to guide renters through programs, permissions, and next steps.
- Test a **city-utility-CBO partnership model** that can be replicated by other municipalities and states.

### Partners & Roles

#### Community-Based Organization (Lead Applicant)

- Serve as lead applicant and community anchor for the pilot
- Translation services
- Host and support Energy Navigator trainees
- Deliver navigator services to renters using the training and tools

#### Municipal Partner (Lead Applicant)

- Serve as lead applicant and community anchor for the pilot
- Participate in partnership design and coordination
- Support renter outreach and alignment with local housing efforts
- Contribute to lessons learned for replication

### **URI Cooperative Extension (Project Lead)**

- Lead overall program design and facilitation
- Develop and deliver the Energy Navigator train-the-trainer curriculum
- Coordinate partners and integrate lessons learned into broader statewide efforts

### **ACEEE (Technical Assistance Provider)**

- Provide TA to strengthen program design, curriculum, and tools
- Scan national best practices and models for renter-focused navigation and weatherization access
- Co-develop a digital Home Weatherization Roadmap Tool
- Support creation of training materials and case study one-pagers
- Help define success metrics and document a replicable city–utility–CBO partnership model and lessons learned

### **Utility Partner (Rhode Island Energy)**

- Coordinate program access, referrals, and navigator touchpoints
- Advise on alignment with utility energy efficiency offerings
- Participate in partnership design and pilot implementation

### **Additional Partners (EEC, OER, DOH)**

- Provide strategic guidance, oversight, policy context, and broad alignment
- Support integration with statewide energy equity and affordability goals

## **Timeline**

February 2026 – June 2027

# Application Question #1

## **1. Please describe the rental energy efficiency *policy and/or program* that the proposed technical assistance will help advance.**

Rhode Island is advancing a renter-focused Energy Navigator Training Pilot designed to improve participation by income-eligible renters in existing energy efficiency and weatherization programs, particularly Rhode Island Energy's Landlord/Tenant Program and related income-eligible services.

Income-eligible renters in Rhode Island experience some of the highest energy burdens in the state and disproportionately live in unhealthy, inefficient housing. While robust energy efficiency programs exist, participation remains limited due to a combination of low awareness, lack of trust in utilities and energy programs, complex application processes, stigmatizing or technical language, and barriers unique to rental housing such as landlord permissions and pre-weatherization deferrals.

To address these challenges, the Energy Navigator Training Pilot will launch a community-embedded, workforce-based support model that equips trusted community-based health workers (CHWs) and community-based organization (CBO) staff with the specialized knowledge and tools needed to actively support renters through the home energy efficiency process. Rather than serving as one-time educators, Energy Navigators are envisioned as ongoing guides or "hand-holders" who help renters understand program options, navigate eligibility requirements, coordinate landlord engagement, and persist through multi-step processes such as home energy assessments, deferral resolution, and weatherization completion.

The pilot builds on several years of groundwork, including the 2025 Efficient Housing for All Community of Practice (EHACoP) and prior state-supported engagement efforts, which demonstrated that relational trust, consistent follow-up, and culturally competent support are critical to overcoming participation barriers. This effort will move forward regardless of ACEEE involvement, as the Rhode Island Energy Efficiency Council has committed financial support for initial development and delivery of the pilot.

### **Key components of the program include:**

- A bilingual (English/Spanish) train-the-trainer **Energy Navigator curriculum**, developed and facilitated by URI Cooperative Extension, that integrates energy efficiency knowledge into existing community health and outreach roles;
- A digital **Home Weatherization Roadmap** tool, used by Navigators to guide renters step-by-step through program eligibility, landlord coordination, deferrals, and available incentives;
- A **state-enabled, locally implemented partnership model** that builds on an existing cross-agency partnership with a municipality and community-based organization serving as a local implementation hub. By grounding local delivery in strong state-level coordination, the pilot is positioned for replication in communities throughout Rhode Island.

Through this pilot, Energy Navigators will support renters in accessing Rhode Island Energy's Landlord/Tenant Program, which offers no-cost home energy assessments, fully subsidized insulation and air sealing improvements (up to \$10,000? per unit), and additional rebates and incentives for rental properties. By pairing existing utility programs with trusted, proactive navigation support, the program aims to increase completed assessments and weatherization projects while reducing energy burdens and improving housing conditions for renters.

The proposed technical assistance would help strengthen and operationalize this emerging program model as it moves from design into implementation, ensuring it is effective, scalable, and replicable beyond Rhode Island.

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## Application Question #2

### **2. How do you envision our technical assistance services being used to advance your planned or active work?**

ACEEE's technical assistance would be used to strengthen and accelerate an Energy Navigator pilot that is already under development through URI Cooperative Extension, with support from the Energy Efficiency Council and multiple state and local partners. The pilot is intended to test whether trusted community-based workers can effectively help income-eligible renters navigate complex energy efficiency and weatherization programs and overcome common participation barriers.

Specifically, ACEEE's technical assistance would advance this work by:

- **Reviewing program and training design** approaches to ensure the Energy Navigator role is realistic, effective, and well-aligned with existing community-based worker workflows.
- **Grounding the pilot in national best practices** through scans of comparable renter-focused navigation, weatherization access, and energy–health integration models.
- **Supporting equitable implementation** by helping translate complex program rules, terminology, and deferral pathways into accessible tools and training materials for trusted messengers.
- **Enhancing learning and evaluation** by supporting both quantitative and qualitative approaches to understanding how community-based workers employ energy efficiency topics in their work and how renters respond; assist with capturing qualitative impact data to use in reporting and program design.
- **Positioning the pilot for replication** by documenting lessons learned and articulating a scalable city–utility–CBO–state partnership model.

ACEEE's technical assistance would not replace or duplicate URI's planned work, but would supplement it by adding rigor, national context, and structured learning to ensure the pilot produces actionable insights for Rhode Island and other jurisdictions.

## Application Question #3

3. Please outline the **scope of technical assistance** work you are requesting from ACEEE. This should outline specific tasks and the timing of those tasks for all involved parties (local government, CBO(s), ACEEE, and other partners).

### PHASE 1: Program Design & Landscape Scan (Feb-June 2026)

#### ACEEE

- Conduct a **scan of national policies, programs, and models** related to:
  - Customer navigation support for energy programs
  - Use of community-based workers (including CHWs) to address energy burden and social determinants of health
  - Incentives that motivate program participants and CHW advocates
- Produce a **brief synthesis of best and emerging practices** relevant to renter-focused energy navigation.
- Provide guidance on **equitable program design considerations**, including trust-building, stigma reduction, and renter–landlord dynamics.

#### URI Cooperative Extension

- Lead overall program design and coordination.
- Integrate ACEEE findings into the Energy Navigator training framework.
- Convene design discussions with partners (CBOs, municipal staff, utility, state agencies).

#### Local Government & CBO Partner

- Participate in discussions throughout the program design process to ensure feasibility and fit with existing workloads, outreach, and service delivery.
- Provide local context – connections, constraints, and priorities.

### PHASE 2: Training & Tool Development (July-Dec 2026)

#### ACEEE

- Support the **design of the Energy Navigator training curriculum**, including:
  - Core competencies for navigators
  - Guidance on incorporating EE topics into CBW practice
- Assist with development of **training materials**, such as:
  - Modular lesson content
  - Visual aids and one-page reference tools
  - Short case-study one-pagers illustrating renter pathways
- Co-develop the **RI Home Weatherization Roadmap**, refining a 2025 draft into a:
  - Digital decision tree or guided workflow
  - Tool usable by community-based workers to support renters and landlords

#### URI Cooperative Extension

- Lead curriculum drafting and delivery planning.
- Coordinate pilot logistics and training sessions.
- Work with CHWs/CBWs to ensure program design aligns with existing workflows.

#### **Rhode Island Energy (Utility Partner)**

- Advise on program accuracy, eligibility, timelines, and landlord/tenant requirements.
- Support alignment with existing utility offerings.

### **PHASE 3: Pilot Implementation & Learning (Jan-June 2027)**

#### **ACEEE**

- Provide guidance on **measuring effectiveness**, including:
  - Quantitative indicators (e.g., applications, assessments, completions)
  - Qualitative learning (e.g., navigator experiences, renter barriers, landlord responses)
- Support development of **survey tools, focus group guides, or reflection prompts** for CBWs and participants.
- Advise on the feasibility of **employing CBWs as data collectors** within ethical and workload constraints.

#### **CBO Partner**

- Host and support trained Energy Navigators.
- Deliver navigation services to renters.
- Participate in learning activities (surveys, focus groups, debriefs).

#### **Municipal Partner**

- Support outreach and coordination with local housing efforts.
- Participate in partnership learning and documentation.

### **PHASE 4: Documentation & Replication (Spring-Summer 2027)**

#### **ACEEE**

- Help **synthesize findings** into:
  - A summary of lessons learned
  - Guidance for replicating the Energy Navigator model
  - Documentation of a state-supported city-utility-CBO partnership approach
- Support **framing of results** for broader dissemination.

#### **URI Cooperative Extension**

- Integrate findings into statewide efforts and future program planning.
- Share results with state agencies, the Energy Efficiency Council, and other stakeholders.

## Application Question #4

**4. Please describe any funding and/or information challenges you may face in completing the work outlined in the scope of work.**

### **Funding Challenges:**

- CBO staff will need to dedicate time to coordinating community engagement, hosting Energy Navigator trainees, and integrating energy efficiency knowledge and resources into their existing programs. Without dedicated funding to offset these responsibilities, there is a risk that participation could detract from their core work and limit the effectiveness of the pilot.
- CHWs taking on the Navigator role may need incentives or stipends to integrate energy efficiency activities into their existing workload without reducing time spent on their core health or social services responsibilities.
- Bilingual delivery and accessibility require dedicated funding for interpreters, translated materials, and culturally competent facilitation.
- Scaling the Energy Navigator pilot beyond the initial municipal/CBO context will require additional resources to support wider adoption.

### **Information Challenges:**

- Measuring the outcomes of individual CBW interactions with residents is complex and requires systematized data collection methods. Implementing these measures may necessitate changes to existing CBW or CBO procedures, as well as technical resources to track engagement, program uptake, and energy savings.
- Capturing both qualitative and quantitative results in a meaningful way is critical to demonstrating the effectiveness of the Navigator model and informing replication, but doing so may require additional support for data collection, analysis, and reporting.

## Application Question #5

**5. Please share information demonstrating local government leadership's commitment to establishing the policy or program the technical assistance is meant to support in the response box below. Examples include (but are not limited to) adopted policies or resolutions, letters of support from policymakers, or allocation of funding to specific projects.**

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## Application Question #6

### **6. How do you expect the initiative(s) will affect housing affordability in your community? Please be as detailed as possible.**

This initiative is designed to improve housing affordability for income-eligible renters by reducing total housing costs, particularly utility expenses, which are a significant and often overlooked driver of housing cost burden.

Housing affordability in Rhode Island has deteriorated rapidly in recent years. According to the 2024 Housing Fact Book, Rhode Island renters now require an income of \$60,320 to affordably rent the average-priced two-bedroom apartment **including utilities**, exceeding the state's median renter income (\$48,434) by nearly \$12,000. One-third of Rhode Island households are housing cost burdened, and nearly half of those households are severely cost burdened, paying more than 50% of income toward housing costs. These pressures are particularly acute for renters in older, inefficient housing stock.

Energy efficiency improvements directly address this affordability gap by reducing monthly utility bills and improving housing stability. Weatherization and energy efficiency measures have been shown nationally to reduce household energy bills by 15–30% on average, with the greatest benefits accruing to low-income households with high pre-retrofit energy burdens. For renters, these savings can be the difference between maintaining stable housing and facing utility arrears, shutoffs, or displacement pressures.

This initiative supports affordability in several ways:

- **Reducing ongoing housing costs:** By increasing participation in weatherization and income-eligible energy efficiency programs, renters benefit from lower heating and electricity costs, reducing total housing expenditures.
- **Protecting renters from displacement:** Participation in Rhode Island Energy's income-eligible and landlord-tenant programs includes landlord agreements that restrict rent increases for a defined period following improvements, helping ensure that energy upgrades do not lead to rent hikes that negate affordability gains.
- **Addressing split incentives:** Energy Navigators help renters and landlords navigate program requirements together, reducing administrative barriers and encouraging landlord participation in no-cost or low-cost efficiency improvements.
- **Targeting those with the highest energy burden:** The pilot focuses on income-eligible renters in under-resourced communities who are most likely to live in older, inefficient housing and face disproportionate utility costs.

By embedding energy navigation within trusted community-based health and social service networks, this initiative helps ensure that energy efficiency investments translate into real, sustained affordability benefits for renters—not just improved buildings.

## Application Question #7

**7. What are *other potential impacts* of the policies and/or programs? Please be as detailed as possible.**

In addition to housing affordability, this initiative is expected to generate significant health, environmental, climate, workforce, and equity impacts, particularly for communities experiencing long-standing disparities.

### Health and Environmental Health Impacts

Rhode Island's housing stock is among the oldest in the nation, with substantial health implications. Between 2019 and 2023, Rhode Island had the highest percentage of low-income children (78%) living in older housing in the U.S. Poor housing conditions—including inadequate insulation, moisture intrusion, mold, and poor ventilation—are closely linked to respiratory illness, stress, and other adverse health outcomes.

Energy efficiency and weatherization improvements can:

- Improve indoor air quality by reducing moisture, mold, and drafts
- Stabilize indoor temperatures, reducing heat- and cold-related health risks
- Reduce asthma triggers and respiratory stress, particularly for children

Asthma is the most common chronic condition among Rhode Island children and a leading cause of school absences and hospital visits. Weatherization investments have been shown to improve indoor environmental quality and are associated with reductions in asthma-related symptoms and healthcare utilization.

By training community-based health workers as Energy Navigators, this initiative explicitly links energy efficiency to social determinants of health, enabling trusted messengers to address housing, energy, and health challenges together.

### Climate and Environmental Impacts

Increased participation in weatherization and energy efficiency programs will:

- Reduce household energy consumption and associated greenhouse gas emissions
- Support Rhode Island's climate and decarbonization goals by improving building performance in existing housing stock
- Advance equitable climate action by prioritizing households with the highest energy burdens and least access to capital

This work aligns with statewide climate and energy equity priorities and complements existing utility and state-led efficiency programs.

## **Economic and Workforce Impacts**

This initiative incorporates workforce development elements by:

- Expanding the skill sets of community-based health workers and other frontline staff
- Creating pathways for Energy Navigator training to be institutionalized through existing certification or continuing education frameworks
- Strengthening coordination between the health, housing, and energy sectors

By investing in trusted local workers, the pilot supports a more resilient, community-rooted workforce while improving program delivery outcomes.

## **Equity and Systems-Level Impacts**

At a systems level, this initiative operationalizes recommendations from Rhode Island's Energy Equity Working Group by translating high-level equity goals into on-the-ground practice. It strengthens coordination among state agencies (EEC, OER, Department of Health), the utility, local government, and community-based organizations, creating a partnership model that is both locally grounded and state-supported.

The result is not only improved access to energy efficiency for renters, but a replicable framework for delivering equitable energy programs through trusted community institutions.

## Application Question #8

***8. Please provide an in-depth description of the past and current relationship between the local government and community-based organization (CBO) partner(s) listed at the beginning of this application.***

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## Application Question #9

9. How would you like to see these **relationships grow** in the future?

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## Application Question #10

**10. ACEEE can provide some funding to compensate CBOs for their participation in work related to our technical assistance. Please share the specific amount you are requesting and any information about these funding needs.**

We anticipate that the CBO partner will require modest compensation to support its active participation in the Energy Navigator pilot and related ACEEE technical assistance work. Specific funding needs include:

- **Translation and interpretation services:** To ensure bilingual delivery of training materials and workshops, CBO staff will need support for translating materials and providing interpretation for participants.
- **Incentives for participation and staff time:** CBO staff will devote time to hosting Navigator trainees, coordinating community engagement, and integrating energy efficiency activities into their ongoing programs. Funding will help offset staff time and allow for meaningful engagement without detracting from other core responsibilities.

**Requested amount:** We propose a total of **\$5,000–\$7,000** to support these activities, distributed proportionally across participating CBOs. This figure is preliminary and can be refined in collaboration with ACEEE based on scope and intensity of participation.

## Application Question #11

**11. Please describe any current work being done by other organizations or groups that will affect the policy or program you are seeking to create and implement.**

- RI Office of Energy Resources
- RI Energy:
  - Landlord sessions
  - RI Energy Efficiency Equity Working Group
  - Customer Advocates
- Green and Healthy Homes Initiative (align - braid - coordinate)
- Energy Efficiency Council
- RI Community Action Agencies (CAPs)
  - Income-eligible weatherization program
  - EEC and URI Cooperative Extension plan to run a focus group with CAP agency representatives to increase alignment on strategic direction and foment collaboration
- CHWARI trainings for CHWs

## Application Question #12

12. What **other partners** (within or outside government) do you anticipate being involved in work on these policies or programs? Please describe their role in this work.

- URI
- RIE
- EEC
- OER
- CAP agency
- CHWARI
- Other CBOs - GHHI? Acadia? GECA?
- HousingWorks RI
- Brown University Health?
- RI HEZ (EOHHS)
- Latino Policy Institute?

**URI Cooperative Extension:** Lead project design, develop and deliver Energy Navigator training, coordinate partners, and integrate findings into statewide efforts.

**Rhode Island Energy:** Utility partner providing core program offerings (assessments, incentives, rebates) and collaborating in outreach, technical input, and feedback on Navigator workflows.

**Rhode Island Energy Efficiency Council:** Financial support, strategic guidance, support for coordination between partners, and integration with ongoing statewide initiatives.

**Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources:** Policy context and alignment with state energy plans, support for equity goals, and connection to statewide climate and housing objectives.

**Rhode Island Department of Health / Health Equity Zones:** Community health infrastructure and networks that connect trusted messengers (CHWs) with households, support outreach and culturally competent engagement, and help align energy burden work with broader social determinants of health.

**Community Health Worker Association of RI:** Potential collaborator in designing credentialing and professional development for Energy Navigators, aligning with broader workforce development goals.

**Other Local CBOs:** Additional community organizations (e.g., housing advocacy groups, tenant associations) may participate in outreach, co-facilitation of Navigator efforts, or evaluation activities.

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## Application Question #13

13. Please **upload any supporting documents** and files for your application below. This includes any documents providing information to questions you chose not to respond to directly on the application form. You can upload up to 10 files.

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## Application Question #14

14. You may share any **additional information** that is relevant to your application in the response box below.

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